

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1427
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	EUAA
Titel:	Security situation
Udgivet:	1. januar 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	16. juni 2022



Iraq Security Situation

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Country of Origin Information Report

January 2022

Manuscript completed in January 2022

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

PDF ISBN 978-92-9465-690-2 doi: 10.2847/65727 BZ-06-22-071-EN-N

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Acknowledgements

EUAA would like to acknowledge the following national asylum departments as co-drafters of this report, together with EUAA:

- Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Cedoca (Centre for Documentation and Research); and
- Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Section for Information Analysis

EUAA would also like to acknowledge ACCORD, the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation, as co-drafter of this report

The following departments and organisations have reviewed respective parts of this report:

- Finland, Finnish Immigration Service, Country Information Service;
- France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division;
- Slovakia, Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation; and
- ARC, the Asylum Research Centre.

All parts of this report have been reviewed by at least one reviewer.

It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EUAA.





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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)¹. The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EUAA nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 26 November 2021. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [methodology](#) section of the Introduction.

¹ The 2019 EASO COI Report Methodology can be downloaded from the EUAA COI Portal [url](#)





Glossary and Abbreviations

AAH	Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (The League of the Righteous). AAH was designated by the US as a terrorist organisation on 3 January 2020 ²
AAK	Ashab Al-Kahf
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AK	Assault rifle, type "Avtomat Kalashnikova"
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
Asayish	Intelligence services of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Awliya Al-Dam	Protectors of the Blood
BabOC	Babil Operations Command
Badr Organisation	Iranian-backed Shia militia that is part of the Popular Mobilisation Units
BasOC	Basrah Operations Command
BOC	Baghdad Operations Command
CHA	Confirmed Hazardous Areas (Term used by Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor)
CJTF-OIR	Command Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve
CPA	Coalition Provincial Authority
CSO	Central Statistical Organization
CTS	Counter Terrorism Services
DIBs	Disputed Internal Boundaries
DMA	Directorate of Mine Action
DOC	Dijla Operations Command
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency
DTM	IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix
EO	Explosive Ordnance
ERD	Emergency Response Division
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
<i>Failli</i>	also written as <i>Feili</i> , <i>Fayli</i> or <i>Feily</i>
Fasail Rijal Allah	Faction of Men of God
FP	Federal Police
HAN	Harakat Al-Nujaba
Hash Al-Atabat / Hashd Al-Marji'i	Unofficial labels for PMU groups affiliated to the holy shrines of Karbala and Najaf
Hash'd Al-Shaabi	Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)
HG	Hand Grenade
HHN	Harakat Hezbollah Al-Nujaba
IED	Improvised Explosive device
ILA	Integrated Location Assessment
INIS	Iraqi National Intelligence Service
IRCC	Iraqi Resistance Coordination Commission
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
IRGC – QF	Quds Forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps of Iran
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces

² USDOS, State Department Terrorist Designations of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Its Leaders, Qays and Laith al-Khazali, 3 January 2020, [url](#)





ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh
ISW	Institute for the Study of War
JAM	Jaysh Al-Mahdi
JOC	Joint Operations Command
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
Jurf Al-Nasr	Town in Babil (in southern Baghdad Belts)
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI	Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, also known as PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, an Iranian Kurdish opposition group operating from Iraq
KH	Kata'ib Hezbollah (Battalions of the Party of God); Iranian-backed Shia militia that is part of the Popular Mobilisation Units. KH was designated by the US as a terrorist organisation on 2 July 2009 ³
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRSC	Kurdistan Region Security Council
KSS	Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada
Liwa Al-Taff	Brigade 20 of the PMF
MAG	Military Advice Group
<i>Marjaiya</i>	Shia religious authority headed by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani
MEOC	Mid-Euphrates Operations Command
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOPA	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs
<i>Mukhtar</i>	Local community leader
<i>Muqawama</i>	Resistant Committees
NMI	NATO Mission Iraq
Peshmerga	Military forces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Kurdistan
PJAK	Free Life Party – in Kurdish Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, PKK's Iranian offshoot
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party. The PKK is on the European Union's list of designated groups which have been involved in terrorism ⁴ , as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey ⁵ , the United States ⁶ , and Australia. ⁷
PMC	Popular Mobilisation Committee
PMF / PMU	Popular Mobilization Forces or Popular Mobilization Units, also called <i>al-Hashd al Shaabi</i> in Arabic
Presidential Brigades	Mainly Kurdish units tasked with the protection of Iraq's President
PSCs	Private Security Companies
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
Rab'Allah	Followers of Allah
ReDS	Returns and Durable Solutions, a REACH initiative
RGB	Regional Guard Brigade

³ USDOS, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, n. d., [url](#)

⁴ EU, Council of the European Union, Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1341 of 8 August 2019 updating the list of persons, groups and entities subject to Articles 2, 3 and 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP on the application of specific measures to combat terrorism, and repealing Decision (CFSP) 2019/25, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

⁵ Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PKK, n. d., [url](#)

⁶ US, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, [url](#)

⁷ Australia, Australian National Security, Listed terrorist organisations, n.d., [url](#)





ROC	Al-Rafidain Operations Command
SAF	Small Arms Fires
SCF	Shiite Coordination Framework
SDOC	Salah Al-Din Operations Command
SFD	Prime Minister's Special Forces Division
SHA	Suspected Hazardous Area
SNTV	Single non-transferable vote system
SOC	Samarra Operations Command
SS	Saraya Al-Salam
SuOC	Sumer Operations Command
SVIED	Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
TMF	Tribal Mobilisation Forces, also known as Al-Hashd Al-Asha'iri
Usbat Al-Thaireen	League of Revolutionaries
USDOD	US Department of Defense
USDOS	US Department of State
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VBIED	Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Device
<i>Wala'i</i>	Factions of the PMF affiliated with Iran's Khamenei (the highest Shia Cleric in Iran)
<i>Wilayat</i>	ISIL denomination of sectors in which it operates
YBS	Sinjar Resistance Unit





Introduction

This report is an update of the [EASO COI report: Iraq, Security Situation 2021](#), published in October 2020.

The purpose of this security situation report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination (refugee status and subsidiary protection), and in particular for use in EUAA country guidance development on Iraq.

Methodology

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)⁸ and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).⁹

The reference period for this report covers the time period between 1 August 2020 and 31 October 2021.

Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 10 December 2021. In this quality review process, a review was carried out by COI specialists from Finland, France and Slovakia, in addition to ARC (Asylum Research Centre) as stated in the [Acknowledgments](#) section of this report, and internally by EUAA. All comments made by reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

Furthermore, and since this report is an update to the previous Iraq Security Situation report published in October 2020, reference to that report was included for background information and where no new information was available.

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report focus on criteria for the assessment of the application of article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive on a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict. The ToR were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Iraq and from policy experts in EU+ countries¹⁰ within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Iraq. The ToR can be found in [Annex 2: Terms of Reference](#) of this report.

Sources

In accordance with EASO COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include: COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies

⁸ EUAA, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

⁹ EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland





of the United Nations; Iraqi and regionally-based media and social media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Iraq. The main source on civilian casualties and civilians killed in Iraq used in this report is the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

UNAMI figures/data on casualties (killed and injured) were received from UNAMI's Human Rights Office (HRO) upon request. UNAMI no longer provides publicly available casualty figures for Iraq. The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicate only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques).¹¹ UNAMI-HRO verifies every single incident with at least three independent sources of information. These sources include victims, family members of victims, witnesses, local tribal elders and Sheikhs, local journalists, local civilian authorities (including mayors and district administrators), local health facilities and health professionals and security officials (primarily local police) who witnessed or have knowledge of the incident.¹²

For data on violent incidents, curated datasets from ACLED have been used. ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on 'the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, the Middle East, Latin America & the Caribbean, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia & the Caucasus, Europe, and the United States of America'.¹³ The information is collected in a database that is searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as media reports. ACLED's methodology applied for coding and monitoring of the data is explained in details in its Codebook.¹⁴ As ACLED points out, the reader should, however, be aware of some limitations in the data.

These limitations are:

'that most of the data is gathered based on publicly available, secondary reports. This means that the data is in part a reflection of the coverage and reporting priorities of media and international organisations. One of the effects of this is that it may underestimate the volume of events of non-strategic importance (for example, low-level communal conflict, or events in very isolated areas). We work to address this possibility by triangulating data sources to include humanitarian and international organisation reports, rather than media alone; and by conducting ground-truthing exercises in which we present data to local organisations and partners to assess its validity among people working directly in conflict-affected contexts.'¹⁵

Therefore, ACLED's figures in this report are to be considered as an estimate and indication of trends in violence over a given period of time.

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- 'Battles': 'a violent interaction between two politically organized armed groups at a particular time and location.' 'Battles can occur between armed and organised state, nonstate, and external groups, and in any combination therein.' Sub-events of battles are 'armed clash', 'government regains territory' and 'non-state actor overtakes'

¹¹ UNAMI, email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

¹² UNAMI, email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

¹³ ACLED, About Acled, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴ ACLED Codebook, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Guide for Media Users, January 2015, [url](#), pp. 9-10



territory'. The subevent type 'Armed clash' occurs when 'armed, organized groups engage in a battle, and no reports indicate a change in territorial control'.

- 'Violence against civilians': 'violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants'. 'Violence against civilians includes attempts at inflicting harm (e.g., beating, shooting, torture, rape, mutilation, etc.) or forcibly disappearing (e.g., kidnapping and disappearances) civilian actors.' The following sub-event types are associated with the violence against civilians event type: 'Sexual violence', 'Attack', and 'Abduction/forced disappearance'.
- 'Explosions/remote violence': 'one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to respond.' They include: 'Chemical weapon', 'Air/drone strike', 'Suicide bomb', 'Shelling/artillery/missile attack', 'Remote explosive/landmine/IED', and 'Grenade'.
- 'Riots': are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include 'violent demonstrations', 'mob violence'.
- 'Protests': 'public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them.' It includes 'peaceful protests', 'protests with intervention', 'excessive force against protesters'.
- 'Strategic developments': 'contextually important information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states.' It includes 'agreements', 'changes to group/activity', 'non-violent transfers of territory', 'arrests'.¹⁶

EUAA provided analytical graphs on security incidents based on publicly available ACLED data. For the purpose of this report, only the following types of events were included as violent incidents in the analysis of the security situation in Iraq: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. The reference period for the ACLED data is from 1 August 2020 to 31 October 2021 and EUAA downloaded the ACLED curated data files on the Middle East, including Iraq, on 10 November 2021.

ACLED identified in its 2019 Codebook¹⁷ three codes for the geo-precision of events: 'If the report notes a particular town, and coordinates are available for that town, the highest precision level "1" is recorded. If the source material notes that activity took place in a small part of a region, and notes a general area, a town with georeferenced coordinates to represent that area is chosen and the geo-precision code will note "2" for "part of region". If activity occurs near a town or a city, this same precision code is employed. If a larger region is mentioned, the closest natural location noted in reporting (like "border area", "forest" or "sea", among others) is chosen to represent the region – or a provincial capital is used if no other information at all is available – and is noted with precision level "3". No ACLED event is associated with the "country" as the smallest location unit available.'

In the governorate chapters of this report, the EUAA analytical graphs holding the breakdown of incidents per administrative unit level 2 (districts) do not include the incidents with code 3, as ACLED has no information about the location of these incidents within the governorate.

¹⁶ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 7-14

¹⁷ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2019, [url](#), p. 29



Structure and use of the report

The report is divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the general security situation in Iraq by providing a general background of recent conflicts in Iraq, the current political situation, and information on the main armed actors in Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq and their territorial presence and role. It is followed by a general overview of the current security situation in the reference period, as it relates to the nature of the violence and impact on civilians.

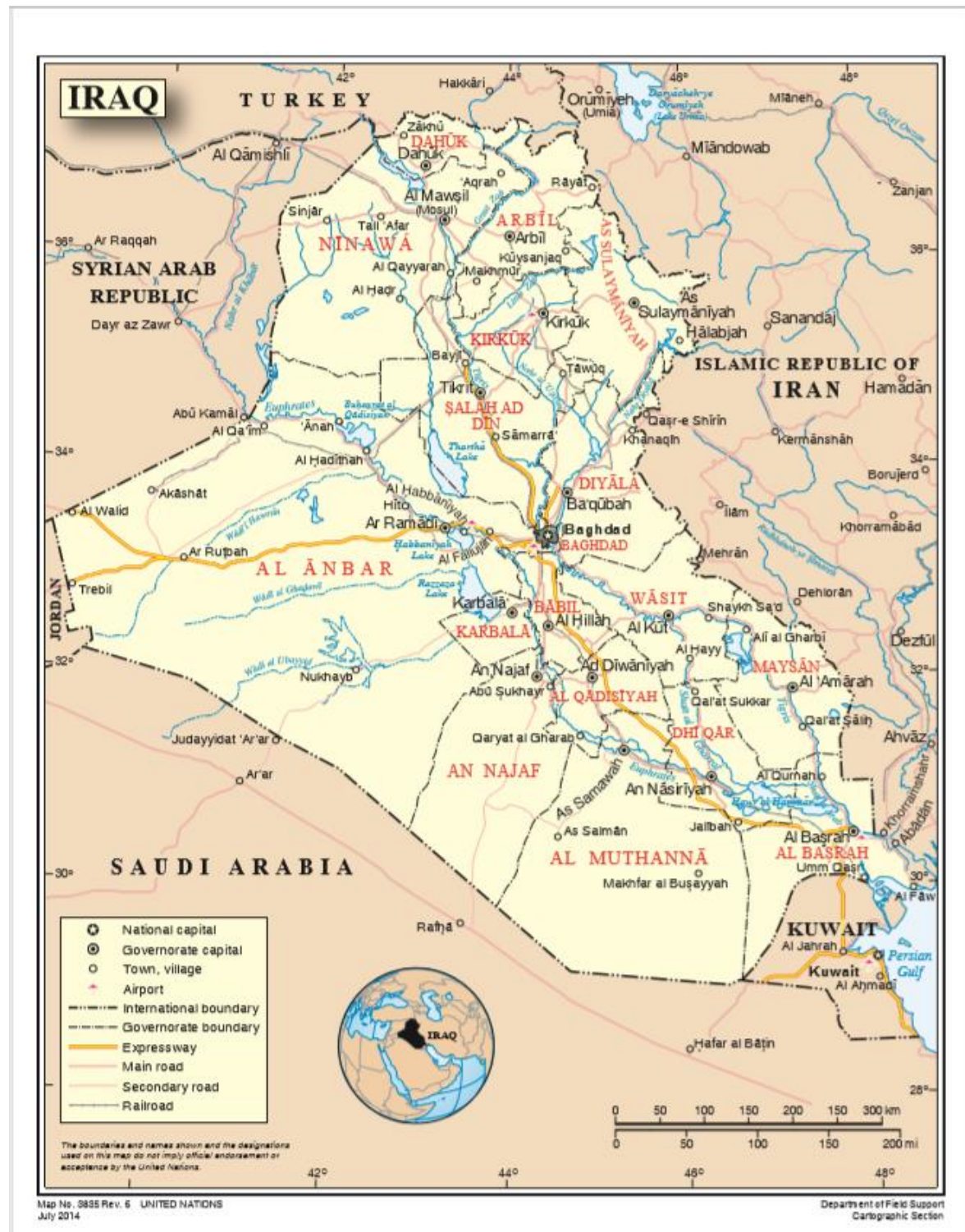
The second chapter provides a governorate-level description of the security situation. Each governorate chapter includes a map, brief description of the governorate, background conflict dynamics and armed actors present in the area, 2020-2021 security trends, including information on civilian deaths, security incidents and trends, armed confrontations (etc.), civilian infrastructure impacted and the existence of unexploded ordnances UXO and Explosive Remnants of War ERW, and information on displacement and return. For organisational purposes only, the governorates are clustered in geographic order and are grouped as follows:

- The northwestern and central governorates: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din)
- Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah)
- The southern governorates (Basrah, Karbala, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar and Wassit).



Map

Map of Iraq



Map 1: Iraq, © United Nations.¹⁸

¹⁸ United Nations, Iraq, Map No. 3835 Rev.6, July 2014, [url](#)



1. General description of the security situation (August 2020 – October 2021)

1.1. Overview of security developments

There are multiple armed conflicts in Iraq, according to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Project (RULAC). Since 2014, the Iraqi government, supported by Peshmerga forces, various militia groups and US-led international coalition forces, has been engaged in an armed conflict against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). An international armed conflict on Iraqi territory involves Turkish airstrikes against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), without the consent of the Iraqi government. (see [1.3: Recent security trends and armed confrontations](#)).¹⁹

1.1.1. General background of the conflict and recent developments in Iraq within the reference period

Conflict with ISIL

After its territorial defeat in Iraq in 2017, ISIL shifted from semi-conventional combat to guerrilla warfare.²⁰ According to Iraq experts Michael Knights and Alex Almeida,²¹ following a decline in ISIL attacks in 2018, attacks continued to drop in the beginning of 2019. Then, ISIL attacks began to increase in the second half of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020.²² In the second quarter of 2020, the US Department of Defense (USDOD) reported that ISIL was regrouping and was seeking to re-establish governance in the northern and western Iraq.²³ USDOD reported in the last quarter of 2020, that ISIL ‘remained territorially defeated’ and did not control any major population centres. ISIL fighters operated from small cells and carried out attacks against both civilians and security forces.²⁴ Raed Al-Hamid, independent Iraqi researcher specializing in armed groups, reported in May 2021 that ISIL operations had increased significantly in the past year, after it reorganized its fighters in small ‘mobile groups’, which it used to carry out operations in different areas. Al-Hamid further added that the organization used bases located in remote areas to carry out operations.²⁵

¹⁹ Rule of Law in Armed Conflict (The) (RULAC), Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 30 April 2021], n.d., [url](#); RULAC is an online portal that identifies and classifies situations of armed conflict based on an independent assessment of open source information; it is based at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, [url](#)

²⁰ International Crisis Groups, Averting an ISIS resurgence in Iraq and Syria, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²¹ Dr. Michael Knights is a Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He has worked in all of Iraq’s provinces, including periods embedded with the Iraqi security forces. Dr. Knights has briefed U.S. officials and outbound military units on the threat posed by Islamic State militants in Iraq since 2012 and regularly visits Iraq. He has written on militancy in Iraq for the CTC Sentinel since 2008. Alex Almeida is the lead security analyst at Horizon Client Access, an analytic consultancy headquartered in New York. Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of the Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, 05 May 2020, [url](#) p. 12

²² Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of the Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, 05 May 2020, [url](#) p. 12

Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, [url](#)

to the United States Congress. January 1, 2020 – March 31 2020, 11 May 2020, [url](#), p.22

²⁴ USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 1, 2020 – December 31 2020, 5 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12 & 13

²⁵ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISP), 18 May 2021, [url](#)



In January 2021, ISIL carried out a suicide attack in a crowded market in Baghdad, killing 32 and wounding more than 100.²⁶ The incident was the first major attack in Baghdad in over three years.²⁷ The second quarter of 2021, witnessed an increase in the number of attacks.²⁸ According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), the number of attacks increased around Ramadan, when ISIL is known to expand its scopes of operations to reduce trust in local governance and government security. ISIL targeted the Baghdad belts,²⁹ and the zones along the disputed areas.³⁰ In July 2021, another attack took place in Baghdad, targeting a marketplace in Sadr city at the eve of Eid al-Adha, killing 35 persons and wounding dozens.³¹

Between June and August 2021, ISIL carried out a wave of targeted attacks on several power facilities in the governorates of Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk and Ninewa,³² causing considerable damage,³³ and further exacerbating already frequent power shortages.³⁴

The Iraqi government conducted counter operations in areas where ISIL carried out attacks, primarily in the governorates of Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din.³⁵ In February 2020, the government launched a multi-phased operation, dubbed 'Heroes of Iraq', aimed at clearing ISIL remnants from areas earlier held by the organisation. The joint operations, headed by the Counter Terrorism Services (CTS)³⁶ involved support from the security forces, which include the Rapid Response Division, Federal Police and Special Operations Forces.³⁷ Other supporting units included the air force, US-led coalition, intelligence, as well as PMU and Peshmerga forces.³⁸ The first phase targeted the governorate of Anbar and the surrounding areas on the Iraqi-Jordanian-Syrian border³⁹, as well as Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates. The second phase, launched in June 2020, targeted ISIL hideouts in Salah al-Din and Kirkuk governorate. Phase three, launched in late June 2020, focused on Salah al-Din, Kirkuk and Diyala.⁴⁰ In July 2020, Iraqi forces launched the final phase of the operation, focusing on Diyala governorate and the Iranian border.⁴¹ During the operations, the Iraqi forces were able to destroy hundreds of ISIL weapons and vehicles and to disable IED devices. The operations also led to the arrests and killings of ISIL fighters, and destruction of more than 60 ISIL operating sites.⁴²

²⁶ BBC News, Iraq bombings: IS says it was behind deadly suicide attacks in Baghdad, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷ Alaaladin, R., To save Iraq from economic collapse and ISIS, contain Iran's proxies, Brookings Institute, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸ USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. April 1, 2021 – June 30 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 19

²⁹ Institute for the Study of War (ISW), ISIS Ramadan 2021 campaign review, [n.d.], [url](#)

³⁰ Voice of America (VOA), Following deadly attack, Iraqi Kurds call for better coordination in countering IS, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

³¹ Reuters, Suicide attacks in Iraq's Sadr City kills at least 35, wounds dozens- sources, 20 July 2021, [url](#)

³² Anadolu Agency (AA), Daesh claims rocket attacks on Iraqi power plant, 28 June 2021, [url](#), AA, Bomb attacks target 2 power transmission towers in Iraq, 12 July 2021, [url](#), AA, Bomb attack targets power line in Iraq's Nineveh province, 8 August 2021, [url](#)

³³ Reuters, Islamic State claims responsibility for rocket attack on power station, 27 June 2021, [url](#)

³⁴ Altayar, Daesh attacks Salah al-Din power plant in Iraq, 28 June 2021, [url](#)

³⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General, Implementation of Security Council resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 18 (p.4)

³⁶ Jamestown Foundation, Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk, 17 June, 2020, [url](#)

³⁷ Operation Inherent Resolve, Iraqi security forces hunt Daesh in Diyala for "Heroes of Iraq 4", 1 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁸ Jamestown Foundation, Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk, 17 June, 2020, [url](#)

³⁹ Iraqi News Agency (INA), Iraqi Heroes Operation launched in Anbar province, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Rudaw, Iraqi forces launch third phase of 'Heroes of Iraq' anti-ISIS Operation, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Iraqi army launches 4th phase in Iraqi Heroes Operations, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴² Operation Inherent Resolve, Iraqi security forces hunt Daesh in Diyala for "Heroes of Iraq 4", 1 August 2020, [url](#)

In February 2021, the government launched ‘operation Lions of Al-Jazeera’⁴³, with the objective of cutting ISIL’s supply and deployment routes between the governorates. According to the daily news site, Diyaruna, the operation was the biggest search operation launched by the armed forces, reportedly, covering 150 square kilometres, stretching from the border strip with Syria, and the desert areas connecting the governorates of Anbar, Ninewa and Salah al-Din.⁴⁴ In June 2021, Land Forces Command and Al-Jazeera Operations Command, from Ninewa and Salah al-Din launched the second phase of the operations. Security units that took part in the operation included; from Salah al-Din: the Iraqi Army’s 91st Brigade, the PMU’s Brigades 6, 21, 35 and 51 and Salah al-Din SWAT-regiment and Salah al-Din’s Emergency Police Regiment. The divisions participating from Ninewa governorate included; the 20th Division and the 44th Brigade of Ansar al-Marjaia, the Tribal Mobilisation Forces (TMF) in west Ninewa, as well joint forces from the 7th Division and the TMF.⁴⁵

Coalition advisors provided intelligence and air support to Iraqi forces operations against ISIL.⁴⁶ In March 2021, US-led coalition aircraft and Iraqi forces conducted airstrikes in a joint operation (Ready Lion) in Makhmour Mountains targeting 120 hideouts and killing 27 terrorists.⁴⁷

In July 2021, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and President Biden sealed an agreement ending the US military mission in Iraq by the end of 2021. Instead, the US will shift its role to training and advising the Iraqi military.⁴⁸ Under the plan, US troops will provide logistics and advisory support.⁴⁹ The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW) described the decision as a rebranding of American troops’ role in the country.⁵⁰

Conflict in Iraq between Iran and the US

Al Jazeera reported on 6 July 2021 that ‘Iraq is increasingly becoming a theatre of conflict between the United States and Iran’.⁵¹ A ‘shadow war between the US and Iran on Iraqi soil’, according to BBC, ‘has shifted gear’ following the US assassination of the Iranian general Soleimani and PMF leader Al-Muhandis.⁵²

On 2 January 2020, US launched a drone strike at Baghdad airport, killing the Commander of the Quds Forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC-QF), Qasem Soleimani, and the leader of the Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah (KH), and deputy of the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU), Abu Hadi al-Muhandis.⁵³

Qasem Soleimani, was long considered the main architect of Iran’s regional strategy. Under his leadership, the Quds Forces rose to be Iran’s main instrument to advance its interests in

⁴³ ESTA, Iraqi forces launch ‘Operations Lions of al-Jazeera’, 1 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Diyaruna, Iraq launches campaign to secure western desert, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Shafaq News, Iraq launches “Lions of Al-Jazeera” phase 2 in western Iraq, 14 June 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁶ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021-March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁴⁷ Air Force Magazine, Coalition aircraft, Iraqi forces continue large offensive targeting ISIS, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Reuters, Biden, Kadhimi seal agreement to end U.S. combat mission in Iraq, 27 July 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Politico, Iraqi officials to announce U.S. military shift to advisory role in Iraq by year’s end, 22 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (The) (AGSIW), End of combat mission in Iraq: Brave new world or just a rebrand, 3 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹ Al Jazeera, ‘Caught in a geopolitical struggle’: US-Iran tug of war in Iraq, 6 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵² BBC, Iraqis suffer as US-Iran shadow war shifts gear, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

⁵³ New York Times (The) (NYT), U.S. strike in Iraq kills Qasim Soleimani, Iranian of the Iranian forces, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

the region.⁵⁴ Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis was a key player in promoting Iran's influence in the country, as well as managing and containing the rivalries between different PMF militia groups.⁵⁵

The attack on the two leaders has since triggered a wave of retaliatory counter attacks from various Iranian-backed militias, aiming to manifest their strength and, at the same time, undermine the Iraqi government's authority.⁵⁶

A recent publication in the CTC Sentinel, in October 2021, reviews the evolution of the Iran-backed resistance factions that emerged following the killings of Soleimani and al-Muhandis. Authors and Iraq experts, Michael Knights, Crispin Smith and Hamid Maliki, analyse the evolution of the Iran-backed militias' Resistant Committees (referred to as *Muqawama*) and the militias' anti-US operations since January 2020. According to the authors, the factions have passed through a number of phases since the airstrike that killed Soleimani and al-Muhandis. The authors describe the first phase as simple revenge, consisting of a random, 'chaotic', pattern of rocket attacks on US bases in Iraq, followed by more planned rocket attacks, mainly carried out by KH.⁵⁷ This prompted a counter response by the US against a KH warehouse in March 2020, causing no fatalities. Subsequently, the mode of resistance shifted towards what the authors describe as 'convoy strategy', consisting of roadside bombings targeting Iraqi civilian trucks working with the coalition. The attacks against convoys escalated throughout the summer of 2020. In October 2020, a group, allegedly lead by KH, calling itself the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee (*al-Haya al-Tansiqiya lil-Muqawama al-Iraqiya*, or *Tansiqiya* for short) announced a conditional ceasefire. Authors Knights, Smith and Malik, argued that KH announcement was an attempt to scale down the risk of escalation in anticipation of the results of the American elections in November 2020.⁵⁸

However, attacks on the US Embassy and coalition forces resumed in the beginning of 2021.⁵⁹ In July, 2021, IRGC-QF Commander, Esmail Qaani, warned against further attacks.⁶⁰ Despite efforts, the attacks continued. In September 2021, coalition air defences intercepted a twin-drone attack near Erbil International airport.⁶¹

The outcome of the Iraqi elections on 10 October 2021 dealt a heavy blow to pro-Iranian parties affiliated to the armed Iraqi militias (see [section 1.2.2](#) of this report), subsequently triggered threats of violence from various militia groups against election results which they labelled as fraudulent.⁶² Following the elections, thousands of PMU supporters began sit-ins

⁵⁴ German Institute for International and Security Affairs- Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) – Challenges to Iran's role on Iraq in the post-Soleimani era, July 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁵ Alaadin, R., Brookings Institute, What will happen to Iraqi Shiite militias after one key leaders death?, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Politico, The Soleimani assassination was supposed to weaken Iraqi militias. Instead, they are flexing their muscles, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Knights, M., Smith, C., Malik, H., Discordance in the Iran threat network in Iraq: Militia competition and rivalry, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 8, 14 October 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁸ Knights, M., Smith, C., Malik, H., Discordance in the Iran threat network in Iraq: Militia competition and rivalry, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 8, 14 October 2021, [url](#), p. 3-4

⁵⁹ Knights, M., Smith, K., Malik, H., Discordance in the Iran threat network in Iraq: Militia competition and rivalry, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 8, 14 October 2021, [url](#), p. 3-4

⁶⁰ Knights, M., Smith, K., Malik, H., Discordance in the Iran threat network in Iraq: Militia competition and rivalry, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 8, 14 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁶¹ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The) (TWI), Iran's proxies in Iraq undertake the world's only terrorist attack commemorating 9/11, 14 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶² Middle East Eye, Iraq elections 2021, Shia parties reject results as armed groups threatens violence, 12 October 2021, [url](#)

and protests across the country.⁶³ Tensions escalated on November 5, when security forces opened fire on PMU supporters trying to block access to the Green Zone in the capital Baghdad, killing three persons and injuring dozens others.⁶⁴ The killings triggered retaliatory reactions from several *Muqawama* groups, especially Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and KH, who blamed Prime Minister al-Kadhimi for the killings.⁶⁵ Qais al-Khazali, leader of the AAH, vowed to indict the prime minister to avenge the death of the protesters.⁶⁶

On 7 November, three explosive-laden drones were fired at the residence of the prime minister. The prime minister was not harmed in the attack, but six members of his security were reportedly injured.⁶⁷ Although no group claimed responsibility for the attack,⁶⁸ various sources suggest the involvement of the Iranian-backed militias.⁶⁹ According to Reuters, Iraqi security officials and militias sources claimed that the attack was carried by at least one Iran-backed militia.⁷⁰ Iraq experts, Knights, Malik and Smith, concluded that the drone, a quadcopter, used in the attack is the same type previously identified carrying munition at a location across the river from the US embassy in Baghdad and in an attempted overflight over a Kurdish leadership compound in Erbil.⁷¹

Experts cited by Reuters maintained that the attack was meant as a message from the militias, warning to resort to violence if they are challenged or excluded from the next government formation. Iraqi officials Reuters spoke to said that the AAH and KH had carried out the attack in tandem.⁷² Reactions from experts to the news of the attack in Kadhimi, cited by the Atlantic Council, suggest the involvement of Iran-backed militias, notably KH and AHH, in the attack. Some experts attributed the attack to Iran, while others were of the opinion that the culprits may have carried out the attack without explicit approval from Teheran.⁷³ An article published in The Guardian, following the attack on 7 November, reported that it was still unclear whether Iran was behind the incident. The Guardian reported that the absence of IRGC-QF general Soleimani, who retained powerful influence over the Iranian-backed militia has weakened Iran's authority over the militia groups, but that does not mean that Iran was against the attack.⁷⁴

Protests and riots

From October 2019, Baghdad and central and southern governorates witnessed protests demanding more job opportunities, an end to corruption, as well as the change of the political system.⁷⁵ The protest movement - known as *Thawrat Tishrin [or Tishreen]* (October Revolution) - ended in March/April of 2020 as the country went into lockdown following the

⁶³ Arab Weekly (The), Hashed supporters begin sit-in to protest Iraq election results, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴ New Arab (The), Three killed as Iraqi security forces fire on pro-militia protestors in Baghdad, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Smith, C., Malik, H., Knights, M., Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The) (TWI), *Muqawama meltdown Part 1: Protesting the elections*, 7 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶ Guardian (The), Drone attack by militants on Iraqi PM 'marks escalation' in power struggle, 7 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷ Al-Monitor, Assassination attempt against Iraqi PM sparks fear of 'return to chaos', 7 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Reuters, Iraqi PM decries 'cowardly' attack on his home by drones carrying explosives, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁹ Reuters, Iran-backed militia staged drone attack on Iraqi PM-officials, 8 November 2021, [url](#); Smith, C., Knights, M., Malik, H., *Muqawama meltdown, part 2: Drone attack on the prime minister*, 7 November 2021, [url](#) 2021

⁷⁰ Reuters, Iran-backed militia staged drone attack on Iraqi PM-officials, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷¹ Smith, C., Knights, M., Malik, H., *Muqawama meltdown, part 2: Drone attack on the prime minister*, 7 November 2021, [url](#) 2021

⁷² Reuters, Iran-backed militia staged drone attack on Iraqi PM-officials, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷³ Atlantic Council, Experts react: Assassination attempt on Iraq's prime minister, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Guardian (The), Drone attack by militants on Iraqi PM 'marks escalation' in power struggle, 7 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Hasan, S., *A Perfect Storm has Hit Iraq's Economy*, LSE [Blog], 22 October 2020, [url](#)



outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In May and June 2020, new protests took place, with fewer participants.⁷⁶ In October 2020, protestors took again to the streets to commemorate the protests of 2019, in which over 600 unarmed demonstrators were killed.⁷⁷ In January 2021, violent clashes broke out in Nasiriyah between demonstrators and security forces over the arrest of an activist, and the killings of two activists. Several governorates followed in support of the demonstrations, including Baghdad, Babel, Wasit, Najaf, Diwaniyah and Missan.⁷⁸

In July 2021, protests took place following the breakout of hospital fires in Nasiriyah and Baghdad, killing 60 and 82 patients respectively. Protestors demanded accountability for the killings of activists associated with the protest movement, and for the ‘systemic corruption’ that has long crippled the country’s public services, including the health sector.⁷⁹

In August 2020, Ali Al-Bayati, spokesperson for the ‘semi-official’ Iraqi Independent High Commission for Human Rights, reported an increase in the number of targeted killings and attempted killings of activists.⁸⁰ In December 2020, the French News agency France 24, reported on an ongoing wave of kidnappings, torture and killings of high-profile activists allegedly by pro-Iran militias, forcing many into hiding, alternatively into exile.⁸¹ In April 2021, Politico magazine reported that the Iraqi human rights commission documented 81 assassinations since October 2019.⁸² In May 2021, a leading figure in the anti-government protests, Ihab Jawad al-Wazni, was killed near his home in Karbala. The killing sparked demonstrations in Karbala and several other cities in the south⁸³ and Baghdad, condemning the assassination.⁸⁴

During the reference period of this report (1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021), ACLED registered 2 134 incidents coded as ‘protests’.⁸⁵ The governorate with the highest number of protests events was Basrah (431), followed by Thi-Qar (354), Muthanna (232), Qadissiya (200), and Baghdad (198). Also, during the reference period of this report, ACLED data registered 368 incidents coded as ‘riots’.⁸⁶ The governorates with the highest numbers of riots events were Thi-Qar (163), Sulaymaniyah (36), Baghdad (26), Basrah (24) and Wassit (20).⁸⁷ Figures 1 and 2 below show the evolution of protests and riots, respectively, in Iraq during the period 1 October 2019 – 31 October 2021.⁸⁸

⁷⁶ EASO, Iraq: The protest movement and the treatment of protests and activists, October 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁷⁷ Middle East Eye, Iraqi return to the streets to mark anniversary of anti-government protests, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Arab Weekly (The), Deaths sparks new protests in Nasiriyah, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Washington Post, Iraqis protest deadly hospital fires as symptoms of embedded corruption, 20 July 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁰ Associated Press (AP), Rights group sound alarm on jumps in activists killings, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

⁸¹ France 24, Iraqi activists go underground after wave of attacks by pro-Iran militias, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

⁸² Politico, The Soleimani assassination was supposed to weaken Iraqi militias. Instead, they are flexing their muscles, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

⁸³ Aljazeera, Activist’s killings in Iraq’s Karbala, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴ Aljazeera, ‘Country has no future’: Iraqi protester killed at Baghdad rally, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵ ACLED defines ‘protests’ as ‘public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them.’ It includes ‘peaceful protests’, ‘protests with intervention’, ‘excessive force against protesters’. ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 12-13

⁸⁶ ‘Riots’: are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include ‘violent demonstrations’, ‘mob violence’. ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 13-14

⁸⁷ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



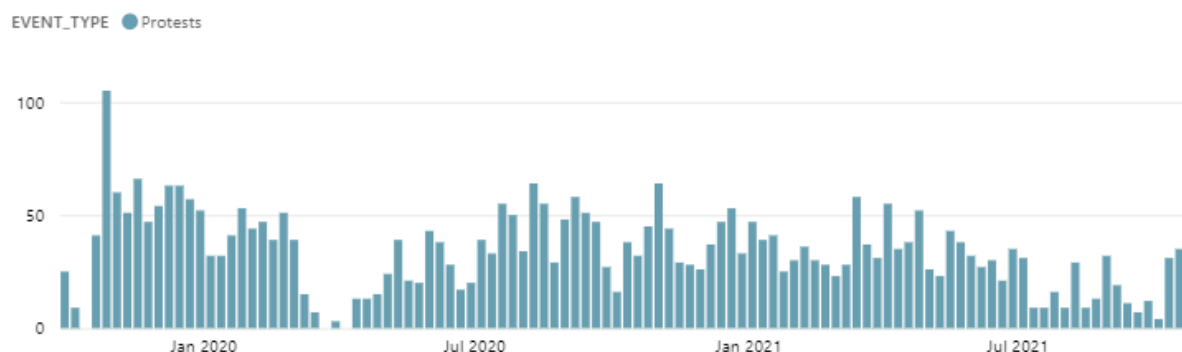


Figure 1: Incidents coded as ‘protests’ events 1 October 2019 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data⁸⁹

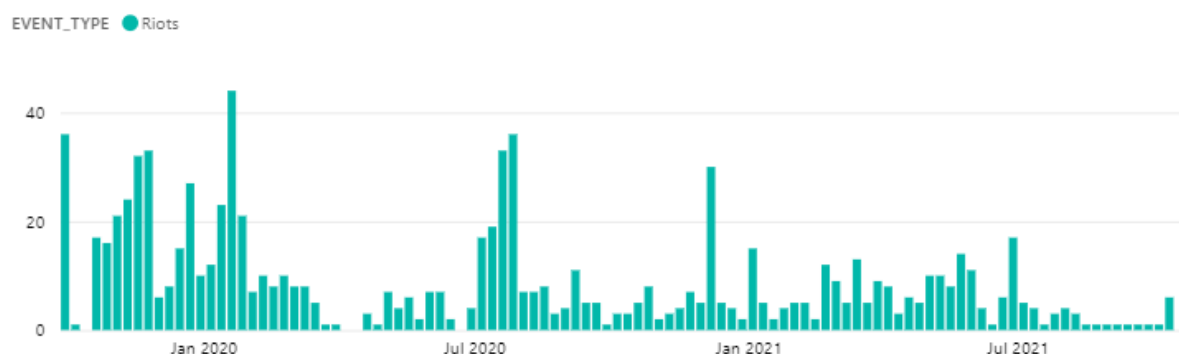


Figure 2: Incidents coded as ‘riots’ events 1 October 2019 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data⁹⁰

For information on the election outcome for the parties affiliated to the protest movement, see [section 1.2.2](#). Additionally, for more information on protests and targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq, see chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of [the EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals](#).

1.2. Political developments

1.2.1 Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi

The political turmoil following the escalation in violence during the street protests in October 2019 resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi in November the same year, leaving the parliament with the task of agreeing on a successor.⁹¹ In May 2020, after months of political wrangling, lawmakers agreed to nominate former intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kadhimi as prime minister.⁹² Al-Kadhimi came to power facing a number of domestic and regional challenges, including bringing stability to the country after months of violent protests and political turmoil, while trying to navigate United States – Iran tensions playing out of Iraqi soil. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and plummeting oil prices

⁸⁹ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 October 2019 – 31 October 2021, 17 January 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 October 2019 – 31 October 2021, 17 January 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹ New York Times (The), Iraqi prime minister resigns in deepening political crisis, 30 November 2019, [url](#)

⁹² BBC News, New Iraq prime minister after five months of deadlock, 7 May 2020, [url](#)



resulted in the deterioration of the economic situation, mired by corruption, a bloating and unproductive public sector, poor public services and widespread unemployment.⁹³ Shortly after taking office, Al-Kadhimi vowed to organise early elections, in response to the demands of the protestors and various political and social bodies asking for comprehensive political and economic reforms, including the influential Shia religious authority (*Marjaiya*), headed by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.⁹⁴ On the same note, al-Kadhimi ordered the immediate release of protesters in detention since October 2019, including those earlier convicted with minor sentences.⁹⁵ Al-Kadhimi also announced the formation of an investigation committee to investigate the parties responsible in the killings of protestors.⁹⁶

In December 2019, the parliament approved amendments of the general elections law.⁹⁷ The most important change in the law was the shift from the proportional representation method that treated governorates as single constituencies and used the system of open and closed lists, allowing candidates with few votes to win because the lists supporting them got many votes.⁹⁸ The new law, adopted in November 2020, aimed to counter the sectarian divisions set by the political bloc system and to allow independents and smaller parties representation in parliament. The amendments included the adoption of district-based constituencies, dividing governorates into multi-seat districts. The law introduced a single, non-transferable vote system (SNTV),⁹⁹ based on a proportional representation system, whereby candidates with highest votes win the seats in each district. Each district contains three to five seats. As such, voters are given full control over who is elected, therefore putting their choice above party preference. The law also lowered the age for candidates from 30 to 28, and allowed separate provisions for women, guaranteeing them one seat within a constituency.¹⁰⁰

Shortly after his nomination, al-Kadhimi's government took rapid steps to shuffle the security leadership, appointing both ministers of interior and defense within days after his nomination.¹⁰¹ Al-Kadhimi also brought in Lieutenant General Abdul Wahab al-Saadi as head of the Counter Terrorism Services (CTS). Al-Saadi, revered for his leading role in the military campaign against ISIL, was removed from office in October 2019. His removal helped spark the months' long street protests.¹⁰² Al-Kadahmi further removed head of the PMU, Faleh al-Fayyad, from his position as National Security Advisor and Director of the National Security Services.¹⁰³

On 25 June 2020, Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) stormed KH's headquarters in southern Baghdad, arresting over a dozen militia members with links to KH, for recent attacks on US targets. The arrests prompted hundreds of militias to gather in the Green Zone,

⁹³ Middle East Institute (MEI), Iraq special briefing: The challenges facing Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Arab Center Washington DC, Mustafa al-Kadhimi's Iraq: Challenges and prospects, 2 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Middle East Institute (MEI), Iraq special briefing: The challenges facing Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Al-Monitor, Iraq to launch investigations against killings of protestors, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷ Emirates Policy Center (EPC), The electoral law, the high commission and the federal court: a trilateral threat to the next Iraqi elections, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Arab Weekly (The), Redistricting at the heart of Iraq's 2021 legislative contest, 9 September 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Stewart-Jolley, V., Iraq's electoral system: Why successive reforms failed to bring change, Chatham House, October 2021, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰⁰ Stewart-Jolley, V., Iraq's electoral system: Why successive reforms failed to bring change, Chatham House, October 2021, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰¹ France 24, Iraq parliament approves PM Kadhimi's new cabinet after months of deadlock, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰² Arab Weekly (The), Kadhimi embodies Iraqis' hope for change even if challenges abound, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³ Knights, M., Almedia, A., Kadhimi's Rolling Shuffle (Part 1): Military Command Changes, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The) (TWI), 14 September 2020, [url](#)





threatening to attack the CTS building.¹⁰⁴ The detained militia members were released a few days later due to lack of evidence.¹⁰⁵ In May 2021, police arrested Qassem Musleh – the commander of the PMU in Anbar governorate, and head of the Iran-backed Tofuf Brigades- in connection with the killings of two activists. According to Middle East Eye, Musleh is the most prominent Iranian-backed commander to have been arrested since 2003.¹⁰⁶ Musleh was released a few days later. His release is seen as another failed attempt by the government, since June 2020, to crack down on the armed groups.¹⁰⁷

In July 2021, the prime minister announced the arrest of the killers of the Iraqi analyst and security advisor Hisham al-Hashimi, who was gunned down the previous year. A senior official who spoke to Middle East Eye said that the perpetrator was identified as a police officer affiliated to KH.¹⁰⁸ In October and November 2021, Basra's Criminal Court sentenced two men to death for their involvement in a death squad responsible for the killings of two journalists covering anti-government protests in Basra in January 2020. A source in the court informed al-Monitor that one of the perpetrators had confessed that the squad had received orders from their superiors in KH to target and kill activists, journalists and members of the ISF.¹⁰⁹

Another step by Al-Kadhimi to curb the influence of the militias was to undercut the flow of resources, obtained mainly through smuggling activities at the border areas with Syria and Iran. In July 2020, Al-Kadhimi launched a nation-wide campaign against border corruption, deploying the Rapid Response Forces to control the Iraq-Iran border, as well as the border with Kuwait, including the port in Basra, which he handed over to the Marine Force Command.¹¹⁰ Five months after the launching of the campaign, the Iraqi border authority reported over 100 million dollars in recovered revenues. Noteworthy, the revenues did not include the governorate of Diyala, where the Badr organisation held key government positions and dominated the security sector. The same applied for the Kurdish region, where the border crossings with Turkey and Iran were controlled by KDP and PUK respectively.¹¹¹ In July 2021, authorities arrested two generals working at the port of Umm Qasr, Basra, for taking bribes to waive customs duties.¹¹²

On 21 March 2021, militias assassinated an officer in the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS), in Baghdad. In June, militias killed another INIS officer. The recent attack on the Prime Minister's home, following the October elections, further exacerbated tensions between the government and the Shia militias. According to Iraq analyst Michael Knights, notwithstanding these acts of intimidation to undermine his authority, Al-Kadhimi continues his gradual pushback strategy against the militias, committed to advocating for the rule of law in order to avoid further violence.¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ Al-Monitor, Iraqi security forces raid militia headquarters, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ New Arab (The), Iraq frees militia fighters held over rocket fire, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ Middle East Eye, Iraq: Arrest of paramilitary commander sparks fears of violent confrontations, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ Middle East Eye, Iraq: Militia leader accused of involvement in killing of activists released from detention, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ Middle East Eye, Hisham al-Hashimi: Iraq's PM says analyst's killer arrested, 16 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ Al-Monitor, Militants get death sentences, for killing two Iraqi journalists, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Al-Monitor, Can Iraqi government control corruption at border outlets, 10 July 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹ London School of Economics and Political Science (The) (LSE), Searching for ghosts: Fighting corruption at Iraq's border crossing, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹² National (The), New arrests in Iraq point to ongoing struggle with militias and corruption, 12 June 2021, [url](#)

¹¹³ Knights, M., The harrowing of Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The) (TWI), 9 November 2021, [url](#)





1.2.2 Elections in 2021

On 10 October 2021, Iraq held its fifth parliamentary election since 2003.¹¹⁴ Election turnout was the lowest in Iraq's recent history,¹¹⁵ despite calls from the Supreme Shite Cleric, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, for people to vote.¹¹⁶ Iraq's Independent Higher Court estimated turnout at 41 percent, while local and international organizations monitoring the elections estimated turnout at 38 percent.¹¹⁷ Other sources recorded the turnout as low as 36 percent.¹¹⁸ The low turnout reflects the disillusion many Iraqis have with the political system, and its corrupt political elite.¹¹⁹

The High Electoral Commission announced the final results on 30 November 2021, confirming the victory for the Sadrist Movement leader Muqtada Al-Sadr who won 73 seats, an increase from the 54 in the 2018 elections.¹²⁰ On 27 December 2021, Iraq's Supreme Court ratified the results of the elections.¹²¹ Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki made a comeback by gaining 12 seats, securing 37 seats in total. Dominating the Sunni vote was the Progress coalition, led by parliament speaker Mohammed Al-Halbousi, who won 43 seats, while his rival, business mogul Khamis Khanjar, took 20. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI), the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) managed to gain an additional seven seats bringing the total to 32. While rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) looked to have lost a single seat, from 18 to 17. Another winner in the Kurdish region was the New Generation movement that gained nine seats.¹²² Shiite factions, representing the Iran-aligned Shia militias, suffered a significant defeat, whereby the Fatah alliance managed to secure merely 20 seats. Five of the seats were allocated to Hadi al-Ameri's Badr organisation, while 10 went to Qais al-Khazali's AAH, and the remainder to the other small blocs. The KH-led Huqooq Movement that ran as a separate PMU-affiliated bloc from Fatah earned only one seat.¹²³ The Emirates Policy Center (EPC), an independent think tank based in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, attributed the PMU-affiliated blocs' losses to ongoing competition for the same electoral base.¹²⁴ Another reason is the militias' dwindling popularity in the last two years, following their suppression of the protest movement.¹²⁵

The Alliance of State Forces, formed by an alliance between Ammar al-Hakim and former Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi, won only four seats. Both leaders retained respectively 19 and 42 seats each in the previous election. According to the EPC, the loss appears to be the failure to adapt to the new electoral system. Another contributing factor to the State Forces loss was the competition for the same electoral base with Maliki's State of the Law Alliance.¹²⁶

¹¹⁴ International Crisis Group (ICG), Iraq's surprise election results, 16 November 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Mansour, R., Stewart-Jolley, V., Explaining Iraq's election results, Chatham House, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Al-Monitor, Iraq's top Shiite cleric calls for voting in upcoming elections, 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ Diwan, Carnegie Middle East Center, Low turnout, high drama, 13 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ Mansour, R., Stewart-Jolley, V., Explaining Iraq's election results, Chatham House, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Mansour, R., Stewart-Jolley, V., Explaining Iraq's election results, Chatham House, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁰ Al Jazeera, Iraq announces final results of October parliament election, 30 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²¹ France 24, Iraq's top court ratifies parliamentary election results, 27 December 2021, [url](#); DW, Iraq Supreme Court ratifies election results, 27 December 2021, [url](#); NYT, Iraq Confirms Election Gains for Shiite Leader Seen as Potential U.S. Ally, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹²² Middle East Institute (MEI), Special briefing: A reshaping of the Iraqi political scene, despite low turnout, 12 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²³ Al-Monitor, Iraq election results put militias between a rock and a hard place, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Emirates Policy Center (EPC), The promise and pitfalls of Iraq's post-electoral scenarios, 30 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Associated Press (AP), In Iraq, elections fraud claims fuel uncertainty, divisions, 3 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶ Emirates Policy Center (EPC), The promise and pitfalls of Iraq's post-electoral scenarios, 30 October 2021, [url](#)





Imtidad, a party with roots in the protest movement, won nine seats. Similar parties, like the Ishraq Qanoon and the New Generation Movement (KRI) won six and nine seats respectively.¹²⁷ Renad Mansour, Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House, maintained that, despite the unexpected outcome, the parties were likely to face challenges. The parties are not part of a coherent coalition and, in many ways, are new to politics. The powerful political parties and ruling elites see these newcomers as a threat to their patronage networks and to the revenues that they have gained over the years. Mansour does not rule out that the political elites may agree to block the protest parties in order to uphold the political status quo.¹²⁸

The elections results triggered strong condemnation amongst the Iran-aligned parties, having lost two-thirds of their parliament seats from earlier elections.¹²⁹ In an effort to circumvent the outcome of the ballot, the opposing parties formed a Shiite Coordination Framework (SCF), challenging the election results and calling for a manual recount of the votes.¹³⁰ The Coordination Framework consists of the State of Law Coalition, Fatah Alliance, AAH, National Wisdom Movement, Victory Alliance and Ataa Alliance.¹³¹

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) reportedly received 1 436 appeals contesting the election results, obligating a recount of over 4 300 voting stations. On 8 November, the IHEC announced the completion of the recount, confirming the initial results of the elections, with the exception of some votes that had been marked invalid, were actually valid.¹³²

On 19 October 2021, militia supporters took to the street, pitching tents at the entrance of the Green Zone, denouncing the elections as fraudulent and chanting slogans against the United States and the United Nations.¹³³ Violence escalated on 5 November, after security forces and demonstrators clashed at the Green Zone, resulting in several deaths and scores of injured.¹³⁴ The incident was shortly followed by a drone attack on the minister's residence.¹³⁵ While Sadr won the most seats, he still has to negotiate a coalition in order to form the next government. As in previous elections, this process has resulted in consensus governments, which include the same political parties, regardless of the outcome at the ballots.¹³⁶ Earlier in November, Sadr met with parliament speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi¹³⁷, and with a delegation from KDP.¹³⁸ On 18 November, Sadr confirmed that he is willing to form a majority statement. According to al-Monitor, Sadr's meetings is seen an indication that the PMU and their allies will not be included in the new government. Sadr went further in his statement and called for dissolving the PMU.¹³⁹

¹²⁷ Mansour, R., Iraq's protestors become parliamentarians, Foreign Affairs, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Mansour, R., Iraq's protestors become parliamentarians, Foreign Affairs, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁹ Associated Press (AP), In Iraq, elections fraud claims fuel uncertainty, divisions, 3 November 2021, [url](#) Emirates Policy Center (EPC), The promise and pitfalls of Iraq's post-electoral scenarios, 30 October 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰ MENA Affairs, IHEC continues manual recount of contested ballots as pro-Iran groups reject election results, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹ Mansour, R., Iraq's protestors become parliamentarians, Foreign Affairs, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³² Rudaw, Iraq electoral commission completes manual recount of votes, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³³ Aljazeera, Iraqi protestors demand elections recount in Baghdad, 19 October 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴ New Arab (The), Three killed as Iraqi security forces fire on pro-militia protestors in Baghdad, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵ Deutsch Welle (DW), Iraq: Prime minister unhurt after assassination attempt by drone, 7 November 2021, [url](#) 1

¹³⁶ Mansour, R., Stewart-Jolley, V., Explaining Iraq's election results, Chatham House, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷ Al-Monitor, Sadr calls for majority government, 'Liquidation' of Iraqi militias, 18 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Shafaq News, KDP delegation meets with Sadrist movement, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹ Al-Monitor, Sadr calls for majority government, 'Liquidation' of Iraqi militias, 18 November 2021, [url](#)





1.2.3 The political situation in the Kurdish Region

The KRI has faced a multitude of challenges since the last regional elections in 2018, which took the Regional Government of Kurdistan (KRG) nine months to form a government, causing divisions between and within the region's main political parties - KDP, PUK and the Goran party.¹⁴⁰ In July 2019, the parliament agreed to nominate Masrour Barzani (son of former the president Masoud Barzani) as prime minister.¹⁴¹ Masrour took over from his cousin Nerchirvan Barzani, who was sworn in as president a month earlier.¹⁴² The PM came to power amidst lingering challenges brought about by a series of security and humanitarian crisis between 2014 and 2018 (e.g. battle against ISIS and the 2017 referendum), including a deteriorating economy, widespread corruption and a bloating public sector.¹⁴³ After a brief recovery (2018-2019), the region found itself amidst a new economic crisis. Plummeting oil prices, a budget dispute with Baghdad and the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in salary cuts, high unemployment and increased poverty.¹⁴⁴

In April 2020, the federal government took the decision to cut federal budget contributions to the KRI following the KRG's failure to deliver its designated share of the oil production to the federal government.¹⁴⁵ The cuts caused delays in salary payments for government employees in the region.¹⁴⁶ In December 2020, the parties were able to reach an agreement,¹⁴⁷ after the KRG parliament passed the Fiscal Deficit Coverage Bill, requiring the region to hand over unspecified amount of oil revenues to Baghdad in exchange for its monthly share of the federal budget.¹⁴⁸

Another major event that contributed to openness in relations between the KRG and the federal government was the announcement of the 'Sinjar Agreement' in October 2020. The agreement called for the handing over of the security sector in the Sinjar district of Ninewa governorate to the Iraqi federal security forces, and called for other armed groups, i.e. Iran-backed militias and the Kurdistan Worker's Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (PKK)), operating in the area to leave. The agreement further aimed to ensure the safe return of the Yazidi population, who were forced to flee after ISIL took control of the region in 2014.¹⁴⁹ For more information, see section [2.6 Ninewa](#) governorate.

In early December 2020, violent protests broke out in the KRI, sparked by the growing economic crisis and the government's failure to pay civil servants' salaries. The demonstrations resulted in the killings and arrests of demonstrators. The authority also closed down a television station and sentenced journalists for covering the protests.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁰ Wahab, B., Iraqi Kurdistan's new government, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The) (TWI), 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ National (The), Iraqi Kurdistan names Masrour Barzani as prime minister, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴² National (The), Nerchirvan Barzani sworn in as president of Iraqi Kurdistan, 11 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³ Global Partners Governance, Economic drivers of youth political discontent in Iraq: The voice of young people in Kurdistan, Baghdad, Basra and Thi-Qar, February 2021, [url](#), p. 36-37

¹⁴⁴ Global Partners Governance, Economic drivers of youth political discontent in Iraq: The voice of young people in Kurdistan, Baghdad, Basra and Thi-Qar, February 2021, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁴⁵ Al-Monitor, Iraq cuts federal budget from the KRG, Kurds defy is a political, 4 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Middle East Monitor (MEMO), Economic crisis threatens stability of Kurdistan Region, 14 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Rudaw, Baghdad, KRG reach 2021 budget agreement, 19 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ Rudaw, There are positives for the KRG in Iraq's contentious new funding deficit laws: MPs, 15 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Al-Monitor, Baghdad, Erbil reached security, administrative agreement in Sinjar district, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Middle East Institution (MEI), Beyond the elite: Taking protest and public opinion seriously in the Kurdistan Region, 24 February 2021, [url](#)





The election turnout in October 2021 in the KRI was not as low as other Iraqi governorates.¹⁵¹ While The KDP earned more seats, PUK managed to maintain its position. Goran's Change Movement lost all its seats this time around.¹⁵² Following its defeat, the party's governing body announced its resignation, and that an interim body would run the party until further notice.¹⁵³

The New Generation party, led by businessman Shaswar Abdulwahid, won nine seats. However, New Generation announced that it will not be involved in the formation of the new government, but that it would support a united Kurdish front in Baghdad.¹⁵⁴ Reportedly, KDP has taken the lead towards forming a united Kurdish front, talking to all other Kurdish parties.¹⁵⁵

1.3. Recent security trends and armed confrontations

1.3.1. Actors in the conflict

This section provides information on the main armed actors in Iraq and KRI and their territorial presence and capacity. Please see Section 1.3. of the [EASO-COI Report – Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#) and Section 1.2 of the [EASO-COI Report – Iraq Security Situation \(2020\)](#) for an overview of these. Where new information has been found about their presence and capacities, it has been added below.

Detailed information on state actors of protection and their capacity to protect, including integrity issues such as alleged abuses, is available in the [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL)

Presence and capacities

Raed Al-Hamid¹⁵⁶ indicated that the UN estimated the number of ISIL fighters in Iraq and Syria at 10 000 in August 2020, an estimation that matches that of the KRG in late 2019 which estimated the number of fighters at 4 000 – 5 000 and the rest to be supporters and sleeper cells.¹⁵⁷ Iraqi intelligence sources estimate the number of ISIL fighters at a range of 2 000 – 3 000.¹⁵⁸

ISIL cells were reportedly present in the desert and remote areas of Iraq and carried out hit-and-run operations according to UN reporting from July 2021.¹⁵⁹ Based on statements by Iraqi security officials, the group 'relies on remote bases deep in the desert in Anbar, Ninewa, mountain ranges, valleys, and orchards in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, and Diyala to house

¹⁵¹ New Arab (The), The fate of Kurdish parties after Iraq's election, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵² Amwaj.media, Iraqi Kurdistan at crossroads as elections reshape political balance, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵³ New Arab (The), The fate of Kurdish parties after Iraq's election, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Amwaj.media, Iraqi Kurdistan at crossroads as elections reshape political balance, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ New Arab (The), The fate of Kurdish parties after Iraq's election, 22 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ 'Raed El-Hamed is an Iraqi journalist and member of the Iraqi Journalists Union'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Raed El-Hamed, n. d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#); European Center for Counter-Terrorism and Intelligence Studies, [مكافحة الإرهاب.. عودة داعش في العراق.. الأسباب وحجم المخاطر](#) [Counter Terrorism.. The return of Daesh in Iraq.. Reasons and Threats], 22 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 37





its fighters and establish monitoring and control points to secure supply routes. It also uses these bases to establish command centers and small camps for training, digging tunnels, and exploiting caves in mountainous areas.¹⁶⁰ UNDP, citing the Joint Analysis Unit of the UN Mission in Iraq, stated that ‘Rugged terrain and mountain ranges in Diyala provides a haven for ISIL fighters and complicates ISF counter insurgency operations’.¹⁶¹ ISIL remnants ‘sought to reestablish footholds in Ninewa, Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah al-Din, and Anbar provinces, especially in the areas of disputed control between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal government’.¹⁶²

Al-Hamid identified four sectors in which ISIL activities occur:

- The first sector is the meeting point between ISIL militants in Syria and Iraq and constitutes an extension of the Syria desert. It includes areas of Anbar and Ninewa Provinces such as Houran Valley and Wadi Al-Abyad Valley.
- The second sector includes areas such as Al-Ba’aj and Hatra districts south of Mosul, the Badush mountain range, Al-Tharthar Valley, the geographical area between the districts of Sharqat in Salah Al-Din and Kirkuk and Makhmour in Ninewa.
- The third sector includes Salah Al-Din, Kirkuk and Diyala Provinces and is considered the most important to the group as it contains agricultural areas that constitute a suitable place ‘for hiding and transporting ISIS fighters, setting up ambushes, and planting explosive devices’.
- In addition to those three sectors, ISIL has presence in the western and northern Baghdad Belts, as well as in the cities of Balad and Samarra in southern Salah Al-Din and Jurf Al-Sakhr in Babil.¹⁶³

Additionally, ISIL maintains ‘safe havens’ and trains its militants in Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) which include areas in Kirkuk, Salah Al-Din and Diyala provinces.¹⁶⁴ This could be attributed to the gaps created by the redeployments of PMF units in the Disputed Areas which ISIL could exploit to reassert itself,¹⁶⁵ and to the withdrawal of the Peshmerga in October 2017 in the wake of the KRI independence referendum.¹⁶⁶

Activity, tactics and targets

Reporting in July 2021, a report to the UN Security Council by the Al Qaida/ISIL Sanctions Monitoring Team stated that ISIL in Iraq remains active, although ‘under constant counter-

¹⁶⁰ Al-Hamid, R., *ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile*, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ UNDP, *Public Perception Survey on Local Safety and Security in Iraq*, January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶² OSAC, *Iraq Country Security Report*, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Al-Hamid, R., *ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile*, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ ISW, *ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region*, 7 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2; UN Security Council, Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 39

¹⁶⁵ ISW, *IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶⁶ Al-Hamid, R., *ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile*, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#)





terrorism pressure'.¹⁶⁷ Al-Hamid also observed that ISIL in Iraq 'remains very weak' despite its 'sufficient combat capabilities to threaten security and stability'.¹⁶⁸

ISIL's current focus is on maintaining and expanding its rural areas of support which would allow the group to conduct training and 'mitigate threats' posed by the ISF. According to ISW, 'ISIS maintains small, rural support zones from which it resists Iraqi Security Forces' activity, including occasional Counter-terrorism Service (CTS) clearing operations and minimal Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and Iraqi Army operations'. Additionally, ISIL is 'rebuilding complex explosives networks' in those rural zones'.¹⁶⁹ In urban areas, the group seems to be re-organising its fighters 'in small "mobile" subgroups in order to cope with the restrictions to which it has been subjected since its defeat'.¹⁷⁰

Additionally, the group has also developed Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) production cells in northeastern Salah Al-Din to facilitate attacks in Baghdad Belts aimed at weakening the ISF. The ISF discovered three such facilities in the Hamrin Mountains and al-Dour District of Salah Al-Din province in February and March 2021. Moreover, ISW observed that ISIL attempted to 'revive its VBIED network in Fallujah and Ramadi' in Anbar province, in late 2020, 'possibly to employ along lines of transit approaching Baghdad toward Abu Ghraib'.¹⁷¹

According to a report of the UN Security Council published on 21 July 2021, the group's strategic goal is 'to undermine critical infrastructure projects, inflame sectarian divisions and grievances and sustain media coverage and relevance'. The source added that ISIL 'reasserted itself somewhat in Iraq' with its attacks of 21 January and 15 April 2021 in Baghdad which resulted in dozens of deaths.¹⁷² ISIL attacks were reported to have taken place primarily in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah Al-Din during the periods 12 August – 10 November 2020,¹⁷³ 9 February – 4 May 2021,¹⁷⁴ and 5 May – 3 August 2021.¹⁷⁵

OSAC observed, in September 2021, that ISIL militants used bombings, indirect fire, IEDs, and ambushes as methods of attack.¹⁷⁶

Based on media affiliated with ISIL, Al-Hamid stated that 'the group carried out 1,422 operations in 2020', of which 485 were operations with explosive devices, 334 sniping operations, 252 clashes, 94 execution operations targeting individuals affiliated with the ISF, PMF, Peshmerga or individuals cooperating with the government, and 257 unclassified

¹⁶⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), paras. 37, 40

¹⁶⁸ Al-Hamid, R., *ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile*, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ ISW, *IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁷⁰ Al-Hamid, R., *ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile*, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ ISW, *ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region*, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷² UN Security Council, Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 38

¹⁷³ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1099), 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 26

¹⁷⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/426), 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 17

¹⁷⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/700), 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 16

¹⁷⁶ OSAC, *Iraq Country Security Report*, 2 September 2021, [url](#)





operations.¹⁷⁷ According to UN sources, an estimated 211 ISIL attacks, mainly in Diyala, were reported between 1 January and 31 March 2021,¹⁷⁸ and 157 attacks against security forces were recorded between 25 August and 9 October 2021, all of which were attributed to ISIL.¹⁷⁹

In Baghdad city, ISIL launched attacks exploiting the security vacuum created by the PMF's strive to push out the ISF from certain neighbourhoods. This was evident through the two successive suicide attacks that the group conducted on 21 January 2021 in Tayaran Square, Bab Al-Sharqi neighbourhood, which resulted in 32 deaths and 110 injuries.¹⁸⁰ According to ISW, the threat of ISIL in Baghdad 'persists despite a spate of Counter-terrorism Services (CTS) arrests in Baghdad and Abu Ghraib in late January as well as the killing of ISIS Wali in Iraq, Abu Yassir al Issawi, on January 27 with coalition support'.¹⁸¹ Those suicide attacks were the first in three years. According to Al-Aqeedi, the existence of 'checkpoints in all the major areas, intense background surveillance on all points of entry into Baghdad from other provinces, intelligence and informant tips on bomb manufacturing in the outskirts, and periodic raids to disrupt sleeper cells have contributed to the noticeable decrease in attacks in the capital'.¹⁸²

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) observed that both ISIL and Iran-backed militias seem to ignite ethnic tensions and displacement 'to exert control over the Sunni and Shia populations, respectively'. According to the source, ISIL targeted a holy Shia site in Khazraj in Salah Al-Din province on 19 August 2020 which 'sparked renewed tensions between the local Sunni and Shia communities'. ISIL also increased its attacks against Iranian-backed militias in Jurf Al-Sakhr in late 2020 and early 2021, an area which used to be majority Sunni but is now majority Shia and is controlled by KH which 'prevents the previous Sunni inhabitants from returning and excludes other Iraqi security forces from operating'.¹⁸³ Additionally, ISIL tends to attribute some of its attacks to Iranian-backed militias. According to ISW, ISIL fighters wore stolen PMF uniforms when launching two attacks in Salah Al-Din Province in March 2021. By doing so, ISIL 'effectively aggravated local resentment borne from legitimate concerns about militia abuses of power'.¹⁸⁴ Sources also stated that in some of their attacks, ISIL fighters were seen in uniforms of Iraqi soldiers or federal police.¹⁸⁵

Al-Jazeera reported, on 5 September 2021, that ISIL continues to use sleeper cells in Iraq to attack security forces with asymmetric attacks. The article indicates that these sleeper cells 'regularly target the Iraqi army and police in the north of the country'.¹⁸⁶ A Middle East Researcher who was contacted in November 2021, similarly stated that, in their view, ISIL is doing two things currently: one is setting up fake checkpoints and conducting abductions of civilians on the road, as well as of security officers. The researcher remarked that ISIL militants are targeting security officers with the aim to bargain for ransoms and to bring in money. They

¹⁷⁷ Al-Hamid, R., *ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile*, Newlines Institute, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ UNDP, *Public Perception Survey on Local Safety and Security in Iraq*, January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁹ UN Security Council, *Electoral process in Iraq Report of the Secretary-General*, (S/2021/932), 8 November 2021, [url](#), para. 13

¹⁸⁰ ISW, *ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region*, 7 May 2021, [url](#); Newlines Institute, *ISIS Attacks Rekindle Iraqi-Saudi Conflict*, 1 February 2021, [url](#); ISW, *IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁸¹ ISW, *ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region*, 7 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸² Al-Aqeedi, R., *ISIS Attacks Rekindle Iraqi-Saudi Conflict*, Newlines Institute, 1 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸³ ISW, *ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region*, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁴ ISW, *ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region*, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

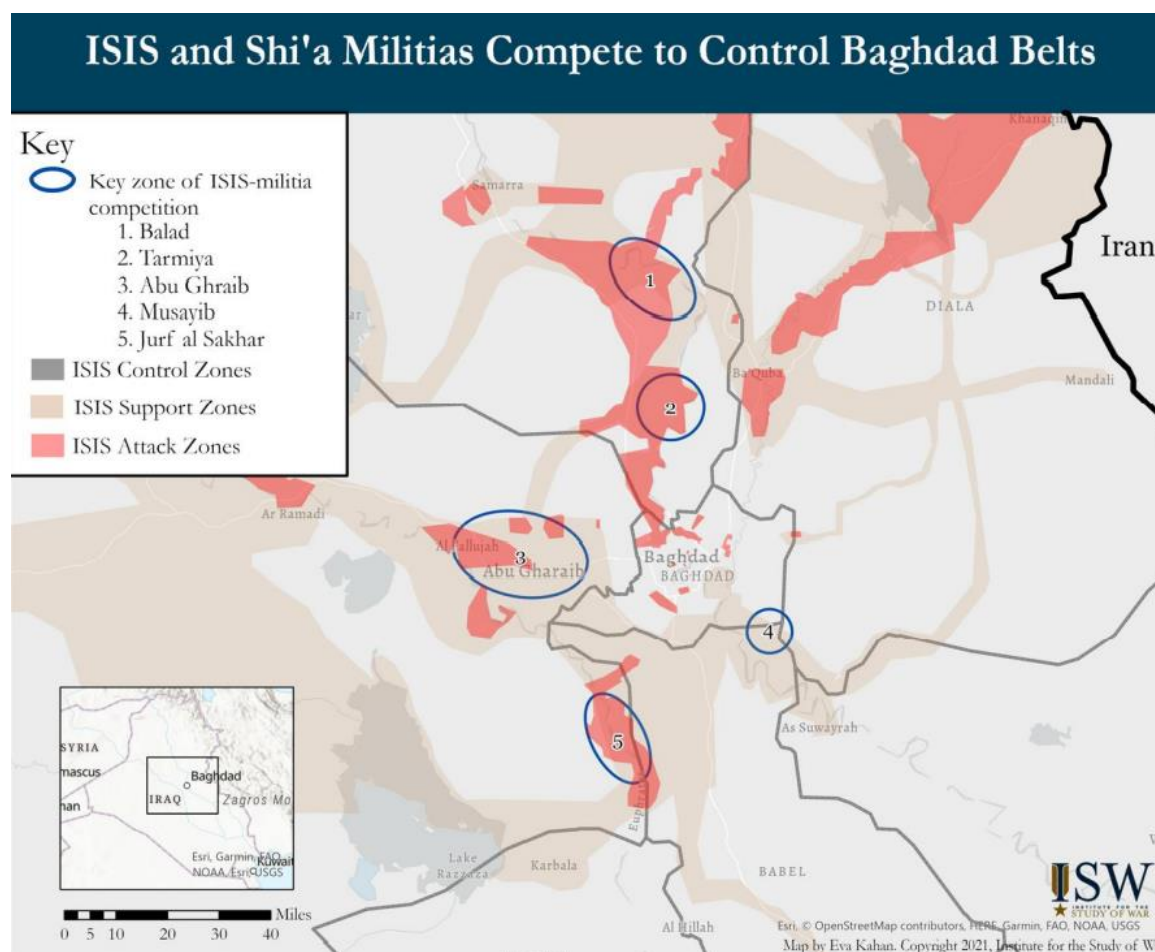
¹⁸⁵ Shafaq, *ISIS claims responsibility for Saladin bloody attack*, 12 March 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, *ISIS is regrouping, gaining strength in Iraq's disputed territories: Peshmerga ministry official*, 27 January 2021, [url](#); CNN, *ISIS behind brutal attack in Salah al-Din province, Iraq, military says*, 14 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Al-Jazeera, *Suspected ISIL attack kills at least 12 Iraqi police near Kirkuk*, 5 September 2021, [url](#)



are equally targeting civilians for ransom and release them upon receiving money. Additionally, 'there have been more of these incidents in the last months, though still not that many.'¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, more generally regarding ISIL targeting, she observed that ISIL is also separately going into certain villages and towns and killing *Mukhtars*, other community leaders, and other individuals who are providing evidence of ISIL movements/membership to security actors. She stated that that 'that has been going on for a long time, with the vast majority of incidents happening in Nineveh.' Specifically on the individual targeting of security force members, she did not have information on reports of patterns of other types of individual targeting except those done by ISIL.¹⁸⁸

The following map shows the areas of Baghdad Belts where ISIL and the PMF compete for control:



Map 2: ISIL and Shia Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Belts © ISW 2021¹⁸⁹

In addition to the above-mentioned tactics, ISIL increased its attacks on the Iraqi electricity grid.¹⁹⁰ On 24 January 2021, the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity announced on Facebook that 'organised' terrorist attacks targeted the electricity grid in the governorates of Ninewa, Kirkuk and Salah Al-Din which included several towers and lines located to the west of Mosul and in

¹⁸⁷ Middle East Researcher, Email to EUAA, 3 November 2021. The researcher has worked in the field for several years and has extensive knowledge on several Middle Eastern countries including Iraq. The researcher has insight to the situation and treatment of persons (perceived to be) ISIL affiliates and issues of westernization.

¹⁸⁸ Middle East Researcher, Email to EUAA, 3 November 2021

¹⁸⁹ ISW, ISIL and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: JANUARY 21 – JANUARY 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

Al-Sufra in Kirkuk. According to the source, the attacks resulted in significant outages across the provinces.¹⁹¹ Later that day, technicians and security personnel who were sent by the Ministry to repair the damages were targeted by IED attacks that led to light injuries among the personnel and material damage.¹⁹² Moreover, similar attacks damaged 13 electricity towers in Salah Al-Din, Kirkuk, and Ninewa in August 2021, and ISIL claimed dozens of such attacks in Iraq and ‘threatened other vital infrastructure’.¹⁹³

Other Iraqi infrastructure targeted by ISIL included highways and oil refineries.¹⁹⁴

Government of Iraq

In response to US threats to close its embassy in Iraq due to increased attacks targeting the International Zone by Iranian-backed militias between July and September 2020, the Iraqi government took measures to increase the security in that area of Baghdad.¹⁹⁵ However, the ability of the Iraqi government to contain the Popular Mobilisation Committee (PMC) or hold its fighters accountable for their actions ‘remains tenuous’.¹⁹⁶ Newlines Institute observed that ‘attempts to bring these militias within the fold of the Iraqi state have been unsuccessful’.¹⁹⁷

KH, for instance, called for the dismissal of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Al-Kadhimi, and threatened that KH would take its role in maintaining security, following the Prime Minister’s changes to the leadership of the ISF in the wake of the ISIL suicide attacks in Baghdad that took place in January 2021.¹⁹⁸ Another militia, *Rab’Allah*, staged a parade in Baghdad on 25 March 2021, intimidating the Iraqi government. The latter responded with symbolic deployments to Baghdad due to lack in manpower and capacity to address the threat such militias pose.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, the Iraqi authorities arrested a PMF commander in Baghdad on 26 May 2021 for accusations of assassination of an activist in Karbala. Reportedly, PMF elements ‘deployed within the former International Zone and demanded his release’; and the commander was released 12 days later as ‘the investigation court did not find evidence proving his involvement’.²⁰⁰

Relating in July 2021, a report to the UN Security Council by the Al Qaida/ISIL Sanctions Monitoring Team described the government’s efforts to counter ISIL as successful, as they resulted in the killing of ISIL deputy leader Jabir Salman Saleh Al-Issawi in the south of Kirkuk in late January 2021, and of the leader Jabbar Ali Fayadh Ghanem Sabbah in southern Iraq,

¹⁹¹ Iraq, Ministry of Electricity [Facebook], posted on: 24 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹² Iraq, Ministry of Electricity [Facebook], posted on: 24 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³ Rudaw, Terror attacks damage 13 electricity towers: Iraqi ministry, 5 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ OSAC, Iraq Country security Report, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁹⁶ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁹⁷ Newlines Institute, A Thousand Hezbollahs: Iraq’s Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁹⁸ Rudaw, المسؤول الأمني لحزب الله العراقي يدعو "لطرده" الكاظمي ويهدد: المقاومة الإسلامية ستأخذ دورها, 22 January 2021, [url](#); [KH’s security commander calls for the dismissal of Kadhimi and threatens: Islamic Resistance would take its role], 22 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region’, 7 May 2021, [url](#); see also: Kurdistan 24, Rab’allah militia parades through Baghdad, issues list of demands to PM, 25 March 2021, [url](#); Shafaq, Raballah movement appeared in military parade in Baghdad, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/700), 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 7



who trained the suicide bombers who conducted the January attacks in Baghdad in February 2021.²⁰¹

According to USDOD, there are four security institutions in federal Iraq, all under the command of the Iraqi Prime Minister: Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Interior, Counter-terrorism Service, and the PMC. The Ministry of Defence comprises the following units: Ground forces (which include Army Divisions, Special Forces, Special Security Division, and Commando Brigades), Army Aviation Command, Air Force, Navy, and Air Defence Command. The Ministry of Interior comprises the Emergency Response Division, the Federal Police, and the Border Guard Force.²⁰²

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

For more information on the ISF, please see Section 1.3.1.1 of the [EASO-COI Report – Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#).

According to OSAC²⁰³ report of 2 September 2021, the ISF are largely present in most of the major urban areas and have ‘a limited ability to respond to security incidents, terrorist attacks, and criminal activities’. They operate under the auspices of the Ministries of Interior and Defence, as well as ‘within the quasi-ministerial Counterterrorism Service’. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) is in charge of domestic law enforcement and oversees the ‘Federal Police, Provincial Police, Facilities Protection Service, Civil Defence, and Department of Border Enforcement’. The Iraqi military forces which operate under the Ministry of Defence conduct counterterrorism operations in conjunction with the MOI in addition to their conventional tasks of defending the country. Additionally, the Counterterrorism Service (CTS) oversees the ‘Counterterrorism Command, an organization that includes three brigades of special operations forces’ and reports directly to the prime minister. It is also in charge of the security of the International Zone of Baghdad together with the Special Division of the ISF. Furthermore, there is an intelligence agency for the National Security Service which reports directly to the prime minister and an Energy Police which is responsible for protecting energy infrastructure and which operates under the Ministry of Oil.²⁰⁴

Attempts to ‘curb militia influence’ render the ISF, or the Iraqi government in general, ‘vulnerable to intimidation and attacks by the militias’.²⁰⁵ GardaWorld stated that ‘Militias increasingly appear to be targeting Iraqi security forces perceived as loyal to the prime minister; state security forces are unlikely to confront militias, however, mitigating the risk of civil war’.²⁰⁶ According to ISW, PMF units had already targeted ISF officials in Shula and Al-

²⁰¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), paras. 37, 40

²⁰² USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p.32

²⁰³ ‘a partnership between the U.S. Department of State and private-sector security community that supports the safe operations of U.S. organizations overseas through threat alerts, analysis, and peer networking groups’. OSAC, Who We Are, n. d., [url](#)

²⁰⁴ OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 34

²⁰⁶ GardaWorld, Iraq Country Report, updated 26 October 2021, [url](#); USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 50





Mansour and that they continue to contest the control the ISF have on key routes in the Baghdad Belts, however, this information could not be corroborated from other sources.²⁰⁷ A 'concerning development', according to ISW, was the attempts by the 'Badr Organization-infiltrated Ministry of Interior' to push the Iraqi Army away from Baghdad and other major cities.²⁰⁸

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

Capabilities and affiliation

The PMU (also known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces, PMF) are 'an umbrella of Iraqi state-sponsored armed groups and militias under the command of Iraq's prime minister'; some of the prominent militias overtly oppose the US presence in Iraq and 'answer to Iran despite being part of the Iraqi state's security apparatus'.²⁰⁹

The total manpower of the PMU is 164 000 members, of whom 110 000 are Shia, 45 000 Sunni, and 10 000 minorities. Of the Shiite factions, around 70 000 are loyalists to the Islamic Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran, while the rest are affiliated with other religious authorities, including the Iraqi cleric, Muqtada Al-Sadr.²¹⁰ In a paper published by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in March 2021, Abdullah Al-Jobour stated that 80% of the management and administration of the PMU is allocated to persons affiliated with the Shiite clerical seminary of Iran, also known as *Marji'yya*. According to the source, Sunni and minority PMUs hold no positions in the upper and medium management of the PMF.²¹¹ Newlines Institute spoke of tensions between the factions of the PMU affiliated with Iran's Khamenei (also known as *Wala'i*) and those affiliated with Iraq's supreme Shiite cleric Al-Sistani. Such tensions manifested themselves through attempts to restructure the PMU in line with the interests of the IRGC loyalist factions and through press statements and mutual accusations between the two groups. In April 2020, Al-Sistani loyalist factions of the PMU became integrated into the Iraqi armed forces.²¹²

As regards *Wala'i* factions, 42% of their members operate under the umbrella of the PMU, while the rest operate in other security apparatuses such as the Iraqi Army, the ISF, and intelligence forces.²¹³ The PMU maintain a large margin of autonomy and have independent military, legal, and economic structures.²¹⁴ Moreover, those groups have staged military parades in Baghdad, e.g., in March 2021 by Rab'Allah and in June 2021 when PMF factions flooded Baghdad's Green Zone following the arrest by the ISF of PMF leader Qassim Musleh.

²⁰⁷ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰⁸ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰⁹ Newlines Institute, Iran Using Iraqi Kurdistan Against the U.S. and Turkey, 19 February 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁰ Newlines Institute, A Thousand Hezbollah: Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 8; see also: USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 50

²¹¹ Abdullah Al-Jobour, The Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq: Regional Dynamics and Local Visibilities, FES, March 2021, [url](#), p. 22; see also: Newlines Institute, A Thousand Hezbollah: Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 8

²¹² Newlines Institute, A Thousand Hezbollah: Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p.p 9-10

²¹³ Abdullah Al-Jobour, The Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq: Regional Dynamics and Local Visibilities, FES, March 2021, [url](#), p. 26

²¹⁴ Abdullah Al-Jbour, The Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq: Regional Dynamics and Local Visibilities, FES, March 2021, [url](#), p. 24





The PMU leader was released afterwards despite accusations of assassination of activists and attacking the U.S Embassy in Baghdad with rockets.²¹⁵

Iranian-backed militias in Iraq have caches of ‘short-range ballistic missiles, armed drones, and smaller-scale rockets’ and produce Iranian weaponry under Iranian supervision and transport Iranian weapons to Syria through Iraq.²¹⁶ PMF factions showcased some of its weaponry, including Russian-made tanks, boats, rocket launchers and Iranian-made drones, in a march organised on 26 June 2021 in Camp Ashraf in Diyala governorate.²¹⁷

Presence, dynamics and tactics

The withdrawal of US troops from Iraq has influenced the presence and expansion of Iranian-backed militias in different provinces. The departure of the US from the Iraqi-Syrian border in Anbar in March 2020, for example, has led to the expansion of Iranian-backed militias, including Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH), at Al-Qaim border crossing. Additionally, Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH), which has been present in the northern Baghdad Belts, in the vicinity of Balad in Salah Al-Din province, has benefitted from the transfer of the Balad Air Base from the US to the ISF in order to fill the security gap. According to ISW, such militias are likely in control of checkpoints and road traffic around the base.²¹⁸

Following the U.S crack-down on the Iran-affiliated militias in Iraq, those groups adopted a new strategy to evade accountability, i.e., the creation of facade groups ‘unaffiliated with the PMF’, such as *Usbat Al-Thaireen* (League of Revolutionaries) and *Rab’Allah* (Followers of Allah) to target US assets in Iraq, and to conduct other activities such as raiding venues deemed as westernised and targeting activists.²¹⁹ Such groups, or armed cells, are connected to KH and other Iranian-backed militias in Iraq such as AAH and Kata’ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada (KSS).²²⁰ The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace reported that anti-US PMF groups such as KH and AAH ‘use Telegram to create new groups that publicize their attacks’. The source identified at least 26 groups of either paramilitary or vigilante formations that appeared between March 2020 and March 2021, some of them run channels on Telegram that publicise their attacks.²²¹

²¹⁵ Al-Ain, *المعركة العراقية بين الدولة والمليشيات* [About the Battle between the State and the Militias], 4 June 2021, [url](#); See also: Washington Post (The), *Iraq releases Iran-linked militiaman in blow to efforts to check impunity*, 9 June 2021, [url](#); ABC News, *Thousands march in large show of Iraqi paramilitary force*, 26 June 2021, [url](#); Al-Hurra, *وزير الدفاع العراقي يوجه تحذيرات غير مسبقة لفصائل الحشد الشعبي* [Iraqi defense minister issues unprecedented warning to PMF factions], 29 May 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁶ ISW, *IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 26

²¹⁷ Al-Jazeera, *Iraq’s PMF display tanks and weaponry in large anniversary parade*, 26 June 2021, [url](#); ABC News, *Thousands march in large show of Iraqi paramilitary force*, 26 June 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁸ ISW, *ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region*, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²¹⁹ Al-Aqeedi, R., *ISIS Attacks Rekindle Iraqi-Saudi Conflict*, Newlines Institute, 1 February 2021, [url](#); see also: Newlines Institute, *Iran Using Iraqi Kurdistan Against the U.S. and Turkey*, 19 February 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰ Abdullah Al-Jbour, *The Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq: Regional Dynamics and Local Visibilities*, FES, March 2021, [url](#), p. 17

²²¹ The 26 groups are either paramilitary or vigilante and comprise of: *Usbat Al-Thaireen* (The League of Revolutionaries), *Fariq Fatemiyoun Al-Maidani* (The Field-based Fatemiyoun Team), *Ashab Al-Kahf* (The People of the Cave), *Qabdat Al-Huda* (The Grip of Guidance), *Saraya Al-Thawra Al-Eshreen Al-Tahniya* (The Second 1920 Revolution Companies), *Tha’ar Al-Muhandis* (The Revenge of Muhandis), *Jund Soleimani* (The Soldiers of Soleimani), *Kata’ib Al-Shabaniya* (The Shabaniya Brigades), *Liwa Muntaqimon* (The Avengers Brigades), *Ahl Al-Marooof* (The People of Favours), *Saraya Awliya Al-Dam* (The Blood Guardians’ Companies), *Rab’Allah* (God’s People), *Abu Jadaha* (The People of the Lighter), *Al-Majame’e Al-Khasa* (The Special Groups), *Quwat Thu Al-Faqar* (The Forces of Thu Al-Faqar), *Saraya Al-Muntaqim* (The Avengers Companies), *Qasim Al-Jabarin* (The Breaker of Titans Companies), *Liwa Al-Shahid Ahmed Dar’am* (The Brigades of Martyr Ahmed Dar’am), *Firqat Al-Ghashia* (The





Another shift in the intra-militia dynamics took place following the assassination of the IRGC's leader Qasem Soleimani and the PMF's Deputy Commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis in January 2020, as PMF groups were forced to collaborate in the framework of the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Commission (IRCC). The IRCC, which came to existence on 10 October 2020,²²² is an entity that claims to speak on behalf of a coalition of PMF groups and is spearheaded by four prominent militias, including KH and AAH, which made it influential.²²³ Harakat Al-Nujaba (HAN) militia announced its membership in the IRCC On 28 February 2021.²²⁴ According to Carnegie Endowment, 'Iran has been able to consolidate a semblance of control over Iraq's groups through the IRCC framework'.²²⁵

Attacks on US/Coalition forces and assets

Following a decline in such militias activities between October 2020 and January 2021, rocket attacks on Coalition bases picked up again, influenced by the trilateral relations between Iraq, Iran and the US.²²⁶ For the period of October – December 2020, Musings on Iraq reported that Iranian-backed militias carried out a total of seven IED and rocket attacks in October 2020 (in Babil, Thi-Qar, Qadissiya, Baghdad, Muthanna, and Basrah), one attack in November 2020 (Baghdad), and eight attacks in December 2020 (Muthanna, Baghdad, Thi-Qar, Babil, and Qadissiya).²²⁷ Between 1 April and 30 June 2021, nine attacks of this type were reported.²²⁸ In order to avoid accountability for rocket attacks of this kind, Iranian-backed militias tended to falsely attribute such attacks to fake third parties. This was the case, for example, for the rocket attack that targeted Baghdad International Airport on 22 April 2021, where on 24 April, PMF Telegram channels attributed the attack to a Kurdish armed group named 'Protectors of the Kurdistan Region' before the attack was claimed by a Shia militia called Fasail Rijal Allah (Factions of the Men of God) later that day.²²⁹

However, Iranian-backed militias shifted their tactics towards targeting Coalition logistical convoys which are manned by Iraqi nationals and do not contain coalition personnel.²³⁰ This new tactic is considered as a 'safer space' for militias as they do not invite retaliation by the US or the Coalition forces.²³¹ During the period 11 August – 2 October 2020, 17 IED attacks targeting 'logistic and supply transport convoys contracted by the international counter-ISIL coalition' were reported in Babil, Baghdad, Thi-Qar, Qadissiyah and Salah Al-Din and resulted

Division of the Overwhelming), Ulu Al-Azam (Those of the Perseverance and Strong Will), Ahbab Allah (God's Beloved People), Saraya Tha'ar Al-Shuhada (The Companies of Martyrs' Revenge), Kata'ib Abul-Fadl Al-Abbas (Abu-Fadl Al-Abbas Brigades), Al-Muqawama Al-Dawliya (The International Resistance), Alwiyat Al-Wa'ad Al-Haq (The Brigades of the Truthful Promise), and Liwa Khaybar (The Khaybar Brigade). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Iraq's Resurgent Paramilitaries, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

²²² Washington Institute, Harakat al-Nujaba Identifies with the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

²²³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Iraq's Resurgent Paramilitaries, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

²²³ Washington Institute, Harakat al-Nujaba Identifies with the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴ Washington Institute, Harakat al-Nujaba Identifies with the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Iraq's Resurgent Paramilitaries, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

²²⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Iraq's Resurgent Paramilitaries, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

²²⁷ Musings on Iraq, Iran Warns Its Allies About Attacking US Targets In Iraq, 26 December 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 44; see also: UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/700), 3 August 2021, [url](#), paras. 17, 19

²²⁹ Washington Institute, Rijal Allah Claims the Baghdad Airport Attack, 24 April 2021, [url](#)

²³⁰ Washington Institute, Iraq's Drone and Rocket Epidemic, By the Number, 27 June 2021, [url](#); BBC, Iraqi interpreters 'stalked by death squads' for helping the British, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

²³¹ Washington Institute, Iraq's Drone and Rocket Epidemic, By the Number, 27 June 2021, [url](#)





in casualties.²³² GardaWorld spoke of ‘Weekly attacks target convoys transporting supplies to [U.S.] bases’,²³³ and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace reported on an uptick in the attacks that targeted logistical convoys perceived to be supplying the Coalition forces in central and southern Iraq between October 2020 and January 2021.²³⁴ In December 2020, 18 similar incidents were reported in Babil, Basrah, Thi-Qar, Muthanna, Qadisiya, and Salah Al-Din; and between 17 February and 21 March 2021, 30 IED attacks reportedly took place in Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Basrah, Thi-Qar, Muthanna, Qadisiya, and Salah Al-Din.²³⁵ Many of the attacks of this kind have been claimed by façade groups such as Qasem Al-Jabbarin which is affiliated with KH and Ashab Al-Kahf (AAK) and Saraya Awliya Al-Dam (SAD) which are affiliated with AAH.²³⁶

In addition to rocket attacks and attacks that target Coalition logistical convoys, the Washington Institute observed that, as of 7 March 2021, KH was shifting its tactics ‘to a new phase of conflict with U.S. forces in Iraq’, namely by the use of ‘drone attacks.’²³⁷ This new tactic, according to the US Lead Inspector General, ‘allows Iran and the militias to have a standoff capability significantly outside the range that indirect fire attacks allow’ and enables ‘more precise and potentially lethal attacks than IEDs or indirect-fire attacks’.²³⁸ Iranian-backed militias conducted the ‘first ever fixed-wing, explosive-laden’ UAV attacks against US interests in Iraq in the second quarter of 2021, starting with Erbil in April 2021 and later targeted Al-Asad Air Base in May 2021. In response to the attacks, the US targeted on 27 June 2021 facilities in Iraq and Syria used by many Iranian-backed militias including KH and KSS.²³⁹

In a report published in June 2021, the Washington Institute stated that drone attacks against U.S. assets in Iraq were ‘heading up again, with a major qualitative jump as drones outnumber rockets for the first time’, and that such attacks were significantly growing in quantity and quality.²⁴⁰ This escalation against U.S. targets coincided with a statement issued on 22 May 2021 by the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee (IRCC) in which the Committee criticised the Iraqi government for its failure to negotiate a withdrawal of foreign forces in Iraq and used legal arguments to legitimise attacks against the U.S. forces present in the country.²⁴¹ The source reported on the following drone attacks that took place in 2021:

- A fixed-wing drone attack that targeted a coalition hangar located at Erbil Airport on 14 April;
- An alleged drone attack that targeted coalition locations at Balad base on 28 April. This attack was claimed on 15 May by Liwa Al-Khaibar;

²³² UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1099), 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 27

²³³ GardaWorld, Iraq Country Report, updated 26 October 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Iraq’s Resurgent Paramilitaries, 22 April 2021, [url](#); see also: EPIC, ISHM: December 24, 2020 – January 7, 2021, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/120), 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 20; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/426), 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 20

²³⁶ Washington Institute, Kataib Hezbollah Leads Drone Warfare Inside Iraq, 14 May 2021, [url](#)

²³⁷ Washington Institute, Kataib Hezbollah Leads Drone Warfare Inside Iraq, 14 May 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 49; see also: GardaWorld, Iraq Country Report, updated 26 October 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 44

²⁴⁰ Washington Institute, Iraq’s Drone and Rocket Epidemic, By the Number, 27 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴¹ Washington Institute, The Tansiqiya Signals Escalation Versus the United States, 24 May 2021, [url](#)



- Several drone attacks that targeted location at Al-Asad Air Base including one that targeted a hangar on 8 May 2021.²⁴²
- A two-drone strike that hit Al-Asad Air Base on 6 June;
- A two-drone attack on a coalition site at Baghdad International Airport on 15 June; and
- A Four-drone attack that targeted the proximity of leadership complexes in Erbil on 27 June.²⁴³

The following graph by the Washington Institute shows the evolution of PMF rocket and drone attacks that targeted coalition points of presence in Iraq between January 2020 and June 2021:

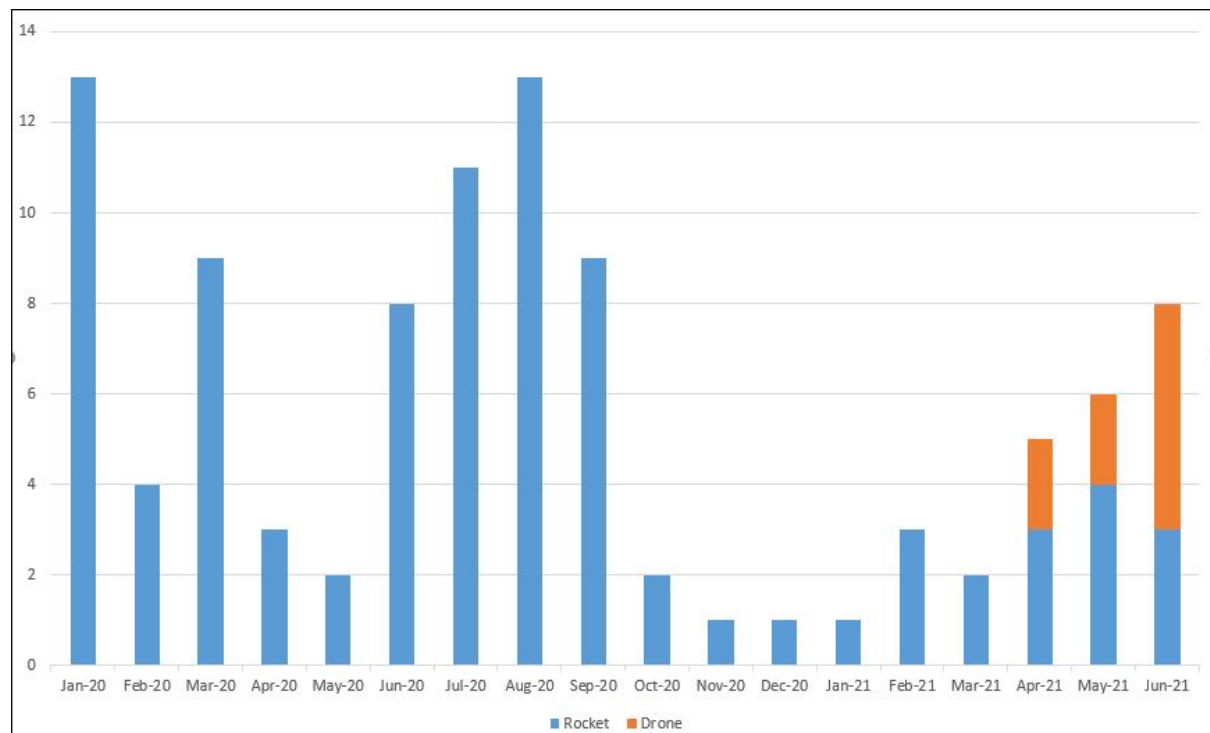


Figure 3: Rocket and drone attacks on coalition points of presence ©Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2021²⁴⁴

Between July and September 2021, Iranian-backed militias launched multiple UAV and rocket attacks on US and Coalition positions in Baghdad, Bashur Air Base, Al-Asad Air Base and Erbil Air Base, including seven UAV attacks all taking place in July.²⁴⁵ However, the remainder of the quarter witnessed a notable pause in the attacks against US and Coalition assets which is assessed by USDOD to stem ‘from various factors including the militias’ desire to manage escalation and evaluate U.S. intentions following the July 26 announcement that U.S. forces will transition to a non-combat role by the end of the year’.²⁴⁶

²⁴² Washington Institute, Kataib Hezbollah Leads Drone Warfare Inside Iraq, 14 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³ Washington Institute, Iraq’s Drone and Rocket Epidemic, By the Number, 27 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Washington Institute, Iraq’s Drone and Rocket Epidemic, By the Number, 27 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 49

²⁴⁶ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 49



Finally, sources reported on instances where the PMF attributed their own attacks to ISIL.²⁴⁷ Examples of such trend included the assassination of the security analyst Husham Al-Hashimi in Baghdad on 6 July 2020,²⁴⁸ and the abduction and killing of eight Sunni civilians likely by AAH in Farhatiya in Salah Al-Din Province on 17 October 2020.²⁴⁹

Actors in the KRI

Peshmerga

For more information on the Peshmerga, please see Section 1.3.1.3 of the [EASO-COI Report – Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#).

According to a USDOD report of 4 November 2021, the Kurdistan security forces are divided into three categories:

- Forces of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs which include 18 regional guard brigades, two independent Shingal battalions, and 1st and 2nd Support Force Commands;
- Forces of the Kurdish Ministry of Interior which comprise the Zeravani forces (KDP affiliated) and the Emergency Response Force (PUK affiliated); and
- Other KRG forces which include Parastin and the Counter Terrorism Division which are KDP affiliated, and the Zanyari forces and the Counter Terrorism Group which are PUK affiliated. Asayish forces fall within this category and both the KDP and PUK have Asayish forces affiliated with them.²⁵⁰

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

The PKK was able to expand its area of presence on both sides of the Syrian-Iraqi border due to its 'ideological and organizational links with the YPG [Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units²⁵¹] and newly formed militias in northern Iraq, particularly the Sinjar District in Ninawa' and to create crossing corridors through the border which its fighters use.²⁵²

Following the tensions between the KRG and the Iraqi Federal government in the wake of the Kurdish referendum of independence, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) lost most of the influence it enjoyed in areas to the south of Zummar, including Sinjar, to the PKK which, according to the source, 'was building its own base of support', and attempting to increase its influence within other groups such as the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS) in Iraq.²⁵³

A trend observed in June 2021 in Sinjar area, Ninewa Province, was the alignment between PMF militias and PKK elements.²⁵⁴ The PMF militias in Sinjar 'provided political cover for

²⁴⁷ ISW, 'ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#); ISW, 'ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#); Ultra Iraq, 'لواء العصاب في الحشد يتهم "داعش" بارتكاب مجزرة صلاح الدين' [AAH Brigade accuses Daesh of committing the Salah Al-Din massacre], 18 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ ISW, 'ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁹ ISW, 'ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2; Ultra Iraq, 'لواء العصاب في الحشد يتهم "داعش" بارتكاب مجزرة صلاح الدين' [AAH Brigade accuses Daesh of committing the Salah Al-Din massacre], 18 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 46

²⁵¹ Clingendael, 'The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict', 19 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵² Hasan, Harith and Kheder Khaddour, 'The Making of the Kurdish Frontier: Power, Conflict, and Governance in the Iraqi-Syrian Borderlands', Carnegie Middle East Center, 30 March 2021, [url](#); see also: OSAC, 'Iraq Country Security report', 2 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵³ Hasan, Harith and Kheder Khaddour, 'The Making of the Kurdish Frontier: Power, Conflict, and Governance in the Iraqi-Syrian Borderlands', Carnegie Middle East Center, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ ISW, 'IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST', June 2021, [url](#), p. 26





continued PKK presence'.²⁵⁵ According to the Arab Center Washington DC (ASW),²⁵⁶ citing reports, PKK fighters joined the PMF units present in Sinjar.²⁵⁷ On 13 February 2021, the Iranian-backed militia Harakat Hezbollah Al-Nujaba (HHN) issued a statement in which it threatened Turkey 'with military consequences if it continued to pursue its operations against PKK militants in Ninewa and Sinjar, calling Turkey's forces as 'Turkish occupation forces'.²⁵⁸

As regards the PKK relations with the KRG security forces, a report of Carnegie Middle East Center stated that there was a rivalry between the PKK (and its affiliated factions) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the contested areas, which 'was generated by competition for territory, resources, and status, but it also reflects a contest between two different worldviews, which have given the border distinctive meanings for either side'.²⁵⁹ This rivalry escalated to direct attacks conducted by PKK elements against *Peshmerga* and Asayish forces. In October 2020, the PKK reportedly assassinated a high level Asayish border official in Dohuk, Kurdistan, while he was off-duty²⁶⁰ in his home.²⁶¹ As a result of the killing, the Kurdish government deployed special forces troops to the Gare mountains, used by PKK as a base; a move seen as antagonistic toward the PKK.²⁶² In November and December 2020, two incidents of PKK elements attacking *Peshmerga* were reported. The first incident took place in the Amedy District of Dohuk and the other took place when *Peshmerga* fighters attempted to stop PKK elements from crossing the border with Syria.²⁶³ On 5 June 2021, an attack targeted *Peshmerga* forces in northern Iraq, leading to the death of five *Peshmerga* soldiers and the injury of four. The KRG attributed the attack to PKK, while the latter denied its responsibility.²⁶⁴ OSAC stated in September 2021 that 'fighting between the PKK and Kurdish regional authorities has increased in 2020, particularly in Dohuk province and the northern areas of the Erbil Governorate'.²⁶⁵

International actors

United States and NATO

Upon the request of the Iraqi government, an international coalition led by the United States formed Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) to formalise military actions against ISIL targets.²⁶⁶ The online portal Rule of Law in Armed Conflict

²⁵⁵ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 54

²⁵⁶ ASW is 'is a nonprofit, independent, and nonpartisan research organization dedicated to furthering the political, economic, and social understanding of the Arab world in the United States and to providing insight on US policies and interests in the Middle East'. ASW, About Arab Center Washington DC, n. d., [url](#)

²⁵⁷ ASW, Iraq's Complicated and Challenging Security Situation, 16 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸ New Arab (The), The Iraq Report: PKK, Iran-backed militias threaten Turkey as tensions rise, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ Hasan, Harith and Kheder Khaddour, The Making of the Kurdish Frontier: Power, Conflict, and Governance in the Iraqi-Syrian Borderlands, Carnegie Middle East Center, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁰ K24, Kurdistan Region says PKK behind assassination of border official, 11 October 2020, [url](#); RUDAW, Kurdish security forces accuse PKK in killing of Dohuk border official, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹ RUDAW, Kurdish security forces accuse PKK in killing of Dohuk border official, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁶² New Arab (The), The Iraq Report: Kurd-on-Kurd violence as protesters clash with police, 6 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/120), 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 22

²⁶⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/700), 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22

²⁶⁵ OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), n.d., [url](#)





(RULAC) considers the international coalition's operation 'a single non-international armed conflict that takes place across Iraq and Syria'.²⁶⁷

The United States decision to kill Soleimani and Muhandis in January 2020, escalated tensions between Teheran and Washington. Iraq, that had already experienced months of violent anti-government protests, found itself at the centre of a new wave of escalating contention.²⁶⁸ On 5 January, Iraqi lawmakers passed a non-binding resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country, including over 5 000 American military personnel.²⁶⁹ The drone attack targeting Soleimani and Muhandis unleashed a series of retaliatory attacks from Iranian-backed militia groups against American and coalition targets in Iraq. See the section on the [Popular Mobilisation Forces \(PMF\)](#) above.

In March 2020, the US led coalition began transferring military installations back to Iraqi forces.²⁷⁰ The US continued to withdraw its troops from Iraq in 2020, and the acting Secretary of Defence announced 'a further drawdown of his country's troops in Iraq from 3,000 to 2,500 by 15 January 2021'.²⁷¹ On 26 July 2021, the US and Iraq reached an agreement which formally ends the US combatting role in Iraq by the end of 2021. The agreement foresaw that US forces would stay in Iraq, but would have an advisory role only.²⁷²

As of July 2021, there were 2 500 US troops deployed in Iraq with a focus on countering ISIL remnants in the country,²⁷³ by guaranteeing 'intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to the ISF' and providing 'rapid air support that the Iraqi Air Enterprise cannot provide, both of which are essential to the continued suppression of ISIS'.²⁷⁴ Despite CJTF-OIR's structural shift towards providing training and advisory support to the Iraqi forces, the coalition forces continues to provide air support to the ISF during operations against ISIL. However, the number of airstrikes carried out by coalition forces are reportedly less, according to the CJTF-OIR's report for the third quarter of 2021.²⁷⁵ CJTF-OIR's report for the first quarter of 2021 stated that the Coalition provided support to several elements within the ISF, including 'the Iraqi Army and Air Force, the Counterterrorism Service (CTS), and the Kurdish Peshmerga—and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense'. The CJTF-OIR conducts its advisory activities at two main command centres: the Joint Operations Command–Iraq (JOC-I) in Baghdad and the Kurdish Coordination Center in Erbil.²⁷⁶

NATO maintains a presence in Iraq, and its activities are agreed upon with the Iraqi government. NATO's mission in Iraq is 'a non-combat advisory and training and capacity-building mission' that aims at supporting Iraq by 'strengthening its security institutions and forces, so that they themselves are able to stabilize their country, fight terrorism, and prevent

²⁶⁷ RULAC, Non-International armed conflict in Iraq, [Last updated: 30 April 2021], n.d., [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Dagher, M., The killing of Qassem Soleimani: What does it mean, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The TWI), 9 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Aljazeera, Iraqi parliament calls for expulsion of foreign troops, 5 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ Stars and Stripes, US reduces footprint in Iraq with transfer base used to fight ISIS, 18 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/120), 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 19

²⁷² Reuters, Biden, Kadhimi seal agreement to end U.S. combat mission in Iraq, 27 July 2021, [url](#); BBC, US combat forces to leave Iraq by end of year, 27 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁷³ Reuters, Biden, Kadhimi seal agreement to end U.S. combat mission in Iraq, 27 July 2021, [url](#); Al-Hurra, [لوقف الحروب التي لا تنتهي](#) "In order to stop "endless wars".. The U.S. reduces its forces in Iraq], 15 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ ISW, IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST, June 2021, [url](#), p. 20

²⁷⁵ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. July 1, 2021 – September 2021, 3 November 2021, [url](#), p. 33 & 35

²⁷⁶ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 4 May 2021, [url](#), p. 28



the return of Daesh'.²⁷⁷ In February 2021, NATO's Secretary General, Jan Stoltenberg, announced a decision to expand the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), from today's 500 personnel to 4 000. The NMI, established in 2018, was set up as an 'advisory, training and capacity-building mission' with the objective to help the country quell the threat of ISIL.²⁷⁸ The decision to expand the mission includes providing advice and assistance on security sector reform to local authorities. The increase in personnel will allow the NMI, currently confined to the headquarters of the Ministry of Defence in the capital, to operate outside Baghdad, and to reach out to several security institutions. According to Michael Knight, the figure of 4 000 is not a set goal, but is intended in the event the MAG should completely withdraw.²⁷⁹ In the report covering the period 1 January – 31 March 2021, the U.S Lead Inspector General stated that the Coalition supported the ISF in its fighting against ISIL and conducted 133 airstrikes, the highest since 2019.²⁸⁰ This support continued thru June 2021.²⁸¹

Turkey and Iran

In July 2015, Turkey renewed military operations against the PKK bases inside Iraq, marking the end of the 2013 ceasefire agreement between the Government of Turkey and the PKK.²⁸² In May 2019, Turkey launched 'Operation Claw', consisting of air and ground strikes against PKK targets in northern Iraq.²⁸³ In June 2020, Turkish commando forces, aided by air support, carried anti-PKK operations, Claw-Tiger and Claw-Eagle.²⁸⁴ Turkey's military intervention, historically contained within the KRI areas, expanded beyond the boundaries of the Kurdish region, including the districts of Sinjar and the Makhmour refugee camp, which hosts Kurdish refugees from Turkey.²⁸⁵ New Internationalist Magazine reported that Turkey has expanded its military installations in Iraq to 37, twelve of which established since the June offensive began.²⁸⁶

In late April 2021, the Turkish army launched a large-scale border offensive - dubbed operation Claw-Lightning and Claw-Thunderbolt- into the KRI. The operation targeted PKK's logistical infrastructure and operational capacity, attacking PKK's tunnel networks in northern Iraq's mountainous terrain.²⁸⁷

Turkey's expanding pursuit of PKK targets inside Iraq has escalated tensions between the KDP and the PKK, resulting in deadly clashes between Iraqi Peshmerga forces and PKK militants during 2021.²⁸⁸ Iraqi Kurdish observers, who spoke to Al-Monitor, maintained that neither side had any interest in fighting each other, but that the situation raised fears over renewed intra-Kurdish fighting similar to that of the 1990s that claimed hundreds of civilian

²⁷⁷ NATO, NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Al-Arabiya, NATO will expand mission in Iraq to 4,000 personnel: Stoltenberg, 18 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ Knights, M., Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The), NATO in Iraq: not a surge, 5 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 4 May 2021, [url](#), p. 30

²⁸¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 30

²⁸² Reuters, Turkey launches air strikes on PKK camps after ceasefire move, 11 October 2015, [url](#)

²⁸³ RULAC, Non-International armed conflict in Iraq, [Last updated: 30 April 2021], n.d., [url](#)

²⁸⁴ Anadolu Agency (AA), Turkey launches operation Claw-Tiger in northern Iraq, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ Al-Monitor, Erdogan: Turkey on path to 'unstoppable power' in region, 10 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶ New Internationalist, Turkey ramps up war on Kurds in northern Iraq, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ Jamestown Foundation (The), Maximum pressure: Turkey's anti-PKK counter terrorism campaigns in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ Aljazeera, Fighting intensifies between Peshmerga and PKK in northern Iraq, 14 December 2020, [url](#), Al-Monitor, Deadly attacks stoke KDP-PKK tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

lives.²⁸⁹ Fear of escalating violence has prompted the KRG to set up more bases in the KRI, to prevent PKK fighters from entering towns and villages and to avoid Turkish airstrikes from targeting populated areas. Rights group Christian Peacemaker Teams, cited by Aljazeera in December 2020, reported that the Turkish shelling and air raids have resulted in the killings of almost 100 civilians and the evacuation of 400 villages, in the past five years.²⁹⁰

For more information on Turkey's military intervention, see sections [2.6. Ninewa](#), [2.8 Dohuk](#), and [2.9 Erbil](#).

In June 2020, Iranian and Turkish military carried out attacks in the district of Haj Omran, bordering to Iran. According to Rudaw, media outlets close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said that Turkey and Iran agreed to 'jointly fight what they called Kurdistan Region-based cross border "terrorism"'.²⁹¹

In August 2021, the body of a senior member of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) was found dead in a hotel room in Erbil. The KDPI, who blamed Iran for the killing, stated that the body showed 'serious marks of torture'.²⁹² In September 2021, British-based media outlet, Iran International, reported that Iran launched artillery and drone attacks at Iranian Kurdish groups inside the KRI.²⁹³ According to Amwaj media, the IRGC also threatened to destroy Iranian Kurdish strongholds and basis if authorities in Erbil and Baghdad did not evict the Iranian Kurdish elements from the region.²⁹⁴

Iran has long campaigned for the closure of the US air base in Harir, located in the KRI. In September 2021, Mohammed Bagheri, Senior Commander in the IRGC, said in a comment to Iran TV that Iraq should not allow the United States and Iranian Kurdish opposition groups to have bases on the border to Iran.²⁹⁵

1.3.2 Geographical overview of the security situation

This section provides a brief explanation of different security issues in different geographical areas in the reference period. Different areas have specific security dynamics, trends and patterns, which are briefly described below. These contextual issues are further elaborated in the governorate level chapters.

The north-western and central governorates: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din

Iranian-backed militias escalated IED attacks in the southern Baghdad Belts targeting 'Iraqi-operated logistics convoys contracted by the US-led Coalition' in an attempt to deter Iraqi businesses from cooperating with the US forces in Iraq. According to ISW, such attacks started in February 2020 and 'escalated dramatically in late 2020 and into 2021'.²⁹⁶ During the period 11 August – 2 October 2020, 17 IED attacks targeting 'logistic and supply transport convoys contracted by the international counter-ISIL coalition' were reported in Babil,

²⁸⁹ Al-Monitor, Deadly attacks stoke KDP-PKK tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ Aljazeera, Fighting intensifies between Peshmerga and PKK in northern Iraq, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹ Rudaw, Iran and Turkey conduct military operations in Haji Omaran for second day straight, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁹² Al-Monitor, Are Iranian threats to escalate in Iraqi Kurdistan more hot air?, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁹³ Iran International, Iran's top commander demands closure of US base in northern Iraq, 19 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁴ Amwaj.media, IRGC steps up pressure on Iranian Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, 11 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ Al-Monitor, Are Iranian threats to escalate in Iraqi Kurdistan more hot air?, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#)

Baghdad, Thi-Qar, Qadissiyah and Salah Al-Din and resulted in casualties.²⁹⁷ GardaWorld mentioned that ‘Weekly attacks target convoys transporting supplies to [U.S.] bases’,²⁹⁸ and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace reported on an uptick in the attacks that targeted logistical convoys perceived to be supplying the coalition forces in central and southern Iraq between October 2020 and January 2021.²⁹⁹ In December 2020, 18 similar incidents were reported in Babil, Basrah, Thi-Qar, Muthanna, Qadisiya, and Salah Al-Din; and between 17 February and 21 March 2021, 30 IED attacks reportedly took place in Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Basrah, Thi-Qar, Muthanna, Qadissiya, and Salah Al-Din.³⁰⁰ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace stated that between July 2020 and March 2021, such attacks took place in the provinces of Babil, Baghdad, Qadisiya, Salah Al-Din, Thi-Qar, Basra, and Anbar.³⁰¹

In the northern Baghdad Belts, Iranian-backed militias made use of counter-ISIL mission ‘to expand their presence and profiteering’. According to ISW, militias in Baquba, Tarmiya, and Fallujah reinforced their presence along transit routes and key bases and attempted to maintain control over border crossings for lucrative purposes.³⁰²

ISW stated on 7 May 2021 that in Baghdad city, the PMF ‘maintain support zones [...] from which they have been conducting an on-again off-again rocket campaign since at least 2018, targeting major US-led Coalition assets including the US Embassy and Baghdad International Airport’.³⁰³ Al-Hurra also reported on a rocket attack that targeted the U.S. Embassy on 22 February 2021, and which was launched from Al-Karrada neighbourhood of Baghdad.³⁰⁴ In addition to US assets, the PMF has also targeted local businesses from the Karrada neighbourhood and expanded such activities to include ‘widespread support zones’.³⁰⁵

In addition to military presence, PMF factions seem to consolidate their social presence in Baghdad through groups such as *Rab’Allah*, which attacked liquor stores in sectarian mixed neighbourhoods in Baghdad. Such activities ‘may be aimed at controlling voter behaviour or intimidating political rivals’ and may be also be ‘intended to restrict population collaboration with the Iraqi Security Forces establishing militias as the dominant security force in central Baghdad’.³⁰⁶ Several IED attacks that targeted liquor stores in Baghdad were reported in January and February 2021.³⁰⁷ *Rab’Allah* also staged an armed parade in eastern Baghdad on

²⁹⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1099), 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 27

²⁹⁸ GardaWorld, Iraq Country Report, updated 26 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Iraq’s Resurgent Paramilitaries, 22 April 2021, [url](#); see also: EPIC, ISHM: December 24, 2020 – January 7, 2021, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/120), 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 20; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/426), 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 20

³⁰¹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Iraq’s Resurgent Paramilitaries, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁰² ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region’, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 1

³⁰³ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region’, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁴ Al-Hurra, [صور.. العتور على منصة الصواريخ التي استهدفت السفارة الأميركية في بغداد](#) [Photos.. Launch platform of the missiles that targeted the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad was found], 22 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region’, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁶ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region’, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁷ Nina News, [انفجار عبوة ناسفة على محل لبيع المشروبات الكحولية وسط بغداد](#) [Explosion of IED targeted a liquor store in the centre of Baghdad], 14 January 2021, [url](#); Al-Sumaria, [اصابة مدني بانفجار استهدف محلاً لبيع "المشروبات الكحولية" وسط بغداد](#) [One civilian injured in an IED attack that targeted a liquor store in Baghdad Centre], 17 January 2021, [url](#); Shafaq, [A new explosion targets a liquor shop in Baghdad](#), 18 January 2021, [url](#); Shafaq, [ثاني تفجير يضرب متاجر بيع المشروبات خلال ساعات..](#) [In a few hours.. Another explosion hits a liquor shop in Baghdad], 18 January 2021, [url](#); Al-Sumaria, [انفجار مسيطر عليه قرب محل مشروبات كحولية في تكريت](#) [Controlled detonation of an IED near a liquor shop in Tikrit], 14 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: FEBRUARY 4 – FEBRUARY 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#)



25 March 2021, threatening prominent figures in the Iraqi government including the Iraqi Prime Minister.³⁰⁸

ISIL carried out two suicide attacks in Baghdad within the reference period of this report. On 21 January 2021, 'a rare twin suicide bombing', likely carried out by ISIL, in the central Tayaran Square in Baghdad, killed at least 32 People and injured more than 110.³⁰⁹ ISIL also carried out a suicide attack in Baghdad city on 19 July 2021, which resulted in at least 30 deaths and more than 50 injured.³¹⁰ The attack targeted a crowded market in the Sadr City neighbourhood.³¹¹

On 7 November 2021, Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi survived an assassination attempt that targeted his residence in Baghdad's Green Zone.³¹² According to a statement by an Iraqi military, the attack was by an armed drone that carried explosives, and at least seven guards were injured.³¹³ Two more drones were used in the attack, but were shot down by security forces before reaching their target.³¹⁴ The assassination attempt, according to the Arab Weekly, 'was the culmination of a continued escalation undertaken by Iran's parties and the "Popular Mobilisation Forces" militias since the election results were announced'.³¹⁵

Musings on Iraq stated that in the wake of the attack that targeted the residence of the Iraqi Prime Minister, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Quds Force visited Baghdad and condemned all attempts to threaten the security of Iraq. Reportedly, he 'told the Hashd factions to backdown, accept the election results and unify the Shiite parties'.³¹⁶

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah)

In the KRI, Turkey 'has sought to project influence in Iraqi Kurdistan through a series of military operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and by strengthening political and economic relations with the KRG'.³¹⁷

Turkish military operations against the PKK in northern Iraq were reported between August 2020 and May 2021.³¹⁸ The Turkish Minister of National Defence announced that in November 2020, 28 anti-PKK operations were conducted.³¹⁹ According to the Iraqi Security

³⁰⁸ ISW, 'ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ Al Jazeera, 'Deadly twin suicide attack hits central Baghdad', 21 January 2021, [url](#); NPR, 'Twin Suicide Bombings In Baghdad Market Kill At Least 32, Wound Over 100', 21 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times, 'Suicide Bombings in Crowded Baghdad Market Kill at Least 32', 21 January 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁰ UN Security Council, 'Press Release: Security Council Press Statement on 19 July Terrorist Attack in Iraq', 21 July 2021, [url](#); CNN, 'ISIS claims responsibility for Iraq suicide attack that left dozens dead', 20 July 2021, [url](#)

³¹¹ Reuters, 'Suicide attack in Iraq's Sadr City kills at least 35, wounds dozens -sources', 20 July 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, 'Baghdad bombing: 35 killed in attack on packed Iraq market', 19 July 2021, [url](#)

³¹² BBC, 'Iraqi PM al-Kadhimi survives drone attack on his home', 7 November 2021, [url](#); Reuters, 'Iraqi PM decries "cowardly" attack on his home by drones carrying explosives', 8 November 2021, [url](#)

³¹³ DW, 'Iraq: Prime minister unhurt after assassination attempt by drone', 7 November 2021, [url](#); BBC, 'Iraqi PM al-Kadhimi survives drone attack on his home', 7 November 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁴ France 24, 'Iraqi PM chairs security meeting after drone assassination attempt', 7 November 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁵ Arab Weekly (The), 'Iran's message behind the drone attack on Kadhimi', 9 November 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁶ Musings on Iraq, 'Pro-Iran Hashd Factions Told To Backdown By Tehran and Shiite Parties After Attempt Upon PM Kazemi's Life', 10 November 2021, [url](#)

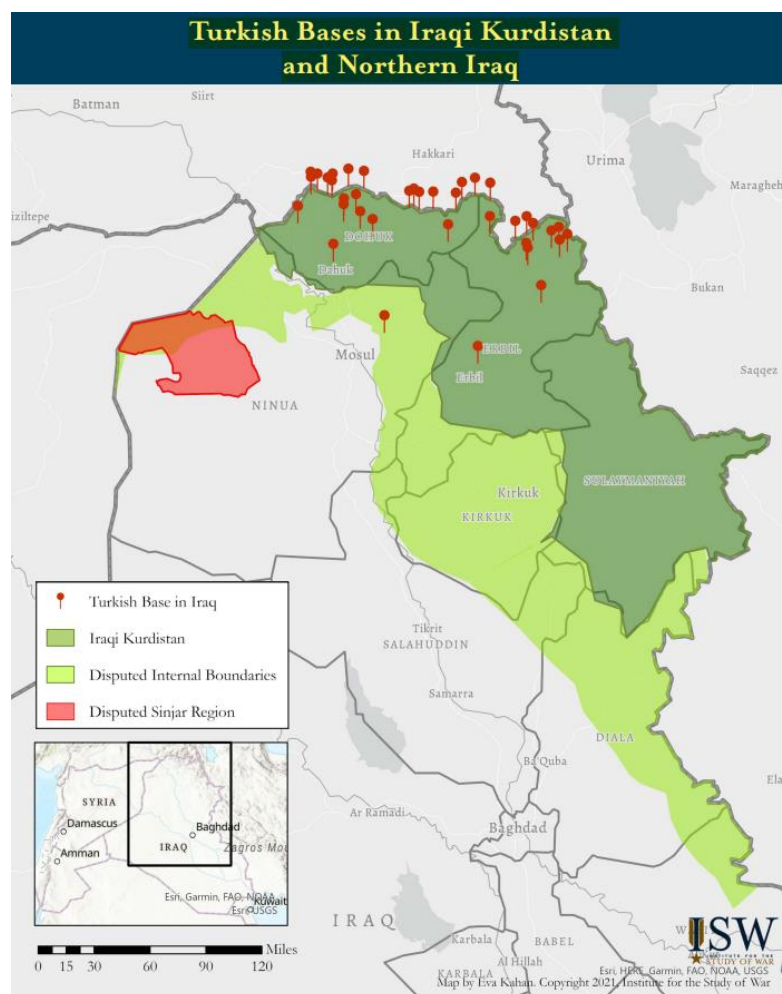
³¹⁷ Newlines Institute, 'Iran Using Iraqi Kurdistan Against the U.S. and Turkey', 19 February 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁸ UN Security Council, 'Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) Report of the Secretary-General', (S/2021/700), 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 20

³¹⁹ UN Security Council, 'Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General', (S/2021/120), 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 21



Media Cell, cited in the UN Security Council report of 10 November 2020, a Turkish drone attack in the Sidakan area in northern Erbil governorate killed two senior Iraqi military officers and their driver. The incident resulted in political tensions between Iraq and Turkey.³²⁰ In April 2021, Turkey launched two military operations, Thunderbolt-Claw and Lightning-Claw, against the PKK in Qandil mountains. While Turkey used to confine its military activities to largely unpopulated areas such as Qandil Mountains, it recently expanded the scope of its operations further south in Dohuk governorate in Sinjar area, ‘forcing local residents to flee dozens of villages and pushing the PKK into clashes with Peshmerga’.³²¹ ISW shared the following map showing the Turkish bases present in the KRI and northern Iraq:



Map 3: Turkish Bases in Iraqi Kurdistan and Northern Iraq © ISW 2021³²²

In addition to Turkish military operations in the KRI, likely Iranian-backed militias launched a ‘series of rocket strikes’ on 15 February 2021 targeting Erbil. According to the source, the rockets were launched from within the KRI, and landed in Naz City, Waziran, a livestock

³²⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1099), 10 November 2020, [url](#), paras. 29-33

³²¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 54

³²² ISW, IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST, June 2021, [url](#), p. 27

market, and outside Erbil International Airport. The attacks resulted in the death of a civilian contractor and the injury of nine persons including a U.S soldier.³²³ The attacks were claimed by *Awliya Al-Dam* (Protectors of the Blood), a militia unknown to Iraqi and Western security experts, which threatened ‘future assaults and warned Kurdish officials of the ‘wrong path’ they have taken in supporting both the US and Turkish ‘occupations’, inflating the death toll above American and KRG accounts.’³²⁴ The rocket attacks were also accompanied by ‘critical messages pushing anti-Turkey and anti-KRG propaganda intended for a Kurdish audience’, which forced the KRG to seek Iran’s help to stop the attacks, amongst fears of an ideological influence Iranian-backed militias could have in the KRI.³²⁵

Iranian-backed militias also made use of their drone capabilities and attacked US positions at Erbil International Airport with two kamikaze drones on 11 September 2021. The attack was intercepted by US protection countermeasures and caused no damage or casualties.³²⁶

Similar attacks took place in April and June 2021, all targeting US locations at the airport,³²⁷ and on 26 June 2021 when three UAV IED targeted locations in north-east Erbil causing material damage.³²⁸ According to Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS),³²⁹ the April 2021 attack can be viewed in the context of the tensions between Iran and Israel, since it was believed that the targeted location was run by Israeli intelligence forces.³³⁰ The source added that Iran accused the KRG of allowing Israel to use the KRI as a base for intelligence, but the latter has constantly denied such accusations.³³¹

The disputed territories

The US Lead Inspector General reported that in the first quarter of 2021, there was a lack of coordination between the ISF and *Peshmerga* along the Kurdish Coordination Line,³³² which increased the security gap that both ISIL and the PMF exploited.³³³ In the second quarter of 2021, however, Iraqi CTS conducted a joint operation with *Peshmerga* in the disputed area, which the CJTF-OIR described as ‘a significant development in uniting Iraq’s national security

³²³ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/426), 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 18; Newlines Institute, Iran Using Iraqi Kurdistan Against the U.S. and Turkey, 19 February 2021, [url](#); WSJ, Investigators Probe Iraq Rocket Attack on U.S. Military Base in Erbil, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁴ Rose, C. and Al-Aqeedi, R., Iran Using Iraqi Kurdistan Against the U.S. and Turkey, Newlines Institute, 19 February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁵ Rose, C. and Al-Aqeedi, R., Iran Using Iraqi Kurdistan Against the U.S. and Turkey, Newlines Institute, 19 February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁶ ISW, Recent Iranian Proxy Attack in Iraqi Kurdistan Unlikely a Signal for New Escalation, 17 September 2021, [url](#)

³²⁷ France 24, Bomb-laden drones hit airport in city of Erbil in northern Iraq, 7 July 2021, [url](#)

³²⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/700), 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 18

³²⁹ Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS) ‘was established in 1968 as an independent research unit within Al Ahram Foundation [...] and] has been one of the leading think tanks in Egypt and the region, committed to independent research and critical thinking’. Europmesco, ACPSS - Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, n. d., [url](#)

³³⁰ ACPSS, كردستان العراق.. ساحة تصعيد جديدة بين إسرائيل وإيران, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

³³¹ ACPSS, كردستان العراق.. ساحة تصعيد جديدة بين إسرائيل وإيران, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

³³² The Line ‘extends across several provinces of northern Iraq, separates the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan Region from the rest of Iraq, and much of the area along either side of the line is claimed by both sides’. USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 4 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 37-38

³³³ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 4 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 38



forces and set conditions for future cooperation between the CTS and the Peshmerga'. The operation came as a response to an ISIL attack that targeted Peshmerga positions.³³⁴ As one of Iran's goals in Iraq is to mitigate the influence of Turkey in the KRI,³³⁵ Iran proxies in Iraq directly targeted a Turkish base in Ninewa province in April 2021, and killed a Turkish soldier for the first time. In retaliation, Turkey likely pressured the KDP-affiliated Peshmerga to 'fire anti-tank guided missiles at two Iranian proxy positions in Ninewa the next day.'³³⁶

In addition to Iranian-backed militias, PKK fighters maintain a presence in Makhmour. According to a UNHCR source cited in the US Lead Inspector General's report of 3 August 2021, the possible presence of 'persons with a non-civilian character' in the Makhmour refugee camp 'makes it difficult for UNHCR to access the camp'. This PKK presence has invited two Turkish UAV attacks on the camp³³⁷ area in June 2021.³³⁸ In addition, a Turkish airstrike that targeted PKK elements was reported to have taken place in Makhmour on 5 June 2021.³³⁹

In a report published in June 2021, ISW stated that Turkey's goal in Iraq is to 'oust the PKK from Sinjar District bordering the Kurdish northeast Syria and from northern Iraq through air campaigns, special operations, and encouraging the implementation of the October 2020 Sinjar Agreement between Baghdad and Erbil.'³⁴⁰ According to the source, when the Sinjar Agreement was negotiated, Iran and its proxies, the PKK, and the residents of Sinjar were not included.³⁴¹

Finally, OSAC observed in September 2021 that ISIL 'maintains lethal capabilities and presents a serious threat almost anywhere along the 700-mile-long Peshmerga and Iraqi Army defensive line'. In the provinces of Ninewa, Kirkuk and Diyala, ISIL 'can conduct asymmetric attacks, to include the use of vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs), ambushes, small unit infantry-style assaults, and assassinations'.³⁴²

Southern Iraq

For information on the security trends and issues in the southern governorates of Iraq, see the chapters of [Basrah](#), [Karbala](#), [Missan](#), [Muthanna](#), [Najaf](#), [Qadisiya](#), [Thi-Qar](#), and [Wassit](#) of this report.

1.3.3. Nature of security incidents

For the purpose of this report, only the following types of events were included in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians.

³³⁴ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), pp. 34, 35

³³⁵ ISW, IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST, June 2021, [url](#), p. 26

³³⁶ ISW, IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST, June 2021, [url](#), p. 28

³³⁷ According to USDOS, cited by the Lead Inspector General, 'the camp has no defined boundary, making it difficult to determine whether Turkish airstrikes there are targeting inside the camp or just outside'. USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 54

³³⁸ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 54

³³⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) Report of the Secretary-General, (S/2021/700), 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 21

³⁴⁰ ISW, IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST, June 2021, [url](#), p. 26

³⁴¹ ISW, IRAQ 2021–2022: A FORECAST, June 2021, [url](#), p. 28

³⁴² OSAC, Iraq Country Security report, 2 September 2021, [url](#)



EUAA used the ACLED Power BI Report dataset for Iraq (10 November 2021) for security incidents figures, graphs and maps.³⁴³ According to this dataset, in all of the reference period (1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021), there were 4 882 security incidents recorded in Iraq: 1 452 were coded as battles, 2 911 as explosions/remote violence, and 519 as violence against civilians. Most security incidents were recorded in Dohuk (1 702), Erbil (664), Diyala (497), Baghdad (383),³⁴⁴ Salah Al-Din (284), Ninewa (281) and Kirkuk (279) governorates. The lowest numbers of security incidents were recorded in Wassit (11) and Karbala (10) governorates.³⁴⁵

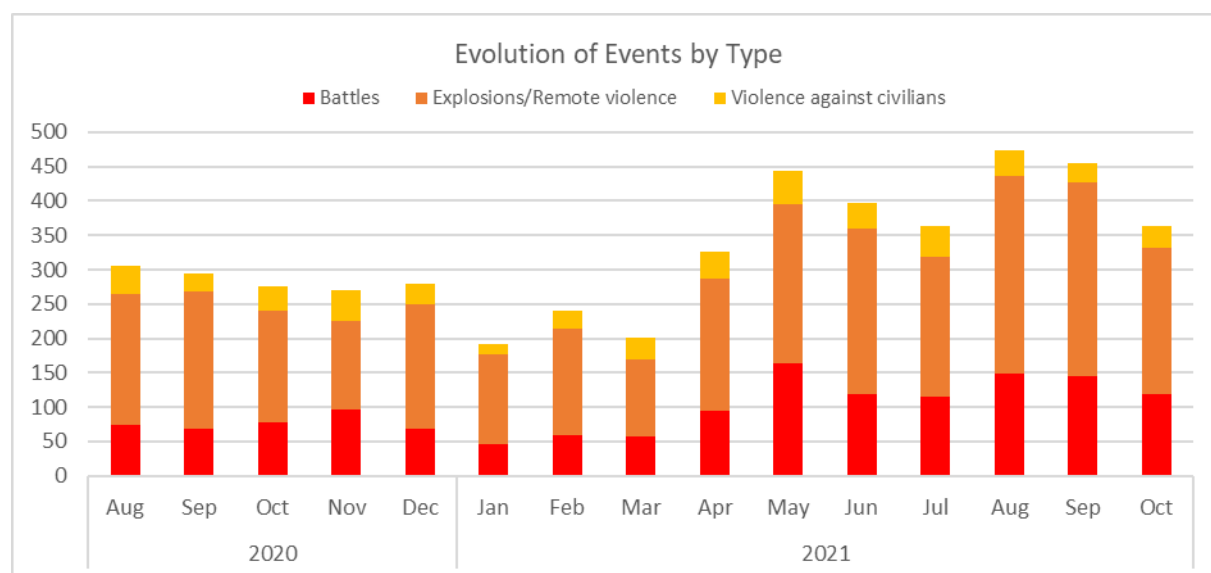


Figure 4: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data³⁴⁶

³⁴³ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ Many of the incidents that actually took place in northern Baghdad belts were coded by ACLED to have taken place in the Khadhimiyah district of Baghdad city. This has significantly increased the number of incidents in Baghdad.

³⁴⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁶ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

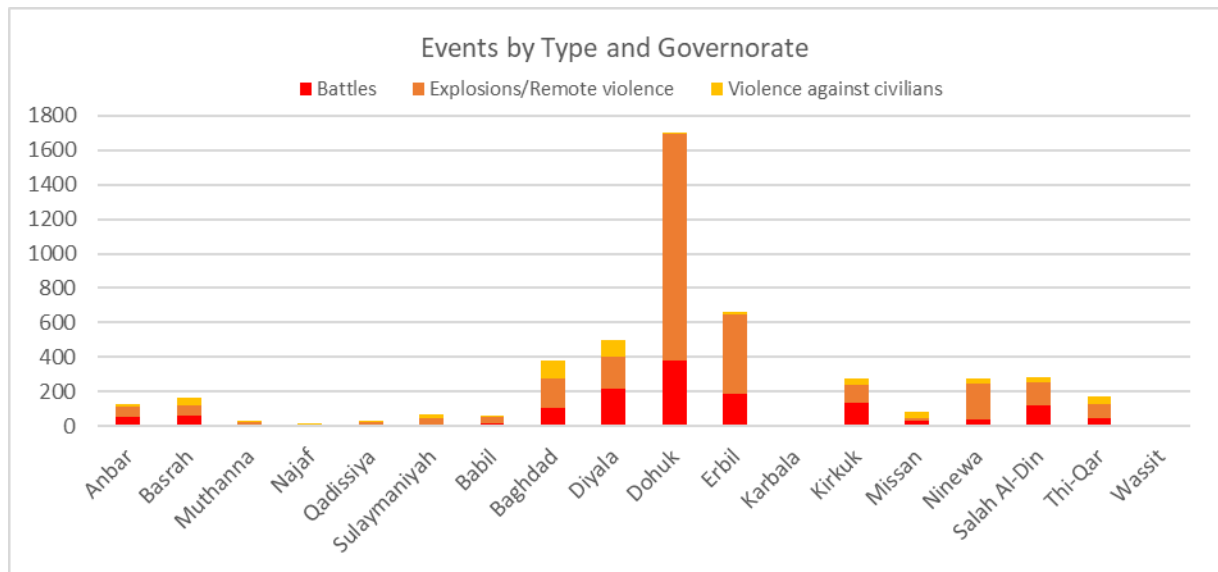
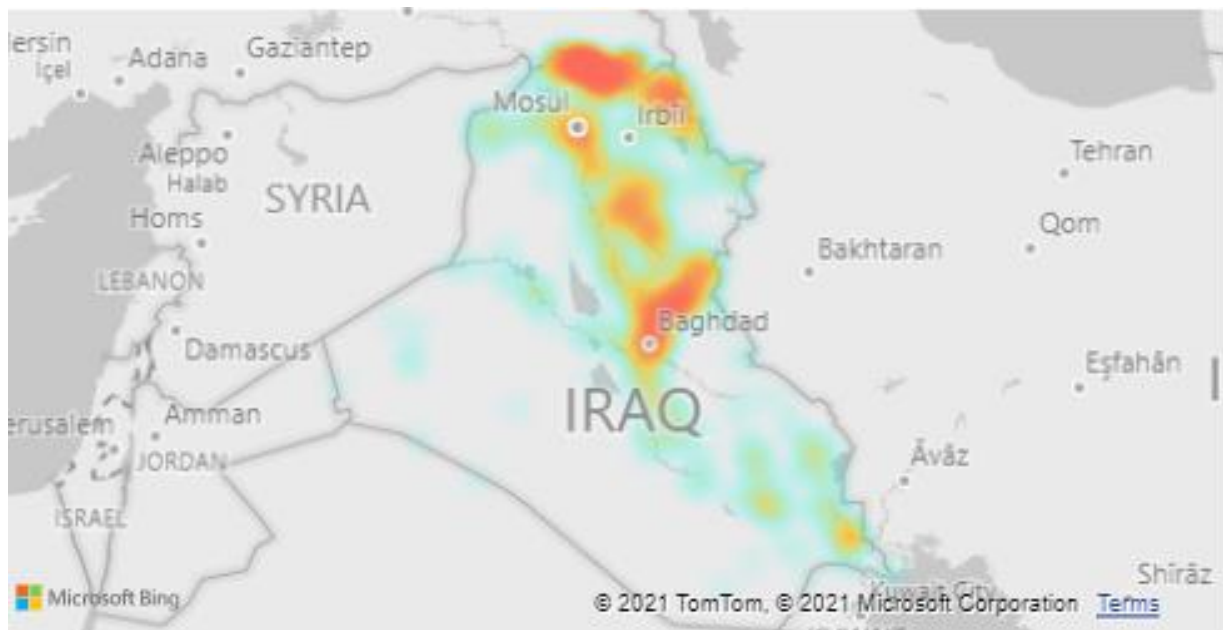


Figure 5: Security events by type coded as battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021 by governorate, based on ACLED data³⁴⁷



Map 4: Heatmap of security events (coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians) occurrences in the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data³⁴⁸

³⁴⁷ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁸ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

Improvised explosive devices and suicide bombing attacks/suicide vest

Explosions/remote violence, which includes explosive devices, artillery fire and air strikes, is the category with the highest number of individual incidents with 2 911 incidents recorded by ACLED in the reference period. The largest number of explosions/remote violence was registered in Dohuk (1 314), Erbil (457), Ninewa (204), Diyala (185), and Baghdad (176). The lowest numbers were recorded in Wassit and Karbala (3 each) and Missan and Najaf (10 each). At a district level, the highest numbers of remote violence during the reference period were recorded in Amadiya, Dohuk (1 136), Rawanduz, Erbil (389), Khanaqin, Diyala (88), and Zakho, Dohuk (170).

The figures varied from month to month, and peaked in May 2021 (231), June 2021 (240), August 2021 (289) and September 2021 (282). Lower levels of this type of incidents were recorded between October 2020 and March 2021, with the lowest being in March 2021 (113).³⁴⁹ ACLED data showed that, as of April 2021, the number of explosions picked up again.³⁵⁰

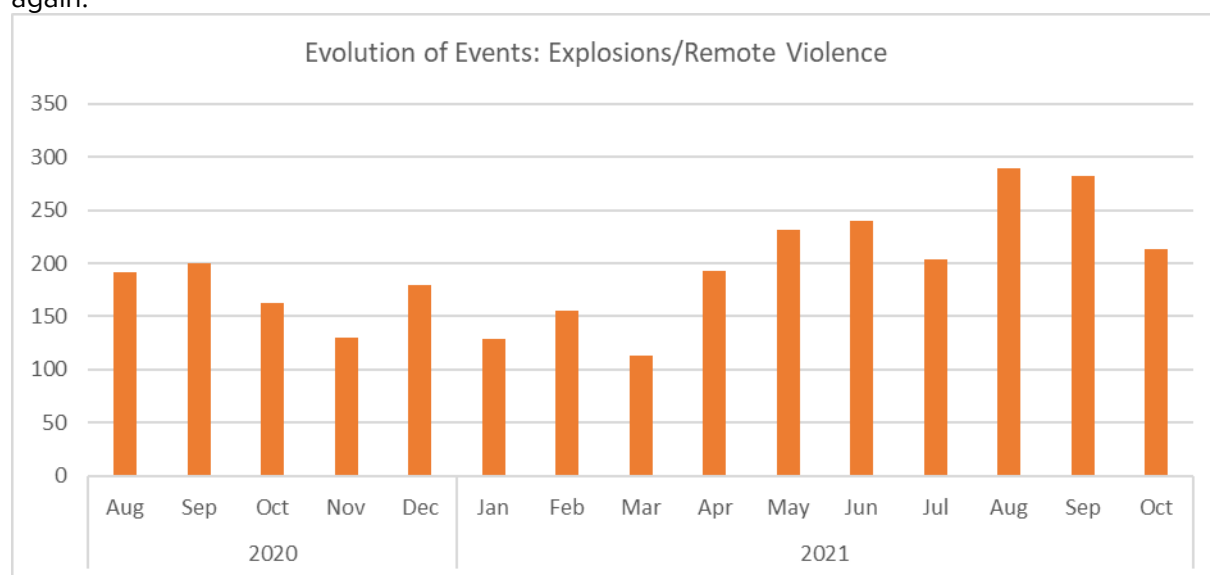


Figure 6: Evolution of ‘explosions/remote violence’ events 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data³⁵¹

Armed clashes, assaults and ground engagements

Battles (armed clashes) is the category with the second most registered number of incidents: 1 452 armed clashes were recorded between 1 August 2020 and 31 October 2021. Most battles were recorded in Dohuk (380), Diyala (219), Erbil (188), Kirkuk (137), Salah Al-Din (125), and Baghdad (104). The lowest number of battles in the reference period took place in Najaf (4), Karbala (3), and Wassit (1). At a district level, the highest numbers of armed clashes during the reference period were recorded in Amadiya, Dohuk (296), Rawanduz, Erbil (166), Khanaqin, Diyala (88), and Zakho, Dohuk (85).

³⁴⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁵¹ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

According to ACLED data, the highest numbers of battles during the reference period were in May 2021 (164), August 2021 (148) and September 2021 (145). The months with the lowest number of battles were January 2020 (45) with the most being recorded in Kirkuk governorate (9); and in March 2020 with the most being recorded in Diyala (10).³⁵²

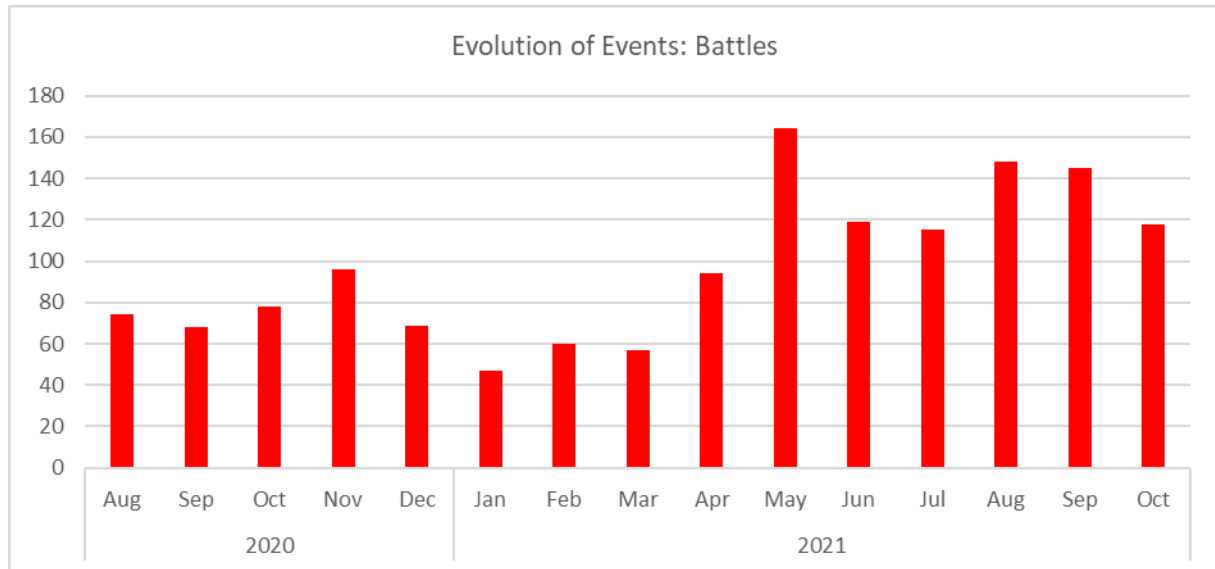


Figure 7: Incidents coded as ‘battles’ events 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data³⁵³

ACLED recorded several incidents of tribal clashes, notably in Diyala, Ninewa, and in Basrah, Thi-Qar and other southern governorates. Clashes between ISIL or unnamed militants, and state forces and PMU occurred notably in Diyala, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Anbar, and Babil governorates. Incidents of clashes between Turkish militants and Turkish forces occurred mainly in the areas in Erbil and Dohuk bordering Turkey.³⁵⁴

Targeted attacks, abductions, killings

ACLED recorded a total 519 incidents of targeted attacks, abductions and killings across Iraq during the reference period. Baghdad and Diyala had the highest number of incidents, 103 and 93 respectively.³⁵⁵ The highest number of this type of incidents during the reference period took place in November 2020 (44), May 2021 (49) and July 2021 (46), the majority taking place in the districts of Basrah, Kahla, and Al-Muqdadiya (33 each).³⁵⁶

³⁵² EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁵³ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

³⁵⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

³⁵⁶ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

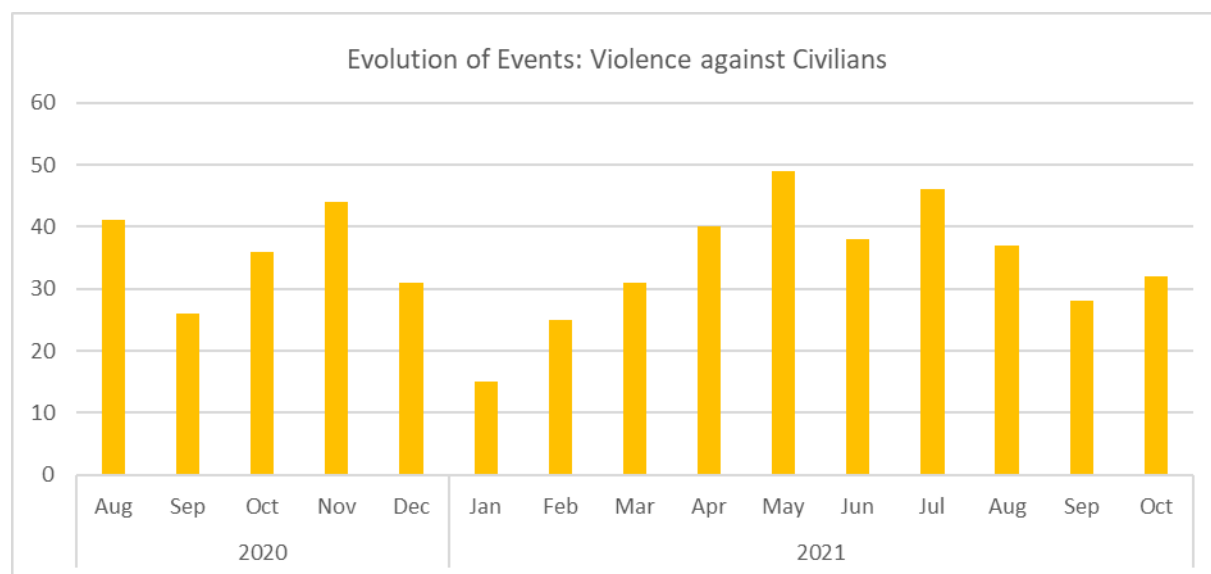


Figure 8: Incidents coded as ‘violence against civilians’ events 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data³⁵⁷

ACLED ascribed 107 targeted attacks on civilians to ISIL during the reference period. The highest number (33) took place in Diyala. The highest number at district level (15) in this governorate occurred in Khanaqin.

348 targeted attacks across Iraq during the reference period, including a small number of abductions and some cases of targeting of protesters, were ascribed to unidentified armed groups. Among civilians targeted under a variety of circumstances were protesters and activists. The highest numbers occurred in Basrah (26), Al-Kahla (24), Nasiriya (21), and Al-Muqdadiya (20).³⁵⁸

Moreover, 51 targeted attacks during the reference period were attributed to unidentified tribal militiamen. Many of the incidents took place in the context of tribal conflicts and feuds, and the highest numbers were recorded in the governorates of Baghdad (16), Basrah and Missan (11 each), and Thi-Qar (7).³⁵⁹

Road security

OSAC stated that the conditions of roads throughout Iraq were ‘reasonably good, and roads are generally well constructed’. The source added that roadside IEDs were common around Baghdad, and tended to target logistical convoys supplying US bases, but were uncommon in the KRI.³⁶⁰ According to the UN Security Council, ‘ISIL continues to threaten road links among Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk Governorates’ and has conducted ‘Repeated roadside bomb

³⁵⁷ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁹ EUAA analysis based on ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ OSAC, Iraq Country Security report, 2 September 2021, [url](#)



attacks [...] on the roads linking Kirkuk, Tikrit and Tuz Khurmatu, as well as ISIL hit-and-run attacks against checkpoints near these cities'.³⁶¹

1.4. Impact of the conflict on civilians

1.4.1. Civilian casualties

At EUAA's request, the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) compiled data on civilian casualties in the reference period. The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicate only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques).. For information on UNAMI's methodology, please refer to the section on sources in the [Introduction](#).

Year	Number of incidents ³⁶²	Killed	Injured	Total civilian casualties (killed + injured)
2020 (Aug – Dec)	138	82	134	216
2021 (Jan – Oct)	223	237	485	722
Grand total	361	319	619	938

Table 1: Overall casualty figures, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021³⁶³

Broken down by gender, age and police, 18 women, 222 men, 64 children, and 15 police, were killed. Segregation for boys and girls was not available. Iraqi police were included due to their civilian functions related to law enforcement at the time of the incident and were considered as civilians (not as individuals directly taking part in hostilities – DPiH).

³⁶¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 39

³⁶² The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

³⁶³ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021



Year	Women casualties		Children casualties ³⁶⁴		Police casualties ³⁶⁵		Civilian men casualties		Total civilian casualties
	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	
2020 (Aug – Dec)	9	11	13	28	3	3	57	92	216
2021 (Jan – Oct)	9	23	51	48	12	15	165	399	722
August 2020 – October 2021	18	34	64	76	15	18	222	491	938

Table 2: Casualty figures by gender, age and police, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021³⁶⁶

UNAMI's breakdown by incident type uses a different categorisation of incidents than ACLED, due to their focus on counting incidents resulting in civilian casualties/harm in the context of armed conflict. As shown by UNAMI's categorisation in the table below, the incidents causing the highest numbers of casualties were small arms fires by pistols and/or AKs (118 killed and 124 injured), body-borne IEDs (59 killed and 153 injured), and IEDs (51 killed and 179 injured).

³⁶⁴ Segregation for boys and girls is not available for 2020 only.

³⁶⁵ Iraqi police due to their civilian functions related to law enforcement at the time of the incident are considered as civilians (not as individuals directly taking part in hostilities – DPIH)

³⁶⁶ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021



Incidents' type	Aug – Dec 2020			Jan – Oct. 2021			August 2020 – October 2021			
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured	# of incidents	Killed	Injured	# of incidents	Killed	Injured	Total civilian casualties (killed + injured)
IED (including roadside IEDs)	36	26	71	59	25	108	95	51	179	230
Vehicle-borne IED (VBIED)	2	0	2	1	1	8	3	1	10	11
Suicide VBIED (SVIED)	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
Body-borne IED (BBIED)	0	0	0	3	59	153	3	59	153	212
SAF (small arms fires by pistols and or AKs)	27	29	39	44	89	85	71	118	124	242
Indirect Fire (mortars and rockets) - IDF	19	8	11	22	5	24	41	13	35	48
Air attack/artisries	37	6	1	27	5	17	64	11	18	29
Explosive Remnant of War (ERW)	4	3	6	30	27	34	34	30	40	70
Unexploded Ordinances (UXOs)	1	0	1	18	18	19	19	18	20	38
Execution-Style	2	9	0	3	4	0	5	13	0	
Hand grenade (HG)	1	0	1	5	3	35	6	3	36	39
Abduction	7	0	1	9	1	1	16	1	2	3
Empty building destructions (by IEDs)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
...Other...	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	1
Total	138	82	134	223	237	485	361	319	619	938

Table 3: Civilian casualties by incident type³⁶⁷

Baghdad had the highest numbers of casualties (335 casualties, of which 84 were fatalities) followed by Diyala (173 casualties, of which 82 were fatalities), Salah Al-Din (107 casualties including 53 fatalities), and Ninewa (103 casualties including 27 fatalities). The lowest numbers appeared in Karbala (1 casualty) and Babil (2 casualties including one fatality). No casualties were recorded in Sulaymaniyah, Qadissiya and Wassit.

The table below shows the figures broken down by governorate. Data for districts were not available.

³⁶⁷ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021



Province	Aug – Dec 2020			Jan – Oct 2021			August 2020 – October 2021			
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured	# of incidents	Killed	Injured	# of incidents	Killed	Injured	Total civilian casualties (killed + injured)
Anbar	9	6	8	9	13	20	18	19	28	47
Babil	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	2
Baghdad	9	12	12	13	72	239	22	84	251	335
Basra	2	0	1	12	6	15	14	6	16	22
Diyala	23	26	35	43	56	56	66	82	91	173
Dohuk	45	4	0	36	5	23	81	9	23	34
Erbil	5	0	1	6	1	11	11	1	12	13
Karbala	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Kirkuk	19	11	29	28	9	27	47	20	56	76
Maysan	0	0	0	4	5	2	4	5	2	7
Muthanna	0	0	0	5	5	4	5	5	4	9
Najaf	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	3	1	4
Ninewa	15	7	29	36	20	47	51	27	76	103
Qadisiyyah	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Salahadin	8	16	18	23	37	36	31	53	54	107
Sulaymaniyah	2	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
Thi-Qar	0	0	0	4	4	3	4	4	3	7
Wasit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	138	82	134	223	237	485	361	319	619	938

Table 4: Civilian casualties by governorate³⁶⁸

1.4.2. IDPs and returnees

The following graph shows the evolution of the IDP/return movement in Iraq between April 2014 and September 2021, which indicates a rising number of returnees and declining numbers of internally displaced people since November/December of 2017:

³⁶⁸ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

HIGHLIGHTS



Figure 9: Number of IDPs and returnees between April 2014 to September 2021© IOM³⁶⁹

IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) stated in its Iraq Master List Report 123 (covering the period August-September 2021) that as of 30 September 2021, 1 189 581 Iraqis were reported to be displaced across the country, located in 18 governorates, 105 districts, and 2 842 localities in Iraq, with a decrease of 1 889 IDPs compared to the number of IDPs recorded in the May-July 2021 period. DTM observed that ‘despite the overall decrease in the total caseload of IDPs across the country, a total of 9,866 IDP individuals arrived to assessed locations in the August-September 2021 period’: 2 446 became displaced for the first time, 6 302 arrived from other displacement locations, and 1 118 became re-displaced again.³⁷⁰ Moreover, 56% of the recorded IDPs originated from Ninewa (especially from Mosul, Sinjar and Al-Ba’aj), while the second and third largest groups originated from Salah Al-Din and Anbar.³⁷¹

According to IOM reporting up to 30 September 2021 through the DTM, there were 4 939 074 returnees across the country, with 54 462 returnees reported during August and September 2021 of the reporting period. This number of new returnees is the highest one recorded since November 2020. IOM clarified that ‘the higher number of new returnees in this round is due to a number of new returnees in Anbar governorate being counted in this round following the DTM teams accessing a number of locations there that had previously been inaccessible due to security issues.’³⁷² The highest numbers of returns took place in Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah Al-Din, with 1 008 people arriving to the districts of Sinjar, Ba’aj, Mosul, Makhmour, Baiji and Al-Shirqat from IDP camps.³⁷³ Finally, the districts that had the highest numbers of returnees were Mosul (Ninewa), Ramadi (Anbar), Falluja (Anbar), Tal Afar (Ninewa), Tikrit (Salah Al-Din) and Makhmour (Erbil).³⁷⁴

In its Humanitarian Bulletin of May 2021, UNOCHA stated that the Iraqi Government published in April 2021 the ‘National Plan to End Displacement under the auspices of the Ministry of Migration and Displacement and the Ministry of Planning’. According to UNOCHA, the Plan ‘notes that tackling the issue of protracted displacement in Iraq is one of the priorities of the current government, acknowledging that camp closures are a major objective, so long as the appropriate conditions are created for the return of IDPs to their areas of origin’. Moreover,

³⁶⁹ IOM DTM, IRAQ Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁰ IOM DTM, IRAQ Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁷¹ IOM DTM, IRAQ Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁷² IOM DTM, IRAQ Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

³⁷³ IOM DTM, IRAQ Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

³⁷⁴ IOM DTM, IRAQ Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

the Iraqi government seeks to achieve long-term sustainability of returns and to promote alternatives to return in cases where return to areas of origin is not feasible.³⁷⁵ Since December 2019, the government of Iraq has closed several camps in different governorates³⁷⁶ in the context of a ‘months-long nationwide effort to bring an end to displacement across Iraq’.³⁷⁷ The closures initially affected IDP camps in the liberated areas including Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah Al-Din, Anbar and Diyala.³⁷⁸

In 2020, the Iraqi authorities closed all the IDP camps in Ninewa governorate (including Al-Jada 1, Al-Jada 5, Al-Salamiyah 2, Mount Sinjar camp, and Hama Al-Alil), two camps in Kirkuk (Yahyawa and Laylan), one camp in Salah Al-Din (Al-Ishaqi), three camps in Diyala (Saad camp, Al-Wand 1 and Al-Wand 2), and three camps in Baghdad governorate³⁷⁹ (Al-Ahl, Al-Shams, Nabi Allah, as well as the Virgin Mary complex in Zayouna).³⁸⁰ As of 8 December 2020, and according to USAID, 15 IDP camps were closed by the Iraqi government, and two camps (Habbaniya Tourist City and Zayona in Anbar and Baghdad governorates) were reclassified as informal. The source added that as of 10 December 2020, ‘34,000 individuals had been affected by the IDP camp closures in non-Kurdish areas of federal Iraq’.³⁸¹

In 2021, the closure of IDP camps continued; as on 9 January, the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement announced the return of more than 3 261 IDPs, resident of the Slamiyya camps, Ninewa governorate, to their areas of origin within the governorate, namely Mosul, Baaj, Rabia, Tal Afar, Tal Abtah, Zammar, and Qayrawan.³⁸² As of February 2021, four IDP camps in federal Iraq remain open (according to UNOCHA, the camps that remained open in federal Iraq were: Jad’ah 5 in Ninewa, Ameriyat al-Fallujah in Anbar, and the two Latifiyah camps in Baghdad),³⁸³ and as of the end of June 2021, only two remained open.³⁸⁴ In the KRI, there are 25 IDP camps that host an estimated population of approximately 180 000 persons; according to sources, those camps are not expected to be closed.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, May 2021, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁶ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Exiled at Home, June 2021, [url](#), p. 11

³⁷⁷ New Humanitarian (The), Nowhere to go: Mosul residents in limbo as camps close, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ ARK, For Iraqi IDPs, no choice but to return, 1 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

³⁸⁰ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Exiled at Home, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 15-21

³⁸¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 46; see also: UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq, February 2021, [url](#), p. 3

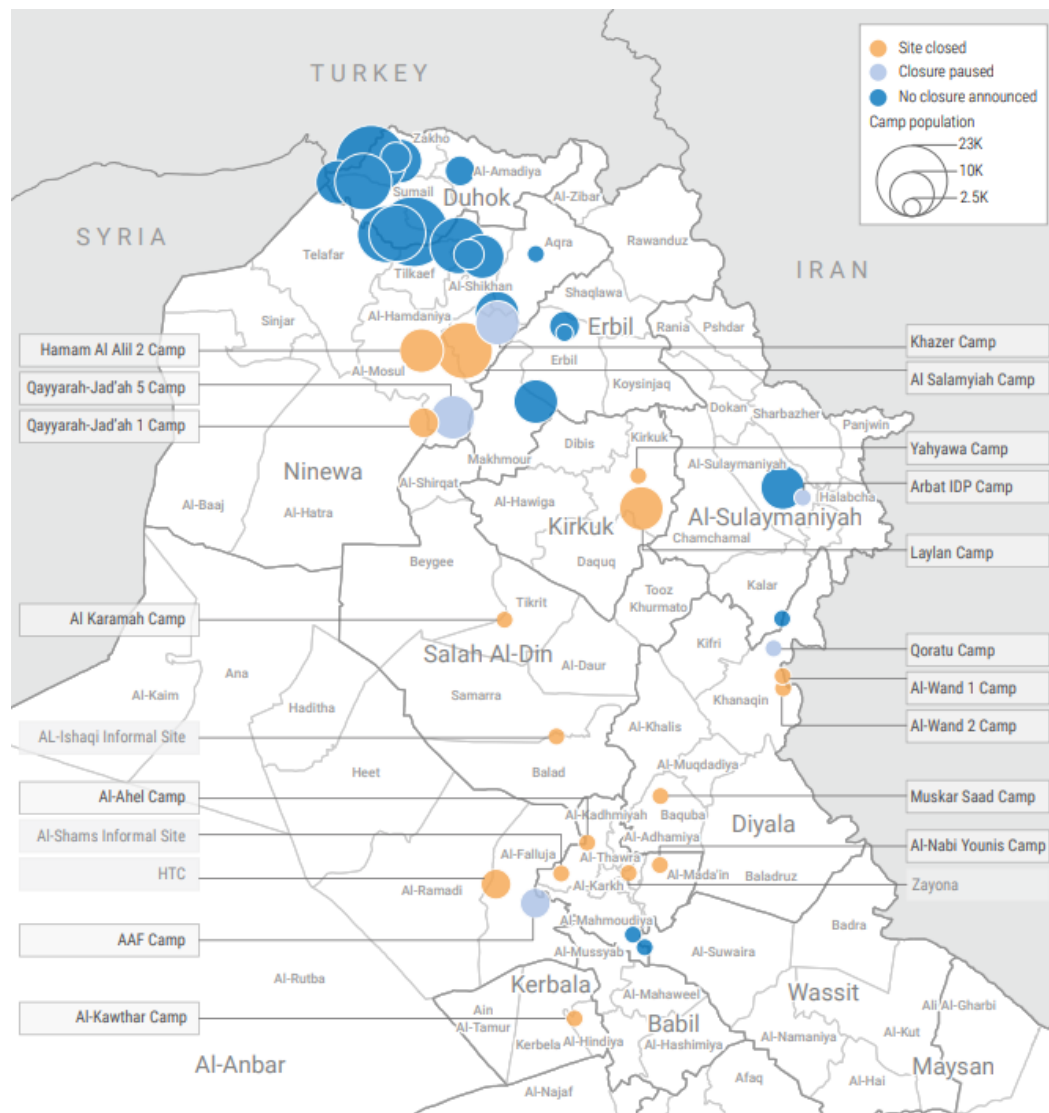
³⁸² Al-Sumaria, الهجرة تعلن عودة أكثر من ثلاثة آلاف نازح طوعاً إلى مناطقهم في نينوى [Ministry of Migration announces the voluntary return of more than 3 000 IDPs to their areas of origin in Ninewa], 9 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁸³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq, February 2021, [url](#), p. 3; According to UNOCHA, the camps that remained open in federal Iraq were: Jad’ah 5 in Ninewa, Ameriyat al-Fallujah in Anbar, and the two Latifiyah camps in Baghdad

³⁸⁴ Cash Working Group, Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance Camp closure Response Guidance note, June 2021, [url](#), p. 2; HRW, Iraq: Inadequate Plans for Camp Closures, 3 June 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq, February 2021, [url](#), p. 3; USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 48

The following map by UNOCHA shows the status of camp closures in Iraq as of 20 January 2021:



Map 5: Camp closure map (as of 20 January 2021) © UNOCHA 2021³⁸⁶ Attribution: “Map provided courtesy of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs”

The Iraqi government announced that camp closures were aimed at supporting voluntary returns of IDPs,³⁸⁷ and denied accusations of forced camps eviction.³⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, citing activists and aid groups on the ground in Ninewa governorate, stated that ‘the Ministry of Displacement and Migration had instructed the camp *mukhtars* – men who often serve as heads of their communities – to inform all families from Tal Abta, al-Mahalabiya and al-Jaban districts to depart immediately’.³⁸⁹ IDPs from three camps in Baghdad and one in Karbala that

³⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq, February 2021, [url](#), p. 4. Upon granting permission to reproduce the map, UNOCHA provided the following Disclaimer: “The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations”.

³⁸⁷ Iraq, Government of Iraq, 19 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁸ Reuters, Years after ISIS, Iraqis forced out of camps into uncertain future, 11 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ Al Jazeera, Iraq: IDPs say they are being threatened to leave camp, 1 February 2021, [url](#)



were to be closed had two days to decide about returning to their areas of origin or staying in another camp.³⁹⁰ Reuters stated that the Iraqi authorities gave the residents of Al-Ishaki camp a 48-hour notice to leave the camp before its closure, and sent pick-up trucks and military vehicles to return people to their areas of origin.³⁹¹ Furthermore, UNHCR stated on 27 May 2021 that it ‘raised its concerns with the government, stressing that some of the closures were conducted without adequate notice and consultation with camp residents’.³⁹² NRC stated on 9 November 2020 that many of the IDPs ‘who have been forced to leave camps in Baghdad and Karbala in the past weeks’ ended up in ‘precarious settings on the edge of towns, in damaged, unsafe apartments or unfinished buildings, lacking basic necessities and health care, and forced into further displacement’.³⁹³

Many displaced families were not able to return to their areas of origin for reasons related to security, lack of housing and services, and livelihoods, and have been displaced to informal settlements.³⁹⁴ According to Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, many of the IDPs in Iraq ‘have moved to various locations or have been displaced again due to a failed return attempt leaving them to seek refuge in informal sites’ and ‘face challenging humanitarian conditions inside and outside the camps due to the lack of security, harsh living conditions, and their inability to meet the humanitarian needs necessary for survival’.³⁹⁵

According to ECHO, ‘The government’s closure of camps has worsened living conditions for displaced Iraqis. People returned to areas that lack services and security, leaving 590,000 of them in need of protection. Many moved to one of the 547 informal settlements with sub-standard shelters and facilities’.³⁹⁶

According to Human Rights Watch, ‘Despite the government’s stated aim to have displaced people return home, administrative hurdles prevent families with perceived ISIS-affiliation from getting documents, including identity cards, birth certificates, and ration cards’.³⁹⁷ For more information about the documents required for IDPs return please see 3.3 IDPs and returnees of the EASO COI Report: [Iraq: Key Socio-economic Indicators \(November 2021\)](#).

CCCM Cluster and Protection Cluster surveyed 17 401 individuals leaving IDP camps during the period September – November 2020, and found that 71% described their departure from the camps as voluntary and 29% reported that the departure was involuntary.³⁹⁸ Moreover, the Protection Cluster found in February 2021 that ‘41% [of returnees] were pushed into secondary displacement’ and that ‘even of those who did return to their immediate area of origin, 38% were not able to return to their previous residence’. The source added that ‘the governorates with the highest proportion of HHs [Households] who did not return to their place of habitual residence are Kirkuk, Ninewa and Diyala’.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁰ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

³⁹¹ Reuters, Years after ISIS, Iraqis forced out of camps into uncertain future, 11 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁹² UNHCR, Returning Iraqis face dire conditions following camp closures, 27 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁹³ NRC, Iraq’s camp closures leave 100,000 people in limbo, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ Cash Working Group, Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance Camp closure Response Guidance note, June 2021, [url](#), p. 2; see also: UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq, February 2021, [url](#), p. 21

³⁹⁵ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Exiled at Home, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12

³⁹⁶ ECHO, Iraq, n. d., [url](#)

³⁹⁷ HRW, Iraq: Inadequate Plans for Camp Closures, 3 June 2021, [url](#); see also: ECHO, Iraq, n. d., [url](#)

³⁹⁸ CCCM Cluster and Protection Cluster, Camp Departure Follow-up Survey: Round 28, 19 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 2

³⁹⁹ Protection Cluster Iraq, Protection Monitoring System: Report 1, February 2021, [url](#), p. 10





1.4.3. Infrastructure damage

According to Freedom House, ‘reconstruction of areas liberated from the Islamic State (IS) militant group’s control continued at a slow pace throughout the year’.⁴⁰⁰ The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) observed that reconstruction in Iraq ‘has not yet reached all parts of the country and several regions still lack public services’.⁴⁰¹ Areas of origin for returnees have been ‘lacking basic infrastructure, utility services, livelihood opportunities’.⁴⁰² According to UNOCHA, destroyed livelihoods in the areas of origin was one of the reasons behind limited returns of IDPs.⁴⁰³ The Global Shelter Cluster observed that around 1 million people in Iraq ‘remain in need of shelter and NFI [non-food items] support’, 530 000 of these are in acute need of humanitarian assistance. According to the source, since 2021 there has been a 60% decrease in the number of people in need for shelter and NFI support, and this was due to ‘a narrower definition of humanitarian shelter needs, focusing on people living in critical shelter, including tents, unfinished and abandoned structures, make-shift shelter, and non-residential, public and religious building; and in sub-standard shelters that pose risks to the residents’ health, safety and dignity’.⁴⁰⁴ ACTED stated that in Ninewa governorate, the lack of access to basic services, together with safety and security concerns, constitute a barrier to return. The source added that ‘a great number of schools have been destroyed or damaged. Roads are in a poor state and medical facilities also endured damages from the conflict’ in the area.⁴⁰⁵ The UN estimated over 8 000 homes in Mosul to be destroyed during the war against ISIL, and ‘mounds of debris’ were still visible in the city as of December 2020.⁴⁰⁶ As of August 2021, many buildings in Mosul ‘are still in ruins’.⁴⁰⁷

On 9 December 2020, AP stated that ‘Baghdad’s cash-strapped government fails to fund reconstruction efforts’.⁴⁰⁸ France 24, citing official sources, stated that ‘the cost of reconstruction for Nineveh would top 100 billion US dollars, a staggering sum for a country mired in an economic crisis’.⁴⁰⁹ Moreover, of the circa 100 000 claims for compensation filed by the residents of Mosul whose homes were damaged during the war, ‘not even three percent have been paid’.⁴¹⁰

However, life was ‘slowly coming back to Mosul these days: merchants are busy in their shops, local musicians again serenade small, enthralled crowds’.⁴¹¹ Earth Observation for Sustainable Development (EO4SD)⁴¹² monitored reconstruction efforts in Mosul between 2017 and 2020, and concluded that ‘results highlight the massive ongoing efforts for rebuilding Mosul, at different levels. In 2020, out of almost 17,000 buildings inventoried, only 7,000

⁴⁰⁰ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021: Iraq, n. d., [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ SIDA, Sida’s work in Iraq, n. d., [url](#)

⁴⁰² NRC, NRC in Iraq, n. d., [url](#)

⁴⁰³ UNOCHA, IRAQ HUMANITARIAN FUND 2021 1st Standard Allocation Strategy, 11 May 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNHCR, Returning Iraqis face dire conditions following camp closures, 27 May 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ Global Shelter Cluster (The), Iraq, August 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ ACTED, Rehabilitating infrastructures to help returnees build their life back in Mosul, 21 May 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶ AP, Iraqis slowly rebuild Mosul, with little aid from government, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ France 24, Iraq’s Mosul struggles to rebuild without funds, 29 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸ AP, Iraqis slowly rebuild Mosul, with little aid from government, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ France 24, Iraq’s Mosul struggles to rebuild without funds, 29 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹⁰ France 24, Iraq’s Mosul struggles to rebuild without funds, 29 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹¹ AP, Iraqis slowly rebuild Mosul, with little aid from government, 9 December 2020, [url](#); see also: France 24, Iraq’s Mosul struggles to rebuild without funds, 29 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹² A project funded by the European Space Agency ESA. Which constitutes ‘an ESA initiative to support the uptake of EO-derived information in sustainable development’: ESA, Earth Observation for Sustainable Development, n. d., [url](#)





showed no signs of evolution, 2,000 were cleared or dismantled, and 7,900 repaired or new.’ The source added that the majority of the reconstructed buildings were located in ‘former high density urban fabric areas’ and that the old city ‘also profited from intense efforts to rebuild.’⁴¹³

In Salah Al-Din, the Global Coalition against Daesh⁴¹⁴ stated that around 100 projects were either finalised or close to completion, and that local authorities were able to ‘rebuild key infrastructure in the governorate allowing thousands of IDPs to resettle in their homes’.⁴¹⁵ According to Salah Al-Din Reconstruction Fund, in a video shared by the Global Coalition, ‘reconstruction projects cover various sectors in Salah Al-Din, including governmental buildings, education, electricity, water, sanitation, and all sectors of the state’.⁴¹⁶ In Anbar, ‘few overt signs remain of the destruction the war wreaked on Ramadi and nearby Fallujah’. However, reconstruction projects were underway, and were mainly funded by private investors.⁴¹⁷

1.4.4. ERW/UXO

According to sources, Iraq has one of the world’s highest explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination.⁴¹⁸ Humanity and Inclusion (HI)⁴¹⁹ reported that ‘Iraq is one of the most heavily Explosive Ordnance (EO) contaminated countries in the world’, specifying EO as ‘broadly defined category, encompassing landmines, cluster munition, explosive remnants of war (ERW), booby traps, Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), as well as other explosive devices’.⁴²⁰ An estimated 3 225 square kilometres of land is contaminated with EO (including 1 866 square kilometres of mine contamination, both old and new), which impacts an estimated 8.5 million people.⁴²¹ Stakeholders interviewed by HI indicated that Mosul, Sinjar, and Tal Afar are the most contaminated districts, while the Ninewa Plains are ‘described as heavily contaminated’. Ninewa governorate ‘is primarily affected by ‘new’ EO contamination stemming from the deployment of explosive weapons, especially those with wide-area effects, including air and artillery strikes, rocket attacks and heavy mortars used by pro-government forces, as well as IEDs including improvised mines.’⁴²² The following maps from HI’s report show the EO contamination level by governorate:

⁴¹³ EO4SD, Monitoring reconstruction efforts in Mosul, IRAQ, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹⁴ The Coalition was formed in September 2014 and had 84 members ‘committed to tackling Daesh on all fronts, to dismantling its networks and countering its global ambitions’. Global Coalition (The), Mission, n. d., [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ Global Coalition (The), Infrastructure in Salah Al-Din, Iraq, 16 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹⁶ Global Coalition (The), Infrastructure in Salah Al-Din, Iraq [online video], 16 March 2021, [url](#), 00:01:15

⁴¹⁷ Al-Jazeera, Iraq: Anbar’s post-ISIL reconstruction spawns autonomy debate, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 11; ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 1

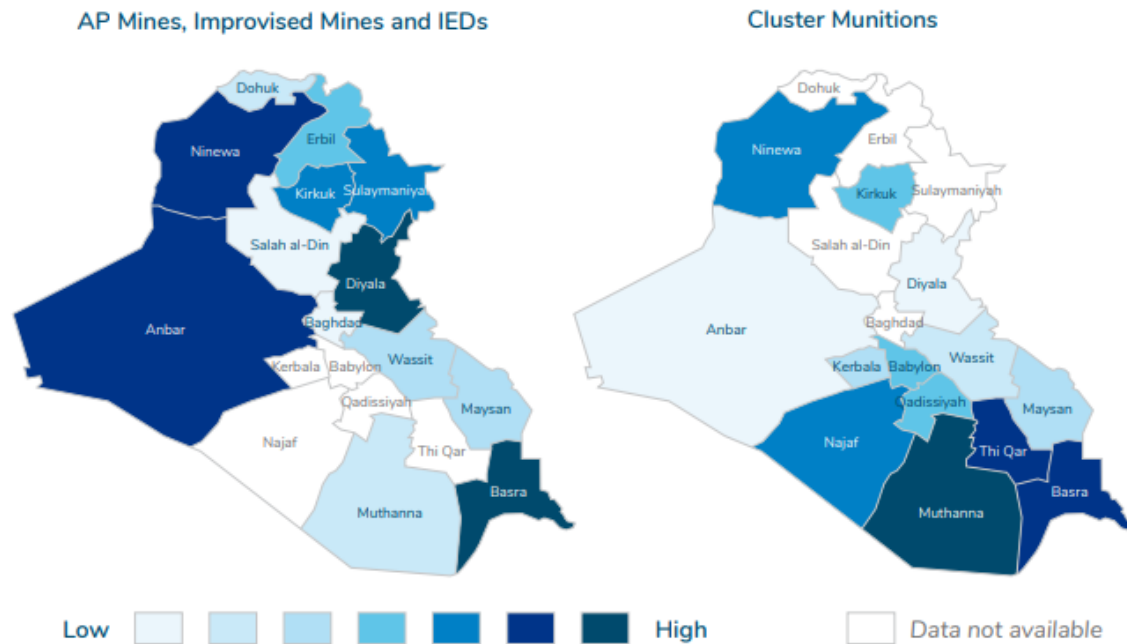
⁴¹⁹ ‘Co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, Humanity & Inclusion (the new name of Handicap International) is a 38-year-old independent and impartial organization working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster.’ HI, About, n. d., [url](#)

⁴²⁰ HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 11

⁴²¹ HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 11; The source clarified that ‘EO covers a broadly defined category, encompassing landmines, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war (ERW), booby traps, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), as well as other explosive devices.’; see also: ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 1

⁴²² HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 16



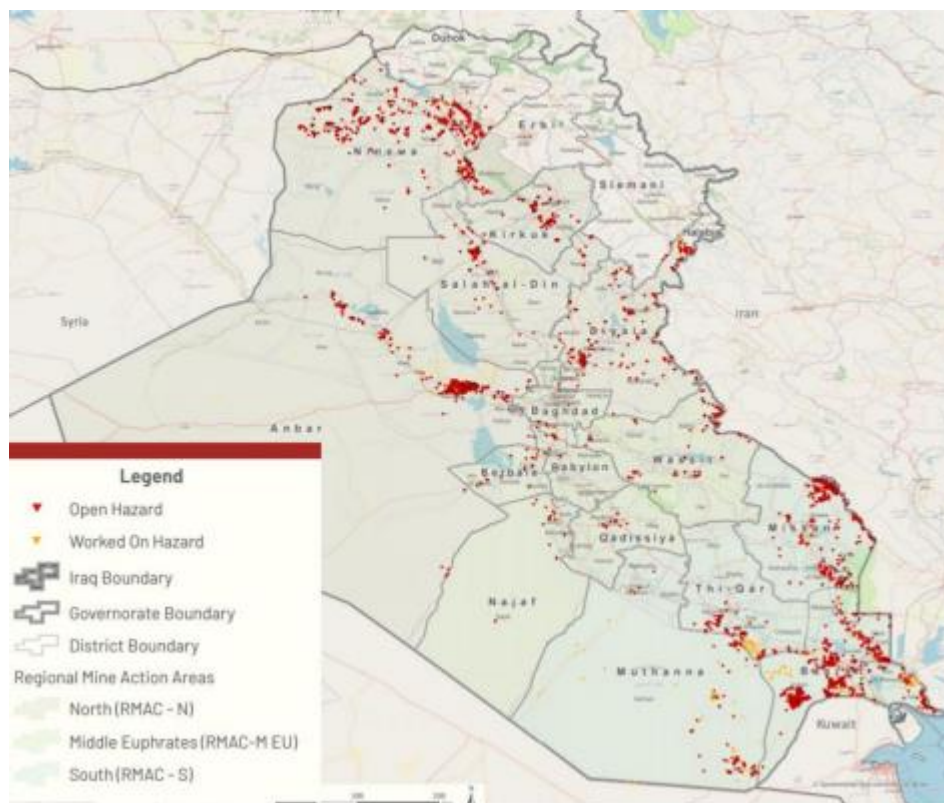


Map 6: Map of EO contamination in Iraq ©HI 2021 based on Mine Action Review data⁴²³

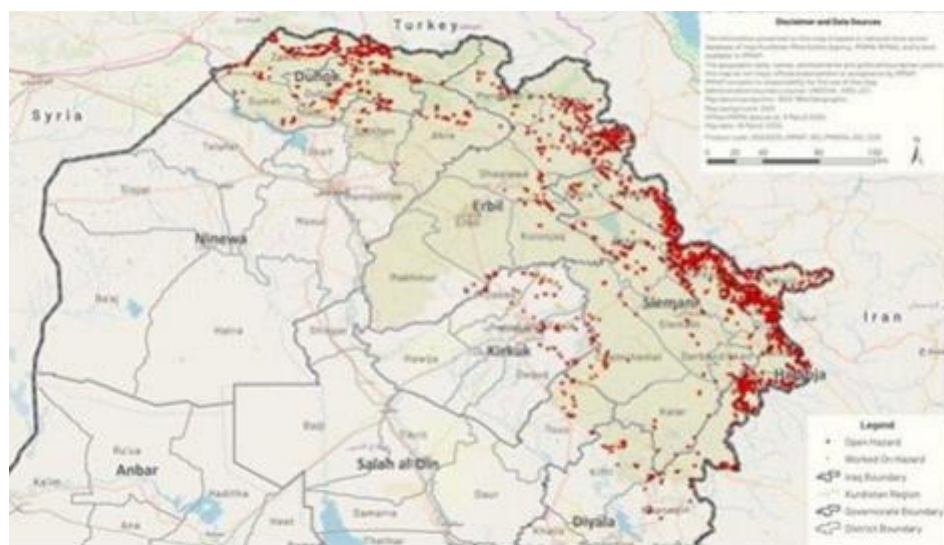
Accurate figures regarding EO are hard to establish due to lack of reliable national surveys and the presence of armed actors and disputed areas; however, iMMAP 2020 data ‘shows that there is at least 3 billion m² of contaminated land in the governorates under federal control (Anbar, Babylon, Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, Ninewa, Qadissiya, Salah al-Din, Thi-Qar, and Wassit)’.⁴²⁴ The following maps show the areas of explosive hazards in Federal Iraq and the KRI, both based on iMMAP 2020 data:

⁴²³ HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 16

⁴²⁴ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 2



Map 7: Map of explosive hazards in federal Iraq © ACAPS 2020⁴²⁵



Map 8: Map of explosive hazards in the Iraqi Kurdistan region © ACAPS 2020⁴²⁶

As regards cluster munition contamination, Iraq ‘ranks as one of the nations most heavily contaminated’.⁴²⁷ Mine Action Review (MAR) labelled the contamination as ‘heavy’ and stated that 163 square kilometres in Federal Iraq only are contaminated, based on official estimates

⁴²⁵ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 3

⁴²⁶ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 2

⁴²⁷ MAR, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants, 2021, [url](#), p. 59; HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, 2021, [url](#), p. 11



at the end of 2020.⁴²⁸ Cluster Munition contamination affects 11 governorates in Federal Iraq, with around 90% being concentrated in Basrah, Muthanna and Thi-Qar.⁴²⁹ Moreover, in the KRI, the amount of cluster munition contamination is considered ‘small, though unspecified’.⁴³⁰

Finally, concerning IED contamination, ACAPS stated that ‘IEDs are mostly found in the former IS stronghold, Mosul (Ninewa governorate), where there are 8 million tons of explosives’, as well is in and around Sinjar district. IED contamination is also found in the southern Kirkuk governorate, and in Ramadi and Fallujah cities in Anbar.⁴³¹

Demining operators in Iraq include local, international, and private actors. While mine action operations are majorly present in Ninewa governorate, Mosul and Sinjar districts in particular, their presence in Salah Al-Din and Diyala is limited. In the southern and northern governorates, there is a limited NGO presence, and the ongoing clearance operations are ‘carried out by private companies contracted by oil and gas companies, but these operations do not include residential areas’.⁴³²

⁴²⁸ MAR, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants, 2021, [url](#), p. 57

⁴²⁹ According to the source, ‘Federal Iraq’s contamination dates back to the Gulf War of 1991 and the United States (US)-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, following the path of allied forces advance from the south to Baghdad’. MAR, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants, 2021, [url](#), p. 59

⁴³⁰ MAR, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants, 2021, [url](#), p. 59

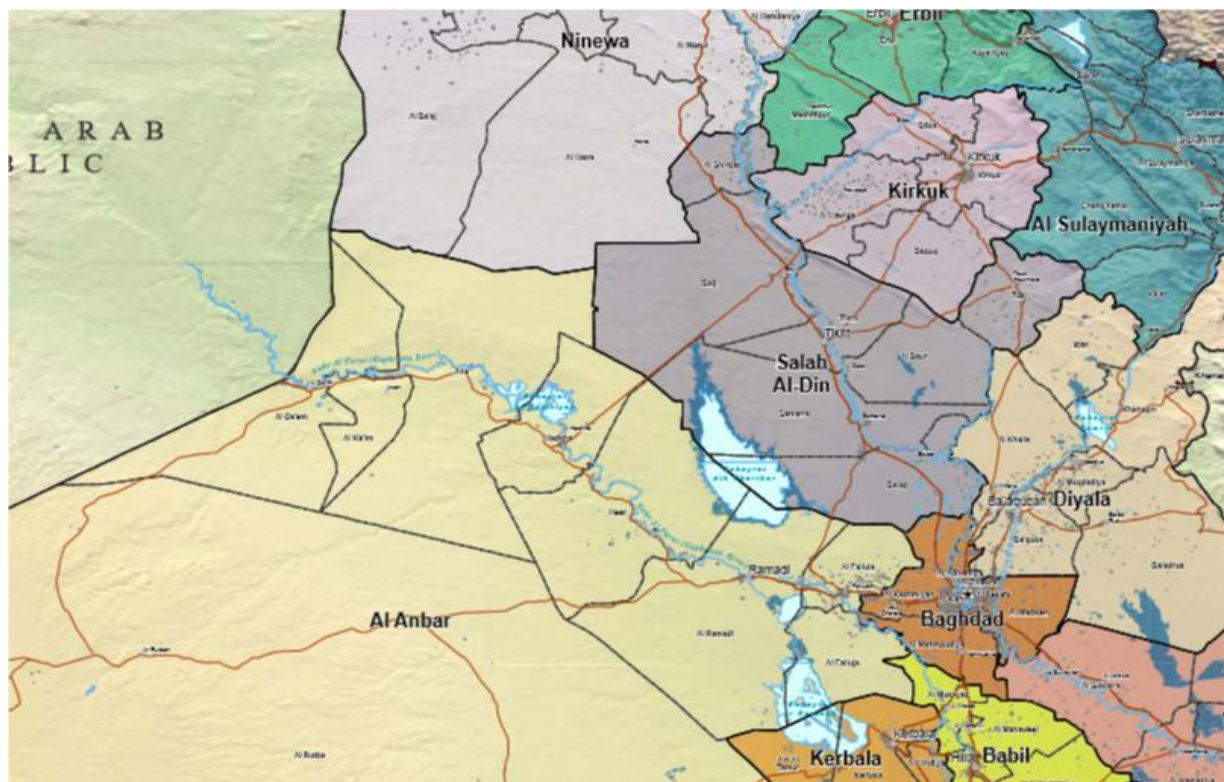
⁴³¹ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, available at: [url](#), p. 3

⁴³² ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, available at: [url](#), pp. 4-5



2. Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by governorate

2.1 Anbar



Map 9: The northwestern and central governorates with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations⁴³³

2.1.1 General description of governorate

The governorate of Anbar is situated in western Iraq, it borders in the west with three of Iraq's neighbouring countries, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Anbar is Iraq's largest governorate. The governorate's vast desert terrain makes it one of the most sparsely populated regions in the country.⁴³⁴ The districts of Anbar include Ana, Fallujah, Haditha, Heet, al-Qaim, Ramadi, Rawa and Rutba. The capital of Anbar is Ramadi.⁴³⁵

⁴³³ UN IAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ UN interagency Information and Analysis Unit (IAU), Anbar Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), accessed 08 September 2021

⁴³⁵ NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), Anbar; NCCI Governorate Profile, 31 March 2004, [url](#)

Population

For 2021, The Iraqi Central Statistical Organization (CSO) estimated the governorate's population at 1 914 165.⁴³⁶

Ethnicity

Anbar's population is predominately Sunni Arab, but it also hosts a small Christian minority.⁴³⁷ The governorate has a strong tribal structure, where tribal leaders and clerics maintain a high level of authority in local affairs.⁴³⁸ Sunni tribes were an important component in the Saddam regime's strategy to contain the Shia revolt in the aftermath of the Gulf war.⁴³⁹ As a result, many of the elder leaders- sheikhs - fled the country after 2003, when the Saddam regime came to an end. This gave an opportunity for new leaders to gain power by aligning with the coalition forces, and subsequently securing reconstruction projects and employment opportunities for their tribes.⁴⁴⁰

Economy

Anbar is historically known as the breadbasket of Iraq, given its good cultivatable land and sufficient water supply from the river Euphrates, as well as surrounding lakes. Agriculture has been the main source of livelihood for the governorate's population. Destruction of the infrastructure following ISIL's occupation, and outdated agriculture methods, has made it difficult for the sector to provide jobs. This has prompted many people to leave the rural areas to seek employment in the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah.⁴⁴¹

According to Carnegie Middle East Center, the expulsion of ISIL from the border area of al-Qaim in 2017, and ISIL's defeat in Baghuz in 2019, led to the deployment of many military and paramilitary forces in the al-Qaim – Bukamal border areas.⁴⁴² The presence of militia groups has harmed the local economy. For example, Kata'ib Hezbollah have taken control over a large swath of agricultural and turned them into a military zone, refusing farmers to use it. In addition, the militias' involvement in black market activities and extortion at the border crossing has further impeded the local economy.⁴⁴³

For more information on the economy after the expulsion of ISIL, see section [2.1.6](#) [Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war](#).

⁴³⁶ Central Statistical Organization (CSO), 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة و الجنس لسنة 2021, [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] (table), n.d., [url](#)

⁴³⁷ Ali, A., Security, Religion and Gender in Al-Anbar Province, Iraq: A focus group-based conflict analysis, May 2014, [url](#), p. 2

⁴³⁸ NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), Anbar; NCCI Governorate Profile, 31 March 2004, [url](#), p. 2

⁴³⁹ Asfura-Heim, P, "No security without us": Tribes and tribalism in al-Anbar province Iraq, CNA, June 2014, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁴⁰ Asfura-Heim, P, "No security without us": Tribes and tribalism in al-Anbar province Iraq, , CNA, June 2014, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁴¹ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Livelihoods and economic growth for Anbar, February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴² Carnegie Middle East Center, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁴³ Carnegie Middle East Center, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, March 2020, [url](#), p. 12



Road security

According to iMMAP, the explosive risk level on the roads in Anbar Governorate from August 2020 until February 2021 showed different stretches of the main roads as being primary risk roads in the governorate. These include the road from Ramadi to Baghdad governorate, and from Ramadi to Heet, Haditha, Rawa (and the to the Syrian border), as well the district of Rutba towards the Saudi Arabian border. The Ramadi-Baghdad road stands out as with more recurrent high-risk stretches during this period.⁴⁴⁴

2.1.2 Conflict background

Conflict with ISIL

Anbar became a stronghold for Sunni insurgency subsequent to the fall of the Baath regime in 2003.⁴⁴⁵ In response, US forces started to conduct counterinsurgency operations throughout the province. In 2006, a group of tribal leaders in Ramadi began to cooperate with the US forces to expel al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).⁴⁴⁶ A local counterinsurgency movement, known as *Sahwa* ('the Awakening') emerged. Recruits, initially vetted by the US and Iraqi officials, joined the Iraqi forces against the insurgency.⁴⁴⁷ The movement soon spread beyond the governorate to other parts of the country. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, AQI's presence in Anbar governorate had significantly diminished by late 2008.⁴⁴⁸

In 2011, a new wave of insurgency started to emerge from the remnants of AQI, in the guise of what later became the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL).⁴⁴⁹ Demonstrations erupted throughout the governorate in December 2012⁴⁵⁰ and 2013 because of growing Sunni dissatisfaction with the Shia-led government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, leading to a breakdown of security in Anbar. This allowed militant groups to exploit Sunni grievances to reconstitute the insurgency.⁴⁵¹ In January 2014, ISIL militants captured the city of Fallujah, declaring it an Islamic emirate.⁴⁵² The months that followed saw other major cities in the governorate come under ISIL control, including the capital Ramadi, Rutba, al-Qaim and Hit.⁴⁵³ In July 2015, the Iraqi government launched a major military operation, backed by air support from the American-led coalition, to retake the governorate from the Islamic State.⁴⁵⁴ In December 2015, the Iraqi military recaptured the governorate's capital Ramadi from ISIL.⁴⁵⁵ In

⁴⁴⁴ iMMAP, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din Governorates, 01-31 August 2020, 6 September 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din Governorates, 01-31 December 2020, 10 January 2021, [url](#); iMMAP, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din Governorates, 01-28 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ Foreign Affairs, Anbar's Illusions: The failure of Iraq's success story, 24 June 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The status and future of the Awakening Movements in Iraq, [url](#), Council on Foreign Affairs, Finding a place for the 'Sons of Iraq', January 2009, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁷ Foreign Affairs, Anbar's Illusions: The failure of Iraq's success story, 24 June 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, Finding a place for the 'Sons of Iraq', January 2009, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁹ Wilson Center, Timeline: The rise, spread, and fall of the Islamic State, 28 October 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ Aljazeera, Iraqi Sunnis rally against Shia-led government, 02 February 2013, [url](#)

⁴⁵¹ United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Iraq timeline: Since the 2003 war, 29 May 2020, [url](#), Foreign Policy (FP), Maliki's Anbar blunder, 15 January 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁵² Foreign Policy (FP), Maliki's Anbar blunder, 15 January 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ BBC News, Iraq crisis: Rutba latest western town to fall to Isis, 22 June 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ New York Times (The) (NYT), Iraq begins military operation to drive ISIS from Anbar Province, 13 July 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ New York Times (The) (NYT), Retaking Mosul from ISIS may pale to what comes next, 18 October 2016, [url](#)





November 2017, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared a final victory over ISIL, after Iraqi forces recaptured the border town of Rawa, the last urban bastion held by ISIL.⁴⁵⁶

Despite its territorial losses in 2017, ISIL began gradually resurging and regrouping in various parts of the country. The Institute for the Study of War maintains, in its report on the comeback of ISIS, that some fighters relocated to control zones in the Jazeera and Anbar desert areas within the governorate.⁴⁵⁷

In 2018, ISIL shifted towards asymmetric attacks against members of the armed forces, but in a more weakened capacity, compared to 2017.⁴⁵⁸ Michael Knights, military and security expert on Iraq at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (TWI), attributed the weakened insurgency to the effect of disruptive counterinsurgency following the full recapture of the province, as well as ISIL choosing to de-prioritize the governorate at the time.⁴⁵⁹ Attacks mostly targeted checkpoints, manned by Iraqi forces, as well as members of the PMU. Civilians were also targeted at the time. Attacks took place along the border areas, but also in central parts of the governorate.⁴⁶⁰ For more detailed information regarding security trends in Anbar in 2018 see EASO's report; [Iraq: Security Situation, March 2019](#).

The number of attacks by ISIL gradually increased in the second quarter of 2019, with an increase also in the number of mass-casualties. As a result, the governorate saw an uptick in the number of incidents involving intimidation of rural tribes, attempted suicides targeting marketplaces and mosques, as well as sniper attacks and attacks against local leaders (*Mukhtar*). The first quarter of 2020 witnessed an escalation of tactical operations, with roadside bombings and mortar and sniper attacks becoming more frequent.⁴⁶¹

Iraqi forces conducted several counter operations throughout 2020. In February 2020, the Iraqi forces, ISF, initiated the first phase 'Operation Iraqi Heroes' against ISIL in the Anbar desert⁴⁶² and the border areas to Jordan and Syria.⁴⁶³ In May 2020, Iraqi forces launched 'Operation Lions of Al Jazeera' in the western desert, covering 150 square kilometers, with the aim of cutting ISIL support lines in the area, as well as transport routes connecting the provinces of Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninewa.⁴⁶⁴ The month of June resulted in additional 10 security sweeps.⁴⁶⁵ In September 2020, Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Services (CTS) killed a suspected ISIL financier and captured an ISIL leader in an operation in western Anbar.⁴⁶⁶

Conflict in Iraq between Iran and the US

Growing tensions between the United States and Iran put further pressure on the security situation in the governorate, this time targeting facilities relating to US and international

⁴⁵⁶ Reuters, Iraq to declare final victory over Islamic State after desert Campaign, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ Institute for the Study of War (ISW), ISIS second comeback, June 2019, [url](#), p. 20-21

⁴⁵⁸ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or preserving Strength, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 2

⁴⁵⁹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or preserving Strength, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 3-4

⁴⁶⁰ Iraqi News, Iraqi troops destroy four Islamic State armoured vehicles, seize three others in Anbar, 10 January 2018, [url](#), Wing, J., Musing on Iraq, Security in Iraq, Mar 22-28, 2018, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of the Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, 05 May 2020, [url](#) p. 15

⁴⁶² US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. January 1, 2020 –March 31 2020, 11 May 2020, [url](#), p. 26

⁴⁶³ Iraqi News Agency (INA), Iraq Heroes operation launched in Anbar province, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ Diyaruna, Iraq launches campaign to secure western desert, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Islamic State's spring offensive in Iraq ends in June, 06 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁶ Al-Monitor, Iraq, Counter-IS coalition kill, capture Islamic State figures, 15 September 2020, [url](#)





coalition forces. In December 2019, US forces carried out retaliatory airstrikes against locations controlled by KH in Iraq and Syria. The airstrikes were in response to previous attacks carried out by KH against Iraqi basis hosting coalition forces, culminating in the death of an American contractor at a base in Kirkuk some days earlier.⁴⁶⁷ The killings of Iran's al-Quds commander, Qasem Soleimani, and of deputy Commander of the PMU, Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis, in January 2020, resonated in several attacks on US and coalition facilities in the country, amongst them the Ain al-Assad airbase in Anbar.⁴⁶⁸

The defeat of the ISIL in Iraq in 2017, and the subsequent territorial losses in border area of Baghuz on the Syrian border in 2019 led to the deployment of a hybrid of military and paramilitary forces in the Al-Qaim-Bukamal border area. Amongst those deployed, there are militias with close ties to Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The presence of Iranian-backed militias in Al-Qaim-Bukamal border area resulted in an enhanced capacity for Iran to project regional influence. As a consequence, the US and Israel regarded the border area as a front to contain such an influence.⁴⁶⁹ The militarization of the area and the growing rivalry between the various militia groups has led to the fragmentation of authority, making it difficult to provide security to these border towns. Reportedly, corruption, inefficiency and illicit activities (e.g., smuggling and extortion) carried out by these security actors has harmed the local economy, as well as any future prospects for reconstruction of these already hard-hit communities.⁴⁷⁰

2.1.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi forces

Iraqi forces' measures to secure the Iraqi border towards Syria remain a challenge. The USDOD quarterly report to the United States Congress in July 2021 maintains that ISF ability to stop illegal crossing of ISIL members remains limited. ISIL often exploits security gaps along the border area, facilitating smuggling routes. Family members of ISIL fighters usually cross ahead to establish resting locations, facilitating for fighters to move to geographic ISIL strongholds.⁴⁷¹ ISF's measures in stopping ISIL smuggling invokes punitive intimidation attacks against members of the security forces.⁴⁷²

For more information on the ISF's areas of control, please see section 2.1.2 of the [EASO-COI report Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#).

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

The PMU hold positions along the Iraqi - Syrian border, despite government efforts to reduce the militias' presence. Carnegie reported in March 2020, that the main Iran-backed militias controlling the border areas are KH, Kata'ib al-Imam Ali, Saraya al-Khorasan, Saraya Ansar al-

⁴⁶⁷ Guardian (The), US: strikes on Iran-backed militia a response to 'campaign' of attacks by Tehran, 30 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁸ Aljazeera, Where did Iran attack US forces in Iraq?, 08 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁹ Carnegie Middle East Center, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 12

⁴⁷⁰ Carnegie Middle East Center, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁴⁷¹ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1 – June 30 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁷² US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1 – June 30 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 33





Hujja,⁴⁷³ including Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada.⁴⁷⁴ Another militia group also mentioned by Carnegie is Liwa Al-Tafuf, which is loyal to the religious authorities led by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Sunni tribal militias, registered as PMU, retain a presence in the area. These are the Hamza Brigade and the Upper Euphrates Brigade,⁴⁷⁵ in addition to the Karbala and the Mahalawi tribes, from al-Qaim.⁴⁷⁶

An analysis published in the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (TWI) in July 2021 reported that KH holds a presence at the border area with Syria.⁴⁷⁷

For more information on the PMU forces areas of control, please see section 2.1.2 of the [EASO-COI report Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#).

ISIL

According to the Newline Institute for Strategy and Policy, the government's achievements in repelling ISIL's activities remain relatively modest despite extensive military operations carried out by security forces. Anbar continues to be a strategic geographic distribution point for the organisation, hosting fighters and securing supply routes.⁴⁷⁸

A security analysis presented by the Emirates Policy Center (EPC)⁴⁷⁹ on ISIL's strategy in Iraq concluded that ISIL continues to maintain sleeper cells in western Iraq. The EPC further noted that, since March 2020, ISIL has attempted to carry out several offensive activities in the governorate, reportedly operating from the areas of Lake Tharthar, Zoya and Tarbasha in northern Anbar.⁴⁸⁰

Joel Wing, in Musings on Iraq in March 2021, stated that Anbar governorate reported lower numbers of ISIL's attacks compared to other governorates.⁴⁸¹ J. Wing attributes the low number of attacks to ISIL's strategy of using the governorate as a logistics hub.⁴⁸²

For information, please see section 2.1.2 of the [EASO-COI report Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#).

⁴⁷³ Carnegie Middle East Center, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁷⁴ Witty, D., @IntelTweet, [Twitter], 28 June 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Middle East Center, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13

⁴⁷⁶ Al-Monitor, Anbar tribes key to security, political backing ahead of Iraq's October vote, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ Malik, H., Crispin, S., Knights, M., , The drones of Kataib Hezbollah's Jazira Command, Washington Institute for the Near East Policy (The)(TWI), 20 July 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISIP), 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ 'an independent think tank based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The EPC was established in September 2013 during the turmoil of the "Arab Spring" to study internal and external threats to nation-states in the Arabian Gulf region and the broader Arab world. The EPC aims to determine and forecast the impacts of geopolitical developments and changes in the global balance of power on the UAE and the region.' EPC, About us, n. d., [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ Emirates Policy Center (EPC), ISIS Strategy in Iraq, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸¹ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Violence in Iraq, March 2021, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸² Wing, J. Musings on Iraq, Security in Iraq June 2021, 6 July 2021, [url](#)





2.1.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020- October 2021

Conflict with ISIL

After a steady increase in the number of attacks in the second quarter in 2020, a gradual decline in ISIL activities has been registered in December 2020.⁴⁸³ According to a USDOD quarterly report to the United States Congress, covering the period April 2020-June 2020, ISIL carried out small-scale attacks, mostly targeting ISF,⁴⁸⁴ as well as members of the PMU.⁴⁸⁵

ISIL fighters operated mostly in small cohesive cells, consisting of five to fifteen fighters, relying on small arms, IEDs and mortars. USDOD further reported that Anbar saw a smaller number of attacks, totalling 55, during the second quarter 2020, in comparison to the northern and central governorates, whereby Diyala recorded 150 attacks, Salah al-Din 61, Kirkuk 70 and Ninewa 24 attacks.⁴⁸⁶ ISIL maintained a low-level insurgency in Anbar throughout the year. Operations carried out against ISIL in northern and western Iraq, such as 'Heroes of Iraq', concluded in the last quarter of 2020, resulted in the destruction of ISIL hideouts and in killing or capturing of ISIL fighters. The operations reduced ISIL's mobility and its ability to access urban centres.⁴⁸⁷ However, Shafaq News reported in November 2020 that the absence of security forces triggered successive ISIL attacks, around the outskirts and suburbs of Rutba.⁴⁸⁸

ISIL's loss of several field-intelligence-operatives within the governorate resulted in retaliatory attacks against local clerics and officials.⁴⁸⁹ On 23 November 2020, a policeman was killed in Rutba district after gunmen opened fire on his vehicle.⁴⁹⁰ NBC news analyst Evan Kohlmann posted on Twitter on the same day that ISIL executed a local official and five Iraqi soldiers in the town of al-Kasra, in Nukhayb district, and reportedly wounded three other soldiers in subsequent armed clashes.⁴⁹¹

In January 2021, Anbar witnessed a temporary increase in attacks, from single digit attacks, mostly IEDs and gun battles, to around 10.⁴⁹² The number of ISIL activities declined thereafter and continued to remain on a relatively low level, reported blogger J. Wing in April and June 2021.⁴⁹³ Notwithstanding, ISIL continued to make its presence known in the governorate, including hit-and-run tactics against civilians, PMU forces and local security forces.⁴⁹⁴ The month of August witnessed successive attacks on power transmissions in several

⁴⁸³ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Islamic State attacks decline in December 2020, 04 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. April 1, 2020 – June 30 2020, released 31 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 22-23

⁴⁸⁵ Epic, Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor (ISHM), ISHM: August 6- August 13, 2020, 13 August 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. April 1, 2020 – June 30 2020, 31 July 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁴⁸⁷ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 1, 2020 – December 31 2020, 05 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 23-24

⁴⁸⁸ Shafaq News, قائم مقام الرطبة: داعش يستهدف المناطق التي تخلو من القطعات الامنية, [Qaimaqam of Rutba: Daesh targets areas void of security sector], 29 November 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ Emirates Policy Center (EPC), ISIS Strategy in Iraq, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ Al-Monitor, Islamic State increases attacks in Iraq's Sunni areas, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ Kohlmann, E., @IntelTweet, [Twitter], 30 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹² Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Violence continues to decline in Iraq, winter 2020-21, 04 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹³ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Violence in Iraq, March 2021, 5 April 2021, [url](#), Wing, J. Musings on Iraq, Security in Iraq June 2021, 6 July 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ Al-Monitor, Islamic State uses hit-and-run tactics in Iraq, 11 July 2021, [url](#)





governorates, including Anbar, prompting the government to ramp up security measures around power distribution facilities.⁴⁹⁵

The government undertook tighter security measures around the border areas facing Syria and Saudi Arabia. In April 2021, the Iraqi army launched a campaign targeting illegal border crossings, including passages of ISIL fighters, smuggling of weapons around al-Qaim border crossing, trench digging and erection of watchtowers.⁴⁹⁶ During the same month, the Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of the Commander of the 5th Border Guard Force, after he failed to thwart an ISIL launched attack near the Arar border area with Saudi Arabia, which allowed ISIL to seize weapons and equipment at a police station.⁴⁹⁷

Conflict in Iraq between Iran and the US

The US airstrikes on KH bases in Syria on 26 February 2021⁴⁹⁸ interrupted the truce announced in October 2020 by the coordinating body of the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee (*Tansiqiya* movement). As a consequence, a series of counterattacks against the base of the US-led coalition in Anbar, Ain al-Assad, occurred.⁴⁹⁹ In March 2021, KH-militias fired multiple rockets against the base.⁵⁰⁰ On 25 May 2021, a drone hit the base, without causing injuries.⁵⁰¹ A similar drone attack took place on 6 June 2021, but was intercepted and shot down.⁵⁰² In July 2021, Iran-backed forces fired rockets at the base, wounding three persons,⁵⁰³ including civilians. On 8 July 2021, a missile launcher used in the attack exploded, damaging and burning houses in a neighbourhood, including a mosque.⁵⁰⁴ The attack was in retaliation to previous US airstrikes on militia targets in the area the month before.⁵⁰⁵

The governorate also witnessed successive roadside IED attacks, targeting convoys carrying supplies for US-led coalition forces and causing disruption to local security, reported Garda in March and April 2021.⁵⁰⁶

Security incidents

In the reference period, 1 August 2020 – 31 October, ACLED reported 55 battles, 58 incidents of remote violence/explosions and 15 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 128 security incidents in Anbar governorate, the majority taking place in Al-Rutba district.⁵⁰⁷ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 13 below.

⁴⁹⁵ Al Mashreq, Iraqi officials ramp up security measures to protect power lines, 18 August 2021, [url](#) Iraq

⁴⁹⁶ Shafaq News, Iraqi army to launch operations on the borders with Syria sources say, 21 April 2021, [url](#), US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. April 1, 2021 – June 30 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 33

⁴⁹⁷ Middle East Monitor (MEMO), Iraq arrests commander of border force following Daesh attack, 29 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ Reuters, U.S. air strikes in Syria target Iranian-backed militia-Pentagon, 26 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The) (TWI), KH publicly leads call for escalation against U.S. presence, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Aljazeera, Multiple rockets land at Iraq's Ain al-Assad airbase: officials, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Reuters, Attack by unmanned aerial surveillance targets Iraqi air base- US-led coalition, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰² Reuters, Two drones intercepted, shot down over Iraqi air base-military, 6 June 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ Reuters, Series of attacks target U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syrian, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ Aljazeera, Attacks on US in Iraq becoming a dangerous cycle: Analysts, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁵ Politico, U.S. airstrikes target Iran-backed militias in Syria, Iraq, 27 June 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Garda, Iraq: Supply convoy struck by improvised explosive device in Fallujah March 11, 11 March 2021, [url](#), Garda, Improvised explosive device targets convoy carrying military supplies in Ramadi April 7, 7 April 2021, [url](#), Shafaq News, An explosion targets a logistic convoy of the global coalition in al-Anbar, 6 May 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



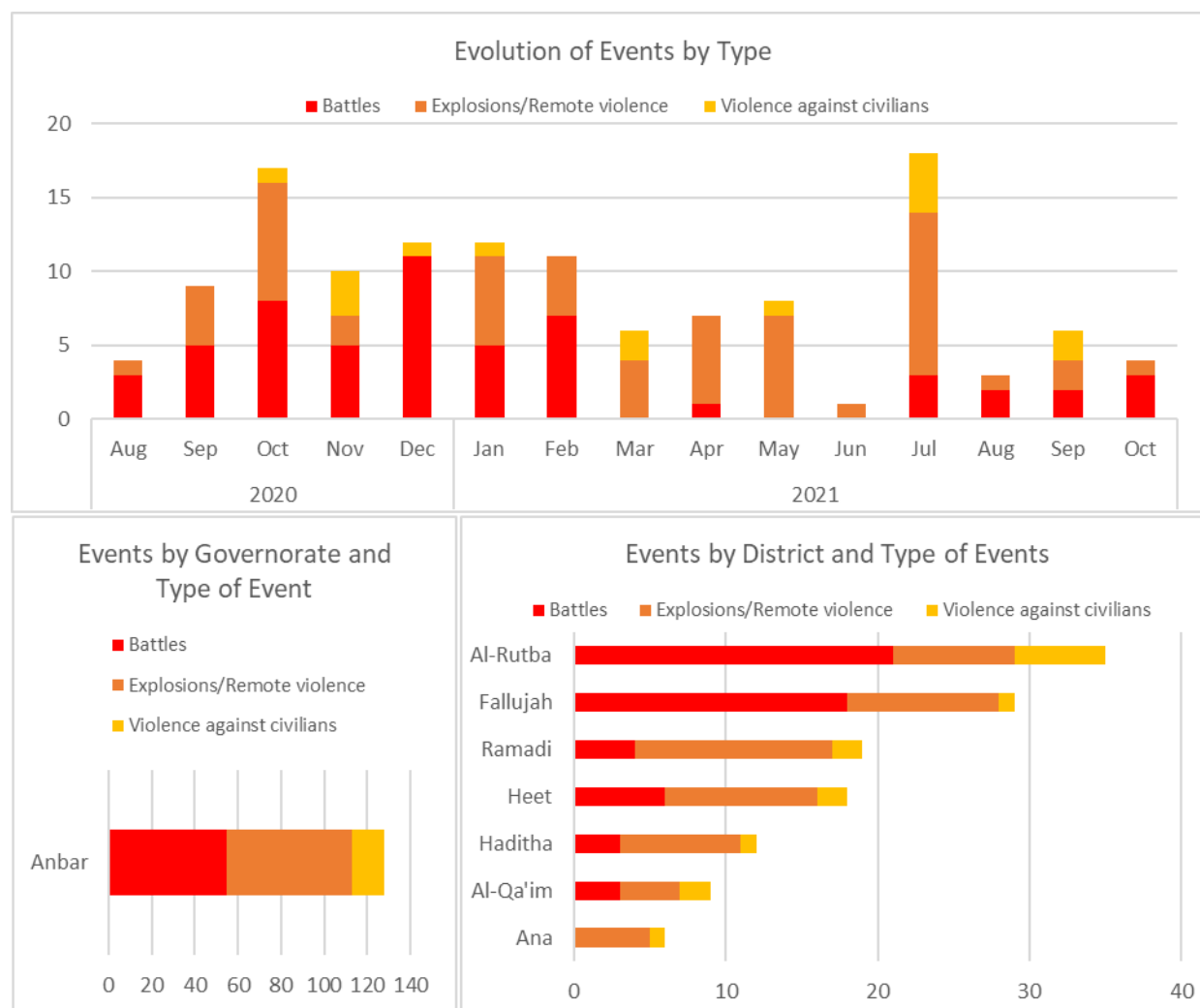


Figure 10: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Anbar governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data⁵⁰⁸

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 10 October 2020, a civilian was killed after entering a trip wired house in Rawa district.⁵⁰⁹
- A car bomb exploded in Haditha on 28 February 2021 during a joint operation carried out by the ISF and tribal militias, killing five persons.⁵¹⁰
- In March 2021, Iran-backed militias fired multiple rockets at Ain al-Assad military base, hosting U.S. and coalition forces. The attack caused no significant losses.⁵¹¹
- In May 2021, ISIL detonated a vehicle bomb at a gathering of Tribal Mobilization Forces, killing 12 persons.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ Iraq News Agency (INA), [إستشهاد مواطن بعد دخوله منزل مفخخ في الانبار](#), [Security media: Killing of civilian after entering tripwired house in Anbar], 10 October 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹⁰ Anadolu Agency, Car-bomb explosion kills 5 in western Iraq, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹¹ Aljazeera, Multiple rockets land at Iraq's Ain al-Asad airbase: officials, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹² US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. April 1, 2021 – June 30 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 14

- In the beginning of May 2021, an explosive in Akashat area, of al-Qaim district, killed a high-ranking officer.⁵¹³
- A car bomb exploded in the district of Haditha on 25 May 2021, injuring 10 persons. No party claimed responsibility for the attack.⁵¹⁴
- In July 2021, ISIL militants killed four fishermen and injured five others, in an attack near the Haditha dam.⁵¹⁵
- In August 2021, ISIL militants targeted border guards in Akashat, killing one and injuring another. A third guard, who was kidnapped,⁵¹⁶ was later found beheaded.⁵¹⁷
- On 3 October 2021, Basnews reported that a massive car bomb exploded in Ramadi, after security forces intercepted the vehicle before reaching its target. No group claimed responsibility for the incident.⁵¹⁸

2.1.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents⁵¹⁹ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 5 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Anbar	9	6	8	14	9	13	20	33

Table 5: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Anbar governorate⁵²⁰

2.1.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Anbar was one of Iraq's worst affected by ISIL's territorial advances in 2014. At that time, 80 percent of Anbar's territory fell under ISIL's control, leading to the displacement of more than a million persons. Anbar faced some of the deadliest fighting since 2003. During the first four years of Operation Iraqi freedom (OIF), the governorate was the deadliest governorate for American service men, claiming one-third of American fatalities. The governorate also was one of Iraq's worst affected in the fight between the Iraqi forces and ISIL, which led to significant infrastructural damage.⁵²¹

Efforts undertaken by the Iraqi authorities in partnership with international organizations have made progressive steps to rehabilitate the damage caused during the anti-ISIL offensive.

⁵¹³ Shafaq News, ISIS kills an Iraqi brigadier in al-Anbar, 1 May 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁴ Al-Rai Media, بمحافظة الانبار العراقية "مفخخه" انفجار 10 مصابين في انفجار 10, [10 injured in an IED explosion in Iraqi Anbar governorate], 25 May 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁵ Al-Monitor, Islamic State uses hit-and-run tactics in Iraq, 11 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁶ Shafaq News, ضحية و مصاب بهجوم مزدوج استهدف الحدود العراقي, [One victim and one injured in dual attack targeting the Iraqi border], 30 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁷ Shafaq News, بعد يومين من اختطافه .. داعش يقطع رأس جندي عراقي علي الحدود السورية, [Two days after his abduction ... Daesh beheads a Iraqi soldier at the Syrian border], 1 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁸ Basnews, Huge suicide car bomb hits Iraq's Ramadi, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁹ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). See the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

⁵²⁰ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

⁵²¹ UN-Habitat, Ramadi recovery and spatial development plan, July 2018, [url](#), p. 13



According to the Kurdish media outlet Rudaw, the government launched a major reconstruction campaign after the defeat of ISIL. Rudaw reported that the assistant governor of Anbar for technical affairs stated that the governorate is currently implementing 500 projects, primarily designated to repairing destroyed facilities.⁵²² Iraq's Reconstruction Fund repaired the Ramadi dam, restoring water for the city's population and agricultural sector. In 2020, United Nations funded projects, through UNDP, completed the rehabilitation of the Maternity Hospital in Ramadi⁵²³ and the Fallujah hospital.⁵²⁴

Al-Monitor stated in October 2020 that the stepped-up measures undertaken by the governorate showed potential signs of growth, and improved job prospects for the governorate. Reconstruction projects have involved the rehabilitation of several bridges and the Haditha oil refinery.⁵²⁵ The New York Times reported that the post ISIS-investment boom has turned the governorate to one of the most stable governorates in the country.⁵²⁶ Aljazeera reported in January 2021 that construction projects have created jobs, at a time when the county's economy is faltering, and poverty rates are rising. The Director of Anbar's Investment Committee who spoke to Aljazeera stated that the in the governorate there were 'more investment opportunities than in other provinces'. The Director attributed the success partly to the absence of armed groups, commonly known to extort businesses, and partly to prevailing social cohesion among the local population.⁵²⁷

2.1.7 Displacement and return

Displacement

The number of IDPs from Anbar governorate gradually decreased following ISIL's territorial losses in 2017. IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) statistics as of 26 October 2021, estimate the number of IDPs from Anbar to be 35 312. The top districts of origin amongst the IDP population for the governorate are Ramadi, Fallujah and al-Rutba.⁵²⁸ There are three IDP camps still operational in the governorate: Ameriyat Al-Fallujah, Habbaniya and Kilo 18 camp. In addition to Bezeibiz camp, which is informal.⁵²⁹

Return

Anbar governorate has the second highest number of returnees, after Mosul. As of 26 October 2021, 1 541 466 individuals have returned, since IOM started noting returns in April 2015. The districts of Ramadi and Fallujah make up the highest numbers of the returnee population.⁵³⁰

⁵²² Rudaw, Iraq's Ramadi makes strides in post-ISIL reconstruction effort, 16 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵²³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Hospital and bridges in Ramadi highlighting city's recovery, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁴ Global Coalition against Daesh (The), Anbar: From destruction to sustainable recovery, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ Al-Monitor, Iraq's western Anbar province getting back on its feet, eyeing autonomy, 20 October 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁶ New York Times (The), After Years as a battleground, investments boom lifts Iraqi city, 10 July 2021, [url](#)

⁵²⁷ Aljazeera, Iraq: Anbar's post-ISIL reconstruction spawns autonomy debate, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵²⁸ International Organisation for Migration (IOM), DTM, Iraq master list report 123, August-September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁵²⁹ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Exiled at home, June 2021, [url](#), p. 25

⁵³⁰ International Organisation for Migration (IOM), DTM, Iraq master list report 123, August-September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 5





The Integrated Location Assessment (ILA)⁵³¹ conducted by IOM in July-August 2020, reported a nearly complete return in most districts of Anbar. According to the ILA, the main incentives to return are the restored security situations in the place of origin, availability of housing and services and the desire to return. Other pulling factors, such as availability of assistance, encouragement of community, religious leaders and government incentives are found as less common. The ILA further noted negative factors that push individuals to leave their place of displacement. These usually include evictions, deteriorating living or security conditions and lack of financial means in the area of displacement. The ILA reported that this was particularly the case for individuals originating from the district of Rutba.⁵³²

IOM's Return Index Governorate Profiling⁵³³ on Anbar concluded in its report in June 2021, that the majority of returnees returned to locations with medium severity (45 percent) or low severity (51 percent) living conditions. Only three percent of returnees reportedly returned to high severity living conditions, making Anbar the third largest governorate to host returnees facing high severity living conditions. According to IOM's assessment, as of December 2020, the districts of Heet, Ramadi and Rutba have the highest numbers of returnees living in high severity living conditions.⁵³⁴

The international organization for promoting the protection of civilians in conflict, The Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), reported in April 2021, that IDP families originating from parts of al-Qaim district in Anbar leaving their areas of displacement due to camp closures were prevented from accessing their areas of origin. In November 2020, IDPs returning from Baghdad to al-Qaim district faced four screening processes by different military operations commands, despite having obtained security clearance from Baghdad Operations Command.⁵³⁵

CIVIC further reported coercive measures undertaken by the authorities and security actors in Anbar to force displaced persons to leave IDP camps. In December 2020, Anbar authorities relocated 150 families living in Habbaniyah tourist camp into a housing complex, lacking access to water and adequate sanitation. According to the same source, authorities also failed to secure the area from unexploded ordinance, resulting in critically wounding two residents. In January 2021, Anbar authorities ordered the removal of the water filtration station in Habbaniyah Tourist IDP camp, which left the remaining residents of the camp without access to water.⁵³⁶

CIVIC reported that families of alleged ISIL members were informed by tribal leaders and relatives that they were not welcomed – despite receiving assurances from Anbar Operations

⁵³¹ The Integrated Location Assessment (ILA) collects detailed information on displaced and returnee households living in locations identified through the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). The information includes geographic distribution and main characteristics of IDPs and returnees, mobility and future intentions.

⁵³² International Organisation for Migration (IOM), An overview of return movements in Iraq, DTM Integrated Location Assessment V, 2020, 1 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁵³³ The Return Index Governorate Profiling provides an analysis on return in a specific governorate.

⁵³⁴ International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Return Index Governorate Profiling, Return Dynamics in Anbar governorate, June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁵³⁵ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Ignoring Iraq's most vulnerable: The plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#) p. 4

⁵³⁶ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Ignoring Iraq's most vulnerable: The plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#) p. 9 -10





Command. Tribal leaders reportedly demanded thousands of dollars to guarantee their safe return.⁵³⁷

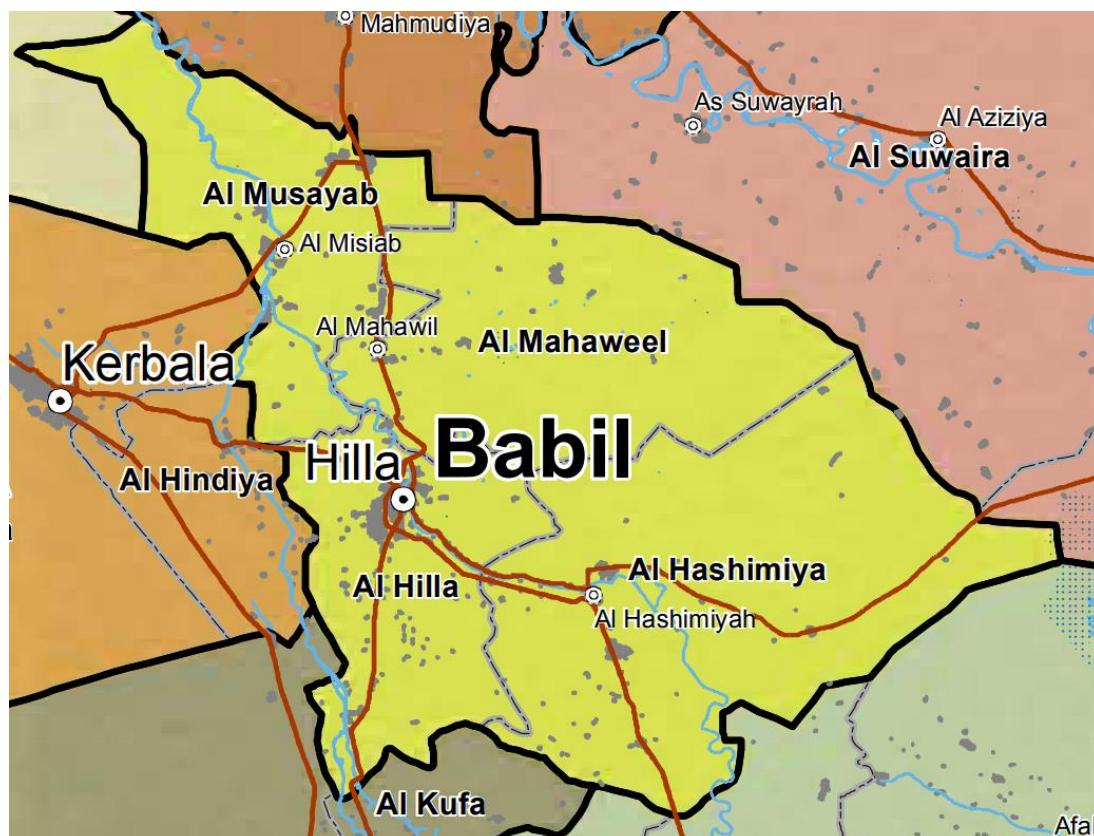
Furthermore, CIVIC observed that the rejection of imputed ISIL suspects, along with other punishment, are closely connected with tribal customary law.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁷ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Ignoring Iraq's most vulnerable: The plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#) p. 8

⁵³⁸ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Ignoring Iraq's most vulnerable: The plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#) p. 17



2.2 Babil



Map 10: Babil governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations⁵³⁹

2.2.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Babil governorate is located in the central part of Iraq, south of Baghdad governorate, and has borders with Baghdad, Anbar, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya, and Wassit governorates. The governorate is divided into the following districts: Al-Musayab, Al-Mahaweel, Al-Hilla, and Al-Hashimiya. The governorate's capital is Hilla.⁵⁴⁰

Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated⁵⁴¹ the governorate's population at 2 231 136, roughly evenly split between urban and rural residents.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴² Iraq, CSO, 2021 لسنة والجنس والبيئة المحافظات حسب العراق سكان تقديرات [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates of Iraq's population by governorates, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)



Ethno-religious composition

The majority of the governorate's population is Shia Arab,⁵⁴³ with a Sunni minority.⁵⁴⁴

Economy

Agriculture is the predominant sector of Babil governorate's economy.⁵⁴⁵ In the Jurf Al-Nasr area, Kata'ib Hezbollah runs 'its own oil refinery and fisheries, as well as crop and dairy farms and facilities for processing poultry', among other facilities.⁵⁴⁶

Road security

The northern part of Babil (around Jurf Al-Nasr⁵⁴⁷) forms part of the southwestern Baghdad Belts, with highways connecting the governorate to the capital.⁵⁴⁸ This area is situated along a main route used by Shiite pilgrims from northern and central Iraq to visit Karbala and Najaf and has therefore been of strategic importance to the government.⁵⁴⁹ In autumn 2021, authorities announced that security forces had foiled an explosives attack on pilgrims heading to Karbala.⁵⁵⁰ There have also been frequent reports of IED attacks on supply convoys for the US-led International Coalition forces travelling through Babil,⁵⁵¹ although such incidents have reportedly rarely resulted in casualties.⁵⁵² For further details on attacks on convoys, please see section [2.2.4 Recent security trends in the governorate](#).

2.2.2 Conflict background

ISIL insurgency

In 2013, the emerging ISIL insurgency established a presence in rural tribal areas of the southwestern Baghdad Belts including in the Jurf Al-Nasr (Jurf Al-Sakhar) area. A network of towns under its control linked ISIL in northern Babil with ISIL groups further north and west, allowing the group to project force upon other parts of Babil as well as on Anbar, Baghdad,⁵⁵³

⁵⁴³ AP, Shattered by war, Sunni Arabs despair over future in Iraq, 10 September 2017, [url](#); NCCI, Babil Governorate Profile, updated July 2015, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁴⁴ NCCI, Babil Governorate Profile, updated July 2015, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁴⁵ NCCI, Babil Governorate Profile, updated July 2015, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁴⁶ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), p. 102

⁵⁴⁷ This town was called Jurf al-Sakhar until its recapture from ISIL and most Iraqis still refer to it by this old name. New Lines Magazine, Post-ISIL Security Pitfalls Lurk in a Small Town Near Baghdad, 9 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁸ ISW, ISIS Re-Establishes Historical Sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁹ Wing, J., Details on Collective Punishment Meted Out by Hashd Upon Jurf al-Sakhr, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 21 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁰ Basnews, Iraqi Forces Thwart Triple Attack on Shia Pilgrims in Babel, 19 September 2021, [url](#); Al Mayadeen, Plot to Target Pilgrims in Iraq Foiled, 19 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy struck by improvised explosive device in Babil Governorate Feb. 25, 25 February 2021, [url](#); for specific incidents, see also, for example, Shafaq News, Bomb attack hits US-led coalition convoy in Iraq, 12 August 2021; Shafaq News, Explosion targets a Logistics Convoy of the Global Coalition in Babel, 29 July 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, US logistic convoys targeted in Iraq's Al-Diwaniyah, Babil, 5 April 2021, [url](#); GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy for US-led forces struck by an improvised explosive device in Babil Governorate March 21, 21 March 2021, [url](#); GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy struck by improvised explosive device in Babil Governorate March 15, 15 March 2021, [url](#); GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy for US-led forces struck by IED in Babil Governorate, Dec. 21, 21 December 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁵² GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy struck by improvised explosive device in Babil Governorate Feb. 25, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ ISW, ISIS in the Southwest Baghdad Belts, 24 November 2014, [url](#), p. 1



and the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.⁵⁵⁴ Thus, in 2014, ISIL used its presence in this area to support its combat operations in Fallujah. Shortly after this, it overran Jurf Al-Nasr town and declared an official province for its activities in northern Babil.⁵⁵⁵ In autumn 2014, ISF and Shia militias launched an offensive against the ISIL stronghold and recaptured Jurf Al-Nasr.⁵⁵⁶

With ISIL losing this territory, local Sunnis, who were mostly from the Al-Janabi tribe,⁵⁵⁷ were expelled by Shia militias⁵⁵⁸ and their homes looted and destroyed.⁵⁵⁹ The town was effectively 'evacuated of its more than 120 000 residents over the course of the ISIS war, leaving only Iraqi security forces [ISF] and the Iranian-backed, state-sponsored Popular Mobilization Forces [PMU] in the town'.⁵⁶⁰ Most of those displaced by the conflict fled to Babil's Al-Musayab district, to Baghdad, or to the KRI,⁵⁶¹ and ISF and the PMU have prevented IDPs from returning to the area.⁵⁶²

In the years since, ISIL carried out a few large-scale attacks (notably in Hilla in 2016)⁵⁶³ and projected some influence towards Jurf Al-Nasr and northern Babil, with arrests of ISIL militants by ISF reported at checkpoints along highways linking Baghdad to Babil.⁵⁶⁴ In 2019, a deadly attack in Karbala was allegedly conducted by an ISIL cell from Jurf Al-Nasr.⁵⁶⁵ Sources reported in March 2021 that Shia militias controlling Jurf Al-Nasr have closed off the town to outsiders, denying entry even to Iraqi government officials.⁵⁶⁶

Protest movement

The large-scale protests that erupted in Baghdad in early October 2019 soon spread to Babil.⁵⁶⁷ At the end of the same month, armed guards in Hilla opened fire on protesters, killing 11 of them and injuring dozens of others.⁵⁶⁸ For further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#). For further details on security developments in Babil governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 2.2.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

⁵⁵⁴ Intercept (The) and New York Times (The), A Spy Complex Revealed, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁵ ISW, ISIS Re-Establishes Historical Sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ ISW, ISIS in the Southwest Baghdad Belts, 24 November 2014, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁵⁷ New Lines Magazine, Post-ISIS Security Pitfalls Lurk in a Small Town Near Baghdad, 9 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ New York Times (The), Bus Bomb Kills 12 Iraqis Near Major Pilgrimage Site, 21 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁹ Intercept (The) and New York Times (The), A Spy Complex Revealed, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ Rudaw, Iraqi militia calls for evacuation of Sunni areas to cut support for ISIS, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶¹ HRW, 'Life Without a Father is Meaningless': Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances in Iraq 2014-2017, September 2018, [url](#), p. 58

⁵⁶² Rudaw, Iraqi militia calls for evacuation of Sunni areas to cut support for ISIS, 3 May 2021, [url](#); see also Rudaw, Sunni IDPs in Kurdistan accuse Shiite militias of preventing their return to Babil, 11 March 2021, [url](#); Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 15; Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁶³ Al Jazeera, Iraq: Scores killed in petrol station Hilla attack, 25 November 2016, [url](#); Reuters, Islamic State truck bomb kills at least 60 people south of Baghdad, 6 March 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁴ ISW, ISIS Re-Establishes Historical Sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ New York Times (The), Bus Bomb Kills 12 Iraqis Near Major Pilgrimage Site, 21 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ New Lines Magazine, Post-ISIS Security Pitfalls Lurk in a Small Town Near Baghdad, 9 March 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Sunni IDPs in Kurdistan accuse Shiite militias of preventing their return to Babil, 11 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁷ IFRC, Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA) Iraq: Civil Unrest, 9 October 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁶⁸ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 8



2.2.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

The Iraqi military's Babil Operations Command (BabOC), which included the 8th Iraqi Army Division, was responsible for Babil governorate (including Jurf Al-Nasr) and the Southern Baghdad Belts in the past.⁵⁶⁹ In late 2014 – shortly after the reconquest of Jurf Al-Nasr – the General Command of the Iraqi Armed Forces decided to 'dissolve the Babel Operations Command and task the Mid-Euphrates Operations Command [MEOC] with security of Babel province'.⁵⁷⁰ A May 2021 report confirms that Babil no longer has an operations command of its own but is under the military responsibility of the Mid-Euphrates Operations Command (MEOC).⁵⁷¹ Meanwhile, activities of the 8th Iraqi Army division were still reported in Babil as of early spring 2021.⁵⁷²

In 2019, it was reported that the government was planning to transfer security duties in Babil from military command to the local police.⁵⁷³ In January 2021, Iraq's Interior Minister confirmed that his security forces had already taken over control in Babil governorate from the forces of the Ministry of Defence.⁵⁷⁴ The latter half of 2021 saw instances of large-scale deployment of police and other forces in the governorate. In September 2021, the Babil Police Command announced that it was implementing a security plan to protect Shia pilgrims heading to Karbala, with 18 000 personnel deployed from 'all types of security services' operating in the governorate, working alongside a PMU brigade.⁵⁷⁵ Moreover, in October 2021, over 20 000 security personnel, including police and members of the Third Brigade of the Iraqi Army, were deployed to protect election centres in the governorate during the October 2021 parliamentary elections.⁵⁷⁶ ISF members have been controlling checkpoints along the Baghdad–Babil highway, in collaboration with PMU and other forces.⁵⁷⁷ It has also been reported in August 2021 that Iraqi intelligence services were playing an active role in the governorate,⁵⁷⁸ including in dismantling alleged ISIL sleeper cells.⁵⁷⁹

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

The PMU, especially those groups with strong links to Iran, maintain a heavy presence in the Baghdad Belts and the borderlands between Babil and Anbar governorates.⁵⁸⁰ The PMU Commission 'maintains administrative offices in each Iraqi province outside Kurdistan,

⁵⁶⁹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 14, 19

⁵⁷⁰ Iraq News Gazette, Urgent – Babel Operations Command dissolved, 26 December 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁷¹ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 75

⁵⁷² Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy [Map], 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷³ Al-Monitor, As Iraqi army retreats to borders, local police controls cities' security, 30 January 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁴ EPIC, ISHM: January 7 - January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#); see also MEMO, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wasit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ INA, 18,000 security personnel participate in securing Arbaeen in Babylon, 19 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁶ NINA, Twenty thousand security personnel protect the electoral centers in Babylon, 9 October 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁷ Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁵⁷⁸ INA, 18,000 security personnel participate in securing Arbaeen in Babylon, 19 September 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Iraq's Intelligence Services arrests prominent ISIS leader in Babel, 5 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁹ See, for example, Shafaq News, Iraq's Intelligence Services arrests prominent ISIS leader in Babel, 5 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁰ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 10





providing a necessary link to wounded fighters and families, as well as a recruitment hub and contact point for off-duty members'.⁵⁸¹

As of early 2021, the town of Jurf Al-Nasr remained under the control of Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH),⁵⁸² an Iranian-backed Shiite militia under the umbrella of the PMU⁵⁸³ that is strongly opposed to current Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhimi.⁵⁸⁴ Jurf Al-Nasr has been described as the most important military hub for KH, 'an exclusive KH principality in which government forces cannot enter and where KH formally acquired land use rights from the government'. KH operates 'extensive private prisons (holding well over 1 000 illegal detainees)' in Jurf Al-Nasr, as well as medical rehabilitation facilities for its fighters.⁵⁸⁵ Out of the three PMU brigades affiliated with KH,⁵⁸⁶ two (brigades 46 and 47) are headquartered in Jurf Al-Nasr. Moreover, it has been noted that 'Jurf is the hub of munitions manufacturing, storage, and testing facilities that KH operates in the rural southern arc of Baghdad'.⁵⁸⁷ According to an Iraqi official interviewed in 2020 by Michael Knights, a fellow at the US think tank Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), Sheikh Adnan al-Mohammadawi (Adnan Yousif Jassim, Abu Ammar) was in charge of the Jurf Al-Nasr base complex.⁵⁸⁸

After the official defeat of ISIL in 2017, PMU units have continued their counterterrorism operations in the Jurf Al-Nasr area.⁵⁸⁹ In September 2021, the PMU Operations Commands announced that its forces had launched a large-scale operation to clear the Jurf Al-Nasr area of ISIL fighters.⁵⁹⁰ PMU forces have also been controlling checkpoints along the Baghdad–Babil highway, in collaboration with Iraqi government and other forces.⁵⁹¹

ISIL

Based on locations of recorded ISIL attacks on ISF and PMU, a May 2021 report by the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy infers that ISIL fighters are mostly distributed in overlapping 'geographical sectors' in several governorates including Babil.⁵⁹² Within Babil governorate, Jurf Al-Nasr, with its extensive KH base, has been referred to as the prime target of ISIL attacks.⁵⁹³ The ISIL-linked news outlet Amaq claimed that the group killed or injured 104 people in Babil governorate during the year 2020, besides causing material damage to vehicles, houses and farms, electricity transmission towers and other facilities.⁵⁹⁴ However, it

⁵⁸¹ Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁸² National (The), ISIS bombed high-voltage power lines near Baghdad, Iraqi military claims, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸³ Rudaw, Sunni IDPs in Kurdistan accuse Shiite militias of preventing their return to Babil, 11 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ FP, A Powerful Iran-Backed Militia Is Losing Influence in Iraq, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁵ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁵⁸⁶ Smyth, P., Making Sense of Iraq's PMF Arrests, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 26 April 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁷ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 13; see also Rudaw, Sunni IDPs in Kurdistan accuse Shiite militias of preventing their return to Babil, 11 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁸ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁸⁹ Mehr News Agency, Iraqi PMU thwarts terrorist attack planned for Ramadan, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ Mehr News Agency, Iraqi PMU launches operation against ISIL in Babil province, 12 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹¹ Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁵⁹² Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹³ Wing, J., Security In Iraq Nov 1-7, 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 10 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁴ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)





has been observed that ISIL attacks in Babil have been rare in recent years in comparison with other parts of Iraq.⁵⁹⁵

As of September 2021, ISIL operatives were allegedly hiding in the orchards and woods around Jurf Al-Nasr⁵⁹⁶ and there have been several reports of ISIL cells or hideouts being dismantled and/or ISIL members being arrested in Babil's north in recent months.⁵⁹⁷ Amongst others, in March 2021, PMU members reportedly 'discovered and destroyed a number of tunnels' belonging to ISIL fighters in the area.⁵⁹⁸

2.2.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Attacks against logistical support convoys for the US-led International Coalition against ISIL are believed to be carried out by Iraqi Shia militias linked to Iran⁵⁹⁹ and their numbers have increased since the killing of Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis in a January 2020 US drone strike.⁶⁰⁰ While some of these attacks have not been claimed by any party,⁶⁰¹ others were claimed by groups that include the following: Ashab Al-Kahf ('The Companions of the Cave'),⁶⁰² a secretive Shia militia group purported to have emerged from older Iran-backed factions in recent years⁶⁰³ and described as an affiliate of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq⁶⁰⁴ or KH;⁶⁰⁵ Sariyat Qasem Al-Jabbarin ('Crusher of Tyrants Brigade'),⁶⁰⁶ described by a US think tank as a KH 'facade group' whose purpose is to claim IED attacks on International Coalition convoys;⁶⁰⁷ and a faction which has been referred to as the 'International Resistance Group'.⁶⁰⁸

Among other locations, attacks on convoys have been reported on the highway between Qadissiya and Babil governorates,⁶⁰⁹ on the international highway passing through Babil,⁶¹⁰ on the Hilla highway,⁶¹¹ in the city of Hilla itself,⁶¹² and in the town of Jableh.⁶¹³ While these

⁵⁹⁵ BBC Monitoring, IS claims rare attack south of Iraqi capital, 10 November 2020

⁵⁹⁶ Mehr News Agency, Iraqi PMU launches operation against ISIL in Babil province, 12 September 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁷ AA, Iraq dismantles Daesh/ISIS sleeper cell in Babel, 26 June 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Iraq's Intelligence Services arrests prominent ISIS leader in Babel, 5 August 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, PMF destroys ISIS Madafas north of Babel, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁸ Mehr News Agency, Hashd al-Sha'abi thwarts ISIL attack in Samarra, 8 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁹ Shafaq News, IED targeted an International Coalition convoy on Babel International road, 27 December 2020, [url](#); Shafaq News, Blast targets US-led coalition convoy in Iraq's Babil, 1 September 2021

⁶⁰⁰ Shafaq News, Bomb attack hits US-led coalition convoy in Iraq, 12 August 2021

⁶⁰¹ See, for example, GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy for US-led forces struck by an improvised explosive device in Babil Governorate March 21, 21 March 2021, [url](#); ABNA, US logistics convoy targeted in Iraq's Basra, 24 May 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰² Mehr News Agency, Two US military logistics convoys targeted in Iraq, 22 September 2021, [url](#); see also Mehr News Agency, US military convoy targeted in Babil province, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰³ Solhdoost, M., Has killing Soleimani backfired on the US?, ASPI Strategist, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁴ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The), Profile: Ashab al-Kahf, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁵ VOA, Iran-backed Militias Resume Rocket Attacks Toward US Embassy in Iraq, 19 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁶ BBC Monitoring, Bomb targets US-led coalition convoy in Iraq's Babil, 6 August 2021; Shafaq News, Bomb attack hits US-led coalition convoy in Iraq, 12 August 2021

⁶⁰⁷ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The), Profile: Qasem al-Jabbarin, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁸ Mehr News Agency, US military convoy targeted in Iraq's in Babil province, 21 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁹ Shafaq News, Bomb attack hits US-led coalition convoy in Iraq, 12 August 2021

⁶¹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: July 22 – August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹¹ BBC Monitoring, Bomb targets US-led coalition convoy in Iraq's Babil, 6 August 2021

⁶¹² Mehr News Agency, Attack on US army's convoy in Iraq's Babil Prov., 21 September 2020, [url](#); ABNA, US logistics convoy targeted in Iraq's Basra, 24 May 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹³ Mehr News Agency, Three US logistic convoys targeted in Iraq, 7 April 2021, [url](#)





incidents have rarely resulted in casualties,⁶¹⁴ one attack at an unspecified location along the Qadissiya–Babil highway in September 2020 reportedly killed a member of the Iraqi security forces (who were escorting a coalition convoy) and injured two others.⁶¹⁵

Meanwhile, it was reported that ISIL ‘accelerated attacks in late 2020 and early 2021 targeting Iranian-backed militia’ in Jurf Al-Nasr.⁶¹⁶ Media sources have reported about several killings of senior PMU commanders⁶¹⁷ and regular PMU troops.⁶¹⁸ Most, if not all, of these attacks occurred in the Jurf Al-Nasr area,⁶¹⁹ with some of the deaths attributed to ISIL attacks.⁶²⁰ It has also been reported that alleged ISIL members were killed in clashes with the PMU.⁶²¹

In early 2021, the Jurf Al-Nasr area also witnessed alleged ISIL attacks on electric power infrastructure.⁶²²

Meanwhile, renewed protests against unemployment and corruption took place in the governorate in October 2020,⁶²³ and there were reports of violent clashes between protesters and security forces in the city of Hilla in March⁶²⁴ and May 2021.⁶²⁵ According to Iraq’s High Judicial Council, 69 cases relating to protests in Babil between October 2019 and 1 March 2021 were submitted to the governorate’s judicial authorities, including allegations of attempted or actual killings of protestors, erection of roadblocks, burning of tyres, assault on security forces, and setting fire on government buildings and headquarters of political parties.⁶²⁶

Moreover, tribal violence in the town of Iskandariya⁶²⁷ and unspecified acts of violence in the run-up to the October 2021 parliamentary elections⁶²⁸ were reported.

⁶¹⁴ GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy struck by improvised explosive device in Babil Governorate Feb. 25, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹⁵ Xinhua, Security member killed in bomb attacks on U.S.-coalition trucks in Iraq, 9 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

⁶¹⁶ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁶¹⁷ Fars News Agency, Iraqi Figure Says Riyadh, Abu Dhabi Run Daesh Elements, Calls on Yemen’s Ansarullah to Hit Saudi Arabia, 6 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 2 – September 9, 2021, 9 September 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, PMF leader killed in an armed attack in Babel, 2 August 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Roadside bomb kills leading militia commander in Iraq, 20 February 2021

⁶¹⁸ EPIC, ISHM: July 8 – July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#); SyriacPress, Iraq: ISIS attacks Popular Mobilization Forces in Babylon Province, 17 November 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Security in Iraq Nov 1-7, 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 10 November 2020, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, IS claims rare attack south of Iraqi capital, 10 November 2020

⁶¹⁹ See reports cited in the previous two footnotes.

⁶²⁰ Fars News Agency, Iraqi Figure Says Riyadh, Abu Dhabi Run Daesh Elements, Calls on Yemen’s Ansarullah to Hit Saudi Arabia, 6 September 2021, [url](#); SyriacPress, Iraq: ISIS attacks Popular Mobilization Forces in Babylon Province, 17 November 2020, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, IS claims rare attack south of Iraqi capital, 10 November 2020

⁶²¹ Xinhua, 5 IS militants killed, 9 arrested in Iraq, 20 December 2020, [url](#)

⁶²² ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed militias compete to control Baghdad region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 7, footnote 14; Mehr News Agency, Hashd al-Sha’abi thwarts terrorist attack on Jurf al-Nasr, 31 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶²³ MEE, Iraqis return to streets to mark anniversary of anti-government protests, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

⁶²⁴ Basnews, Over 10 Protesters Injured in Iraq’s Babil, 18 March 2021, [url](#); see also Rudaw, Iraqi protesters demanding change to local governance met with violence, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶²⁵ Rudaw, Protesters arrested in droves in Iraq’s Babil: activist, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

⁶²⁶ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 8, 22

⁶²⁷ GardaWorld, Iraq: Officials implement indefinite curfew in Iskandariya, Babil Governorate, Sept. 4, 4 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ BBC Monitoring, Iraq: Social media highlights for 4-10 June, 10 June 2021



Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 15 battles, 38 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 11 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 64 security incidents in Babil governorate, the majority taking place in Al-Musayab district.⁶²⁹ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 14 below.

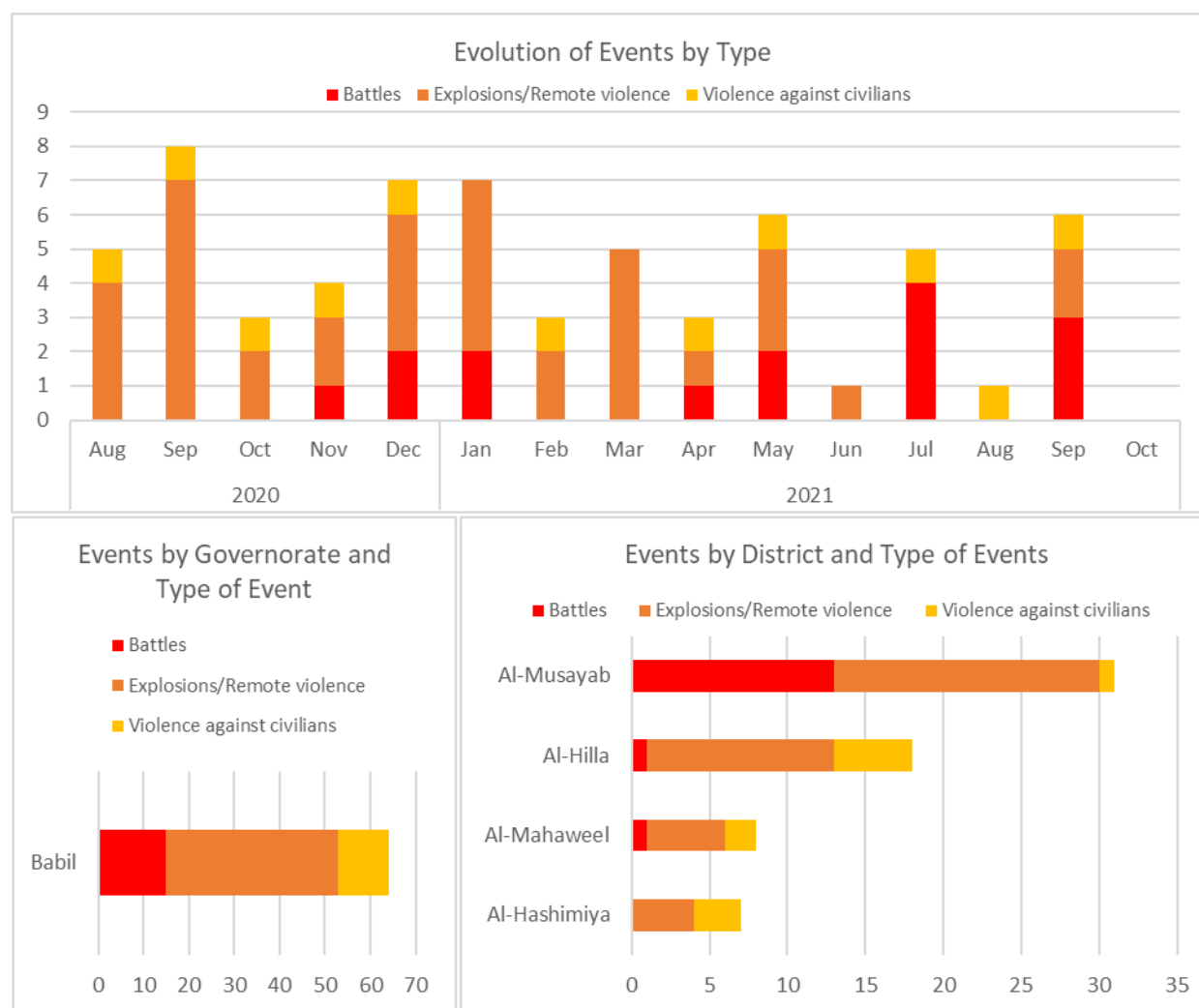


Figure 11: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Babil governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶³⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



Illustrative examples of incidents

Incidents reported in the Jurf Al-Nasr area

- On 9 November 2020, ISIL claimed that it had killed or wounded 16 PMU members in the Jurf Al-Nasr area. While most mainstream media outlets did not report about these purported attacks, some websites quoted sources saying on 7 November 2020 that two soldiers had been injured in an IED explosion in Jurf Al-Nasr.⁶³¹
- In mid-November 2020, one PMU member was killed and another wounded while responding to an ISIL attack.⁶³²
- On 19 January 2021, the ISF reported that ISIL militants had carried out attacks on several electric transmission towers⁶³³ in the Bahbahani area. There were no reports of deaths or injuries.⁶³⁴
- On 20 February 2021, a roadside bomb targeting a convoy of KH's 47th Brigade killed the commander of the KH special forces. No group had claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of reporting.⁶³⁵
- On 15 July 2021, an IED blast wounded two PMU fighters near a checkpoint.⁶³⁶
- On 5 September 2021, the deputy commander of the PMU's Al-Jazeera operations was killed in an IED explosion,⁶³⁷ while two members of KH's 47th Brigade were wounded in the attack.⁶³⁸ According to an Iranian media report, the PMU attributed this incident to ISIL.⁶³⁹

Incidents reported in other areas of Babil or at unspecified locations within the governorate

- On 8 September 2020, roadside bombs targeting a convoy carrying logistical support for the US-led International Coalition against ISIL reportedly killed a member of the Iraqi security forces (who were escorting a coalition convoy) and injured two others at an unspecified location along the Qadissiya–Babil highway.⁶⁴⁰
- On 18 March 2021, at least 11 protesters were wounded in clashes with riot police forces in the city of Hilla. Nine security personnel were also injured.⁶⁴¹
- On 13 May 2021, security forces arrested large numbers of protesters after clashes had erupted in Hilla's city centre during protests against the killing of a prominent activist in Karbala governorate.⁶⁴²

⁶³¹ BBC Monitoring, IS claims rare attack south of Iraqi capital, 10 November 2020

⁶³² SyriacPress, Iraq: ISIS attacks Popular Mobilization Forces in Babylon Province, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶³³ Esta Media Network, Babil explosions were ISIS attacks on transmission towers: Iraqi military, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶³⁴ National (The), ISIS bombed high-voltage power lines near Baghdad, Iraqi military claims, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶³⁵ Shafaq News, Roadside bomb kills leading militia commander in Iraq, 20 February 2021

⁶³⁶ EPIC, ISHM: July 8 – July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

⁶³⁷ INA, PMF announce the martyrdom of Al-Jazeera operations deputy commander in Babil, 6 September 2021, [url](#); Fars News Agency, Iraqi Figure Says Riyadh, Abu Dhabi Run Daesh Elements, Calls on Yemen's Ansarullah to Hit Saudi Arabia, 6 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶³⁸ Fars News Agency, Iraqi Figure Says Riyadh, Abu Dhabi Run Daesh Elements, Calls on Yemen's Ansarullah to Hit Saudi Arabia, 6 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶³⁹ INA, PMF announce the martyrdom of Al-Jazeera operations deputy commander in Babil, 6 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁰ Xinhua, Security member killed in bomb attacks on U.S.-coalition trucks in Iraq, 9 September 2020, [url](#); see also EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁴¹ Basnews, Over 10 Protesters Injured in Iraq's Babil, 18 March 2021, [url](#); see also Rudaw, Iraqi protesters demanding change to local governance met with violence, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴² Rudaw, Protesters arrested in droves in Iraq's Babil: activist, 13 May 2021, [url](#)



- On 2 August 2021, unknown gunmen killed the commander of the 9th Brigade of the PMU and one of his bodyguards in a targeted attack.⁶⁴³ The attack's location within the governorate could not be identified in the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.
- In early September 2021, two members of the Al-Janabi tribe were reportedly killed in a dispute with unidentified persons at a market in the town of Iskandariya. Numerous armed tribe members reportedly deployed in the area for the purpose of identifying the perpetrators. This situation led authorities to impose an indefinite curfew in the town.⁶⁴⁴

2.2.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents⁶⁴⁵ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 6 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Babil	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1

Table 6: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Babil governorate⁶⁴⁶

2.2.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In early 2021, ISIL reportedly launched attacks on the electric power infrastructure in the Jurf Al-Nasr area.⁶⁴⁷ At the end of the second quarter of 2021, attacks possibly carried out by ISIL disabled power lines at an unspecified location in Babil.⁶⁴⁸

As of end of 2020, around 290 701 square metres of Babil governorate's area were reported to be cluster munition-contaminated.⁶⁴⁹ Based on data last updated in August 2020, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) listed the area contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 1 457 446 square metres.⁶⁵⁰ Further relevant information could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

⁶⁴³ Shafaq News, PMF leader killed in an armed attack in Babel, 2 August 2021, [url](#); AA, Shia militia commander killed in Iraq attack, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁴ GardaWorld, Iraq: Officials implement indefinite curfew in Iskandariya, Babil Governorate, Sept. 4, 4 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁵ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

⁶⁴⁶ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

⁶⁴⁷ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed militias compete to control Baghdad region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 7, footnote 14; Mehr News Agency, Hashd al-Sha'abi thwarts terrorist attack on Jurf al-Nasr, 31 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021– June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 52

⁶⁴⁹ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59

⁶⁵⁰ iMMAP, Recorded explosive ordnance contamination in Iraq - overall (DMA) - 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)



2.2.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 16 938 IDPs were registered in Babil governorate. The vast majority of the IDPs (89 %) originated from other areas in the same governorate, while the rest originated from Ninewa (9 %), Anbar (2 %), Baghdad, Salah Al-Din and Diyala (each less than 1 %) governorates. Within Babil governorate, most of the IDP population was concentrated in Al-Musayab district (89 %), followed by Al-Hilla district (8 %). In Babil, 642 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (most of them categorised as tents, caravans, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses), 600 of them in Al-Musayab district.⁶⁵¹ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 80 and 90 % of IDP households in Al-Musayab district were living in severe or extreme need. Other districts of the governorate were not assessed.⁶⁵²

IOM documented a total of 43 460 IDPs originating from Babil. Of these, 35 % were displaced to other places within Babil, while arrival locations outside the governorate included Sulaymaniyah (23 %), Anbar (21 %), Baghdad (17 %) and Karbala (3 %) governorates.⁶⁵³ According to IOM, no returns to Babil governorate were documented.⁶⁵⁴

For further details on displacement and return in Babil governorate in 2018-2020, please refer to section 2.2.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq \(October 2020\)](#).

⁶⁵¹ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

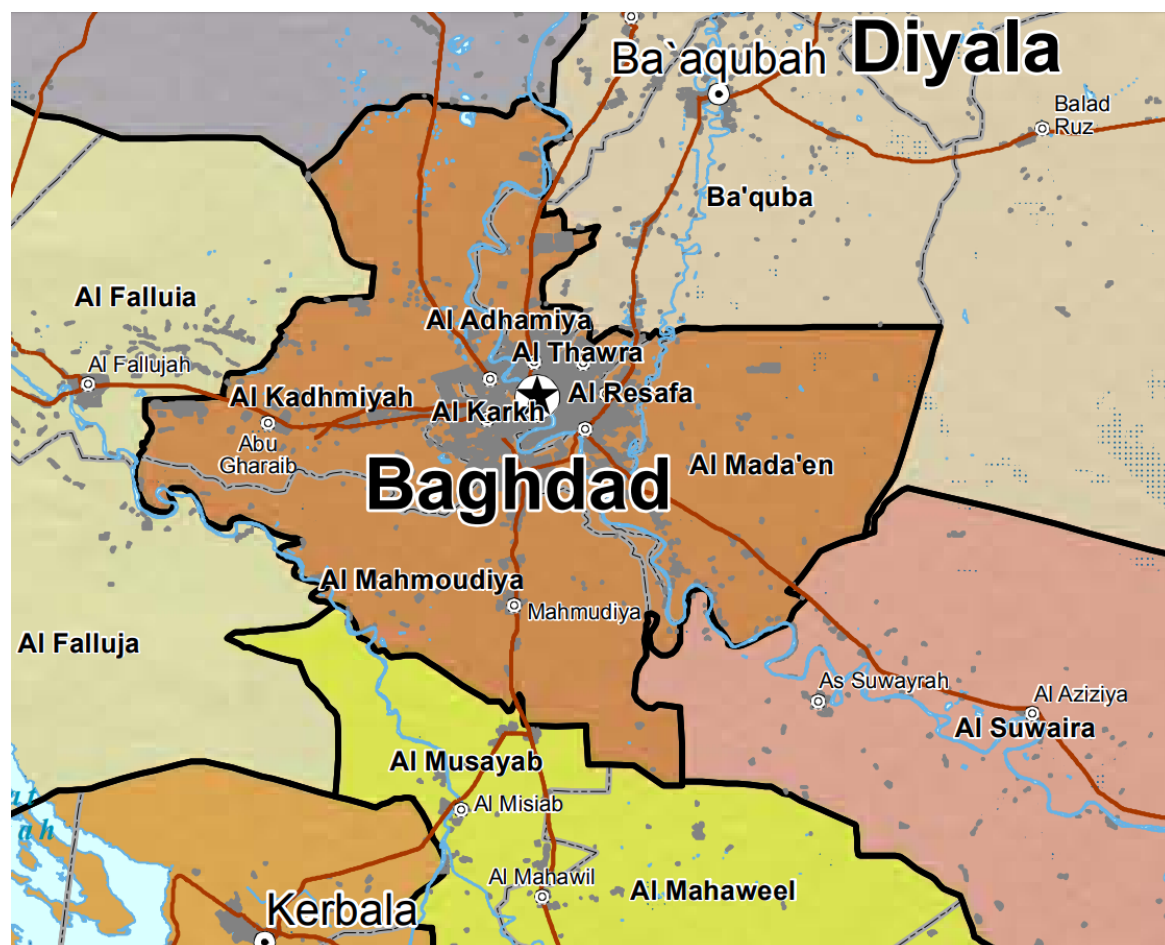
⁶⁵² REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁵³ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁴ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.3 Baghdad



Map 11: Baghdad governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations⁶⁵⁵

2.3.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Baghdad governorate is situated in the Tigris plain in the centre of Iraq and is the smallest of all governorates in terms of surface area (4 555 square kilometres). It is the location of Baghdad City, the capital of Iraq and the country's largest city. Baghdad City is a major economic hub⁶⁵⁶ and includes the heavily protected Green Zone which hosts Iraqi government buildings and foreign embassies,⁶⁵⁷ including the US embassy.⁶⁵⁸

The governorate is divided into a total of 14 districts. Baghdad City is made up of Adhamiya, Karkh, Karrada, Khadhimiya, Mansour, Sadr City (Thawra 1 and 2⁶⁵⁹), Al-Rashid, Rusafa and 9 Nissan ('new Baghdad') districts, while the rest of Baghdad governorate comprises the

⁶⁵⁵ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁶ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁶⁵⁷ Reuters, Rockets hit Baghdad Green Zone, no casualties - security sources, 29 July 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁸ Reuters, Rocket attack targets U.S. embassy inside Baghdad's Green Zone -Iraqi security sources, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁹ IAU, Baghdad Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

districts of Al-Mada'in, Taji, Tarmiya, Mahmudiya, and Abu Ghraib. The governorate's capital is Baghdad City.⁶⁶⁰

The residential, industrial and agricultural areas encircling Baghdad City in a radius of about 30 to 50 km and connecting it to other parts of Iraq are referred to as the 'Baghdad Belts', which include parts of neighbouring governorates⁶⁶¹ and can be divided into four quadrants: 'Taji and Tarmiyah to the north; Nahrawan and Jisr Diyala to the east; Mada'in and Yusifiya to the south; and Abu Ghraib to the west'.⁶⁶² In these areas, Baghdad governorate shares borders with Salah Al-Din, Diyala, Babil and Anbar governorates.⁶⁶³ In addition to these four governorates, Baghdad has a border with Wassit governorate.⁶⁶⁴ According to one description, the Baghdad Belts comprise 'heavily irrigated farmlands that contain the ranches of former government officials and the town houses of tribal sheikhs and serve as a logistics hub for trucking companies and vegetable markets.'⁶⁶⁵

Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated⁶⁶⁶ Baghdad governorate's population at 8 780 422, making it by far the country's most populous governorate⁶⁶⁷, and the one with the highest population density (1 928 inhabitants per square kilometre)⁶⁶⁸. The overwhelming majority of the governorate's inhabitants (7 682 136, or 87.5 %) were identified as urban residents.⁶⁶⁹ The population of Baghdad City was estimated to be around 7 323 000 as of 2021.⁶⁷⁰

Ethno-religious composition

The population of Baghdad City is predominantly Shiite.⁶⁷¹ Baghdad has traditionally been a city for all the country's ethnic and religious population groups. The majority population has naturally consisted of Sunni and Shia Muslim Arabs, but Kurds, Assyrians, Shabaks, Mandaeans and Yazidis have also had a presence in the city.⁶⁷² Additionally, Baghdad contained Chaldeans, Armenians and smaller minority groups⁶⁷³ including Palestinian

⁶⁶⁰ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁶⁶¹ ISW, Baghdad Belts, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶² Knights, M., Predicting the Shape of Iraq's Next Sunni Insurgencies, August 2017, p. 20; see also ISW, Baghdad Belts, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶³ IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁴ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁶⁵ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 19, footnote aj

⁶⁶⁶ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁷ Iraq, CSO, 2021 [قديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021](#) [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by province, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ Based on data on Baghdad governorate's surface area and population provided in NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 1 and Iraq, CSO, 2021 [قديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021](#) [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by province, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#), respectively

⁶⁶⁹ Iraq, CSO, 2021 [قديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021](#) [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by province, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷⁰ US, CIA, World Factbook, Iraq, last updated 16 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷¹ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), p. i

⁶⁷² Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Bagdad - sikkerhetssituasjon per februar 2015 [Baghdad – Security situation] [Informal Translation] [Informal Translation], 13 February 2015, [url](#), p. 12

⁶⁷³ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 10

refugees.⁶⁷⁴ Since 2003, large numbers of minorities and Sunni Muslim Arabs have fled the city.⁶⁷⁵ While a majority of Baghdad's districts previously had a mixed Sunni and Shia Muslim population, the expulsions have led to the city now appearing much more segregated and Shia-dominated.⁶⁷⁶ Sunnis reside in 'a few small areas of the city'⁶⁷⁷ such as Mansour and Adhamiya,⁶⁷⁸ although mixed neighbourhoods also exist.⁶⁷⁹ The structure of the Sunni Arab community itself is reportedly 'heavily skewed towards the middle and upper classes'.⁶⁸⁰

Economy

Most of the country's manufacturing, commercial and financial activities are concentrated in Baghdad City and its surrounding areas. At least half of Iraq's large-scale manufacturing and a significant portion of its smaller manufacturing facilities are located in the governorate,⁶⁸¹ producing leather, cement and tobacco, amongst others.⁶⁸²

An extensive oil field is situated underneath densely populated suburbs directly to the east and south-east of Baghdad City and extends further north-west into parts of Salah Al-Din governorate.⁶⁸³ According to a 2019 report, this 'East Baghdad oilfield' contains about 10 billion barrels of recoverable oil reserves.⁶⁸⁴ The potential daily output was estimated by Iraqi officials at 120 000 barrels, as reported in late 2017.⁶⁸⁵ Although discovered in the 1970s, this oil field remained 'very underdeveloped, primarily due to the political, practical and health and safety issues involved with exploiting an oil field in an urban area'.⁶⁸⁶ However, in May 2018, the Iraqi government sealed a contract with China's Zenhua Oil company to develop the southern part of the East Baghdad oilfield, envisaging to increase oil production to 40 000 barrels per day over a period of five years.⁶⁸⁷ However, more recent information regarding the exploitation of the East Baghdad oilfield could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

As regards infrastructure, Baghdad is home to the Baghdad International Airport and is also well-connected to other parts of Iraq through railways and roads.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁷⁴ UNHCR, Relevant COI on the Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Baghdad, 30 March 2017, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁶⁷⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Bagdad - sikkerhetssituasjon per februar 2015 [Baghdad – Security situation] [Informal Translation], 13 February 2015, [url](#), p. 12; Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Iraq SSR Country Background Note, 25 February 2020, [url](#); see also Knights, M. et al., Iranian Influence in Iraq: Between Balancing and Hezbollahization?, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁶ Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Bagdad - sikkerhetssituasjon per februar 2015 [Baghdad – Security situation] [Informal Translation] 13 February 2015, [url](#), p. 12; NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 3; see also Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 10

⁶⁷⁷ Izady, M.M.R., Urban Unplanning: How Violence, Walls, and Segregation Destroyed the Urban Fabric of Baghdad, 2020, [url](#), p. 56

⁶⁷⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 10

⁶⁷⁹ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁰ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 10, 14

⁶⁸¹ Encyclopædia Britannica, Baghdad, Economy, last updated 25 May 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁸² NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁸³ Al-Rawi, M., East Baghdad Super-Giant Field Under a Populated Area, Geo ExPro, 2016, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁴ IEA, Iraq's Energy Sector: A Roadmap to a Brighter Future, April 2019, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁸⁵ Reuters, Iraq reaches initial deal with China's Zenhua to develop East Baghdad oilfield, 24 December 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ Al-Rawi, M., East Baghdad Super-Giant Field Under a Populated Area, Geo ExPro, 2016, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁷ Iraq, Government of Iraq, Iraq signs contract to develop East Baghdad oilfield, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁸ NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2



Road security

During the reference period, there were several reports of roadside bomb attacks carried out in Baghdad governorate against logistical supply convoys of the US-led International Coalition against ISIL⁶⁸⁹ and, in one instance, a diplomatic convoy.⁶⁹⁰ Diplomatic missions and international corporations regularly hire private security companies (PSCs) employing armoured vehicles and security personnel when travelling within Baghdad, including inside the Green Zone. According to a US government source, these procedures contribute to reducing the threats posed by IED and gun attacks, as well as the potential of being targeted by criminal groups. At the same time, private security companies themselves have become targets of ‘considerable militia threats’ across Iraq, with armed militias viewing all such companies as ‘American’.⁶⁹¹

A map published by iMMAP covering the month of February 2021 in Baghdad governorate⁶⁹² shows that road sections in Baghdad governorate assessed to be at ‘primary risk’ of explosive hazards were located in Abu Ghraib district along main roads running westwards from Baghdad City towards Fallujah, in the southern portion of Baghdad City and parts of Mahmudiyah district on the main road running south from Baghdad City towards Babil governorate, in Mada’in district on the main road between Baghdad City and Wassit governorate, and in Khadhimiyah and Tarmiyah districts on the main road stretching north from Baghdad City towards Salah Al-Din governorate. Furthermore, the same map shows a number of road sections assessed to be at ‘secondary risk’ of explosive hazards. These are located along ancillary roads in Abu Ghraib, Mahmudiyah, Mada’in, Khadhimiyah and Tarmiyah districts as well as in Baghdad City’s Karkh district. These ‘secondary risk’ areas are often clustered around sections of main roads that have been assessed to be at ‘primary risk’.⁶⁹³

2.3.2 Conflict background

ISIL insurgency

During ISIL’s advance in Iraq, Baghdad governorate was the main target of attacks carried out by the group.⁶⁹⁴ The large waves of attacks that hit the governorate in 2013⁶⁹⁵ and 2014⁶⁹⁶ were particularly targeted at Shia communities in the capital,⁶⁹⁷ mainly through IEDs and car bombs.⁶⁹⁸ These incidents showed a high level of coordination between ISIL cells and the

⁶⁸⁹ See, for example, Shafaq News, IED explosion targets a convoy of the Coalition in north Baghdad, 28 October 2021, [url](#); AA, Bomb attacks target US-led coalition convoys in Iraq, 8 August 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, A roadside bomb targets a convoy of the Coalition in Baghdad, 5 April 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Official injured in an IED blast targeting a Coalition convoy in Baghdad, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰ AP, Diplomats: Roadside bombing targets British convoy in Iraq, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹¹ US, OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁹² This was the most recently available map on this topic at the time of writing.

⁶⁹³ iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Baghdad Governorate 1-28 February 2021, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁴ Sweden, Migrationsverket, Irak: Säkerhetssituationen 2019 2020 och dess påverkan på särskilda grupper [The security situation in 2019–2020 and its impact on specific groups] [Informal Translation], 22 March 2021, [url](#), p. 28

⁶⁹⁵ ISW, Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking the Walls Campaign, Part I, Middle East Security Report 14, September 2013, [url](#), pp. 17-18

⁶⁹⁶ ISW, Warning Intelligence Update: Baghdad, 23 July 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁷ ISW, Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking the Walls Campaign, Part I, September 2013, [url](#), pp. 17-18; ISW, Warning Intelligence Update: Baghdad, 23 July 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁸ Sweden, Migrationsverket, Irak: Säkerhetssituationen 2019 2020 och dess påverkan på särskilda grupper [The security situation in 2019–2020 and its impact on specific groups] [Informal Translation], 22 March 2021, [url](#), p. 28





group's ability to penetrate Baghdad City (despite the defences put in place by the ISF and PMU forces), in addition to it having established a firm presence across the northern, western, and southern Baghdad Belts.⁶⁹⁹ These zones became the scene of some heavy clashes between ISF and Shia militias fighting ISIL.⁷⁰⁰

As ISIL forces were closing in on the city in June 2014, Shia militias mobilised in large numbers in support of the ISF.⁷⁰¹ Thus, while the Iraqi army was primarily maintaining security in the city centre, these Shia militias took up the task of defending Baghdad's suburban areas (where ISIL had established advanced military positions⁷⁰²). As these militias expanded their local power in 2014 and were granted a high level of autonomy, sectarian tensions came to a head. Multiple killings and abductions mainly of Sunni men by Shia militias were reported in 2014,⁷⁰³ although the large-scale sectarian killings of 2006-2007 did not reoccur then or at any later point.⁷⁰⁴

While ISIL gradually lost territory across Iraq from 2015 onwards,⁷⁰⁵ it continued to launch attacks on targets in Baghdad governorate such as security checkpoints and other ISF and PMU positions, but also markets, funerals and Shia pilgrims.⁷⁰⁶ The group mounted a number of mass civilian casualty attacks, including a massive suicide bombing at a crowded market in Karrada district of Baghdad City in July 2016 that left 324 people dead,⁷⁰⁷ and a series of suicide attacks in different locations in Baghdad City in late 2016⁷⁰⁸ and the first half of 2017.⁷⁰⁹ At the same time, however, there was a steady decline in the overall numbers of incidents in the governorate, from 8 to 12 daily ISIL attacks over most of 2016 to about three in the second quarter of 2017, as recorded by Iraq analyst Joel Wing. Also, ISIL mass casualty bombings were less often carried out successfully.⁷¹⁰ While the first quarter of 2018 still continued to see dozens of attempted mass casualty attacks 'in the Baghdad Belts or projected into Baghdad via the rural districts'⁷¹¹, the frequency of these types of attacks dropped significantly after that.⁷¹²

While the overall frequency of attacks continued at reduced levels, in late 2018, ISIL's activities in the governorate had reportedly again moved from the outlying towns north and

⁶⁹⁹ ISW, Warning Intelligence Update: Baghdad, 23 July 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁰ CBS News, ISIS encroaches on ultimate prize in Iraq, 11 October 2014, [url](#); see also Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Militser i Bagdad [Iraq: Militias in Baghdad] [Informal Translation], 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁰¹ US, CRS, Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights, 2 July 2014, [url](#), 19

⁷⁰² Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Militser i Bagdad [Iraq: Militias in Baghdad] [Informal Translation], 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁰³ Netherlands, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ambtsbericht Veiligheidssituatie in Irak [General Official Report Security Situation in Iraq] [Informal Translation], September 2014, [url](#), pp. 18; see also New York Times (The), As Sunnis Die in Iraq, a Cycle Is Restarting, 18 June 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ New York Times (The), As Sunnis Die in Iraq, a Cycle Is Restarting, 18 June 2014, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Sectarian killings return to Baghdad as war rages elsewhere, 29 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 16, 2014, 16 July 2014, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Pro-Government Militias' Trail of Death, 31 July 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁵ USIP, Iraq Timeline: Since the 2003 War, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ See, for example, ISW, ISIS's Explosive Attacks in the Greater Baghdad Area: April 4-May 11, 2016, 11 May 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁷ IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#); New York Times (The), Major Islamic State Attacks in Baghdad, 15 October 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁸ BBC News, IS Conflict: Baghdad suicide car bomb blast kills 35, 2 January 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁹ BBC News, IS Conflict: Baghdad suicide car bomb blast kills 35, 2 January 2017, [url](#); BBC News, Mastermind of deadly 2016 Baghdad bombing caught, Iraq says, 18 October 2021, [url](#)

⁷¹⁰ Wing, J., 1,459 Killed, 636 Wounded In Iraq July 2017, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 August 2017, [url](#)

⁷¹¹ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷¹² Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019, cited from EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#), p. 74





south of the capital to the outskirts of the city.⁷¹³ At the same time, during the period from mid-2018 to mid-2019, incidents attributed to ISIL in rural areas of Baghdad reached their lowest levels since 2003.⁷¹⁴

The intensity of operations in rural Baghdad, particularly in the northern and western Baghdad Belts including in the historic insurgent stronghold Tarmiya, began to rise again from mid-2019 (albeit to much lower levels than those documented in 2017)⁷¹⁵ as the group ‘slowly but surely built up its attacks’⁷¹⁶ in an effort to ‘preserve and expand its rural freedom of movement in northern Baghdad areas like Tarmiya, Mushahidah, Taji, and Soba Saab al-Bour’.⁷¹⁷ It was even able to reach Baghdad City again and to carry out multiple bombings on a single day on several occasions.⁷¹⁸

The group also reactivated a former cell in the Abu Ghraib area and a previous operations zone in Al-Mada’in. Moreover, as Michael Knights and Alex Almeida observed in May 2020, the group’s tactics had gradually shifted to a more varied strategy that included use of sophisticated IEDs and bombing methods (including daisy-chaining⁷¹⁹), booby-trapped houses, and sniper operations, with attacks now geared more towards striking security forces rather than civilians.⁷²⁰

Meanwhile, after its spring campaign in 2020, the group seemingly ‘focused back upon the countryside’, with its attacks in the capital decreasing significantly.⁷²¹ As of May 2020, it maintained its ability to operate in areas north of Baghdad City and had active autonomous sleeper cells to conduct attacks in these areas.⁷²²

US-Iran tensions

After ISIL collapsed as a physical entity in late 2017, the Iran-backed militia group Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH), already known in the past as the ‘most public and persistent advocate of the eviction of US military forces from Iraq’, began active efforts to expel the US forces, deeming that their presence was no longer needed to assist large-scale operations against ISIL.⁷²³ With tensions between the US and Iran increasing,⁷²⁴ Baghdad governorate witnessed a number of acts of ‘tit-for-tat escalation’ in 2019⁷²⁵ between the US and Iran-backed groups opposing the

⁷¹³ Wing, J., October 2018: Islamic State Expanding Operations In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 November 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹⁴ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 19; see also Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁷¹⁵ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 19

⁷¹⁶ Wing, J., Islamic State’s Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹⁷ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 19

⁷¹⁸ Wing, J., Islamic State’s Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹⁹ A method involving use of a small explosion to attract crowds before a larger device detonates; Independent (The), School children killed in ‘daisy chain’ bomb blasts, 7 January 2004, [url](#)

⁷²⁰ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 19

⁷²¹ Wing, J., Islamic State’s Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷²² Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷²³ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

⁷²⁴ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 34

⁷²⁵ Atlantic (The), The World Paid Attention to the Wrong Iraqi Protests, 7 January 2020, [url](#)





US presence.⁷²⁶ Pro-Iranian militias and rogue elements frequently carried out rocket and mortar attacks targeting the Green Zone and Baghdad International Airport. It was reported that between October 2019 and July 2020, some 40 rocket attacks targeted bases housing US troops or the US Embassy⁷²⁷ the latter of which was viewed by KH as a force orchestrating the popular protests that erupted in October 2019 (see below).⁷²⁸

On 31 December 2019, militia members stormed the Green Zone, protested in front of the US Embassy⁷²⁹ and set part of it on fire afterwards.⁷³⁰ A few days later, on 3 January 2020, General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC's Quds Force and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the de facto leader of the PMU, were killed together with their entourage in a US drone strike near Baghdad International Airport.⁷³¹

Following this incident, Shia militias carried out a number of activities targeting both the International Coalition against ISIL and the government. In March 2020, two attacks were launched against Camp Taji military base (located north of the capital⁷³²), killing two US troops and one British soldier and wounding several other personnel.⁷³³ A group called Usbat al Thairen ('League of the Revolutionaries'), which was assessed to be a likely 'front' for more established Iran-backed groups⁷³⁴ like KH, claimed both attacks,⁷³⁵ while KH itself denied responsibility.⁷³⁶

In April 2020, KH again demonstrated its capability to penetrate the Green Zone, when nearly 100 of its fighters, some armed with rocket-propelled grenades, surrounded the residence of the designated PM Kadhimi to whom KH has been extremely hostile due to his pro-Western views.⁷³⁷

In late June 2020, following recent rocket attacks on US installations, the airport and other locations, the (newly inaugurated⁷³⁸) PM Kadhimi ordered the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service to raid the headquarters of KH in Dora,⁷³⁹ a neighbourhood within Baghdad City's Al-Rashid

⁷²⁶ Al Jazeera, Iraq denounces 'dangerous' US embassy pullout threat, 30 September 2020, [url](#)

⁷²⁷ Al Jazeera, Iraq denounces 'dangerous' US embassy pullout threat, 30 September 2020, [url](#); see also, for example, VOA, Rocket Strikes Baghdad Green Zone as Anti-Government Protesters Mass, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷²⁸ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁷²⁹ Mansour, R., Networks of power; The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 3; Warsaw Institute, Iraq's Two Rivers, 25 July 2020, [url](#), p. 19

⁷³⁰ Atlantic (The), The World Paid Attention to the Wrong Iraqi Protests, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷³¹ Mansour, R., Networks of power; The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 3; see also BBC News, Qasem Soleimani: US strike on Iran general was unlawful, UN expert says, 9 July 2020, [url](#); AP, US kills Iran's most powerful general in Baghdad airstrike, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷³² Sweden, Migrationsverket, Irak: Säkerhetssituationen 2019-2020 och dess påverkan på särskilda grupper [The security situation in 2019–2020 and its impact on specific groups] [Informal Translation], 22 March 2021, [url](#), p. 31

⁷³³ Washington Post (The), U.S.-led coalition to withdraw hundreds of troops from smaller bases in Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#); see also Defense Post (The), US and UK identify soldiers killed in Camp Taji, Iraq rocket strikes, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁴ LWJ, New 'League of the Revolutionaries' warns U.S. troops in Iraq, 18 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁵ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 34; see also Washington Post (The), U.S.-led coalition to withdraw hundreds of troops from smaller bases in Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#); LWJ, New 'League of the Revolutionaries' warns U.S. troops in Iraq, 18 March 2020, [url](#); WSJ, Militants in Iraq Take Covert Approach to Anti-U.S. Campaign, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁶ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁷³⁷ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The), The Harrowing of Mustafa Kadhimi, 9 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷³⁸ Al Jazeera, Who is Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Iraq's new prime minister?, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Baghdad, Washington: Raid on Kataib Hezbollah HQ was Strictly Iraqi, 29 June 2020, [url](#)





district.⁷⁴⁰ 14 persons were arrested in this move that was reportedly supported by most political forces and civil society actors who had been ‘complaining for years about the rising influence of armed factions’.⁷⁴¹ However, after armed pro-Iranian militiamen took to the streets calling for the release of the arrested KH members, resulting in the Green Zone being put under lockdown, a judge ordered them to be freed.⁷⁴²

Protest movement

In early October 2019, mass protests erupted in Baghdad as residents expressed their discontent with ‘widespread corruption, unemployment and poor public services’. Baghdad City’s Tahrir Square came to be the ‘stronghold and symbolic heart’ of the protest movement (‘Tishreen Uprising’), which ‘began as a youth grassroots uprising’ and was later joined by ‘traditional engines of popular mobilisation’ such as the Sadrist movement, the Iraqi Communist Party, and labour unions. Between October and December 2019, when the movement was at its peak, it enjoyed the support of large parts of Baghdad’s population,⁷⁴³ with most of the protesters stemming from the southern and eastern portions of the city.⁷⁴⁴

While the protests were initially peaceful,⁷⁴⁵ from the onset the government employed heavy-handed counter-riot measures to disperse protesters in Baghdad, with riot police sometimes firing live rounds into crowds, in addition to using tear gas and hot water cannons. Moreover, masked snipers, believed to be Iran-backed paramilitaries, shot at protesters. The government’s harsh response propelled further mobilisation and prompted enraged protesters to erect barricades. Standoffs with security forces turned into street battles,⁷⁴⁶ with some protesters attempting to gain access to Government buildings or the Green Zone. In order to prevent movement of protesters, the ISF used live ammunition, but also ‘less-lethal weapons, including tear gas canisters and stun grenades (‘flash bangs’) in a deadly manner by firing the devices horizontally at protesters at close range’ which caused at least 26 fatalities.⁷⁴⁷

As the area of protests expanded from the Tahrir Square area to other parts of the city (e.g. Khulani Square,⁷⁴⁸ Tayaran and further east towards Sadr City⁷⁴⁹) where the presence of regular security forces was often scant, clashes between protesters and armed persons linked with paramilitary groups were reported,⁷⁵⁰ with protesters being shot, including by

⁷⁴⁰ ISW, RASHEED (الرشيد), n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁴¹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Baghdad, Washington: Raid on Kataib Hezbollah HQ was Strictly Iraqi, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁴² Al-Arabiya, Detained Kata’ib Hezbollah fighters burn US, Israeli flags upon release, 30 June 2020, [url](#), see also Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁴³ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), pp. i., 5

⁷⁴⁴ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁷⁴⁵ UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁷⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 4, 12, 14

⁷⁴⁷ UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 13, 19; see also MEE, Protesters regain control of third bridge near Green Zone in Baghdad, 17 November 2019, [url](#); CNN, Death toll in Iraq protests climbs to 63 since Friday, 26 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), p. 14; UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), p. 59

⁷⁴⁹ UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), p. 59

⁷⁵⁰ International Crisis Group, Iraq’s Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), p. 14





snipers.⁷⁵¹ While KH played a key role in coordinating the crackdown and targeting protest leaders and civil society activists, the shooting and other physical attacks on the ground were reportedly to a large extent committed by the Badr Organisation and other factions like Saraya Talia Al-Khorasani and Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada.⁷⁵²

In early December 2019, masked men wearing civilian clothes attacked demonstrators in the Sinak area, reportedly killing at least 22 protesters and injuring at least another 116.⁷⁵³

Among the supporters of the Sadrist movement who participated in the protests, some were acting as part of a 'peacekeeping force' known as Blue Hats which comprised both civilians and members of Saraya Al-Salam, the movement's armed wing. While their proclaimed aim was to offer protection to peaceful protesters and preserve order, the group acted according to a disciplinary system of its own, carrying out arrests of protesters it suspected of using violence (e.g. throwing Molotov cocktails) or defaming the group's leader, Muqtada Al-Sadr. At the same time, a variety of security personnel set up broad intelligence networks within protest camps to closely monitor the protesters' activities. Not only the police and security services, but also members of paramilitary groups 'detained, interrogated and in some cases tortured activists before releasing them'.⁷⁵⁴

In the aftermath of the early January 2020 drone strike that killed Soleimani and Muhandis, Sadr withdrew his support for the protest movement. Sadrist then began to crack down on protesters with the aim of ending the demonstrations⁷⁵⁵ which had already diminished in size since December 2019⁷⁵⁶. Mass demonstrations effectively came to a halt with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of curfews, which on top of repression and government concessions reduced the protesters' resolve, although protesting continued on a smaller scale.⁷⁵⁷

On 31 July 2020, the Kadhimi government indicated that of the at least 560 people killed in violence during these demonstrations across the country (including both civilians and security personnel) and whose families were eligible for compensation, over half were based in Baghdad.⁷⁵⁸ International Crisis Group indicated that over 600 were killed and more than 20 000 others were injured across Baghdad and southern Iraq in the first six months of the protests.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵¹ UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), p. 59

⁷⁵² Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁷⁵³ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 8; see also EPIC, The Long Game: Iraq's "Tishreen" Movement and the Struggle for Reform, October 2021, [url](#), p. 43; Al Jazeera, Tensions flare as unidentified gunmen kill protesters in Baghdad, 8 December 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 13-15

⁷⁵⁵ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁵⁶ UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁷⁵⁷ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), pp. ii, 21-23

⁷⁵⁸ UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 6, 8

⁷⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), p. i





A report of a government High Ministerial Investigative Committee informed that 107 protesters had been killed in Baghdad during the period from 1 to 8 October 2019 alone.⁷⁶⁰

For further details on security developments in Baghdad governorate relating to protests in 2019-2020, please refer to section 2.3.3 of [EASO's report on the Security Situation in Iraq from October 2020](#). As regards the targeting of specific profiles of protesters and activists in Baghdad, please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

2.3.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

This section draws to a large extent on a December 2017 report of the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) which provides detailed information on various ISF entities and their areas of control in Baghdad as of 2016/2017. More recent publications covering this topic in similar breadth and depth could not be found.

Iraqi Army

Although the Security and Defence Committee of the Iraqi Parliament in January 2019 revealed plans to eventually transfer security duties in Baghdad from the military to the police forces,⁷⁶¹ as of March 2021, the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC) of the Iraqi Army was reported to be active in the governorate.⁷⁶² In October 2021, the BOC was deployed to secure the electoral process in Rusafa and Karkh districts.⁷⁶³

The BOC, established in 2006 as part of Operation Enforcing the Law,⁷⁶⁴ is not part of the Joint Operations Command (JOC) and answers directly to the commander-in-chief of the armed forces⁷⁶⁵ (i.e. Iraq's Prime Minister).⁷⁶⁶ It includes various security institutions and agencies mostly affiliated with the MoD and Mol.⁷⁶⁷ According to a report published by ISW in December 2017, the BOC consists of the Karkh Area Command (comprising the 6th Iraqi Army Division) and the Rusafah Area Command (comprising the 9th Iraqi Army Division and the 1st Federal Police Division).⁷⁶⁸

The 6th Iraqi Army Division is operating in the western city district of Karkh and in areas of north Baghdad.⁷⁶⁹ ISW described the 6th Division as 'one of several units allocated to securing the western Baghdad Belts', comprising the 22nd, 24th, 54th, 59th Brigades as well as unattributed units.⁷⁷⁰ The headquarters of the 6th Division is located in Abu Ghraib. In April

⁷⁶⁰ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁶¹ Al-Monitor, As Iraqi army retreats to borders, local police controls cities' security, 30 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶² Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶³ INA, Baghdad Operations Commander reveals the plan to secure the electoral centers, 2 October 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ Sirri, O., When the Lights Go Out: Iraq in Revolution, Society and Space, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁵ Al-Monitor, As Iraqi army retreats to borders, local police controls cities' security, 30 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁶ Shafaq News, The military advisor of the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Forces tests positive for Covid-19, 20 April 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁷ Sirri, O., When the Lights Go Out: Iraq in Revolution, Society and Space, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), pp. 14-16

⁷⁶⁹ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), p. 15





2020, control of an operating base situated inside the headquarters was transferred back to the Iraqi forces from the French troops who had been running it.⁷⁷¹

Units of the BOC's 9th Armoured Division of the Iraqi Army, though described by ISW in 2017 as having a 'functional rather than a geographical area of responsibility',⁷⁷² were also reported to be operating in Baghdad governorate as of March 2021.⁷⁷³

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's Special Forces Division (SFD), which answers to the PM as well as to the Ministry of Defence via the BOC and the Joint Operations Command (JOC), was responsible for protecting the PM and, as of spring 2016, for maintaining security in the Green Zone (through its 56th Mechanised Brigade and 57th Brigade) and at Baghdad International Airport (through its 61st Brigade).⁷⁷⁴

The Presidential Brigades (comprising two brigades as of 2016) are mainly Kurdish units tasked with the protection of Iraq's President, who is customarily an ethnic Kurd. While they are not Peshmerga and formally operate under the MoD, their ultimate loyalty lies with the President and they have close links to his party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). As reported by ISW in 2017, these brigades had 'some responsibilities for securing parts of Baghdad, especially during Shi'a pilgrimages'.⁷⁷⁵

As of March 2021, Iraqi Army divisions operating in the governorate outside of the BOC chain of command also comprised the 11th Division, stationed in Rusafa district in the eastern part of the city, and the 17th Division, which operates south of Baghdad.⁷⁷⁶ Previously in 2017, the ISW reported that parts of the 45th Brigade which at the time belonged to the 11th Division were stationed in Sadr City.⁷⁷⁷ However, after dozens of people were killed in this district during clashes with members of the army in October 2019, the then Prime Minister ordered the army to withdraw from this area and to be replaced by the police.⁷⁷⁸

Forces of the Ministry of Interior (Mol)

As of 2016/2017, the Federal Police (FP) were present in Baghdad through the 1st FP Division (part of the BOC) securing the northwest, west, south-west, south-east and east (including the Canal Zone) of Baghdad City.⁷⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the mechanised 2nd FP Division was mostly responsible for counter-terrorism operations in Baghdad City and the Belts, protecting pilgrimage routes, and law enforcement. The 4th FP Division appeared to be responsible for southern Baghdad as well as areas south of the capital including Karkh prison.⁷⁸⁰

In November 2021, activities of brigades of the BOC's 1st FP Division were reported in areas in the city's east (including Al-Ubaidi, Al-Mashtal and Diyala Bridge) and north (Taji Beach).⁷⁸¹ As reported in July 2021 by Skelton and Saleem, routine security in Baghdad City is controlled by the ISF on an everyday basis, rather than by the PMU.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷¹ Rudaw, US-led coalition withdraws from sixth Iraqi military base, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), p. 15

⁷⁷³ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), p. 12

⁷⁷⁵ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁷⁷⁶ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), p. 24

⁷⁷⁸ AP, Iraqi police replacing army in volatile Baghdad neighborhood, 7 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 15-16

⁷⁸⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 25

⁷⁸¹ NINA, The arrest of 14 suspects in the tribal dispute in Baghdad, 25 November 2021

⁷⁸² Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12





Control of security checkpoints

According to Sirri,⁷⁸³ the BOC functions as the coordinating body with regard to security checkpoints in Baghdad City and ‘decides where checkpoints are placed and how they are run’. These checkpoints, described as being omnipresent in the city, are ‘manned by a variety of state security personnel, but primarily soldiers and federal police’. Dating back to the days of the US-led occupation when ‘counterinsurgency tactics included fortifying discrete neighbourhoods and districts of Baghdad’, these checkpoints were kept more or less intact by the Iraqi forces after the US temporarily withdrew in 2011. Although improved security in recent years led to some of the checkpoints being removed, hundreds reportedly still exist.⁷⁸⁴ An intelligence briefing published in May 2021 by Newlines Institute stated that outside of Baghdad City, the ISF control the following security checkpoints with official or unofficial participation of groups affiliated with the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU):

- Al-Sayafiya checkpoint: Situated on the international route linking Baghdad and the governorates of the mid-Euphrates, this checkpoint established under BOC supervision is controlled by the 17th Division of the Iraqi army and KSS Brigade 14, as well as KH Brigade 46 and Saraya al-Khorasani Brigade 18.
- Dira’ Dijla checkpoint: Located on the road connecting between Baghdad City and Fallujah, this checkpoint is controlled by the Baghdad security forces including the 6th Division of the Iraqi Army.
- Al-Abayaji checkpoint: Situated on the stretch of the international route between Baghdad and Salah al-Din, this checkpoint is jointly administered by the Baghdad and Salah al-Din security forces, with participation of forces of the Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH) Brigade 43.
- Al-Ghalibiya checkpoint: Situated east of Baghdad City on the route to Diyala governorate, this checkpoint belongs to the Baghdad security forces. It is jointly administered between the 11th Division of the Iraqi army and the FP, although AAH Brigade 42 participates in its administration illegally.
- Diyala Bridge checkpoint at the southern entrance of Baghdad City, established under BOC and FP supervision, is administered with unofficial participation of the Saraya al-Khorasani Brigade 18 (and previously also Kata’ib Jund al-Imam Brigade 6).⁷⁸⁵
- Checkpoints along the Baghdad–Babil highway have been controlled by the ISF in collaboration with PMU and other forces, with the ISF and ‘PMF registered and unregistered groups and other forces in and outside the government’ sharing profits through taxation of traffic on this strategic road.⁷⁸⁶ For example, the Iskaniya-Awirij checkpoint is controlled by Division 17 of the Iraqi Army, although KH Brigade 46 and Kata’ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada (KSS) Brigade 14 participate in the checkpoint’s supervision illegally.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸³ ‘a PhD Candidate in political science at the University of Toronto. He is currently an Affiliated Scholar at the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut’. Sirri, O., When the Lights Go Out: Iraq in Revolution, Society and Space, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁴ Sirri, O., When the Lights Go Out: Iraq in Revolution, Society and Space, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁵ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq’s Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-19

⁷⁸⁶ Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁷⁸⁷ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq’s Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 18





Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

The PMU have no formal operational headquarters in Baghdad governorate although in practice, Iran-backed PMU factions maintain ‘substantial bases’ in rural areas of the Baghdad Belts, including a KH base complex in Jurf Al-Nasr in the southern Belts (part of Babil governorate) and an Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH) zone of dominance ‘in the swathe of northern Baghdad Belts and southern Salah al-Din’ governorate.⁷⁸⁸ These northern and western Belts where PMU generally maintain a more direct military presence are reportedly controlled by a variety of PMU forces.⁷⁸⁹

As of March 2021, PMU forces were reported to be operating in areas north and south of the capital (including Tarmiya and Yusufiya), Abu Ghraib in the west and in the Baghdad City neighbourhoods of Shula (a mainly Shia area in the northwestern part⁷⁹⁰) and Ghazalia (on the western edge of the city⁷⁹¹).⁷⁹² For example, the Khan Bani Sa’ad checkpoint situated on the old route between Baghdad and Baqubah is reportedly under the control of Saraya Al-Khorasani Brigade 18.⁷⁹³ As the ISW reports, Iranian-backed militias expanded their control within the Baghdad Belts following expedited US drawdowns in early 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁹⁴

Furthermore, most of Baghdad City has been described as a zone where influence is mixed between ISF and PMU. The PMUs ‘do not maintain a major visible military presence’ in the centre of the city, though their networks and offices extend through the city via varying degrees based on neighbourhood and social class.⁷⁹⁵ Indeed, specific PMU militias have ‘carved out zones of dominance’ within the city.⁷⁹⁶

Saraya Al-Salam, the PMU linked to the Sadrist Movement is ‘generally considered to be the most influential PMF in Baghdad’ according to a July 2021 report produced for the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq, as it has a mixture of economic, military and commercial assets across the city, though it is strongest in eastern Baghdad (in Sadr City⁷⁹⁷). Sadr City is a traditional Sadrist bastion that allows Saraya Al-Salam ‘a foothold into the rest of the city’.⁷⁹⁸

AAH, an offshoot of the Sadrist Movement, is generally viewed as the second most influential PMU group in Baghdad, with political and economic assets clustered in the southern neighbourhoods of the city,⁷⁹⁹ although the group is reported to have a strong presence in Sadr City as well.⁸⁰⁰ In these eastern and southern areas, largely populated by poor Shia

⁷⁸⁸ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁸⁹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 12

⁷⁹⁰ Reuters, At least four killed, 15 wounded in Baghdad bomb blast, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹¹ New York Times (The), A Baghdad Neighborhood, Once Hopeful, Now Reels As Iraq’s Turmoil Persists, 14 December 2003, [url](#)

⁷⁹² Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁹³ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq’s Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁷⁹⁴ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁹⁵ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12, 14

⁷⁹⁶ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁹⁷ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁹⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁷⁹⁹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁸⁰⁰ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 6





residents, Saraya Al-Salam and AAH have been able to cultivate strong support bases among individuals who have ‘little political agency’ without the support of these militias.⁸⁰¹

The Badr Organization is considered the ‘third most influential group due to its stronghold in Diyala,’ which projects into the eastern edge of Baghdad governorate,⁸⁰² while it has also been reported to be dominant in the central Karrada and Jadiriya areas (along with the group Kata’ib Al-Imam Ali).⁸⁰³

KH dominates in the Palestine Street area (located east of the Tigris River, in the vicinity of Tahrir Square)⁸⁰⁴ where it is reportedly able to draw on supporters in many sites like the Baqiyatalah mosque (KH’s main mosque). The area has served as a refuge for KH fighters following confrontations with the ISF. The group has also been able to muster fighters from its headquarters inside the Green Zone. However, the number of KH fighters based within the Green Zone has been estimated to be relatively low.⁸⁰⁵

KH reportedly has also maintained cells in sites with a presence of US forces, including at Baghdad International Airport, Taji in the northern part of the governorate and Bismayah (located southeast of Baghdad City), for the specific purpose of counting US troops and profiling their movements.⁸⁰⁶ At Baghdad airport, KH in 2018/2019 reportedly ‘forced its way into the running of ground handling services, fee collection, the VIP lounge, and an airport hotel’ and –through contracting partners– gained control over strategic areas like the air traffic control tower. However, the new government forced KH to shut down its known offices at the airport in September 2020, and the pro-KH firms were ‘removed from various functions at the airport, being replaced by Sadrist-linked companies.’⁸⁰⁷

The leader of Saraya Al-Ashura (PMU Brigade 8), Kadhim Al-Jabiri, who is also the nominal PMU director of training, has been reported to run ‘a secret prison on the south side of the Karrada Peninsula in Baghdad’.⁸⁰⁸ Saraya Al-Ashura, along with KH and Saraya al-Jihad (PMF brigade 17), have been identified by Michael Knights as ‘anti-Iraq networks’.⁸⁰⁹

The Badr Organisation moreover ‘maintains well-organized and depot-like recruitment and training bases’ in Baghdad and neighbouring governorates, while Kata’ib Al-Imam Ali (KIA) runs ‘a training facility in Aziziyah, on former Iraqi military facilities just south of Baghdad’.⁸¹⁰ According to a May 2020 map published by Iran Wire,⁸¹¹ the following PMU units had a presence in Baghdad city:

⁸⁰¹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 14

⁸⁰² Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living Among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁸⁰³ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁰⁴ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁰⁵ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 15-16

⁸⁰⁶ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 6, footnotes a, b

⁸⁰⁷ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁸⁰⁸ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁰⁹ Knights, M., [Twitter], posted on: 18 October 2020, [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 67-68

⁸¹¹ ‘IranWire is a ‘joint venture of a group of journalists in the Diaspora’ who seek ‘to empower Iranian citizen journalists’ by creating a forum to discuss national and local news and connecting local and professional Iranian journalists.’ Iranwire, About Us, n. d., [url](#)





- Saraya Al-Khorasani – Gherai'at, Al-Bayda', and Bu'aitha – headquartered in Karrada
- Saraya Al-Salam Brigades – headquartered in Sadr City, presence in Al-Shu'la
- Al-Tayyar Al-Risali – in A502 and 9 Nissan
- Abu Fadl Al-Abbas Brigade – mixed elements from Lebanese Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH); in Safarat and Al-Saadoon Park
- Kata'ib Al-Imam Ali – in the Al-Mutanabi Street area
- Badr Organisation – in Mansour, Suwaib and Al-Rashid
- Saraya Ashura – in the Abu Nuwas Street area
- Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH) – in the Diyala River area and Bab Al-Sham
- Kata'ib Jund Al-Imam – 6th Brigade⁸¹² – at [former] Base Falcon.⁸¹³

A decree issued in September 2019 by the then Prime Minister (Executive Order 331) mandating a reformed structure of the PMU mentioned a new command that had not been identified previously—the 'Baghdad Reserve Operations Command'. This command consisted of four brigades and, according to Knights et al., its likely area of control would be the 'Baghdad belts area guarding the main approaches to the city'.⁸¹⁴ However, no information could be found as to how far this has been implemented.

Outside of the PMU (Hashd al-Shaabi) chain of command, another Hashd group, nominally affiliated with the MoD and consisting of multiple smaller groups, has been operating in the Baghdad Belt areas. These 'Defence Hashd' groups, though not recognized by the PMU Commission and denigrated by some PMU supporters as criminal gangs, provided 56 platoon-sized checkpoint units operating under the oversight of the MoD's Baghdad Operations Command (BOC).⁸¹⁵

ISIL

Based on locations of recorded ISIL attacks on ISF and PMU, a May 2021 report by the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy infers that ISIL fighters are mostly distributed in overlapping 'geographical sectors' in several governorates, including Baghdad.⁸¹⁶ In their May 2020 report, Knights and Almeida assessed that active ISIL attack cells existed in Tarmiya, Taji/Saab al-Bour, Abu Ghraib/ Zaidon, the Latifiya/ Yusufiya/ Mahmudiya triangle, and Jisr Diyala/Al-Mada'in.⁸¹⁷

According to the same source, the northern Baghdad Belts around the historic ISIL stronghold Tarmiya have been serving as a passageway for the group, connecting several of its geographic sectors such as the 'Euphrates corridor west of Baghdad and the Tigris and Diyala river valley systems extending out to the north and east'. This area appears to be used

⁸¹² Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 68, 117

⁸¹³ Iran Wire, خريطة انتشار الميليشيات الإيرانية في سوريا والعراق [Map of Iran-backed Militias in Syria and Iraq], 8 May 2020, [url](#)

⁸¹⁴ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 42-43

⁸¹⁵ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 125

⁸¹⁶ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸¹⁷ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 23





as a ‘hub for fighters’ moving down the Euphrates from Syria and gathering in the triangle (in Anbar governorate) between Hit, Fallujah/Karma, and the southern shores of Lake Tharthar.⁸¹⁸

US-led Coalition forces

In July 2021, the Biden administration announced that the combat mission of US troops in Iraq would come to an end by the end of 2021, although US forces would continue to train and advise the Iraqi armed forces. As of July 2021, there were 2 500 US troops in the country.⁸¹⁹ 2020 saw the transfer of control of two bases from Coalition troops to the ISF, with Camp Taji handed back to Iraqi forces by US forces in August⁸²⁰ and an operating base in Abu Ghraib handed over by French troops in April.⁸²¹

Meanwhile, Camp Victory base, an installation located around Baghdad International Airport, continued to house US forces as of September 2021.⁸²² This site has been used by US troops as a command centre and for intelligence and control purposes.⁸²³

In mid-2020, the Task Force-Iraq of the US-led International Coalition against ISIL had already transitioned to an entity called the Military Advisor Group comprising ‘advisors from 13 Coalition nations, working side-by-side with Iraqi operational command liaison officers in one centralized Baghdad location’.⁸²⁴ Further details regarding this location could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

2.3.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

ISIL insurgency

ISIL continued to carry out attacks in the governorate during the reference period, while the ISF pursued counter-terror operations in response.⁸²⁵ While in 2019 and the early part of 2020 it was estimated that ISIL’s activities were ‘limited mostly to the country’s rural periphery’⁸²⁶ with the group seemingly no longer capable of penetrating urban areas like Baghdad City,⁸²⁷ ISIL has since advanced its presence from the Belts to hit Baghdad City with

⁸¹⁸ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 19; see also Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁸¹⁹ BBC News, US combat forces to leave Iraq by end of year, 27 July 2021, [url](#)

⁸²⁰ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 1; Al Jazeera, US-led coalition troops withdraw from Iraq’s Camp Taji base, 23 August 2020, [url](#)

⁸²¹ Rudaw, US-led coalition withdraws from sixth Iraqi military base, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

⁸²² Tasnim News Agency, Huge Cloud of Smoke Seen Billowing from Base Housing US Forces in Iraq (+Video), 28 September 2021, [url](#); see also AA, Airport in Iraqi capital comes under drone attack, 10 June 2021, [url](#)

⁸²³ Al Jazeera, خريطة انتشار القواعد العسكرية الأميركية بالعراق [Including 5 200 Soldiers.. Map of Locations of US Military Bases in Iraq], 8 January 2020, [url](#)

⁸²⁴ USDOD, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, Coalition Task Force-Iraq transitions to Military Advisor Group, 4 July 2020, [url](#)

⁸²⁵ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 26; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 18; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 17; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 16

⁸²⁶ Heller, S., When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, International Crisis Group, [url](#)

⁸²⁷ International Crisis Group, Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p. 7





suicide bombings.⁸²⁸ The ISIL-linked news outlet Amaq claimed that the group killed or injured 210 people in Baghdad governorate during the year 2020.⁸²⁹

After a period that has been referred to by Joel Wing as ‘hibernation’ from November 2020, ISIL started its annual offensive in April 2021.⁸³⁰ Although the group continues to target civic and tribal leaders in the Baghdad Belts, it also maintains small urban cells for the purpose of conducting high-profile attacks⁸³¹ and has been moving military materials and equipment such as VBIEDs from its safe havens in the disputed territories of northern Iraq through the Baghdad Belts to the capital. This may suggest, as ISW wrote in May 2021, that it was prioritising mass-casualty attacks around Baghdad City over attacks elsewhere in the country.⁸³²

ISIL has reportedly exploited ‘security vacuums in Baghdad City neighbourhoods where militias have pushed out the Iraqi Security Forces’,⁸³³ claiming responsibility for a twin suicide attack at a market in Baghdad City’s Tayaran Square in January 2021 (at least 31 civilian deaths, 110 injured)⁸³⁴ and another suicide bombing at a market in Sadr City in July 2021 (at least 36 people killed, 60 injured).⁸³⁵ ISW reported that ISIL was also behind another bombing carried out in Sadr City during Ramadan⁸³⁶ in April 2021 (1 or 4 people killed, depending on sources).⁸³⁷ Attacks were also reported in Khadhimiyah, which saw a small-scale attack on Shia pilgrims in March⁸³⁸ and a restaurant bombing at its Shia shrine in June 2021 (4 dead and 36 injured).⁸³⁹

Tensions between Iran-backed Shia militias and the Iraqi government/International Coalition

Baghdad governorate continued to be affected by IED attacks on convoys of trucks contracted to supply the US-led International Coalition against ISIL.⁸⁴⁰ In recent months, such attacks have mainly been claimed by the groups Qasem al-Jabbarin (linked to KH) and Ashab al-Kahf (linked to AAH).⁸⁴¹

Iran-backed Shia militias also continued their rocket attacks against key Coalition assets such as the US Embassy and Baghdad International Airport from support zones within Baghdad

⁸²⁸ GIGA, Not a Storm in a Teacup: The Islamic State after the Caliphate, April 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸²⁹ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸³⁰ Wing, J., Islamic State Ramadan Offensive Begins, Pro-Iran Groups Increase Attacks In April 2021, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸³¹ ISW, ISIS Ramadan 2021 Campaign Review, 26 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁸³² ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁸³³ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸³⁴ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 54

⁸³⁵ DW, Iraq: Market bomb attack kills 36, including children, 20 July 2021, [url](#); see also UN News, Iraq: Bomb attack on eve of Eid al-Adha, ‘terrorism knows no bounds’, 20 July 2021, [url](#)

⁸³⁶ ISW, ISIS Ramadan 2021 Campaign Review, 26 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁸³⁷ Agencia EFE, 4 Die in blast in Iraq's capital, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

⁸³⁸ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁸³⁹ EPIC, ISHM: June 3 – June 10, 2021, 10 June 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁰ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 27; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021 [url](#), para. 20; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 19

⁸⁴¹ Knights, M. and Smith, C., Ashab al-Kahf's Takeover of the Convoy Strategy, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 22 November 2021, [url](#)





City.⁸⁴² One (unclaimed⁸⁴³) IED attack also targeted a vehicle carrying British diplomatic staff.⁸⁴⁴

Continuing a trend that possibly started in May 2019, KH appears to be using a variety of artificially created new group names to claim attacks in order to mask its role in the attacks, ‘both to enable KH to remain part of the PMF and avoid political criticism’, according to Knights.⁸⁴⁵ According to an October 2021 report, these ‘façade groups’ (including Usbat al-Thairen, Qasem al-Jabbarin, Ashab al-Kahf, and Rab’Allah) allow Shia militias to ‘enjoy the benefits of the attack (demonstrating resistance, satisfying supporters, pressuring the government and coalition) while mitigating any risks’ (including delaying retaliation, avoiding arrest and avoiding popular disapproval).⁸⁴⁶ In December 2020, Ashab Al-Kahf, launched rockets on the US Embassy, thereby violating an Iran-supported ceasefire⁸⁴⁷ concerning all operations against US forces.⁸⁴⁸

Apart from attacks on targets directly linked to the US-led Coalition, the reference period witnessed an escalation of activities of Iran-backed Shia militias against (the US-backed⁸⁴⁹) PM Kadhimi when in early November 2021 AAH and KH militants, in what sources described as a coordinated attack, flew two explosives-laden drones onto the PM’s residence inside the Green Zone, injuring several of his guards. This assassination attempt followed a vow of the AAH commander to take revenge on Kadhimi after an attempt by AAH and KH supporters to storm the Green Zone had resulted in the death of at least one of the supporters. Other activities directed against the Kadhimi administration included a rocket attack assumed to have been targeting the headquarters of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) in late October 2021 (resulting in no casualties).⁸⁵⁰

Besides, Shia militias reportedly engaged in ‘social control efforts’ aimed at degrading ISF control in the city and, in November 2020, expanded to target local businesses not only in the central Karada district but also inside their own support zones. Rab’Allah a Shia vigilante group (linked to KH⁸⁵¹), reportedly carried out ‘concentrated attacks on liquor stores in mixed sectarian neighborhoods’ as well as in Christian neighbourhoods—possibly with the aim of ‘controlling voter behaviour or intimidating political rivals’ ahead of the October 2021 parliamentary elections. The group also held an armed parade in eastern Baghdad City late March 2021.⁸⁵²

⁸⁴² ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4; see also UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 28; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 20; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 17

⁸⁴³ GardaWorld, Iraq: Explosive device strikes British diplomatic vehicle in Baghdad September 15, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁴ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 27

⁸⁴⁵ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata’ib Hezbollah and Iran’s Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁴⁶ Knights, M., Discordance in the Iran Threat Network in Iraq: Militia Competition and Rivalry, October 2021, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁴⁷ Weiss, J. L., Iran’s Resistance Axis Rattled by Divisions: Asaib Ahl al-Haq’s Leader Rejects the Ceasefire in Iraq, Jamestown Foundation, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁸ Weiss, J. L., Iran’s Resistance Axis Rattled by Divisions: Asaib Ahl al-Haq’s Leader Rejects the Ceasefire in Iraq, Jamestown Foundation, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁹ Jameel, R., Iraqi Prime Minister Walks Tightrope Between Shia Militias and the United States, Jamestown Foundation, 2 July 2021, [url](#)

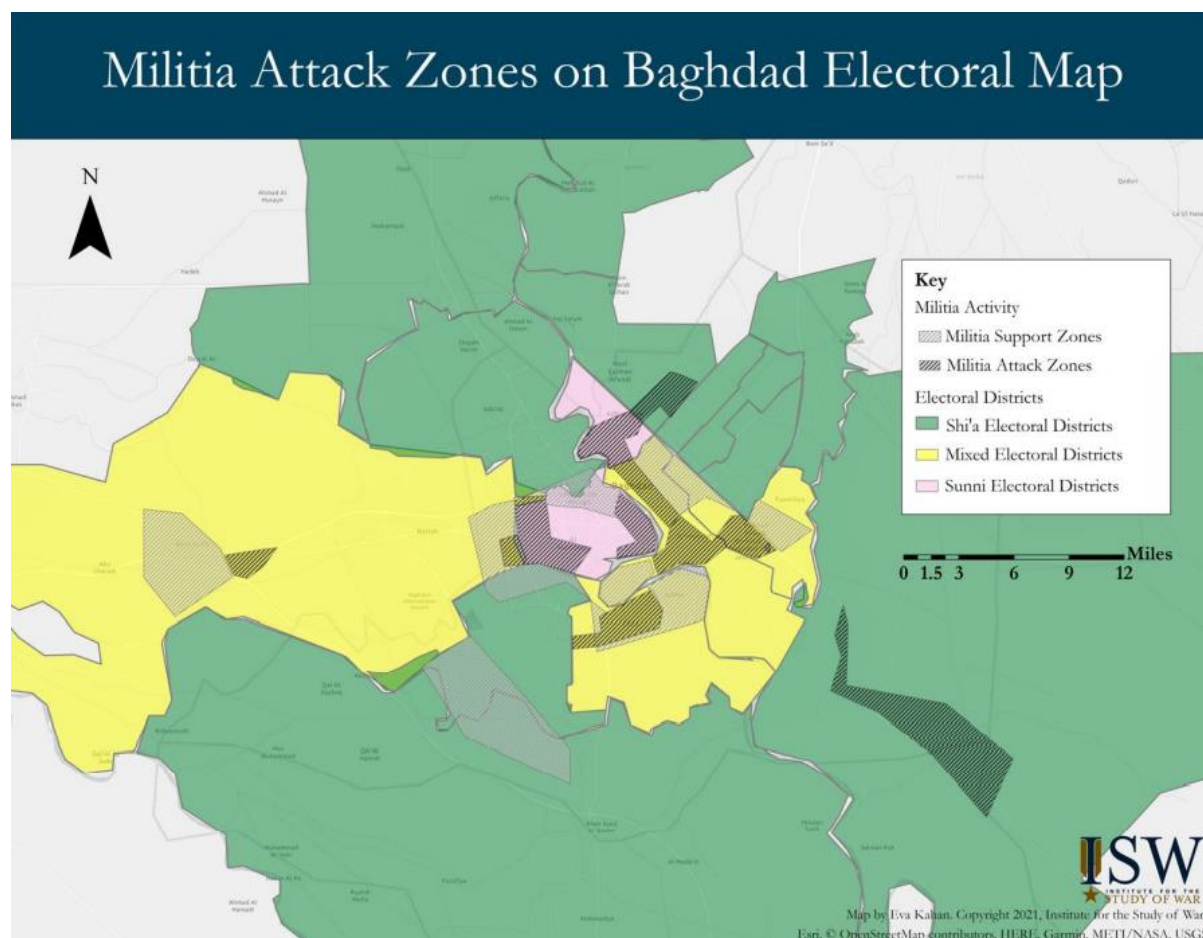
⁸⁵⁰ ISW, Iran’s Axis of Resistance in Review, October 21 - November 7, 2021, 8 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 1, 4-5

⁸⁵¹ Hamdi, Malik, Ph.D., [Twitter], posted on: 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵² ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4



The following map by ISW shows the distribution of PMF attacks in Baghdad, projected on the city's electoral map:



Map 12: Militia Attack Zones on Baghdad Electoral Map © ISW 2021⁸⁵³

According to a May 2021 assessment by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), efforts by the ISF to counter Shia militias in Baghdad have been mostly unsuccessful: the CTS's efforts against militias have focused on arresting militia representatives, 'who are frequently freed by their political allies hours later'. Although the CTS made 'symbolic deployments' to the Green Zone and Karada neighbourhood after the March 2021 Rab'Allah parade, it lacks the manpower to counter threats posed by those militias.⁸⁵⁴

Protests

Protests continued on a small scale into late 2020, with demonstrations staged at the end of November.⁸⁵⁵ In the following days and weeks, a rise in incidents was reported⁸⁵⁶ as unidentified armed men attacked protesters in various locations around Baghdad including in

⁸⁵³ ISW, 'ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁵⁴ ISW, 'ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region', 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁵⁵ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 12

⁸⁵⁶ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 17



the vicinity of Tahrir square, causing injuries.⁸⁵⁷ As Knights observed, groups targeting activists were becoming increasingly less identifiable compared to autumn 2019 when the militias attacking demonstrators on the streets were known, given that impunity of militias was 'no longer assured'.⁸⁵⁸

Large demonstrations were held in several areas of Baghdad in late May 2021 in protest against impunity of the perpetrators of targeted killings of protesters and activists.⁸⁵⁹ In Tahrir Square, security forces (whose affiliation could not be ascertained) 'fired live ammunition, tear gas canisters and used batons' to disperse protesters, leaving two of them dead while 130 people sustained injuries, including members of the security forces.⁸⁶⁰ As regards the targeting of specific profiles of protesters and activists in Baghdad, please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

Meanwhile, supporters of pro-Iranian groups protested against the results of the October 2021 parliamentary elections in which the PMU-affiliated political alliance had suffered significant losses. Protesters calling 'fraud' clashed with security forces outside the Green Zone, resulting in the deaths of two protesters and dozens of protesters and security forces injured.⁸⁶¹

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 104 battles, 176 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 103 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 383 security incidents in Baghdad governorate, the majority taking place in Khadhimiyyah district.⁸⁶²

⁸⁵⁷ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 46

⁸⁵⁸ Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁵⁹ France 24, Two Iraqis killed at protest demanding justice for slain pro-democracy activists, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁰ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 17

⁸⁶¹ Al Jazeera, Protests against Iraq election results turn violent, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#). Many of the incidents that actually took place in northern Baghdad belts were coded by ACLED to have taken place in the Khadhimiyyah district of Baghdad city. This has significantly increased the number of incidents in Baghdad.



The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 15 below.

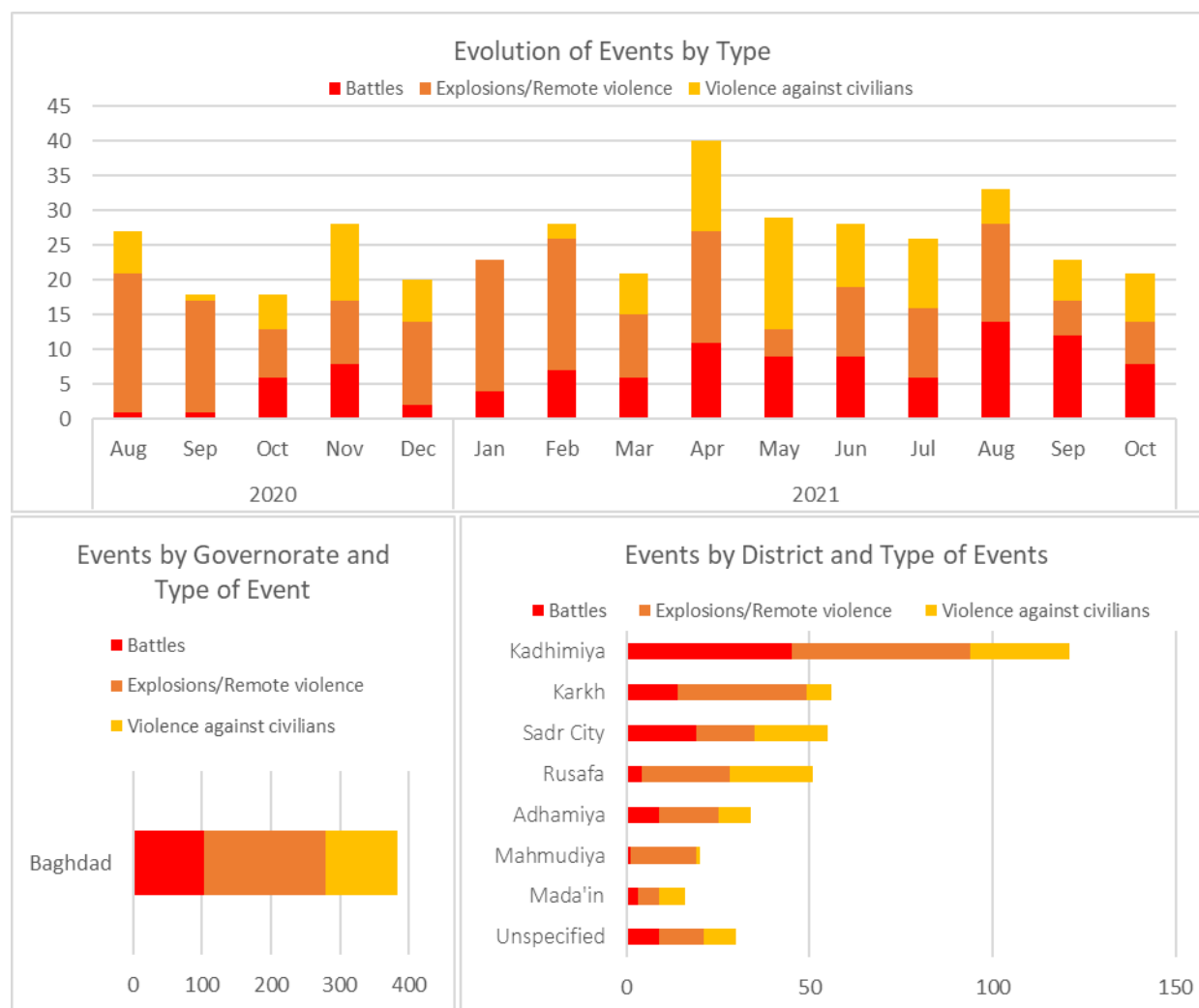


Figure 12: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Baghdad governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data⁸⁶³

Illustrative examples of incidents

Sadr City

- ISIL carried out a bombing⁸⁶⁴ in a market in Sadr City on 15 April 2021, killing between one and four people (depending on sources) and injuring 20 others.⁸⁶⁵
- On 30 June 2021, at least 15 civilians were injured in a bombing in Sadr City's Maridi market. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁴ ISW, ISIS Ramadan 2021 Campaign Review, 26 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁶⁵ Agencia EFE, 4 Die in blast in Iraq's capital, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁶ AA, At least 15 people injured in Baghdad blast, 30 June 2021, [url](#)



- On 19 July 2021, ISIL claimed a suicide bombing at a market in Sadr City, killing at least 36 people and wounding 60 others.⁸⁶⁷

Central districts of Baghdad City

- On 4 December 2020, unknown gunmen fired shots at a vehicle carrying four protesters from Tahrir Square, leaving two people injured.⁸⁶⁸
- On 11 December 2020, a group of men wearing masks assaulted protesters near Tahrir Square, stabbing one person multiple times.⁸⁶⁹
- On 21 January 2021, ISIL claimed responsibility for a twin suicide attack at a market in Baghdad City's Tayaran Square that killed at least 31 civilians and injured 110.⁸⁷⁰
- On 25 May 2021, unidentified security forces used live ammunition, tear gas canisters and batons to disperse protesters in Tahrir Square, leaving two demonstrators dead while 130 people, including members of the security forces, were injured.⁸⁷¹

Green Zone

- On 26 May 2021, following the arrest of a PMU commander, elements of the PMU reportedly deployed inside the Green Zone demanding his release.⁸⁷²
- On 5 November 2021, supporters of pro-Iranian groups protested against the results of the October 2021 parliamentary elections, clashing with security forces outside the Green Zone.⁸⁷³ At least three protesters were killed and dozens more sustained injuries.⁸⁷⁴
- On 7 November 2021, AAH and KH militants, in what has been reported as a coordinated attempt to assassinate PM Kadhimi, flew two explosives-laden drones into the PM's residence inside the Green Zone, injuring seven of his guards.⁸⁷⁵

Baghdad International Airport area

- On 28 September 2020, a rocket attack reported near Baghdad International Airport hit a house, leaving two women and three children dead and injuring two other children.⁸⁷⁶
- On 21 January 2021, an IED reportedly struck a convoy carrying supplies for the US-led International Coalition against ISIL in the Abu Ghraib area. An ISF member escorting the convoy was reportedly injured.⁸⁷⁷

⁸⁶⁷ DW, Iraq: Market bomb attack kills 36, including children, 20 July 2021, [url](#); see also UN News, Iraq: Bomb attack on eve of Eid al-Adha, 'terrorism knows no bounds', 20 July 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁸ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 46

⁸⁶⁹ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 46

⁸⁷⁰ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 54

⁸⁷¹ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 17

⁸⁷² UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para 7

⁸⁷³ Al Jazeera, Protests against Iraq election results turn violent, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁴ GardaWorld, Iraq: At least three demonstrators killed, dozens injured amid clashes with security forces near the checkpoint one of Baghdad's Green Zone Nov. 5 /update 1, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁵ ISW, Iran's Axis of Resistance in Review, October 21 - November 7, 2021, 8 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁷⁶ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 28

⁸⁷⁷ GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy for US-led forces struck by improvised explosive device in Baghdad Governorate, Jan. 21, 21 January 2021, [url](#)



- On 8 November 2021, 11 people, including five PMU members, were killed as suspected ISIL fighters attacked a lookout point in the Radwaniya area south of Baghdad International Airport. Eight other people were wounded in the attack.⁸⁷⁸

Tarmiya

- On 20 August 2021, ISIL fighters attacked PMU members, killing four of them and leaving several others wounded.⁸⁷⁹
- On 23 October 2021, ISIL militants killed a civilian and injured his mother. On the following day, militants injured another civilian as they attacked his vehicle.⁸⁸⁰

2.3.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed-conflict-related incidents⁸⁸¹ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, is shown in table 7 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Baghdad	9	12	12	24	13	72	239	311

Table 7: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Baghdad governorate⁸⁸²

2.3.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Based on data last updated in August 2021, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) listed the area contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 3 511 square metres.⁸⁸³ Further relevant information could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

2.3.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 26 610 IDPs were registered in Baghdad governorate. The largest share of these IDPs (43 %) originated from Anbar governorate, while others had come from Babil (27 %), Ninewa (18 %), Salah Al-Din (7 %) and Diyala (3 %) governorates. Within the governorate, districts hosting the largest IDP populations were Mahmudiya (28 %), Abu Ghraib (20 %) and Karkh (18 %). In Baghdad governorate, 8 448 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block

⁸⁷⁸ Al-Monitor, Suspected Islamic State gunmen kill 11 at military post outside Baghdad, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁹ EPIC, ISHM: August 19 – August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ EPIC, ISHM: October 21 – October 28, 2021, 28 October 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸¹ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

⁸⁸² UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

⁸⁸³ iMMAP, Statistical overview and spatial data of explosive ordnance contamination levels in Iraq, 3 September 2020, [url](#)



houses or unowned or uninhabitable houses), 67 % of them in Mahmudiya district.⁸⁸⁴ In September 2020, REACH assessed that 60 to 80 % of IDP households in Adhamiya district, 80 to 90 % of IDP households in Mahmudiya and Karkh districts, 90 to 100 % of IDP households in Khadhimiya district and all IDP households in Rusafa district were living in severe or extreme need. The other districts of the governorate were not included in the assessment.⁸⁸⁵

Moreover, as of September 2021, IOM documented a total of 45 324 IDPs across the country who originated from Baghdad governorate. Of these, the vast majority were being hosted in Sulaymaniyah (66 %) and Erbil (27 %) governorates.⁸⁸⁶

IOM data also show that there were 91 902 returnees in Baghdad governorate as of 30 September 2021, of whom 90 % had returned from displacement areas within the same governorate.⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁴ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

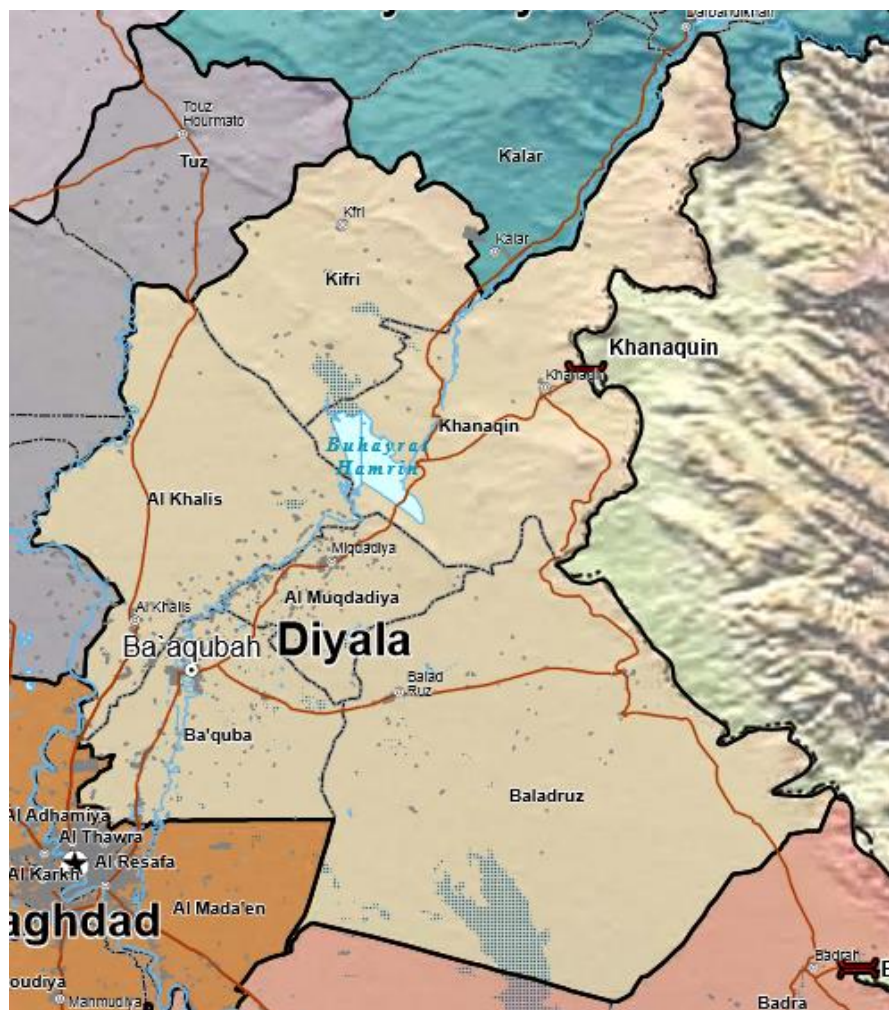
⁸⁸⁵ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁸⁶ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁷ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.4 Diyala



Map 13: Diyala governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.⁸⁸⁸

2.4.1 General description of the governorate

Basic geography

Diyala province is located in the central-eastern part of Iraq and has borders with Sulaymaniyah, Salah al-Din, Baghdad and Wassit provinces and an international border with Iran. The governorate is divided into six districts: Baquba, Baladruz, Khalis, Khanaqin, Kifri and Muqadadiya. Baquba city is the capital of the governorate.⁸⁸⁹ The districts in Diyala which are disputed by the KRG and the central government are Khanaqin, Kifri and the sub-district Mandali, situated in Baladruz district.⁸⁹⁰ The district of the disputed Khanaqin (also written as Khaniqin) includes the sub-districts of Jalawla, Saadiya and Qara Tape.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁸ UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Diyala Governorate Profile, March 2009, available at: [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁹⁰ Kane, S., Iraq's disputed territories: a view of the political horizon and implications for U.S. policy, United States Institute of Peace, 2011, [url](#), p. 35; EPIC, ISHM, ISHM reference guide, last revision: May 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹¹ ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 14



Population

Diyala governorate has an estimated population of 1 768 920 inhabitants as of 2021.⁸⁹²

Ethnicity

Diyala has a diverse ethnic and religious population. Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen make up the majority of the population, each including the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam.⁸⁹³ A majority of Diyala residents are Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkmen. The majority of the population of the provincial capital of Baquba are Sunni Arabs.⁸⁹⁴ The ('Pro-KRG')⁸⁹⁵ Shia Kurds constitute the largest portion of the population in the city of Khanaqin.⁸⁹⁶ Other ethnic and religious groups residing in the governorate include Christians, Yazidis and Ahl al-Haqq (a religious group with roots in Shia Islam). Among the Kurdish population is also the community of Faili (also written as Feili, Fayli or Feily) Kurds, who are predominantly Shia Muslims.⁸⁹⁷

The Juburi and the Tamimi tribes are the biggest and most influential tribes in the governorate.⁸⁹⁸ Other important tribes in Diyala are the al-Assadi, the Atighi and the Salhi.⁸⁹⁹

Road security

The highways Baghdad–Tehran and Baghdad–Kirkuk–Erbil–Mosul pass through Diyala. Diyala has particularly good connections with Baghdad, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.⁹⁰⁰ Whilst the road network of Diyala is in bad condition and suffered further damage in the context of the battle against ISIL, the main road Baghdad–Baquba did not sustain any major damage and is in good condition.⁹⁰¹

In the September 2020 – February 2021 period, iMMAP designates stretches of the road from Baquba to Khanaqin as a primary risk road, other parts of the same road have qualified as a secondary risk road. Stretches of the road leading from Khanaqin to Kalar have also been designated as primary and secondary risk roads. Parts of the road leading from Baquba to Baladrooz have been designated as primary risk road, as have parts of the road leading from Khalis to Kifri at times.⁹⁰² Especially in Khanaqin district and, to a lesser extent, in Muqdadia

⁸⁹² Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁹³ NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁹⁴ Knights, M., Losing Mosul, Regenerating in Diyala: How the Islamic State Could Exploit Iraq's Sectarian Tinderbox, October 2016, [url](#), p.2

⁸⁹⁵ Saleem, Z.et al., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁶ Saleem, Z.et al., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI, November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁷ NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), p. 2; Minority Rights Group International, Iraq, Faili Kurds, November 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁸ US Army, Tamimi, Jibouri tribes uphold reconciliation in Diyala, 29 October 2007, [url](#); New York Times (The), Wary tribal alliances, born of necessity, offer hope in Iraq, 6 October 2014, [url](#); LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 27

⁸⁹⁹ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁰⁰ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁰¹ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 61

⁹⁰² iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-28 February 2021), 7 March 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access



district explosive hazard incidents, resulting in casualties, have been reported from December 2020 to February 2021.⁹⁰³

Groups under the PMF issue their own ‘authorization’ letters that allow passage through checkpoints across the country. Moving through the province of Diyala may be best facilitated with a letter from the Badr Organization or AAH, which have gained power in much of the province.⁹⁰⁴ At Diyala’s largest checkpoint, Safra, PMF groups such as Badr or AAH have variously worked with the Iraqi army’s operations command and the province’s governor (Muthanna al-Tamimi) to collect anywhere between 100 and 500 US dollars per truck, earning at times as much as 20 000 US dollars per day.⁹⁰⁵ In Jalawla, AAH staffed checkpoints on commercially strategic roads in 2018, imposing taxes on vehicles passing through.⁹⁰⁶

Economy

Known as the orange capital of the Middle East due to its production of oranges and citrus fruits, Diyala’s economy rests largely on agriculture.⁹⁰⁷ Diyala province is a key gateway for Iranian-Iraqi trade.⁹⁰⁸ It is ‘strategically important for commercial, security and political reasons’ and produces major revenues via the Mounzariah and Paruezkhan border crossings with Iran.⁹⁰⁹ As customs officials have to collaborate with the Badr-controlled political and security apparatus in Diyala, Badr has effective control over the Mounzariah and the Mandali border crossings and relies on them for revenues and military support from Iran.⁹¹⁰ Khanaqin district, rich in oil, deploys an oil field and an oil refinery.⁹¹¹ In April 2021, a contract to develop the al-Mansouriya natural gas field in Diyala province was awarded to the Chinese company Sinopec.⁹¹²

Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 January 2021), 11 February 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 December 2021), 10 January 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 October 2021), 5 November 2020, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 August 2020), 6 September 2020, available at: [url](#)

⁹⁰³ iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Casualties from Explosive Hazard Incidents in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates 1-28 February 2021, 2 March 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Casualties from Explosive Hazard Incidents in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates 1-31 January 2021, 11 February 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Casualties from Explosive Hazard Incidents in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates 01-31 December 2020, 10 January 2021, available at: [url](#)

⁹⁰⁴ Mansour, R., Networks of power: the Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁹⁰⁵ Mansour, R., Networks of power: the Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 31

⁹⁰⁶ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁹⁰⁷ UNDP, Iraqi heroes confronting COVID-19 in Diyala and Kirkuk, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁸ ICG, Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁰⁹ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Iraq’s disputed internal boundaries after ISIS, February 2019, [url](#), p. 11

⁹¹⁰ Saleem, A.Z. & Skelton, M., Searching for ghosts: fighting corruption at Iraq’s border crossings, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹¹ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 43

⁹¹² EPIC, ISHM, April 15 – April 22, 2021, 22 April 2021, [url](#)





Water scarcity, exacerbated by climate change and dam construction projects in Iran, threatens Diyala's agricultural sector.⁹¹³ 'The surface area of Lake Hamrin, Diyala province's main source of water, has shrunk by half, affecting irrigation and agricultural production.'⁹¹⁴ 'The Iraqi government restricted farmers from planting summer crops due to the diminishing water levels, which affects income and food security,' USDOD reports in July 2021.⁹¹⁵ In October 2021, the grain growing season in Diyala was canceled due to 'severe water scarcity'.⁹¹⁶

2.4.2 Conflict background

Diyala has been described as an 'ethno-sectarian microcosm for security dynamics' for the whole of Iraq.⁹¹⁷ Its mixed ethnic-religious population and proximity to Baghdad and Iran turned it into 'a crucial prize in the sectarian struggle engulfing Iraq' and it became 'a battleground of Shia and Sunni factions who vied for power'.⁹¹⁸ The governorate's geographical location made it a priority for the Iraqi government and the Iranian-backed PMF to control the region.⁹¹⁹ Diyala is known to have hosted extremist insurgents in Iraq since 2004.⁹²⁰

Diyala is one of Iraq's governorates 'worst affected' by the 2013-2014 ISIL invasion.⁹²¹ ISIL managed to occupy large areas in the north of the governorate including Saadiyah and Jalawla during its offensive.⁹²² Portions of the rural areas of Kifri, Khanaqin, Muqdadiya, and Khalis were also captured. None of the district centres were seized, despite a number of attacks into some of them.⁹²³ ISIL's advances in Diyala in 2014 prompted many tribal leaders, such as from the Aza, Obeidi and Juburi tribes, angered and humiliated by the atrocities committed by ISIL, to broker ad hoc allegiances to support the ISF in the fight against ISIL.⁹²⁴ The Karawi (or Kerwi /Kerwei), a large Arab tribe in the area of Jalawla, pledged loyalty to ISIL.⁹²⁵

Diyala was declared entirely freed of Islamic State control in January 2015, after an occupation of approximately six months that led to thousands of its inhabitants being

⁹¹³ Middle East Monitor, Water shortages leave Iraq thirsty for regional cooperation, 6 September 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Iraq's environment, food security very fragile: deputy minister, 25 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, July 8 – July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#); Corona, A., How mangled dam diplomacy is shaping Iraq's water crisis, 4 November 2020, [url](#);

⁹¹⁴ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 58

⁹¹⁵ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 58

⁹¹⁶ EPIC, ISHM, October 14 -21, 2021, 14 October 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹⁷ Flood, D., From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 36

⁹¹⁸ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁹¹⁹ Flood, D., From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

⁹²⁰ Niqash, New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

⁹²¹ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 23

⁹²² NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), pp. 3-4

⁹²³ Sanad for Peacebuilding and Social Inquiry, Conflict Fragility and Social Cohesion in Diyala Governorate: Khalis, Muqdadiya, Kifri, and Balad, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁹²⁴ New York Times (The), Wary tribal alliances, born of necessity, offer hope in Iraq, 6 October 2014, [url](#)

⁹²⁵ BBC News, Islamic State Crisis: How Jalawla became a changed town, 15 December 2014, [url](#); Knights, M., Losing Mosul, Regenerating in Diyala: How the Islamic State Could Exploit Iraq's Sectarian Tinderbox, October 2016, [url](#), p.4





displaced.⁹²⁶ During the counter-ISIL offensive Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Units ‘forcibly displaced thousands of Sunni Iraqi civilians from Diyala Province, killing hundreds’, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) reports in December 2020.⁹²⁷ An international NGO working in Iraq interviewed in April 2018 by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS)/Landinfo states Diyala’s security landscape evolved into ‘a real hodgepodge’, pointing out the presence of armed groups, protracted communal conflicts and PMU competition over access to resources and rents.⁹²⁸

Especially after ISIL’s territorial defeat in central Iraq, many ISIL fighters rejoined forces with former allies inside the Diyala governorate.⁹²⁹ Retreating to the rural periphery, ISIL’s diminished insurgency in Diyala remained deadly,⁹³⁰ particularly in parts of the province into where the state’s reach is weak or non-existent.⁹³¹ The Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), cited by USDOD, reported in early 2020 that ‘Diyala, which has one of the largest concentrations of Iranian aligned militias, is also the largest focus of attacks by ISIL within Iraq’.⁹³² USDOD added that ‘since the fall of ISIL’s territorial caliphate,’ ‘Diyala province northeast of Baghdad has consistently seen the highest concentration of ISIL attacks in the OIR [Operation Inherent Resolve] battlespace’.⁹³³ The PMF, who are the dominant authority in Diyala, exacerbate sectarian tensions, USDOD explains, ‘as they are mainly concerned with using Diyala’s strategic location to smuggle arms and other assistance from Iran.’⁹³⁴ Their combat against ISIL is hampered by a lack of coordination with local tribal forces, the Peshmerga, and Coalition forces.⁹³⁵ In its report covering the period 1 April 2020 – 30 June 2020, USDOD noted that ISIL were responsible for small attacks in Diyala almost on a daily basis. Many of these attacks targeted farmers and other civilians, who were often killed or kidnapped for ransom.⁹³⁶ According to a March 2020 Middle East Institute report ISIL’s daily attacks in Diyala impede any attempt at a return to normal life stating that ‘areas like Jalawla remain impossible to reach, while larger cities such as Khanaqin or Baquba are becoming increasingly insecure the longer the situation is ignored.’⁹³⁷

⁹²⁶ Flood, D., From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State’s Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32; NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), p. 4.

⁹²⁷ ISW, Iraq is fragile, not hopeless: how Iraq’s fragility undermines regional stability, December 2020, [url](#), p. 27; GICJ, Iraq: ethnic and sectarian cleansing in Diyala, 17 February 2016, [url](#)

⁹²⁸ Denmark, DIS (Danish Immigration Service)/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 43

⁹²⁹ Niqash, New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

⁹³⁰ ICG, Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria, Middle East Report N°207, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p.3

⁹³¹ SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), Governing the ‘ungoverned’: Suppressing the Islamic State’s insurgency in Iraq, 12 April 2019, [url](#)

⁹³² US, USDOD, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress – January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 26

⁹³³ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve –Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁹³⁴ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁹³⁵ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁹³⁶ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁹³⁷ MEI, The forgotten Iraq, policy paper 2020-7, March 2020, [url](#)





2.4.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

Dijla Operations Command (DOC)

Diyala governorate falls under the Dijla Operations Command (DOC), which includes all of Diyala governorate⁹³⁸, eastern Salah al-Din and its ethnically mixed town of Tuz Khurmatu, as well as the Hamrin Mountains.⁹³⁹ In October 2020, Major General Adnan Salman al-Anzi took command of the 5th Iraqi Army division in Diyala province, replacing Major General Saleh Harz Nasser.⁹⁴⁰ The ISF Diyala is led by either Badr members or other members from the PMF networks, Renad Mansour noted in a February 2021 report.⁹⁴¹ USCENTCOM noted in 2020 that the 5th Iraqi Army Division, which is responsible for Diyala, ‘operates as an extension of the Badr Organization, making it more responsive to Iran than to the Iraqi Prime Minister and the formal Iraqi chain of command’.⁹⁴²

Border Guards Command

In 2017, the Border Guards Command in Diyala operated under the 3rd border region which covers the Diyala –Wassit border with Iran.⁹⁴³ In July 2020, Prime Minister Kadhimi visited a border crossing near the Iraq-Iran border in Diyala, proclaiming a new era in fighting corruption and stating that border guards had the authorization to use firearms against those who violated the rules of the customs zone.⁹⁴⁴ AFP reports in March 2021 that many of Iraq’s entry points are informally controlled by groups within the PMF. Diyala’s Mandali crossing on the Iranian border, for instance, is run by Badr. An official informed AFP that border operatives at the Mandali crossing can collect as much as 10 000 US dollars per day in bribes, the bulk of which is distributed to Badr and complicit officials.⁹⁴⁵ To reduce corruption at border crossings, Iraq signed a contract with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in May 2021 to automate custom procedures.⁹⁴⁶

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

The Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF or PMU) Diyala Operations Command is led by Talib al-Musawi, a commander of the Badr Organisation.⁹⁴⁷ Based at Camp Ashraf, it exercises operational control over PMF Brigades 4, 23, 24, and 110 (all Badr formations)—plus Liwa al-Taff (Brigade 20).⁹⁴⁸ Particularly in southern Diyala, the Badr Organisation remains the

⁹³⁸ Al-Hashimi, H., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹³⁹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 17

⁹⁴⁰ EPIC, ISHM, October 8- October 15, 2020, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴¹ Mansour, R., Middle East and North Africa Programme, Networks of power: the Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁹⁴² US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, 4 August 2020, [url](#), p. 25

⁹⁴³ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁴⁴ Saleem, A.Z. & Skelton, M., Searching for ghosts: fighting corruption at Iraq’s border crossings, LSE [Blog], 24 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁵ France 24, ‘Worse than a jungle’: the cartel controlling Iraqi borders, 29 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁶ Al-Monitor, Iraq automates its customs service to reduce corruption at border crossings, 22 June 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁷ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, A thousand Hezbollahs: Iraq’s emerging militia state, May 2021, [url](#), p. 89; Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁴⁸ Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 41



dominant Shia militia, the ‘first among equals’.⁹⁴⁹ PMU brigades 4, 20, 23, and 24 are all under Badr Organisation leader al-Ameri’s command and are almost all focused on southern Diyala and the adjacent Jallam Desert.⁹⁵⁰ Hashd Brigade 110 and Liwa al-Taff (Brigade 20) are mainly based in the Khanaqin area.⁹⁵¹ PMU-brigade 110 belongs to Badr Organisation and consists of Faili Kurds.⁹⁵² Liwa al-Taff (Brigade 20) is led by Hashim Ahmad al-Tamimi. It is an independent militia that split off from the al-Abbas Combat Division and its fighters are said to be Sistani loyalists.⁹⁵³ In a May 2020 report, Husham Al-Hashimi noted the presence of PMUs in Al-Udhaym, Khanaqin, Mansuriya, Muqdadiah, Khana, Mandali and Hamrin as of December 2019.⁹⁵⁴

Northern Diyala has increasingly become an area of operations for Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH).⁹⁵⁵ AAH forces operating in northern Diyala do not seem to be under the operational control of the PMU Diyala Operations Command.⁹⁵⁶ In northeastern Diyala, Badr has ceded control of Jalawla to AAH.⁹⁵⁷ In the area, AAH constructed local Sunni-manned militias from the Kerwi (or Karawi⁹⁵⁸) tribe.⁹⁵⁹ In Abu Sayda, AAH militiamen have unsuccessfully contested Badr’s control of the town in 2016.⁹⁶⁰

Diyala is ‘a vital military and economic entry point for Iran into Iraq’, and a priority area for Iran and the brigades of Badr Organisation, the Institute for the Study of War reports in 2017.⁹⁶¹ USDOD, in its Lead Inspector General Report covering the second quarter of 2020, reported that in Diyala the PMU has ‘outsized influence relative to the ISF’.⁹⁶² The source further described that PMUs regularly conduct counter-ISIL operations, drone surveillance, raids, clearing operations and man checkpoints, but also engage in extortion, detaining Sunnis on false charges and weapon smuggling from Iran, ‘exacerbating sectarian tensions’.⁹⁶³ In its 2020 report USDOS notes that a Sunni parliamentarian from Diyala was warned of repeated forced displacement of Sunnis in the governorate by PMF forces or associated militias, resulting in demographic change along the border with Iran.⁹⁶⁴ According to Sunni

⁹⁴⁹ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁵⁰ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁵¹ Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 42

⁹⁵² Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁵³ Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 205

⁹⁵⁴ Al-Hashimi, H., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁵ Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 131

⁹⁵⁶ Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 42

⁹⁵⁷ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 22

⁹⁵⁸ Saleem, Z. et al., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI, November 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁹ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁶⁰ Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁶¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 17

⁹⁶² US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p.23

⁹⁶³ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#), p.25

⁹⁶⁴ US, USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#)



Endowment representatives, Shia militias, including AAH, Badr, and Khurasani, turned Sunni mosques into PMF headquarters in a number of Sunni areas in Diyala.⁹⁶⁵ Reporting on the first quarter of 2021 USDOD observes that Shia militia groups belonging to the PMF continue to operate in Sunni areas against the will of the local populations.⁹⁶⁶ In the April 2021 – June 2021 period, USDOD notes that malign activities conducted by PMF in the predominately Sunni Arab areas are driving more Sunni Arabs to join or support ISIL. Furthermore, the presence of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in the disputed territories exacerbates the security gap in these areas because Peshmerga forces and the PMF do not cooperate.⁹⁶⁷ In May 2020, a top commander of Kata'eb Hezbollah stated that the forced displacement of residents in Tarmiyah and al-Mukhaisha villages in Diyala was the only way to curb ISIL in these predominantly Sunni Arab regions.⁹⁶⁸

Tribal Mobilization Forces (TMF, Hashd al-Asha'iri)

The Hashd al-Asha'iri (or Ashayari) are an Arab Sunni militia, composed mainly of Sunni tribes and backed and armed by the Ministry of Defense. To defend and to secure the northern Diyala area, a TMF branch was created in the area in 2014.⁹⁶⁹ In a March 2019 interview, Abdul Khaliq Al-Azzawi, a member of the Defense Committee in the Iraqi parliament from Diyala, stated that tribal mobilization forces are better organized in Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Anbar than in Diyala. In Diyala 3 500 armed men can be counted, serving without pay.⁹⁷⁰ According to Christopher H. Brodsky, a research associate at the Council on Foreign Relations, Iraq's economic crisis poses a challenge to Sunni Arabs in the Tribal Mobilization Forces. TMF are intentionally organized as 'the smallest and weakest entities' within the PMF in order to prevent them from posing a threat to Shia militia. As such, they are likely to be affected first by government austerity measures such as cuts to public sector salaries.⁹⁷¹ TMF in Diyala do not receive funding from the United States, whilst TMF in Anbar and Nineveh do.⁹⁷²

Tribal Mobilization Forces participate in military operations against ISIL⁹⁷³ and are targeted directly by ISIL.⁹⁷⁴ On 14 October 2020, for instance, a member of the TMF was killed in an ISIL attack on a security post northeast of Baquba.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁶⁵ US, USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁶ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p.16

⁹⁶⁷ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁶⁸ EPIC, ISHM, April 29 – May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁹ Iraqi Center for Policy Analysis and Research, Sunni Arabs' grievances in post-ISIL Iraq, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ Iraqi Center for Policy Analysis and Research, Sunni Arabs' grievances in post-ISIL Iraq, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷¹ Small Wars Journal, Iraq's ethno-sectarian landscape: Sunni Arab collaboration with the dominant Shi'a militia apparatus, 14 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷² Gaston, E., Regulating irregular actors, can due diligence checks mitigate the risks of working with non-state and substate actors, May 2021, [url](#), p. 51

⁹⁷³ Al-Hamid, R., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: weakened but agile, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁴ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 14; EPIC, ISHM, August 6 – August 13, 2020, 13 August 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁵ EPIC, ISHM, October 8- October 15, 2020, 15 October 2020, [url](#)





Kurdistan Regional Government Security Forces

In October 2017, after the Kurdish withdrawal, the Iraqi forces took control of the district of Khanaqin and the subdistrict of Jalawla, some of the disputed territories of Diyala province.⁹⁷⁶ In a May 2020 report, Husham Al-Hashimi noted the presence of ‘PKK and affiliates’ in the Jalawla area.⁹⁷⁷ In the summer of 2020, Peshmerga Forces and ISF participated in a number of military campaigns in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din.⁹⁷⁸ However, this cooperation was not without tensions, as the Peshmerga were apprehensive about Baghdad’s forces’ intentions.⁹⁷⁹ In the last quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, the Peshmerga and the ISF did not conduct joint operations against ISIL.⁹⁸⁰ In June 2021, the two forces executed a joint operation in the disputed territories.⁹⁸¹ In addition, four new Joint Coordination Centres in northern Iraqi provinces were set up to curb ISIS along the border between Iraqi Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq.⁹⁸² The first of these joint command centres was commissioned in May 2021 in Khanaqin.⁹⁸³ In September 2021 joint activities by federal and Peshmerga troops were conducted in the buffer zones separating both forces.⁹⁸⁴ As of reporting in July 2020, PUK was in control of Kifri district.⁹⁸⁵ In August 2021, Asayish security forces were sent to the Paruezkhan (Parvis Khan) border crossing to combat smuggling.⁹⁸⁶

ISIL

Security forces pushed ISIL back from Diyala in 2015, but after the group’s defeat in central Iraq in 2017, many ISIL fighters reportedly re-established contacts with former allies inside the Diyala governorate.⁹⁸⁷ Waging a ‘low-level insurgency’, ISIL fighters are mainly organized in ‘small cells, operating in rural areas and relying primarily on improvised explosive devices (IED) and small-arms fire to carry out attacks against both civilians and security forces’.⁹⁸⁸ Despite being territorially defeated, controlling no major population centers and disposing of limited finances, ISIL remains active and continues to pose both a local and a global threat.⁹⁸⁹ Operating from its rural bastions along the Diyala River Valley, the Iranian border, and the

⁹⁷⁶ BBC News, Iraq takes disputed areas as Kurds ‘withdraw to 2014 lines’, 18 October 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁷ Al-Hashimi, H., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁸ ISW, Iraq situation report: July 8-14, 2020, 17 July 2020, [url](#); Kirkuk Now, Iraqi forces and Peshmerga set up 10 military outposts in disputed areas, 15 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁹ Kirkuk Now, Peshmerga in Kifri: Iraqi forces have bad intentions and we will take a stance, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁰ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p.25; US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p. 38

⁹⁸¹ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁹⁸² Al-Monitor, Iraqi security forces to fill security vacuum that harbors Islamic State, 26 May 2021, [url](#); US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 35-36

⁹⁸³ Al-Monitor, Iraqi security forces to fill security vacuum that harbors Islamic State, 26 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁴ EPIC, ISHM, September 16 – September 23, 2021, 23 September 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁵ Kirkuk Now, Peshmerga in Kifri: Iraqi forces have bad intentions and we will take a stance, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁶ Rudaw, Security forces deployed at Parvizkhan border crossing to prevent smuggling, 9 August 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁷ Niqash, New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁸ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁸⁹ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 13





provincial border with Salah al-Din⁹⁹⁰ ISIL wages its insurgency through roadside bombings, attacks on security forces checkpoints and sniping attacks (small arms fire).⁹⁹¹ It carries out attacks on ISF checkpoints and kills pro-government village and tribal leaders, thus undermining the limited state authority in the region.⁹⁹² ISIL's operations are financed through kidnappings, extortion, car-jackings and robberies.⁹⁹³ The New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy in March 2021 reports that the estimates of ISIL fighters in Iraq vary considerably. The source observes that ISIL fighters in Iraq are distributed in 11 geographical sectors. The estimate of active ISIL fighters in each of these sectors, including the Diyala sector, is 350 to 400.⁹⁹⁴ Due to ISIL's reorganization in small mobile subgroups, the operations conducted did not involve large numbers of fighters. ISIL operations mainly consisted in 'planting IED's, setting up ambushes, sniping operations, assassinations, and burning homes and farms, none of which have major political or security repercussions'.⁹⁹⁵

Iraqi security officials indicate ISIL relies on remote bases in mountain ranges, valleys and orchards to house its fighters and establish monitoring and control points to secure supply routes in Diyala. These bases are also used as command centers and small camps for training.⁹⁹⁶ In the Hamrin Mountains, ISIL has built a permanent infrastructure consisting of hideouts, training camps and its own courts.⁹⁹⁷ ISIL has also built a tunnel network in the Hamrin Mountains, and has weapons arsenals there.⁹⁹⁸ Aaron Y. Zelin, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, explains that Diyala's status as the epicenter of ISIL attacks in Iraq is partly due to terrain. The area is 'studded with mountains, canals, groves, and other features that make hiding out and ambushes easier and conducting effective counter-insurgency operations more difficult'.⁹⁹⁹

ISIL attack cells are active in Buhriz/Kani Ban Saad, western Baquba, Mukhisa/Abu Sayda, Sherween/ Muqdadiah, Jalula/Sa'adiyah, Qara Tapa/Hamrin, Khanaqin and Nida/Mandal. ¹⁰⁰⁰ Zaghaniyah, Qubbah, Mukhisa and Abou Karmah villages, situated in the Diyala river valley, are reported to be natural bastions for ISIL.¹⁰⁰¹ ISIL is most active in Diyala governorate's northern area and the Makhmour, Makhul, Palkhana, and Hamrin mountains, spanning several northern governorates.¹⁰⁰² According to Joel Wing of Musings on Iraq, ISIL has access to all the rural parts of Diyala.¹⁰⁰³ ISIL targets Kurds, Shia and uncooperative Sunni tribes,

⁹⁹⁰ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

⁹⁹¹ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

⁹⁹² Rudaw, ISIS threat unabated in Diyala province's 'security vacuum': Kurdish officials, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹³ SIPRI [blog], Governing 'the ungoverned': Suppressing the Islamic State's insurgency in Iraq, 12 April 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁴ Al-Hamid, R., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: weakened but agile, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁵ Al-Hamid, R., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: weakened but agile, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁶ Al-Hamid, R., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: weakened but agile, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁷ ISW, ISIS re-establishes historical sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁸ ISW, ISIS' second come-back: assessing the next ISIS insurgency, 30 June 2019, [url](#), p. 21

⁹⁹⁹ Zelin, A.Y., A year since Baghuz, the Islamic State is neither defeated nor resurging (yet), 25 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁰ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 21, 23

¹⁰⁰¹ Bouvier, E., Le gouvernorat irakien de Diyala : un point d'appui historique et récurrent pour les groupes terroristes. Partie 2 [The Iraqi governorate of Diyala: a historical and recurring point of support for terrorist groups. Part 2], 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰² US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress – January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁰⁰³ Wing, J., Islamic State Might Be Coming Out Of Its Winter Hibernation In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 March 2019, [url](#)





conducting in Diyala ‘ethnic or sectarian cleansing activities’ on a scale not seen in other provinces.¹⁰⁰⁴ Mortar shells are regularly fired on Shia, Kurdish, and Kaka’i¹⁰⁰⁵ villages. Knights and Almeida report that houses and crops are burned, machinery is destroyed, electricity lines are sabotaged, and livestock is slaughtered. This resulted in the evacuation of villages in the Mukhisa, Abu Saida, Muqdadiah, Khanaqin, and Mutabijah areas.¹⁰⁰⁶

The Institute for the Study of War observed that ISIL’s key leadership is housed in small zones of control within sparsely populated desert and mountain areas that are largely beyond government control, including the Hamrin Mountains.¹⁰⁰⁷ USDOD reports being unaware of significant internal fractures, major defections or power struggles that could threaten ISIL’s internal cohesion and unity of effort.¹⁰⁰⁸

2.4.4 Recent security trends

Developments 2020-2021

According to the US Defense Intelligence Agency, ISIL has taken advantage of a security vacuum caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to reorganize and redistribute its forces.¹⁰⁰⁹ Many counter-ISIL activities in Iraq were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a report published by USDOD in 2021, a Kurdish Peshmerga commander observed that ‘thousands of ISIL fighters who had been hiding among civilians after the group lost its territorial control had seized on the lull to emerge from hiding and begin operating in the mountains again’.¹⁰¹⁰ Throughout 2020 and up until September 2021 Diyala *wilayat* (province) has remained the main focus of ISIL attacks.¹⁰¹¹ During the last quarter of 2020 more than 100 mostly small ISIL attacks were reported in Diyala.¹⁰¹² In November 2020 Prime Minister Kadhimi ordered the Ministries of Defense and Interior to reinforce the Iraqi Army and police forces in Diyala. Particularly the security situation in Abu Saida concerned security officials as several ISIL attacks had taken place.¹⁰¹³ In early 2020 ISIL remained entrenched in the mountainous regions in northern and north-central Iraq to conduct ambushes and IED attacks against the

¹⁰⁰⁴ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC Sentinel, Volume 3, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰⁰⁵ ‘The Kakais are an ethnically Kurdish minority group that have been targeted by ISIS since 2014 for their religious beliefs.’ EPIC, ISHM, June 11 - June 18, 2020, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁶ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC Sentinel, Volume 3, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰⁰⁷ ISW, ISIS Ramadan 2021 campaign, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁸ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 12; US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p.12; US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020, 3 November 2020, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁰⁹ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰¹⁰ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰¹¹ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Islamic state ends its summer offensive in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 October 2021, [url](#); Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Security in Iraq November 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2020, [url](#); Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, CTC Sentinel, Volume 3, Issue 5, [url](#), p. 12, p. 15

¹⁰¹² US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰¹³ EPIC, ISHM, November 12 – November 19, 2020, 19 November 2020, [url](#)





ISF, the Peshmerga, and the PMF,¹⁰¹⁴ particularly in the Khanaqin and Baquba regions.¹⁰¹⁵ In the April 2021 – June 2021 period ISIL continued to focus its activity in rural and ungoverned areas of Iraq, including Diyala.¹⁰¹⁶ In June 2021, attacks at night by ISIL militants in the border areas between Diyala and Salah al-Din, especially in Mutaibija, al-Mitah, Sbe'at al Bu Khalil, al-Bu Juma'a and Alb Bakr, caused displacement.¹⁰¹⁷

Airstrikes on suspected ISIL hideouts in and around the Hamrin mountains by international coalition forces and/or Iraqi warplanes were reported throughout the October 2020 – October 2021 period.¹⁰¹⁸ Counter-terrorism operations in Diyala involved ISF¹⁰¹⁹, PMF¹⁰²⁰, tribal militia¹⁰²¹ and, to a limited extent, Peshmerga forces.¹⁰²² For instance, in October 2020, the ISF cleared 15 villages near al-Udheim on the border of Diyala and Salah ad-Din.¹⁰²³ On 11 April 2021 the Iraqi army, federal police, rapid response units and PMF fighters performed a joint operation targeting ISIL positions in Lake Hamrin and the surrounding areas in Diyala province.¹⁰²⁴ In May 2021, a joint command centre in Khanaqin, consisting of KRG and federal security officials was set up in Khanaqin to prevent ISIL militants from exploiting buffer zones between Iraqi forces and Peshmerga in disputed areas.¹⁰²⁵ In June 2021, French forces within the International Coalition cooperated with Peshmerga troops in a land and air operation to clear ISIL hideouts between Tuz Khurmatu (Salah al-Din province) and Kifri district (Diyala province).¹⁰²⁶

On 8 December 2020 protests took place in Kifri over unpaid salaries and unemployment. Gunmen from the PUK branch in the Kifri district opened fire on the protesters, resulting in one casualty. The branch building of the PUK was torched.¹⁰²⁷

¹⁰¹⁴ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress – January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁰¹⁵ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress – January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰¹⁶ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰¹⁷ NINA, A govt source warns of mass exodus to border villages between Diyala and Salah al-Din, 24 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁸ EPIC, ISHM, October 7 – October 14, 2021, 14 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Iraqi fighter jets hit ISIS hideouts south of Khanaqin, 9 October 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, 'Main' ISIS hideout destroyed in Hamrin mountains, 23 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, February 25 – March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); Middle East Eye, Islamic State regrouping in northern Iraq and relying on women operatives, 4 February 2021, [url](#); US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 30; EPIC, ISHM, October 1 - October 8, 2020, 8 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, June 25 – July 2, 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁹ EPIC, ISHM, August 26 – September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); VOA, Iraqi military launches operation against IS remnants, 12 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁰ VOA, Iraqi military launches operation against IS remnants, 12 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, April 8 – April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, April 1 – April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, February 4 – February 11, 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²¹ Al-Hamid, R., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: weakened but agile, 18 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, October 1 - October 8, 2020, 8 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²² EPIC, ISHM, May 27 – June 3, 2021, 3 June 2021, [url](#); US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4; ISW, Iraq situation report: July 8-14, 2020, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²³ EPIC, ISHM, October 1 – October 8, 2020, 8 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁴ EPIC, ISHM, April 8 – April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ EPIC, ISHM, May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁶ EPIC, ISHM, May 27 – June 3, 2021, 3 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ Middle East Eye, Iraq: Kurdish security forces kill six protesters, 8 December 2020, [url](#)





On 15 March 2021, seven rockets targeted Balad air base, north of Baghdad, resulting in limited infrastructural damage. The rocket launch site was discovered in the Saadiyat al-Shat area in Diyala.¹⁰²⁸

On 26 July 2021, demonstrators in Khanaqin district blocked a major road leading to a border crossing with Iran to protest poor public services.¹⁰²⁹

ISIL operations

In the July 2020 - September 2020 period, USDOD noted ISIL continued to pose a terrorist threat to Iraqi forces and civilian populations, despite being territorially defeated, its leadership degraded, and its ideology 'widely condemned'.¹⁰³⁰ ISIL continued to operate primarily in rural areas of Iraq and to rely mainly on IEDs and small-arms fire in attacks. ISF and PMF forces and their (supposed) collaborators continued to be targeted by ISIL.¹⁰³¹ In late August 2020, Joel Wing reported an increase in ISIL activities, particularly in Diyala's Khanaqin district. The reported incidents included the kidnappings of truck drivers and mortar attacks on villages.¹⁰³² During the last quarter of 2020, ISIL's strategy, capabilities and cohesion in Iraq did not change significantly, USDOD noted.¹⁰³³ In November 2020, Joel Wing observed that ISIL had de facto control in many rural areas of central and northeast Diyala in Muqdadiya and Khanaqin districts. Hundreds of people had been forced out and dozens of towns were empty.¹⁰³⁴ Most of the security incidents in Diyala in late 2020, which include kidnappings, gun battles and assaults on checkpoints and villages, were reported in these districts.¹⁰³⁵

Whilst the number of ISIL attacks in Iraq decreased in the January 2021 – March 2021 period,¹⁰³⁶ ISIL sustained its insurgency in the countryside north of Baghdad, utilizing the wadis, river basins, and mountains in the area to evade ISF clearance operations.¹⁰³⁷ In the spring of 2021, ISIL attacks increased in Iraq, in keeping with the annual spike in ISIL operations for the month of Ramadan, which began on 13 April 2021. Maintaining its overall strategy, the group continued to conduct hit-and-run and IED attacks, targeting security forces as well as tribal and civic leaders and other symbols of governance.¹⁰³⁸ Intensified attacks on Iraq's electrical infrastructure, using IEDs to destroy power transmission lines, were also

¹⁰²⁸ EPIC, ISHM, March 11- March 18, 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁹ EPIC, ISHM, July 22 – Aug 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁰ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020, 3 November 2020, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰³¹ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020, 3 November 2020, [url](#), p. 4, p. 19

¹⁰³² Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Security in Iraq Aug 22–28, 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 31 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³³ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p.12

¹⁰³⁴ Wing, J., Islamic State attacks slowly creep up in Iraq, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁵ Wing, J., Islamic State attacks decline in December 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 January 2021, [url](#); Wing, J., Security in Iraq November 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁶ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p.14

¹⁰³⁷ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p.19

¹⁰³⁸ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 12





reported in Diyala during that period.¹⁰³⁹ Diyala was ISIL's main focal point during its Ramadan 2021 offensive. Most of the reported assaults on checkpoints and villages, mortar assaults and gun battles were situated in Khanaqin and Muqdadiya districts.¹⁰⁴⁰ In June and July 2021, violence in Diyala dropped off considerably,¹⁰⁴¹ before picking up again in September 2021. A number of these attacks were located in the northwest of the province, along the Salah al-Din border.¹⁰⁴²

ISIL tactics and targets

Michael Knights notes that ISIL has not reached the same levels of strength in Iraq that it boasted in 2014 but did succeed in establishing the physical infrastructure for insurgency in Iraq by using caves to store caches of weapons, ammunition, explosives and other gear and by bringing some key cadres from Syria back to Iraq.¹⁰⁴³ Given Diyala's complex human and physical terrain, its heavy presence of Iran-backed militias and the fact that coalition forces cannot embed with local forces, the province remains the most consistent producer of ISIL attacks. The 'rural overmatch strategy' ISIL employs in Diyala, consists in the creation of bastions and no-go zones in rural areas that are too difficult for the central government to access.¹⁰⁴⁴ Depopulating these areas further and 'essentially daring Iraqi and coalition forces to move in', ISIL awaits better conditions to emerge before attempting a full resurgence.¹⁰⁴⁵ Oxfam reports that armed attacks targeting security forces or civilians usually take place at night. Direct attacks on civilians – such as assassinations of *mukhtars*, civil authorities or tribal members – 'seem to be conducted to exert psychological pressure on the population and erode the social fabric of communities'.¹⁰⁴⁶ For instance, on 27 October 2020, a Shia sheikh from the Bani Kaab tribe was killed near Khailaniyah in the Muqdadiyah area along with four of his relatives. Reportedly the sheikh was beheaded, while his body was rigged with explosives that killed those who had come to retrieve him.¹⁰⁴⁷ On 26 April 2021, ISIL killed the *mukhtar* of al-Qaya village in Khanaqin district.¹⁰⁴⁸

¹⁰³⁹ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁴⁰ Wing, J., Islamic State Ramadan offensive begins, Pro-Iran groups increase attacks in April 2021, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴¹ Wing, J., Violence in Iraq picks up again in July 2021 Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 August 2021, [url](#); Wing, J., Security in Iraq June 2021, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴² Wing, J., Islamic State ends its summer offensive in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴³ Knights, M. and Zelin, A.Y., The Islamic State's resurgence in the COVID era? From defeat to renewal in Iraq and Syria, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁴ Knights, M. and Zelin, A.Y., The Islamic State's resurgence in the COVID era? From defeat to renewal in Iraq and Syria, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁵ Knights, M. and Zelin, A.Y., The Islamic State's resurgence in the COVID era? From defeat to renewal in Iraq and Syria, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁶ OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰⁴⁷ Al-Monitor, Islamic State resurfaces with attacks in Iraq's Diyala province, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁸ EPIC, ISHM, April 22 - April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#)





ISF,¹⁰⁴⁹ PMF,¹⁰⁵⁰ TMF¹⁰⁵¹ and Peshmerga troops¹⁰⁵² remained targets of ISIL attacks. For instance, on 17 February 2021, an ISIL attack killed three PMF fighters and wounded five others in Khanaqin. Reportedly, the 28th PMF brigade clashed with militants while responding to an attack on a checkpoint.¹⁰⁵³

Abductions and kidnappings are tactics used by ISIL to acquire money for ransom, to finance its operations.¹⁰⁵⁴ For instance, on 4 July 2021 the kidnapping of two farmers led to clashes between villagers and ISIL militants near Qara Tapa in Diyala, resulting in the deaths of five civilians.¹⁰⁵⁵

Michael Knights and Alex Almeida documented ‘numerous village evacuations in the Mukhisa-Abu Saida-Muqdadiyah, Khanaqin, and Mutabijah areas’ in 2019-2020. They considered that the aim of the ISIL attacks witnessed in the area appears to be ‘not only to intimidate and extort, but even to depopulate’.¹⁰⁵⁶ USDOS reports that ISIL attacks caused the displacement of residents of seven Kaka’i villages in 2020, two in Khanaqin District.¹⁰⁵⁷ In May 2021, growing ISIL activities led to displacement in seven villages north of Jalawla.¹⁰⁵⁸

Rudaw reported observations shared by a Peshmerga commander stating that ISIL continues to force residents of the disputed territories to pay money and support them under threat of death or having their farms burned.¹⁰⁵⁹ As was the case in earlier summers,¹⁰⁶⁰ ISIL militants were believed to be behind crop fires that were reported in Diyala in 2021 during harvesting season.¹⁰⁶¹

USDOD reports ISIL sought to forcibly recruit individuals in Sunni-majority, rural areas through intimidation or financial inducement during the first quarter of 2020.¹⁰⁶² ISIL’s practice of

¹⁰⁴⁹ NINA, A soldier martyred, another wounded in an ISIS attack on a military point north of Baquba, 6 October 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, September 9 – September 16, 2021, 16 September 2021, [url](#); NINA, 3 soldiers killed and wounded in an attack by ISIS gangs in Diyala, 31 July 2021, [url](#); Iraq Body Count, On the 18th anniversary, Iraq’s state of war, 20 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, February 25 – March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); BBC News, IS militants step up attacks on Iraqi security forces, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁰ EPIC, ISHM, February 25 – March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); Middle East Monitor, Daesh kills three pro-government fighters in Iraq’s Diyala province, 19 February 2021, [url](#); US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020, 3 November 2020, [url](#), p. 4, p. 19

¹⁰⁵¹ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁰⁵² EPIC, ISHM, May 6 - May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵³ EPIC, ISHM, February 25 – March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁴ OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 15; Zelin, A.Y., A year since Baghuz, the Islamic State is neither defeated nor resurging (yet), 25 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁵ EPIC, ISHM, July 1 - July 8, 2021, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁶ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰⁵⁷ US, USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁸ Rudaw, Civilians flee surging ISIS in Diyala, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁹ Rudaw, Isis is regrouping, gaining strength in Iraq’s disputed territories: Peshmerga ministry official, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁰ EPIC, ISHM, May 21 – May 28, 2020, [url](#); Reuters, After years of war and draught, Iraq’s bumper crop is burning, 20 June 2019, [url](#); Bellingcat, Torching And Extortion: OSINT Analysis Of Burning Agriculture In Iraq, 03 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶¹ Basnews, Crops set on fire in disputed Kurdish village, 18 May 2021, [url](#); Basnews, Diyala: IS militants set farms on fire as harvesting season approaches, 6 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶² US, USDOD, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress – January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15





targeting the most susceptible for recruitment continued, particularly in displaced persons camps, where the group has relative freedom of movement and extensive influence.¹⁰⁶³ Middle East Eye reports ISIL increasingly relies on women to secure logistical support for their operatives in the Hamrin Basin.¹⁰⁶⁴

Khanaqin District

After the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from Khanaqin in October 2017, Iraqi forces took control of the district.¹⁰⁶⁵ Although the Federal Army and Badr did not force out all of the existing predominately PUK administration in Khanaqin town and allowed Kurdish Asayish to maintain a presence at checkpoints, security in the district became dominated by the federal authorities.¹⁰⁶⁶ The ensuing lack of security personnel in the countryside between Jalawla and Khanaqin transformed the area into a haven for ISIL cells, who started a campaign of bombings, assassinations, and skirmishes against local security forces.¹⁰⁶⁷ Inadequate coordination between Baghdad-controlled Iraq and the Kurdish region in Diyala's disputed territories facilitated ISIL's exploitation of these 'unguarded spaces' commented the International Crisis Group in October 2019.¹⁰⁶⁸ The lack of government protection caused displacement of villagers from central and northeast Diyala.¹⁰⁶⁹ In a number of the district's towns, PMF forces dominated the security landscape. For instance, Badr controlled security in the Sunni majority town Sadiyah, according to Skelton and Saleem report in 2019.¹⁰⁷⁰ The security situation in the 'mixed Kurdish and Sunni Arab' city of Jalawla was dominated by AAH, the same authors report in 2019.¹⁰⁷¹ In Kifri, the PUK remained in control, the Danish Immigration Service reports in 2018.¹⁰⁷²

Reporting on the April 2021 – June 2021 period, USDOD observed that the presence of PMF in the disputed region exacerbated the security gap in these areas because Peshmerga forces and the PMF did not cooperate.¹⁰⁷³ During the same period, Peshmerga and ISF forces set up a number of Joint Coordination centres, including one in Diyala.¹⁰⁷⁴ This joint command centre of Iraqi and Peshmerga forces was commissioned in Khanaqin in May 2021.¹⁰⁷⁵ By

¹⁰⁶³ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁶⁴ Middle East Eye, Islamic State regrouping in northern Iraq and relying on women operatives, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁵ BBC News, Iraq takes disputed areas as Kurds 'withdraw to 2014 lines', 18 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁶ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq's political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 27; ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15; Saleem, A.Z. et al., Security and governance in the disputed territories under a fractured GOI, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁷ International Review, Iraq's Diyala faces a new insurgency, 22 March 2019, [url](#); Saleem, A.Z. et al., Security and governance in the disputed territories under a fractured GOI, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁸ ICG, Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria, 11 October 2019, pp. 6-7, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁹ Wing, J., Islamic State forcing people out of rural Diyala, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 25 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁰ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Iraq's disputed internal boundaries after ISIS, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰⁷¹ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Iraq's disputed internal boundaries after ISIS, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰⁷² Denmark, DIS/Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁰⁷³ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰⁷⁴ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰⁷⁵ EPIC, ISHM, May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#)





sharing intelligence,¹⁰⁷⁶ setting up joint checkpoints and launching joint operations Iraqi forces and Peshmerga aim to prevent ISIL militants from exploiting buffer zones between both forces in the area.¹⁰⁷⁷ In September 2021, Federal and Peshmerga troops were conducting joint operations in the buffer zones separating both forces.¹⁰⁷⁸ No information has been found on the level of involvement of the PMF in Khanaqin's joint command centre amongst the sources consulted for the reference period of this report.

In September 2020, repeated ISIL attacks in Khanaqin caused the displacement of Kaka'i inhabitants from a number of villages.¹⁰⁷⁹ A Peshmerga source reported that at least 30 Kurdish-majority villages in the area of Khanaqin have been abandoned due to recent ISIL attacks.¹⁰⁸⁰

In October 2020, ISF launched several large-scale operations to prevent smuggling of various goods, including drugs and scrap metal, through Khanaqin district.¹⁰⁸¹

In December 2020, Joel Wing reported Diyala's PMF command responded to ISIL hit and run attacks by building a series of barriers and fortifications around rural towns in Khanaqin and Muqdadiya districts.¹⁰⁸²

Security incidents

According to the July 2020-September 2020 USDOD report, roughly 34 % of the overall attacks registered in the Country occurred in Diyala.¹⁰⁸³ Approximately 31 % of the 309 ISIL attacks reported during the last quarter of 2020, took place in Diyala.¹⁰⁸⁴ Whilst the number of ISIL attacks in Iraq decreased in the January-March 2021 period,¹⁰⁸⁵ ISIL sustained its insurgency in Diyala.¹⁰⁸⁶ As ISIL attacks increased in the spring of 2021,¹⁰⁸⁷ Diyala province remained a focal point of ISIL's insurgency, according to USDOD.¹⁰⁸⁸

In the summer of 2020, Joel Wing reported an increasing number of security incidents, particularly in Diyala's Khanaqin district. Incidents in Diyala ranged from 19 in June to 25 in July, 26 in August and then 31 in September 2020.¹⁰⁸⁹ Since October 2020, the number of security incidents in Diyala dropped from 31 to 20 in November 2020.¹⁰⁹⁰ In December 2020,

¹⁰⁷⁶ Al-Monitor, Iraqi security forces to fill security vacuum that harbors Islamic State, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁷ EPIC, ISHM, May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁸ EPIC, ISHM, September 16 – September 23, 2021, 23 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ Rudaw, Kakai villages emptied by ISIS attacks in Khanaqin, 27 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ EPIC, ISHM, September 24 – October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸¹ EPIC, ISHM, October 15 – October 22, 2020, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸² Wing, J., Security in Iraq November 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸³ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020, 3 November 2020, [url](#), p. 4, p. 19

¹⁰⁸⁴ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020, 9 February 2021, [url](#), p.14

¹⁰⁸⁵ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p.14

¹⁰⁸⁶ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021 – March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p.19

¹⁰⁸⁷ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁸⁸ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁸⁹ Wing, J., Islamic State and Pro-Iran groups both pick up attacks in Iraq in September, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 5 October 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Security in Iraq Aug 22–28, 2020, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁰ Wing, J., Security in Iraq November 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2020, [url](#)





31 security incidents were reported in Diyala,¹⁰⁹¹ dropping to 21 monthly attacks in early 2021 (January, February and March 2021).¹⁰⁹² During ISIL's Ramadan offensive incidents in Diyala rose to 30 in April 2021,¹⁰⁹³ and to 31 in May 2021.¹⁰⁹⁴ In June 2021 only 19 security incidents were reported in Diyala,¹⁰⁹⁵ before dropping to 17 security incidents in July and August 2021 both.¹⁰⁹⁶ In September 2021, 30 security incidents were registered in Diyala,¹⁰⁹⁷ while 22 incidents were counted in October 2021.¹⁰⁹⁸

In the August 2020 – October 2021 period, ACLED reported 219 battles, 185 incidents of remote violence/explosions and 93 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 497 security incidents in Diyala governorate, the majority taking place in Khanaqin district.¹⁰⁹⁹ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in the figure below.

¹⁰⁹¹ Wing, J., Islamic State attacks decline in December 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹² Wing, J., Violence in Iraq, March 2021, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 5 April 2021, [url](#); Wing, J., IS winter break continues in Feb while Pro-Iran groups picking up attacks, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 8 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹³ Wing, J., Islamic State Ramadan offensive begins, pro-Iran groups increase attacks in April 2021, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁴ Wing, J., Islamic State's Ramadan offensive appears over while Pro-Iran groups maintain offensive in May 2021, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 7 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁵ Wing, J., Violence picks up again in Iraq in July 2021, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁶ Wing, J., Islamic State's summer offensive ends in August, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 6 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁷ Wing, J., Islamic State ends its summer offensive in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁸ Wing, J., Oct saw another drop in violence in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>



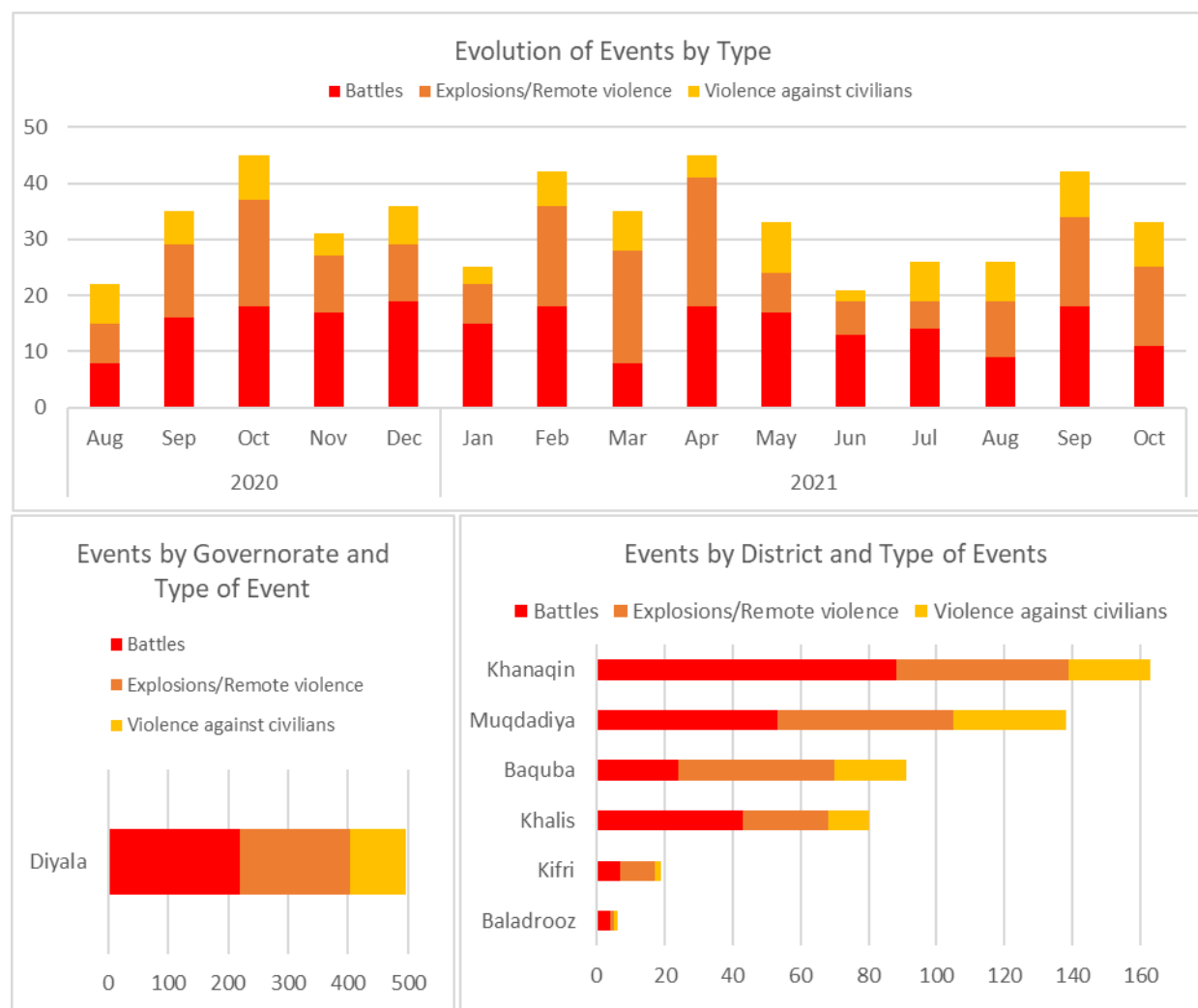


Figure 13: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Diyala governorate, based on ACLED data¹¹⁰⁰

¹¹⁰⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>



2.4.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents¹¹⁰¹ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Diyala	23	26	35	61	43	56	56	112

Table 8: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Diyala governorate¹¹⁰²

State ability to secure law and order

More information on the capacities of the Iraqi forces and the forces under the KRG as actors of protection, including the ability to secure law and order, as well as information on the integrity of armed forces, please see the report [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#).

Following the retreat of ISIL in 2017, the elite Iraqi units that had fought them were replaced by ‘poorly trained and thinly spread forces’, according to The Intercept.¹¹⁰³ Lacking local knowledge and public confidence the Iraqi army and police were too understaffed and unprepared to definitively defeat ISIL in Diyala, it was reported in 2018 and 2019.¹¹⁰⁴ Knights and Almeida observed the ISF were ‘neither trained nor equipped to conduct counterinsurgency’ during 2019 and 2020.¹¹⁰⁵ According to USDOD the ISF struggled to maintain territorial control in regions where ISIL continued to be supported by the local population.¹¹⁰⁶ ISIL retains freedom of movement especially in rural and desert areas, where ISF have a limited presence and where ISIL previously exercised territorial control. The group is primarily active at night, carrying out assassinations and abductions of local leaders and attacks with IEDs on military and civilian targets.¹¹⁰⁷ ISIL’s strategy in these rural areas consists in the creation of no-go zones that are too difficult for the central government to access.¹¹⁰⁸ Badr is the dominant security actor in Diyala, holding sway over both its members and affiliates, including those at all levels of the ISF (army, police).¹¹⁰⁹ According to Skelton and

¹¹⁰¹ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report’s [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI’s methodology.

¹¹⁰² UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

¹¹⁰³ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁴ Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Islamic State’s new game plan in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 9 September 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁵ Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹⁰⁶ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2019-October 25, 2019, 19 November 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹⁰⁷ Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 2, 8; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/101], 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4; ISW, ISIS resurgence update, 19 April 2019, [url](#); ISW, ISIS’ Second resurgence, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁸ Knights, M. and Zelin, A.Y., The Islamic State’s resurgence in the COVID era? From defeat to renewal in Iraq and Syria, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁹ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 22



Saleem, ‘the unity, political allegiance, and synergy of command structure between a PMF faction (Badr) and the ISF (both the army and police) is unique to Diyala and is not seen anywhere else in Iraq’.¹¹¹⁰ Badr-backed PMFs can act with near total impunity in Diyala due to the influence exerted on the security apparatus and provincial administration.¹¹¹¹ The dominance of Badr in Diyala exacerbates sectarian tensions, USDOD reports. Diyala evolved into Iraq’s most consistent site of ISIL attacks due to the lack of coordination between the PMF, the local tribal forces, the Peshmerga, and Coalition forces.¹¹¹² Non-Shia populations in Diyala Province often complain that PMF militias ‘fail to adequately protect their communities, thereby enabling further displacement’.¹¹¹³ Furthermore, as the PMF are distrusted by the local population, many local, ‘impromptu’ militias are active in Diyala, according to the International Review in 2019.¹¹¹⁴

Joel Wing observes ISIL has de facto control in many rural areas of central and northeast Diyala in Muqdadiya and Khanaqin districts. Hundreds of people have been forced out and dozens of towns are empty.¹¹¹⁵ In November 2020 Prime Minister Kadhimi ordered the Ministries of Defense and Interior to reinforce the Iraqi Army and police forces in Diyala, particularly in Abu Saida.¹¹¹⁶ Forces from the army, federal police and the PMF carried out security sweeps and counter-terrorism operations in Diyala province in the reference period.¹¹¹⁷ In December 2020, Diyala’s PMF command responded to ISIL hit and run attacks by building a series of barriers and fortifications around rural towns in Khanaqin and Muqdadiya.¹¹¹⁸ In May 2021, a joint command Center in Khanaqin, consisting of KRG and federal security officials was set up in Khanaqin to prevent ISIL militants from exploiting buffer zones between Iraqi forces and Peshmerga in disputed areas.¹¹¹⁹ In June 2021, PMF undertook a military parade at camp Ashraf, Diyala. According to Farzin Nadimi and Michael Knights, fellows at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the parade showcased a range of Iranian-provided weapon systems intended to make the PMF look ‘like a fully fledged military, on par with or exceeding the capabilities of Iraq’s army, counterterrorism, and federal police forces’.¹¹²⁰ In October 2021, an ISIL attack in the village Rashad, in Muqdadiya district, caused the deaths of eleven civilians. In what appears to be acts of retaliation a group of gunmen

¹¹¹⁰ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 22

¹¹¹¹ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 55

¹¹¹² US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹¹³ ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed militias compete to control Baghdad region, 19 May 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁴ International Review, Iraq’s Diyala faces a new insurgency, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁵ Wing, J., Islamic State attacks slowly creep up in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁶ EPIC, ISHM, November 12 – November 19, 2020, 19 November 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁷ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 32; EPIC, ISHM, August 26 – September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); VOA, Iraqi military launches operation against IS remnants, 12 April 2021, [url](#); VOA, Iraqi military launches operation against IS remnants, 12 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, April 8 – April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, April 1 – April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); Al-Hamid, R., Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq: weakened but agile, 18 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, October 1 - October 8, 2020, 8 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁸ Wing, J., Security in Iraq November 2020, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 3 December 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁹ EPIC, ISHM, May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²⁰ Nadimi, F. and Knights, M., Militias parade under the PMF banner(Part 2): Ground combat systems, 3 July 2021, [url](#)



subsequently killed seven people in the nearby village of Nahr al-Imam.¹¹²¹ The government sent forces and installed a curfew in an attempt to stamp out further retribution.¹¹²² In November 2021, authorities approved a plan to recruit 500 locals from Rashad and Nahr al-Imam to form a local security force to defend against ISIL incursions.¹¹²³

Forces from the army, Federal Police and the PMF carried out security sweeps and counter-terrorism operations in Diyala province.¹¹²⁴ For instance, in August 2021 joint forces from the Diyala police and Counter-Terrorism Service carried out a security operation in the orchards of the village of Had Makasar, Al Dourien, Al Sawaed and Al Had Al-Akhdar in Al-Abara district, northeast of Baquba.¹¹²⁵ In early October 2021, troops from the 4th, 23rd and 24th brigades of the PMF launched a large-scale security operation to pursue ISIL remnants in the Thalab basin, northeast of Diyala.¹¹²⁶

2.4.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Although the share of Diyala's territory invaded and occupied by ISIL was relatively small, the governorate suffered 'extensive' infrastructure and housing damage.¹¹²⁷ Roads were particularly damaged, especially in Khanaqin and Khalis. The most severe residential damage was situated in Muqdadiya, followed by Khalis and Khanaqin.¹¹²⁸ In sub-district Abo Sayda, situated in Muqdadiya district, residential destruction was recorded as high in June 2021 with 'extremely high concerns among returnees regarding [...] mines and unexploded ordnances'.¹¹²⁹ In sub-district Jalawla, situated in Khanaqin district, residential destruction is medium, according to IOM, also in June 2021.¹¹³⁰

According to a January 2018 World Bank report concentrated on the seven governorates directly affected by ISIL's territorial ambitions (Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah Al-Din), the total damage to the housing sector in Iraq is estimated at IQD (Iraqi Dinar) 18.7 trillion, around 138 051 residential buildings were affected. 7 % of these damages were situated in Diyala.¹¹³¹ Damages to the power sector, one of the worst affected, amount to IQD 8.2 trillion (USD 7 billion), of which IQD 38.5 billion are situated in Diyala.¹¹³² The damage to water resources assets, ranging from dams and barrages, irrigation canals, and irrigation pumping stations, is around IQD 134 billion (USD 115 million), 3.8 % of which is located in

¹¹²¹ EPIC, ISHM, October 21 – October 28, 2021, 28 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²² Wing, J., Oct saw another drop in violence in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²³ EPIC, ISHM, November 4-11, 2021, 11 November 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²⁴ US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 32; EPIC, ISHM, August 26 – September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); VOA, Iraqi military launches operation against IS remnants, 12 April 2021, [url](#); VOA, Iraqi military launches operation against IS remnants, 12 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, April 8 – April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, April 1 – April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: weakened but agile, 18 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, October 1 - October 8, 2020, 8 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹²⁵ NINA, A joint security operation to pursue ISIS cells in Al-Abarra orchards in Diyala, 11 August 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²⁶ NINA, The Popular Mobilization Forces begin a security operation to hunt down terrorists in Wadi Thalab, in Diyala, 6 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²⁷ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), pp. 11, 24

¹¹²⁸ Sanad for Peacebuilding and Social Inquiry, Conflict Fragility and Social Cohesion in Diyala Governorate: Khalis, Muqdadiya, Kifri, and Balad, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹¹²⁹ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return dynamics in Diyala governorate, June 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹³⁰ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return dynamics in Diyala governorate, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-9

¹¹³¹ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹¹³² World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 70-72





Diyala.¹¹³³ Total damage to the industry and commerce facilities was IQD 6.0 trillion, of which IQD 51 billion is situated in Diyala.¹¹³⁴

The total damages to the agricultural sector in Diyala are estimated to amount to IQD 557 billion, about 478 million USD.¹¹³⁵ The livestock sector declined by 50 percent since 2003.¹¹³⁶ Damage to municipal assets in Diyala amounts to an estimated cost of IQD 1.5 billion (USD 1.3 million).¹¹³⁷

Total damages to the health sector are estimated to be approximately IQD 2.7 trillion, of which IQD 190.6 billion are situated in Diyala.¹¹³⁸ Damages to the education sector in Diyala amount to IQD 165.9 billion.¹¹³⁹ Across Diyala, more than 60 schools have been totally destroyed, and another 181 partially destroyed in the context of the battle against ISIL, as reported in 2018.¹¹⁴⁰

Damages to cultural heritage, contemporary religious buildings and tourism in Diyala amount to IQD 42 billion.¹¹⁴¹ The total damage costs in the transport sector, consisting of roads, airports, bridges, and railways is IQD 3.3 trillion (USD 2.8 billion), IQD 129.9 billion of which is the damage cost in Diyala.¹¹⁴² The cost of damage to the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) sector is estimated to be IQD 1.6 trillion (USD 1.4 billion), 21 % of which (IQD 329.1 billion) is situated in Diyala.¹¹⁴³ Total damage to government buildings is equivalent to IQD 868 billion (USD 745 million), IQD 71.6 billion of which is situated in Diyala.¹¹⁴⁴

According to the International Crisis Group in October 2020, Iraq's post-war reconstruction remains 'stunted'¹¹⁴⁵ whilst it found in October 2019 that the Iraqi government had made only minimal progress rebuilding post-ISIL areas and reviving their local economies.¹¹⁴⁶ Oxfam notes some progress in 'rehabilitating key infrastructure – notably through UNDP's Funding Facility for Stabilization as well as other stabilization projects' – but 'major gaps remain, especially in Diyala and in camps'.¹¹⁴⁷ In Khanaqin district, different areas faced different challenges, as reported in April 2019. Whilst Khanaqin city is largely in good condition and provides residents and IDPs with a range of services, damages reported in Jalawla are more extensive, with damaged power, water and sewer lines and the hospital failing to meet demand.¹¹⁴⁸

¹¹³³ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 51-53

¹¹³⁴ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 59

¹¹³⁵ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. XVIII-XIX

¹¹³⁶ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 47

¹¹³⁷ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. XXIV, 103

¹¹³⁸ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 21-22

¹¹³⁹ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 27

¹¹⁴⁰ LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 75

¹¹⁴¹ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 41

¹¹⁴² World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 88-90

¹¹⁴³ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 94-97

¹¹⁴⁴ World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 108

¹¹⁴⁵ ICG, Exiles in Their Own Country: Dealing with Displacement in Post-ISIS Iraq, 19 October 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁴⁶ ICG, Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p. 18

¹¹⁴⁷ OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 31

¹¹⁴⁸ IOM, Labour market opportunities and challenges – Khanaqin district, Diyala Governorate, April 2019, [url](#), p. 5





According to the Shelter Cluster's data on Iraq, as of June 2021, reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged houses have been completed in Diyala's Khalis district, where 982 houses were rehabilitated. In Muqdadiya district, 322 house rehabilitations were completed and 270 are planned. In Khanaqin 787 houses had been targeted. Of these, 392 have been rehabilitated and the other 395 are planned, as of June 2021.¹¹⁴⁹

Between September 2020 and February 2021, the explosive hazards risk level on roads in Diyala governorate was elevated most frequently in and around Khanaqin district.¹¹⁵⁰ In November 2018, Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor noted four confirmed hazardous areas (CHA) in Diyala province, and six suspected hazardous areas (SHA) contaminated by IED's.¹¹⁵¹ Mines and explosive leftovers from the 1980 to 1988 Iraq-Iran war are reportedly still threatening the security in sixty locations in Khanaqin district along the Iraq-Iran border.¹¹⁵² Handicap International (HI), a non-governmental organization, works on mine action and since 2017 deploys clearance and survey teams in Diyala. However, mine action operations have limited presence in Diyala governorate because of the security situation, particularly in the Hamrin mountain region where ISIL still operates. Despite high contamination, with 36 000 hectares of the province affected, in early 2021 no operators were active in the province.¹¹⁵³

2.4.7 Displacement and return

As of September 2021, 43 963 IDPs were registered in Diyala, the majority of them were displaced within the governorate.¹¹⁵⁴ By the same date, 239 310 returnees have been registered in Diyala, of which almost half returned to Khanaqin district.¹¹⁵⁵ The majority of the returnees (80 %) were formerly displaced within the governorate.¹¹⁵⁶

Between December 2019 and December 2020, the returnee population in Diyala increased by 8 388 individuals. As such, Diyala recorded more returns in 2020 than in the previous year, when only 4 860 individuals returned.¹¹⁵⁷ Between December 2020 and October 2021,

¹¹⁴⁹ Global Shelter Cluster, UN Habitat Iraq war damaged shelter rehabilitation dashboard, updated 20 June 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁰ iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-28 February 2021), 3 March 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 January 2021), 11 February 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 December 2021), 10 January 2021, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 October 2021), 5 November 2020, available at: [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (1-31 August 2021), 6 September 2020, available at: [url](#)

¹¹⁵¹ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Iraq Mine action, Last updated: 16 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵² Kurdistan 24, Land mine remnants, explosive leftovers remain threat in disputed Khanaqin district, 21 January 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ ACAPS, Iraq Mine action, Briefing note, 22 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹¹⁵⁴ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁵⁵ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁵⁶ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 123 (August-September 2021), October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁵⁷ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return dynamics in Diyala governorate, June 2021, [url](#), p. 1





the number of returnees increased by 11 124.¹¹⁵⁸ The rate of return¹¹⁵⁹ to Diyala, increased from 73 % in June 2019¹¹⁶⁰ to 77% in October 2021.¹¹⁶¹

As of October 2021, 25 188 of Diyala's returnee population were living in critical shelters.¹¹⁶² According to IOM's Return Index, 27 630 returnees face so-called low severity conditions in Diyala, 165 792 persons face medium severity conditions, while 44 958 face high severity conditions.¹¹⁶³ Returnees in Al A'dheem (Khalis district), Al-Mansouriyah (Khalis district), Markaz Al-Muqdadiya (Muqdadiya district), As-Saadiah (Khanaqin district), Jalawla (Khanaqin district) and Qara Tabe (Kifri district) face severity conditions, impacted by concerns about non-state military actors in control of checkpoints.¹¹⁶⁴

In April 2021, Diyala counted a number of locations with no returns. In Khanaqin district 33 locations with no returns are cited,¹¹⁶⁵ in Muqdadiya district there are two areas of no return, Al-Khalis district counts four areas of no return.¹¹⁶⁶ As the security situation 'improved in Khanaqin' over the course of 2020 and families were granted security clearances, IOM registered returns to a number of areas in Khanaqin where no returns had been witnessed before.¹¹⁶⁷

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Iraq, reported 'large-scale closures of IDP camps and informal sites in Baghdad, Kerbala, Ninewa, Al-Anbar, Salah Al-Din, Kirkuk and Diyala in December 2020, resulting in the movement of more than 34 000 people (6 800 households) in a two-month period'.¹¹⁶⁸ The UNOCHA report highlights protection concerns resulting from people leaving the camps 'with little or no notice'.¹¹⁶⁹ Between November and December 2020, IOM tracked a total of 3 870 individuals who arrived in non-camp settings in Diyala after departing camps across the country, mostly as a consequence of the camp closures. Almost two thirds of these individuals returned to their area of origin, while the others moved to new areas of displacement.¹¹⁷⁰

Reporting on 2020, USDOS makes note of numerous reports of IDPs, particularly those suspected of ISIL affiliation, facing hostility from local government officials and populations, as well as expulsion, when they attempted to return to areas of origin.¹¹⁷¹ Likewise, UNAMI observes families with (real or perceived) ISIL affiliation experiencing difficulties to return to

¹¹⁵⁸ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return trends, 30 September 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁵⁹ IOM defines the rate of return as the proportion of returnees originally from a governorate/district to the sum of returnees and IDPs originally from the same governorate/district

¹¹⁶⁰ IOM Iraq, Integrated location assessment IV, 30 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹¹⁶¹ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return overview, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁶² IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return trends, 30 September 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁶³ IOM Iraq, Return Index Findings round 13- Iraq, Aug-Sep 2021, 30 September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁶⁴ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return dynamics in Diyala governorate, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-9

¹¹⁶⁵ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Protracted displacement in Iraq: District of origin profiles, August 2021, [url](#), p.7

¹¹⁶⁶ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Protracted displacement in Iraq: District of origin profiles, August 2021, [url](#), pp.12, 27

¹¹⁶⁷ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return dynamics in Diyala governorate, June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁶⁸ UNOCHA, 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 9 March 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹⁶⁹ UNOCHA, 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 9 March 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹⁷⁰ IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return dynamics in Diyala governorate, June 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁷¹ US, USDOS, 2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#)





their original communities in Diyala, due to ‘local “decrees” and threats of violence’.¹¹⁷² According to al-Hashimi, an expert on Iraq, suspicions that such families could facilitate new ISIL attacks ‘likely contributed to their forced displacement’ and made reintegration more difficult.¹¹⁷³

‘The ISF’s alignment with Badr and the PMF is a driving factor behind IDP perceptions of insecurity regarding return’ to Diyala, Skelton and Saleem report in February 2021.¹¹⁷⁴ Episodes of violence perpetrated by PMF against IDPs were reported in Diyala even after the military campaign against ISIL ended. As observed by Skelton and Saleem, Sunni Arab IDPs consider ‘themselves to be without an ally in the security sector’ as ISF did not intervene to protect them.¹¹⁷⁵ Skelton and Saleem report that some analysts believe that Badr aims at weakening the presence of Sunni Arabs in the province. In this view, forced displacement and the refusal to allow IDPs to return helped to render Diyala’s Sunni Arab population ‘politically impotent and difficult to mobilize’.¹¹⁷⁶ Whilst selected subgroups of IDPs were permitted to return to areas under strict Badr or AAH control, these PMF forces ‘used this right to return as leverage to co-opt IDPs and to build (or more accurately, coerce) allegiances or loyalties with them following return’ argued Skelton and Saleem in February 2021.¹¹⁷⁷

The Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) reports that returns in Diyala may be hampered by local disputes and longstanding tensions. In Muqdadiya district, for example, despite security clearances, 370 families from Al-Khaylania village have not been able to come back due to a dispute between their clan of Sunni Arabs (Al-Khaylani clan) and the Beni Tamim clan from Al-Bazool village (Shia Arabs). The Beni Tamim clan accuse the inhabitants of Al-Khaylania of joining ISIL and attacking their village in 2014. However, people interviewed by CIVIC indicated that the grievances between both communities predated ISIL’s 2014 offensive.¹¹⁷⁸

In many rural areas of central and northeast Diyala in Muqdadiya and Khanaqin districts ISIL militants have forced out hundreds of people and dozens of towns are empty.¹¹⁷⁹ Employing ‘ethnic or sectarian cleansing activities’ in Diyala on a scale not seen in other provinces, ISIL’s insurgency has caused displacement in villages in the Mukhisa, Abu Saida, Muqdadiyah, Khanaqin, and Mutabijah areas.¹¹⁸⁰ In 2020, ISIL attacks caused displacement of residents in Kaka’i and Kurdish villages in Khanaqin District.¹¹⁸¹ In May 2021, growing ISIL activities led to displacement in seven villages in the north of Jalawla.¹¹⁸² In June 2021, ISIL attacks in the border areas between Diyala and Salah al-Din caused displacement, especially in Mutaibija,

¹¹⁷² UNAMI/OHCHR, The right to education, Part one: The legacy of ISIL territorial control on access to education, February 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹¹⁷³ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIL in Iraq: The Challenge of Reintegrating ‘ISIS Families’, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁴ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹⁷⁵ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹⁷⁶ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹⁷⁷ Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Displacement and Iraq’s political marketplace: Addressing political barriers to IDP return, February 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹⁷⁸ CIVIC, Ignoring Iraq’s most vulnerable: the plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#), p. 20

¹¹⁷⁹ Wing, J., Islamic State attacks slowly creep up in Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁰ Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹¹⁸¹ US, USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM, September 24 – October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸² Rudaw, Civilians flee surging ISIS in Diyala, 3 May 2021, [url](#)





al-Mitah, Sbe'at al Bu Khalil, al- Bu Juma'a and Alb Bakr .¹¹⁸³ In October 2021, retaliatory violence after an ISIL attack in the village of Rashad forced 227 families from Nahr al-Imam to abandon their village.¹¹⁸⁴

In its 2020 report on International Religious Freedom, USDOS cited a warning from Raad al-Dahlaki (a Sunni parliamentarian from Diyala Province) of continued forced displacement of Sunnis in Diyala by PMF forces or associated militias. Al-Dahlaki accused government-affiliated Shia militia groups of intimidating the Sunni population in the province, resulting in widespread demographic change along the border with Iran. Another Sunni parliamentarian reported similar acts of intimidation.¹¹⁸⁵

¹¹⁸³ NINA, A govt source warns of mass exodus to border villages between Diyala and Salah al-Din, 24 June 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁴ EPIC, ISHM, October 21 – October 28, 2021, 28 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁵ US, USDOS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#)



2.5 Kirkuk



Map 14: Kirkuk governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.¹¹⁸⁶

2.5.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Kirkuk (previously called al-Tamim)¹¹⁸⁷ is a governorate in northern Iraq. It comprises four districts,¹¹⁸⁸ namely Kirkuk, where Kirkuk city is located, Dibis (Dabes), Hawija (Al-Hawija), Al

¹¹⁸⁶ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁷ Hanish, S. B., The Current Kurdish Iraqi Governments Relations: An Evaluation, December 2013, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁸⁸ Individual reference maps for the four districts can be found via the following links: UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Al-Hawiga District Reference Map Reference Map 2020, 15 July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Kirkuk District Reference Map 2020, 15 July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Dibis District Reference Map 2020, 15 July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Daquq District Reference Map 2020, 15 July 2020, [url](#)



Hawiga) and Daquq.¹¹⁸⁹ UNOCHA and iMMAP draw the borders between Kirkuk and Daquq districts differently from the map depicted above in some of their publications.¹¹⁹⁰

Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated¹¹⁹¹ the governorate's population at 1 726 409 with around 450 000 people living in rural and around 1,3 million people in urban areas.¹¹⁹²

Ethno-religious composition

Described as a 'microcosm of Iraq', Kirkuk has a diverse and mixed population with a variety of ethnic and religious groups, including (Sunni and Shia)¹¹⁹³ Arabs and (Sunni) Kurds,¹¹⁹⁴ but also Turkmen (Sunni and Shia¹¹⁹⁵) and a small community of Chaldo-Assyrian Christians.¹¹⁹⁶ Among these diverse groups, Kurds, Turkmen and Sunni Arabs constitute the major communities.¹¹⁹⁷ Kirkuk city, similarly to the entire governorate, has a mixed population of Kurds, Turkmen and Assyrians.¹¹⁹⁸ While Kirkuk city¹¹⁹⁹ and Hawija district¹²⁰⁰ were said to be predominately populated by Sunni Arabs, the majority in Daquq district were Shia Turkmen and the population in Dibis was mostly Kurdish.¹²⁰¹ Several villages near Daquq district are reported to be inhabited by Kaka'i, an ethno-religious minority.¹²⁰²

Economy

Abundant oil reserves make Kirkuk a governorate of great strategic importance, but also a source for tensions and a longstanding territorial dispute between the Iraqi central government and the KRG.¹²⁰³ The different population groups compete for positions of power

¹¹⁸⁹ UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Kirkuk Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Iraq: Kirkuk Governorate Profile and Humanitarian Response, December 2020, [url](#), p. 1; iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response, Risk level Monitoring Maps of the Airstrike Incident on the District level for the 7 Governorates Nov 2019 - Feb 2021, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹¹ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹² Iraq, CSO, 2021 [تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021](#) [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁹³ Izady, M., Kirkuk and Environs: Ethnic Composition, 2014, 2015-2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹¹⁹⁵ Palani, K., Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq's disputed regions, Al Jazeera, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1; see also Arab America, Kirkuk: The Iraqi City of Black Gold, 17 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁷ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹¹⁹⁸ O'Driscoll, D., Everyday peace and conflict: (un)privileged interactions in Kirkuk, Iraq, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2230

¹¹⁹⁹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 28

¹²⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹²⁰¹ Derzsi-Horváth, A., Iraq after ISIL: Kirkuk, GPPI, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁰² Basnews, Kirkuk: Village of Kakai Minorities Comes under Attack, 20 September 2020, [url](#); KirkukNow, Kakai minority fights for life on two fronts, 29 April 2020, [url](#); see also Derzsi-Horváth, A., Iraq after ISIL: Kirkuk, GPPI, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁰³ Devereux, A., Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk, Jamestown Foundation, 17 June 2020, [url](#); see also International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1





in the governorate, as financial gains can be made from substantial hydrocarbon reserves and the extraction and export of oil and gas.¹²⁰⁴

Road security

As previously reported for 2019 and early 2020,¹²⁰⁵ ISIL continued to threaten road security in Kirkuk governorate in the first half of 2021. Roadside bomb attacks targeted roads connecting Kirkuk, Tikrit and Tooz Khurmatu, hit and run attacks occurred at checkpoints near Kirkuk city.¹²⁰⁶ According to the latest iMMAP publication on the risk of explosions on Kirkuk roads in February 2021, a primary risk was reported to exist on the main road linking Kirkuk city to Baiji through Hawija district, on a stretch of the road connecting Kirkuk city and Tikrit, as well as on the road leading south of Kirkuk city through Daquq district in the direction of Tooz in Salah Al-Din governorate. Moreover, several other stretches of road in Hawija district were classified as carrying a secondary risk regarding explosive hazards.¹²⁰⁷ On 1 September 2020, a woman was killed and three other persons were wounded when a VBIED exploded at the Miryam Bek Bridge checkpoint on the Kirkuk-Tikrit road,¹²⁰⁸ while in August 2021, a roadside IED explosion in Daquq district killed a civilian and injured ten further individuals.¹²⁰⁹

2.5.2 Conflict background

When ISIL launched its 2014 offensive in northern Iraq, the Iraqi army collapsed and ISIL took over Hawija district in south-western Kirkuk governorate.¹²¹⁰ In the wake of the Iraqi army's collapse fighting ISIL in Kirkuk in 2014, Kurdish Peshmerga forces moved in and replaced the federal forces, with Kirkuk city remaining for three years under the rule of the Kurdish PUK and Kurdish forces taking control of the oil fields.¹²¹¹ ISIL administered areas of Hawija district from June 2014, controlling the countryside and rural areas of Kirkuk¹²¹² while Peshmerga forces prevented ISIL from taking over the entire governorate. Between 2015 and 2017, Peshmerga fighters as well as PMU forces in a joint effort began regaining parts of Kirkuk and pushing out ISIL while the remaining areas of ISIL control in Hawija and Daquq were liberated by ISF forces in October 2017.¹²¹³

Boosted by its fighting successes against ISIL, the KRG decided to hold an independence referendum at the end of September 2017, despite objections by the central government and

¹²⁰⁴ O'Driscoll, D., Everyday peace and conflict: (un)privileged interactions in Kirkuk, Iraq, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2228

¹²⁰⁵ Basnews, IS Temporarily Seizes Control of Kirkuk-Baghdad Road, 15 September 2019, [url](#); Kurdistan24, ISIS sleeper cells attack Iraqi army in disputed Kirkuk, kill 2 soldiers, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2021/655], 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 39; see also VOA, Islamic State Resilient as Ever in Iraq, Syria, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁷ iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Kirkuk Governorate 1-28 February 2021 [Map], 7 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁸ Shafaq News, انفجار سيارة مفخخة على طريق محافظتين في العراق [VBIED explodes on road linking to governorates in Iraq], 1 September 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁹ EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹²¹¹ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

¹²¹² Flood, H.D., The Hawija Offensive: A liberation exposes faultlines, 18 November 2017, [url](#), p. 24; Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹²¹³ CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, December 2019, [url](#), p. 6





neighbouring countries.¹²¹⁴ Kirkuk governorate, claimed by both the KRG and the central government, was included in the referendum.¹²¹⁵ In retaliation, Baghdad launched an offensive from 15 to 21 October 2017 against Kurdish security forces and regained control of Kirkuk governorate, driving out the Peshmerga fighters.¹²¹⁶

Since Kirkuk fell back under central government control, multiple forces, among which the Iraqi army, the federal police, PMU, as well as local police, have been deployed in Kirkuk and have taken on security-related tasks. These units do not possess a clear mandate and do not act as a cohesive force.¹²¹⁷ A plethora of state and non-state armed groups affiliated with certain ethnic or sectarian groups were present in the governorate, controlling certain areas and roads as well as manning checkpoints, leading to a sense of insecurity among residents.¹²¹⁸ The societal cleavages along ethnic and sectarian lines as well as weak governance in the area allowed for ISIL elements to expand, converting villages abandoned during the conflict into camps and depositories.¹²¹⁹

For further details on security developments in Kirkuk governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 2.5.3 in [EASO's report on the Security Situation in Iraq](#) from October 2020.

2.5.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

As of June 2020, a wide range of security actors were reported to operate in Kirkuk governorate, including the Iraqi army, the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), an array of PMU, federal and local police and various intelligence services. The International Crisis Group assessed that the high number of security actors was possibly undermining the stability of the governorate instead of contributing to it. Each actor had its own mandate, structure and political affiliation.¹²²⁰ The governorate reportedly lacked a central node for coordination between the different security forces, heightening the risk of escalation.¹²²¹

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

In a May 2020 report, Iraqi security expert Husham al-Hashimi noted the presence of the Counter Terrorism Second Operation Command in the center of Kirkuk, as well as the presence of Federal Police around the cities of Kirkuk and Hawija and two Brigades of the Iraqi Army stationed in the South and West and Southwest of the governorate.¹²²² According to the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), the Iraqi Federal Police was, as of December

¹²¹⁴ Washington Post (The), How the Kurdish independence referendum backfired spectacularly 20 October 2017, [url](#); ISW, The "War after ISIS" begins in Iraq, 15 October 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹⁵ DW, Iraqi Kurd independence referendum: Curfew in Kirkuk, 25 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹⁶ Al Jazeera, Iraq forces in full control of Kirkuk province, 21 October 2017, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, p. i, [url](#); Independent (The), Iraq seizes Kirkuk from Kurds leaving two US allies locked in conflict and bringing end to move for independence, 16 October 2017, [url](#); ISW, The "War after ISIS" begins in Iraq, 15 October 2017, [url](#);

¹²¹⁷ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, pp. i-ii, [url](#)

¹²¹⁸ OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, 5 March 2020, [url](#), p. 15

¹²¹⁹ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS Thrives in Iraq's 'Money and Death' Triangle, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²²⁰ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

¹²²¹ Bridsky, C. H., Iraq's Ethno-Sectarian Landscape: Sunni Arab Collaboration with the Dominant Shi'a Militia Apparatus, Small Wars Journal, 14 November 2020, [url](#); see also Palani, K., Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq's disputed regions, Al Jazeera, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²²² Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the cities [Map], Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)





2019, the main security force in the governorate.¹²²³ The predominantly Shiite Federal Police's 5th, 6th and 14th divisions were responsible for the security in the rural areas, checkpoints on major roads and along the borders of the governorate.¹²²⁴ In November 2020, it was announced that the 6th Federal Police division would withdraw from Kirkuk and the 21st battalion of the 8th division of the Iraqi Army would take its place in Shwan, Dibis and Altun Kupri.¹²²⁵ The elite CTS, which is linked to the PM of Iraq and supervised by the National Security Council, was deployed in Kirkuk in 2017 to fight ISIL. After the ousting of Kurdish forces from the area in October 2017 the CTS assumed overall command of the federal forces in Kirkuk.¹²²⁶ As of November 2020, the number of federal police brigades in Kirkuk governorate was said to have increased to twelve, while there were three Iraqi army brigades stationed there as well.¹²²⁷

During the reference period, ISF activities were reported across the province. Among them operations in Wadi Zghaytoun and Al-Rashad (Daquq district),¹²²⁸ Sargaran sub-district (Dibis district)¹²²⁹ and south of Kirkuk city.¹²³⁰ ISF positions were reported near Qarachogh mountains¹²³¹ and checkpoints in Al-Riyadh sub-district (Hawija district).¹²³² The Iraqi air force carried out airstrikes on ISIL hideouts in the Wadi Shay area.¹²³³

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

The PMU arrived in Kirkuk and other disputed areas in northern Iraq in October 2017 following the Kurdish independence referendum.¹²³⁴ Pro-Iranian PMU, while nominally under central government control, have since pursued their own political and military goals in the area, looking to establish themselves permanently by recruiting fighters locally and creating new factions.¹²³⁵

The Badr Organisation was described as the 'most decisive actor' in provincial politics as well as in the security sector since October 2017, having incorporated the federal police.¹²³⁶ It worked closely with the ISF commander in the area.¹²³⁷ The Badr leader Hadi Al-Amiri

¹²²³ CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹²²⁴ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹²²⁵ Shafaq News, الفرقة السادسة بالشرطة الاتحادية تنسحب من أطراف كركوك [The 6th division of the Federal Police withdraws from Kirkuk regions], 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²²⁶ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 12

¹²²⁷ Bridsky, C. H., Iraq's Ethno-Sectarian Landscape: Sunni Arab Collaboration with the Dominant Shi'a Militia Apparatus, Small Wars Journal, 14 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²²⁸ EPIC, ISHM: September 16 – September 23, 2021, 23 September 2021, [url](#), EPIC, ISHM: September 3 – September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

¹²²⁹ EPIC, ISHM: December 24, 2020 - January 7, 2021, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²³⁰ EPIC, ISHM: October 1 - October 8, 2020, 8 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 15 - October 22, 2020, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

¹²³¹ EPIC, ISHM: September 9 – September 16, 2021, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²³² EPIC, ISHM: July 22 - August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#)

¹²³³ Al-Hurra, "مدمرة" تستهدف أوكلار لتنظيم داعش في كركوك [Iraq – three airstrikes target ISIL hideouts in Kirkuk], 22 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²³⁴ Rudaw, President Salih calls on parties to remain peaceful, 15 October 2021, [url](#); Palani, K., Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq's disputed regions, Al Jazeera, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²³⁵ Palani, K., Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq's disputed regions, Al Jazeera, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²³⁶ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 29

¹²³⁷ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 29; Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 19





reportedly played an instrumental role in the appointment of the provincial governor, Rakan Al-Jabouri.¹²³⁸ In November 2021, a meeting took place between Al-Jabouri and the leader of the Badr Organisation Northern Branch, Muhammad Mahdi Al-Bayati, during which the governor stressed the large role the Badr Organisation played in supporting the security sector and guaranteeing stability in the province.¹²³⁹ Several other PMU groups were also present in Kirkuk, among them Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH) and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH). Those groups reportedly carried out their own economic activities in the area, among which smuggling.¹²⁴⁰ In November 2020, a military leader of KH announced on Twitter that KH would defend Kirkuk against Masoud Barzani (former president of KRI) and his militia.¹²⁴¹

Recruitment into different PMU Brigades in several instances followed ethno-sectarian lines, leading to a 'militarisation of ethno-religious and sectarian identities'.¹²⁴² Sunni tribal fighters from prominent Sunni tribes in Kirkuk such as Jabour, Obeid and Hamdan joined the PMU 56th Brigade,¹²⁴³ therefore it was also referred to as a brigade in the Tribal Mobilisation Forces or Tribal Hashd.¹²⁴⁴ Iran-affiliated PMU set up the PMU 16th Brigade¹²⁴⁵ as well as the 52nd Brigade by recruiting local Shia Turkmen.¹²⁴⁶ There were reportedly overall four Turkmen Brigades within the lines of the PMU, recruited among Shia as well as Sunni Turkmen.¹²⁴⁷ Local PMU recruitment among tribes and Turkmen communities shifted the security balance in the governorate to Turkmen and Arabs at the expense of Kurdish representation.¹²⁴⁸ An attempt by pro-Iran PMU to create a faction for the local Kaka'i community in Daquq district has not been successful so far.¹²⁴⁹ In December 2020, the formation of the first Kurdish PMU unit was announced, numbering about 150 fighters and stationed in Dibis district.¹²⁵⁰ A PMU official later denied the official formation of a Kurdish PMU, saying that residents of a village in northern Kirkuk had submitted a request to form a PMU, which had not been granted yet.¹²⁵¹

Researcher Renad Mansour described the societal role taken on by PMU within the governorate. According to an interviewed tribal leader, even though PMU were responsible

¹²³⁸ Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹²³⁹ Iraq, Kirkuk Governorate official website, الجبوري يبحث مع البياتي اوضاع كركوك [Al-Jabouri discusses the situation in Kirkuk with Al-Bayati], 1 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁰ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 29

¹²⁴¹ Buratha News Agency, كتائب حزب الله: سندافع عن سنجار وتلعفر وكركوك من شر مسعود ومليشياته [Kata'ib Hezbollah; We will defend Sinjar, Tal Afar and Kirkuk from the evil of Masoud and his militia], 26 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴² Palani, K., Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq's disputed regions, Al Jazeera, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴³ Bridsky, C. H., Iraq's Ethno-Sectarian Landscape: Sunni Arab Collaboration with the Dominant Shi'a Militia Apparatus, Small Wars Journal, 14 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁴ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 9

Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 26

¹²⁴⁵ The 16th Brigade has been described as a Turkmen Brigade belonging to the Badr Organisation, see ISW, The "War after ISIS" begins in Iraq, 15 October 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁶ Palani, K., Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq's disputed regions, Al Jazeera, 8 May 2021, [url](#); Bridsky, C. H., Iraq's Ethno-Sectarian Landscape: Sunni Arab Collaboration with the Dominant Shi'a Militia Apparatus, Small Wars Journal, 14 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁷ Al-Hamoud, A., Iraqi Turkmen: The Controversy of Identity and Affiliation, FES, August 2021, [url](#), pp. 21-22

¹²⁴⁸ MP, كركوك على طاولة العلاقات المرتبكة بين بغداد واربيل [Kirkuk at the forefront of uneasy relations between Baghdad and Erbil], 14 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁹ Palani, K., Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq's disputed regions, Al Jazeera, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁰ Saeed, Y., Policy Failures Lead to a Kurdish PMF Battalion in Kirkuk, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 23 December 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Kurdish PMF unit formed in Kirkuk, 13 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵¹ Baghdad Today, مسؤول في الحشد الشعبي ينفي تشكيل حشد كردي في كركوك [PMU official denies formation of Kurdish PMU in Kirkuk], 15 December 2020, [url](#)





for blackmailing residents, he thought they responded quicker and more effectively to a problem since they, unlike the federal police, were locally recruited.¹²⁵² Members of the 56th PMU Brigade were reportedly hired for around 40 % of vacancies in the public sector in Hawija district and Kirkuk city.¹²⁵³

ISIL

A 2020 map by the Center for Global Policy depicted ISIL presence all along the eastern border of the governorate bordering Salah Al-Din (Hamrin mountain range) as well as further areas of Hawija district bordering Makhmour district of Erbil governorate (Qarachogh mountain range).¹²⁵⁴ ISIL elements were regrouping and sheltering in the mountains and gorges and living a 'quasi-nomadic existence' in small groups of fighters, with the triangular region between the cities of Kirkuk, Baiji and Samarra being of specific importance to the group. Their activities ranged from attacks on military and police checkpoints, to the assassination of local leaders and attacks on electricity transmission lines and oil installations.¹²⁵⁵ The disputed territories were characterised by lack of security and governance¹²⁵⁶ and ISIL exploited the lack of coordination between federal forces and Kurdish Peshmerga on the one hand¹²⁵⁷ and between army, federal police and PMU on the other, in order to infiltrate Kirkuk.¹²⁵⁸

ISIL attacks were recorded in all of Kirkuk's districts within the reference period, in Daquq¹²⁵⁹, Hawija¹²⁶⁰, Dibis¹²⁶¹ as well as Kirkuk district.¹²⁶² Especially since the start of 2021, a significant increase in cases of abductions carried out by ISIL fighters in its areas of operation, among them Dibis and Hawija districts, was noted.¹²⁶³

Kurdistan Region security forces

Following the Kurdish independence referendum of 2017, neither PUK nor KDP had any troops stationed in Kirkuk. However, the Badr Organisation and ISF still allowed a certain presence of PUK Asayish in order to undertake intelligence gathering and security oversight

¹²⁵² Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

¹²⁵³ Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 27

¹²⁵⁴ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS Thrives in Iraq's 'Money and Death' Triangle [Map], Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁵ Guardian (The), 'They will never let go': Isis fighters regroup in the heart of Iraq, 11 July 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁶ MP, [url](#) كركوك على طاولة العلاقات المرتبكة بين بغداد واربيل [Kirkuk at the forefront of uneasy relations between Baghdad and Erbil], 14 February 2021, [url](#); see also SIPRI, The resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq: Political and military responses, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁷ Independent Arabiya, "يستغل داعش في كركوك لإرباك المشهد الانتخابي" [ISIL uses its cells in Kirkuk to disturb the electoral process], 9 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁸ MP, [url](#) كركوك على طاولة العلاقات المرتبكة بين بغداد واربيل [Kirkuk at the forefront of uneasy relations between Baghdad and Erbil], 14 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁹ NINA, [url](#) داعش يحرق ثلاث مركبات تعود لمدنيين جنوب كركوك [ISIL burns three civilian vehicles in southern Kirkuk], 16 October 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, [url](#) ضحايا وجرحيان من الشرطة الاتحادية بهجوم لداعش جنوب غربي كركوك [Federal police members killed and wounded in ISIL attack southwest of Kirkuk], 24 July 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁰ Shafaq News, [url](#) ضحية وجرحيان من القوات الأمنية بهجوم لداعش جنوب غربي كركوك [Members of security forces killed and wounded in ISIL attack southwest of Kirkuk], 27 June 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶¹ Kurdistan24, Iraqi army removes outposts in rural Kirkuk amid heightened ISIS threat, 3 September 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Kurdish farmer abducted by ISIS in Kirkuk province, 28 April 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶² Shafaq News, [url](#) "شوان" وتدعو لتعزيز أمن أطراف كركوك [Turkmen Front denounces attack in Shwan and calls for strengthening the security of outskirts of Kirkuk], 19 October 2020, [url](#); KirkukNow, [url](#) فرض حظر التنقل الليلي [Ban on nightly travel in sub-district Shwan], 4 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶³ ORSAM, Iraq's Upcoming Elections: One-List Decision by the Turkmen, 14 April 2021, [url](#)



in Kurdish-majority areas.¹²⁶⁴ In August 2021, the federal government and the KRG agreed to form joint security forces operating in the buffer zones separating their respective territories in Kirkuk, Ninawa and Diyala governorates. It was further declared that six joint coordination centres had been established, one of them in Kirkuk.¹²⁶⁵ In September 2021, joint activities of Peshmerga and federal forces targeting ISIL elements in the buffer zones were reported.¹²⁶⁶ In October 2021, two Peshmerga fighters were killed in an ISIL attack near Altun Kupri in northern Kirkuk.¹²⁶⁷

US-led coalition forces

The international coalition forces that were stationed at the K1 airbase west of Kirkuk city left in March 2020 and handed the base over to the ISF.¹²⁶⁸ ACLED recorded 13 airstrikes carried out by the US-led Global Coalition against ISIL positions in Kirkuk during the reference period, most of them in Daquq district.¹²⁶⁹ For example, in February 2021 the Global Coalition executed eight consecutive airstrikes in Wadi Al-Shay area in southern Kirkuk based on Iraqi intelligence input, killing seven ISIL members.¹²⁷⁰

2.5.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Throughout the reference period, the UN Secretary-General continued to report that ISIL remnants frequently carried out asymmetric attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, especially in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din governorates.¹²⁷¹ During the year 2020 up until September 2021, about 90 operations were claimed by ISIL each month, with the geographical focus of these operations lying primarily in the governorates Salah Al-Din, Kirkuk and Diyala.¹²⁷² In August 2021, an escalation of ISIL attacks was reported for the areas between these governorates, also referred to as the ‘Triangle of Death’.¹²⁷³ In an October 2021 blog post, Iraq analyst Joel Wing referred to Kirkuk as a major target alongside Salah Al-Din governorate during ISIL’s summer 2021 offensive. For August 2021 alone, he reported twenty ISIL-related incidents in the governorate, which again sharply declined in September 2021 with seven such incidents. According to Wing, the insurgent group has a presence in the governorate that manifests itself mostly during spring

¹²⁶⁴ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 30

¹²⁶⁵ EPIC, ISHM: August 12 - August 19, 2021, 19 August 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁶ Shafaq News, تنفيذ فعاليات مشتركة بين القوات الاتحادية والبشمركة بمناطق التماس مع كوردستان [Joint operations between federal forces and Peshmerga in buffer zones with Kurdistan], 17 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁷ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, مقتل عنصرين من البشمركة في كركوك في شمال العراق بهجوم لتنظيم الدولة- (تغريدات) [Two Peshmerga killed in ISIL attack in Kirkuk - tweets], 30 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁸ Bridsky, C. H., Iraq's Ethno-Sectarian Landscape: Sunni Arab Collaboration with the Dominant Shi'a Militia Apparatus, Small Wars Journal, 14 November 2020, [url](#); USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

¹²⁶⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁰ Shafaq News, قتل من داعش بضربات جوية للتحالف الدولي في كركوك [ISIL members killed in Global Coalition air strikes in Kirkuk], 22 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷¹ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 16; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 17; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 18; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 26

¹²⁷² Soufan Center (The), IntelBrief: The Islamic State is Not Finished in Iraq and Syria, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷³ AA, Daesh/ISIS militants attack oilfield in Iraq's Kirkuk, 15 August 2021, [url](#)

and summer campaigns.¹²⁷⁴ ISIL attacks that caused several deaths and/or injuries of security personnel as well as civilians in Kirkuk were, however, also reported during late 2020 and early 2021 as well as autumn 2021.¹²⁷⁵ ACLED data indicates that ISIL was involved in 123 incidents as 'Actor' in Kirkuk governorate between August 2020 and October 2021. These incidents reportedly caused 133 fatalities in total. 18 of these security incidents involved acts against civilians, causing overall 17 fatalities.¹²⁷⁶

EPIC recorded incidents of violence against civilians in Kirkuk governorate almost every month during the reference period, with most of these incidents attributed to ISIL and affecting all four districts of Dibil, Hawija, Daquq and Kirkuk.¹²⁷⁷ The kinds of ISIL-related incidents affecting civilians included attacks on villages and groups of civilians,¹²⁷⁸ killings,¹²⁷⁹ abductions and kidnapping for ransom.¹²⁸⁰

Furthermore, IED explosions were frequently reported, some of which wounded or killed civilians.¹²⁸¹ In several maps published by iMMAP, the number of explosive hazard incidents is depicted for the months from August 2020 until February 2021. Such incidents were recorded for each of the respective months in Kirkuk governorate, with a rise in intensity in September and October 2020. In September 2020, a high-risk level of explosive hazard was related for Kirkuk and Daquq districts with 9 to 13 incidents each and in October 2020 Daquq district was reported to still have the same risk level. In December 2020, Hawija district was classified as high risk with 9 to 13 explosive hazard incidents.¹²⁸² For the months from February to October 2021, ACLED recorded explosive hazard incidents and remote violence

¹²⁷⁴ Wing, J., Islamic State Ends Its Summer Offensive In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁵ For examples of such ISIL-related incidents, see NINA, داعش يحرق ثلاث مركبات تعود لمدنيين جنوب كركوك [ISIL burns three civilian vehicles in southern Kirkuk], 16 October 2021, [url](#); AA, داعش "ل" داعش " في كركوك [Iraq: Two workers killed in ISIS attack in Kirkuk], 30 October 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 - February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 17 - December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#); Shafaq News, ارتفاع إرثاع [Death toll of ISIL attack in Kirkuk rises to two members of security forces as well as a further 4 wounded], 14 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁷ EPIC, ISHM: October 14 - October 21, 2021, 21 October 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 5 - August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 15 - 22, 2021, 22 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 24 - July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 20 - May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 1 - April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 21 - January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 17 - December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 15 - October 22, 2020, 22 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 24 - October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 13 - August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁸ EPIC, ISHM: October 14 - October 21, 2021, 21 October 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 1 - July 8, 2021, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁹ EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 5 - August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁰ Shafaq News, داعش يختطف مدنياً في كركوك.. والغدية 100 ألف دولار [ISIL kidnaps civilian in Kirkuk and demands ransom of 100,000 Dollar], 9 July 2021, [url](#); NINA, داعش يختطف مدنياً جنوب كركوك [ISIL kidnaps civilian south of Kirkuk], 4 April 2021, [url](#); KirkukNow, أسفر الهجوم عن قتلى وجرحى ومختطفين - قرابة 20 مسلحاً "ل" داعش " يهاجمون قرية في كركوك [The attack led to individuals being killed, wounded and abducted - about 20 ISIL militants attack a village in Kirkuk], 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸¹ EPIC, ISHM: August 13 - August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#); AA, إصابة 4 مدنيين بانفجار عبوة ناسفة شمالي العراق [Four civilians wounded in IED explosion in northern Iraq], 23 August 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 10 - September 17, 2020, 17 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸² iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Risk level Monitoring Maps of the "Explosive Hazard Incident" on the District level for the 7 Governorates (Nov. 2019 - Feb. 2021), 1 March 2021, [url](#)



each month, with a spike in August 2021 with ten such incidents recorded across all four districts.¹²⁸³

The Iraqi security forces repeatedly launched operations directed against ISIL in Kirkuk during the reference period.¹²⁸⁴ iMMAP published maps depicting the intensity of airstrikes per district in the months from August 2020 until February 2021. The maps show airstrikes carried out in Kirkuk governorate in each of those months, with December 2020 and January 2021 seeing the most air strike intensity: in December 2020 one air strike was recorded in each of the four Kirkuk districts, while in January 2021, two airstrikes were recorded in Kirkuk district and three such incidents were recorded each in Hawija and Daquq districts.¹²⁸⁵ After February 2021, ACLED recorded overall six airstrikes by Iraqi army and Global Coalition forces in the months of May, June, September and October as well as two Turkish drone strikes in October 2021.¹²⁸⁶

Local media reported on land disputes between Arab and Kurdish communities. Those disputes can be traced back to the confiscation of Kurdish lands and settling of Arabs in Kirkuk under Baath rule. A constitutional article introduced to remedy this problem, return land to its original owners and compensate involved parties has not been fully implemented.¹²⁸⁷ In August 2020, clashes broke out in a village in Daquq district between Kurdish residents and former Arab settlers.¹²⁸⁸ In December 2020, tensions were reported between Kurdish and Arab farmers because of disputes over land in Palkana village in Sargaran sub-district (Dibis district). Arab farmers supported by a PMU militia threatened Kurdish residents, broke into four empty homes and told some residents to leave, only to be stopped by Iraqi army troops.¹²⁸⁹ Disputes over land ownership were also said to be an issue in Daquq district and Laylan sub-district,¹²⁹⁰ for example between the Kaka'i community and former Arab settlers.¹²⁹¹ In November 2021, renewed disputes over land were reported in Sargaran sub-district in Dibis, with Kurds supported by the local police and Arabs supported by the Iraqi army. In Sargaran sub-district, overall twelve villages were reportedly experiencing land disputes.¹²⁹²

¹²⁸³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁴ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, القوات العراقية تطلق عملية جديدة ضد «داعش» في كركوك [Iraqi forces start new operation against ISIL in Kirkuk], 14 May 2020, [url](#); Al-Qabas, العراق: عملية أمنية واسعة لملاحقة عناصر «داعش» في كركوك [Iraq: Widespread security operation to chase down ISIL members in Kirkuk], 19 May 2021, [url](#); AA, Iraq nabs 10 Daesh/ISIS militants in Kirkuk, 19 June 2021, [url](#); Arab News, Iraq launches operation against Daesh after policeman killed in Kirkuk, 28 June 2021, [url](#); Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, العراق: عملية عسكرية لملاحقة بقايا "داعش" بمشاركة التحالف الدولي [Iraq: Military operation to chase down remnants of ISIL in cooperation with international coalition], 6 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁵ iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response, Risk level Monitoring Maps of the Airstrike Incident on the District level for the 7 Governorates Nov 2019 - Feb 2021, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁷ Rudaw, Resolving Kurd-Arab disputes must not affect Iraqi unity: Sadrist, 11 October 2021, [url](#), see also Kurdistan24, Kurdistan leader condemns new Kirkuk Arabization, calls on UN to intervene, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁸ Rudaw, Kurdish villagers, resettled Arab families clash in Kirkuk disputed territory, 2 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁹ KirkukNow, Kurdish villagers "threatened to leave" their homes in Kirkuk, 11 December 2020, [url](#); see also Rudaw, Kurds forced out of Kirkuk village: locals, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁰ KirkukNow, Parliamentary committee to investigate landownership dispute in Kirkuk, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹¹ KirkukNow, Conflict over land of Kaka'i minority in Daquq disputed territories, 27 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁹² Rudaw, Kurdish farmers foil renewed effort to confiscate farmland in Kirkuk, 4 November 2021, [url](#)



Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 137 battles, 107 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 35 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 279 security incidents in Kirkuk governorate, the majority taking place in Daquq district.¹²⁹³ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 17 below.

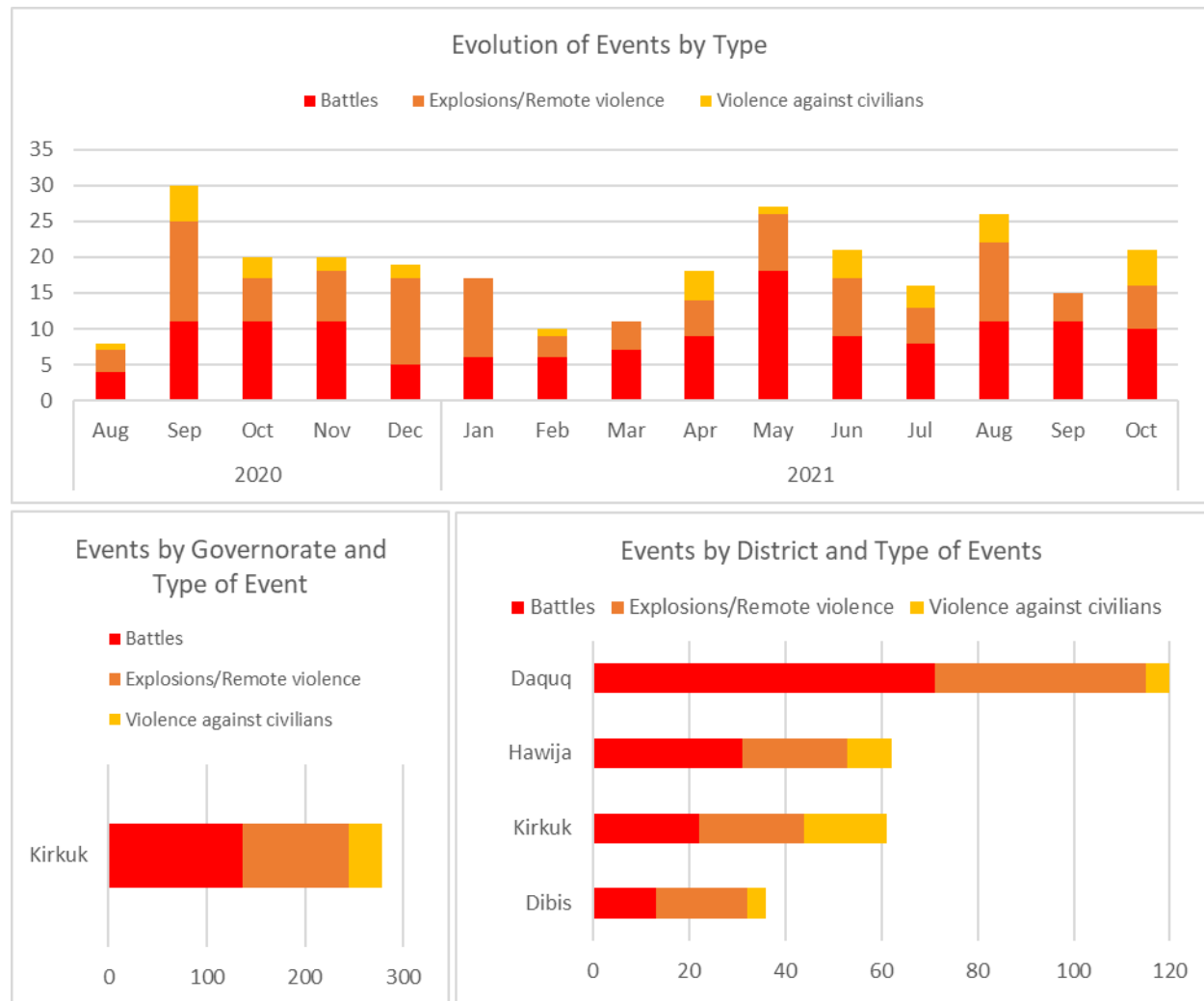


Figure 14: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Kirkuk governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data¹²⁹⁴

¹²⁹³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 16 August 2020, two IED explosions were reported in Al-Riyadh sub-district (Hawija district), the first wounding a civilian and the second killing a woman and injuring two other individuals.¹²⁹⁵
- On 23 August 2020, an IED exploded during Ashura festivities in the Qadisiya neighbourhood of Kirkuk city, wounding four civilians.¹²⁹⁶
- On 6 October 2020, four members of the local police and two members of the federal police were killed and a fifth was wounded in an exchange of fire with ISIL militants.¹²⁹⁷
- On 18 February 2021, ISIL gunmen on two motorcycles killed a civilian in Daquq district in a drive-by shooting.¹²⁹⁸
- On 4 April 2021, a man was abducted from his home by ISIL members in Al-Rashad sub-district (Daquq district) and brought to an unknown location.¹²⁹⁹
- On 18 April 2021, six Katyusha rockets hit the positions of a tribal mobilisation regiment in a village in Daquq district, leading to the death of an Iraqi soldier and three wounded tribal mobilisation fighters as well as two wounded army soldiers.¹³⁰⁰
- On 25 June 2021, ISIL militants attacked a federal police checkpoint in Daquq district and killed five policemen.¹³⁰¹
- On 9 July 2021, ISIL militants kidnapped a civilian in Sargaran sub-district (Dibis district) and demanded a ransom payment of 100 000 USD. Ransom payments were described as one of the most important sources of income for the extremist group.¹³⁰²
- On 31 August 2021, ISIL elements targeted a village in Taza sub-district (Daquq district), burning down a house as well as three vehicles.¹³⁰³
- On 2 September 2021, about 20 armed men attacked a village in Sargaran sub-district (Dibis district) using firearms and explosive devices, wounding eight civilians and military personnel and abducting a civilian. According to the residents, the attackers were ISIL members.¹³⁰⁴
- On 30 October 2021, ISIL militants attacked workers in the coal industry in Hawija district, killing two and wounding a third.¹³⁰⁵

¹²⁹⁵ NINA, استشهاد واصابة اربعة مدنيين بانفجار عبوتين غرب كركوك [Four civilians killed or wounded in two IED explosions in Kirkuk], 16 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁶ AA, إصابة 4 مدنيين بانفجار عبوة ناسفة شمالي العراق [Four civilians wounded in IED explosion in northern Iraq], 23 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁷ Iraq, SMC [Twitter], posted on: 6 October 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁸ Shafaq News, مقتل مدني برصاص داعش في كركوك [Civilian killed in ISIL gunfire in Kirkuk], 18 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁹ NINA, داعش يختطف مدنيا جنوب كركوك [ISIL kidnaps civilian south of Kirkuk], 4 April 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁰ Rudaw, قتل 5 وجرحى بسقوط قذائف كاتيوشا على مقر فوج في كركوك [One killed and five wounded in shelling of Katyusha rockets on brigade headquarters in Kirkuk], 17 April 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰¹ NINA, داعش يهاجم الشرطة الاتحادية واستشهاد خمسة عناصر جنوب كركوك [ISIL attacks federal police and five members], 25 June 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰² Shafaq News, داعش يختطف مدنياً في كركوك... والفدية 100 ألف دولار [ISIL kidnaps civilian in Kirkuk and demands ransom of 100 000 Dollar], 9 July 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰³ NINA, داعش يستهدف إحدى قرى جنوب كركوك [ISIL targets a village south of Kirkuk], 31 August 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁴ KirkukNow, أسفر الهجوم عن قتلى وجرحى ومختطفين - قرابة 20 مسلحاً لـ"داعش" يهاجمون قرية في كركوك [The attack led to individuals being killed, wounded and abducted – about 20 ISIL militants attack a village in Kirkuk], 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁵ AA, العراق.. مقتل عاملين اثنين بهجوم لـ"داعش" في كركوك [Iraq: Two workers killed in ISIS attack in Kirkuk], 30 October 2021, [url](#)



2.5.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents¹³⁰⁶ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 9 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Kirkuk	19	11	29	40	28	9	27	36

Table 9: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Kirkuk governorate¹³⁰⁷

2.5.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Based on data last updated in August 2020, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) reported the area contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 3 357 280 square metres, the area being contaminated by IEDs as 68 480 688 square meters.¹³⁰⁸ By the end of 2020, around 37 square kilometres of the governorate were reported to still be IED contaminated.¹³⁰⁹ According to a January 2021 ACAPS report, Salah Al-Din, Anbar, Ninewa, and Kirkuk were the most affected by ‘new’ mine contamination due to post-2003 internal conflict and ISIL occupation in 2014-2017.¹³¹⁰ Especially the southern part of Kirkuk governorate was described as highly contaminated.¹³¹¹

IED attacks on oil fields and transmission towers caused infrastructure damage during the reference period.¹³¹² In December 2020, the explosion of two IEDs targeting the Khabas oil field caused a fire to break out that could only be extinguished a couple of days later.¹³¹³ The Bay Hassan oil field in Dibis district was repeatedly targeted with explosives, leading in some instances to slight damages,¹³¹⁴ and in one case to the killing of an oil company police officer.¹³¹⁵

During the summer 2021, frequent attacks by ISIL elements on power transmission towers in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah Al-Din provinces led to power outages in the region and affected electricity and water supply.¹³¹⁶ For example, on 13 June 2021, an IED explosion toppled a transmission tower in Al-Riyadh sub-district, leading to electricity disruption in the region.¹³¹⁷

¹³⁰⁶ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

¹³⁰⁷ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

¹³⁰⁸ iMMAP, Recorded Explosive Ordnance Contamination in Iraq - Overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁹ Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 159

¹³¹⁰ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine action, 22 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹³¹¹ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine action, 22 January 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹³¹² Guardian (The), ‘They will never let go’: Isis fighters regroup in the heart of Iraq, 11 July 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹³ Al-Ain, داعش يستهدف حقول "خبار" النفطية بركوك [ISIL targets oil field ‘Khabas’ in Kirkuk], 9 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹⁴ Arab News, Militants attack two oil wells in northern Iraq, production unaffected, 17 April 2021, [url](#); GardaWorld, Iraq: Militants attack oilfield in Kirkuk Governorate early April 17, 17 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, مصدر لروداد: استهداف بئر نفط [Rudaw source: Oil well in Bay Hassan oilfield in Kirkuk targeted], 15 August 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁵ WKI, Kirkuk Minute May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁶ KirkukNow, War of power transmission towers, 7 August 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁷ EPIC, ISHM: June 10 – June 17, 2021, 17 June 2021, [url](#)



Later that same month, an IED targeted a team of engineers charged with repairing a transmission tower in Al-Rashad sub-district that had been blown up previously.¹³¹⁸

According to an IOM survey in spring 2021, in the majority of locations surveyed in Hawija district, returnees reported moderate destruction to their houses as well as insufficient supply of water and some returnees reported insufficient access to electricity, with 32 locations reporting reconstruction underway and 49 locations saying that no reconstruction efforts had been undertaken yet.¹³¹⁹

2.5.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 90 582 IDPs were registered in Kirkuk governorate, originating to a large part from within the governorate (58 %), but also from Salah Al-Din (22 %), Ninewa (10 %), Diyala (6 %), as well as Anbar, Baghdad, Babil and Erbil governorates. Within Kirkuk governorate, the IDP population was primarily concentrated in Kirkuk district (91 %) and to a lesser extent in Daquq (7 %).¹³²⁰ As of March 2021, the city of Kirkuk reportedly hosted a significant non-camp IDP population of 73 404 individuals, with the highest concentration (18 %) residing in the Hay Al Jamia-Mahalla neighbourhood.¹³²¹ In November 2020, the closure of an IDP camp near the city reportedly left thousands of IDPs at risk.¹³²² About 1 200 families had to leave the camp but were unable to return to their home areas.¹³²³

As of September 2021, in Kirkuk governorate, 9 168 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses or unowned or uninhabitable houses), most of them in Kirkuk district.¹³²⁴ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 90.1 and 99.9 % of IDP households in Hawija district lived in severe or extreme need. Between 60 and 80 % lived in similar circumstances in the other districts of the governorate.¹³²⁵

In August and September 2021, IOM documented 23 134 IDPs from Kirkuk governorate in other parts of the country, most of them in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Salah Al-Din.¹³²⁶ According to IOM, as of 30 September 2021, 350 886 returnees to Kirkuk governorate were reported.¹³²⁷ According to a February 2021 survey, a particularly high proportion of interviewed households that departed from camps and returned to Daquq district reported feeling unsafe in their place of arrival. There were also reports of serious protection incidents in the return areas, including threats of physical violence against returning families in Hawija district.¹³²⁸

¹³¹⁸ Shafaq News, تفجير يستهدف الكوادر الهندسية لوزارة الكهرباء في كركوك [Explosion targets group of engineers of electricity ministry in Kirkuk], 26 June 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Protracted Displacement In Iraq: District of Origin Profiles, August 2021, [url](#), p. 30

¹³²⁰ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³²¹ IOM Iraq, DTM: Urban Displacement in Federal Iraq, 14 March 2021, [url](#), p. 15

¹³²² MEE, Iraq: Closure of Kirkuk camp leaves displaced in despair, 30 November 2020, [url](#); MSF, Displaced people in Iraq's Laylan camp express fears as camp closes, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³²³ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Exiled at Home, Internal displacement resulted from the armed conflict in Iraq and its humanitarian consequences, 13 June 2021, [url](#), p. 18

¹³²⁴ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁵ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹³²⁶ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁷ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁸ Protection Cluster, Iraq – Protection Monitoring System, Report 1, February 2021, [url](#), p. 6



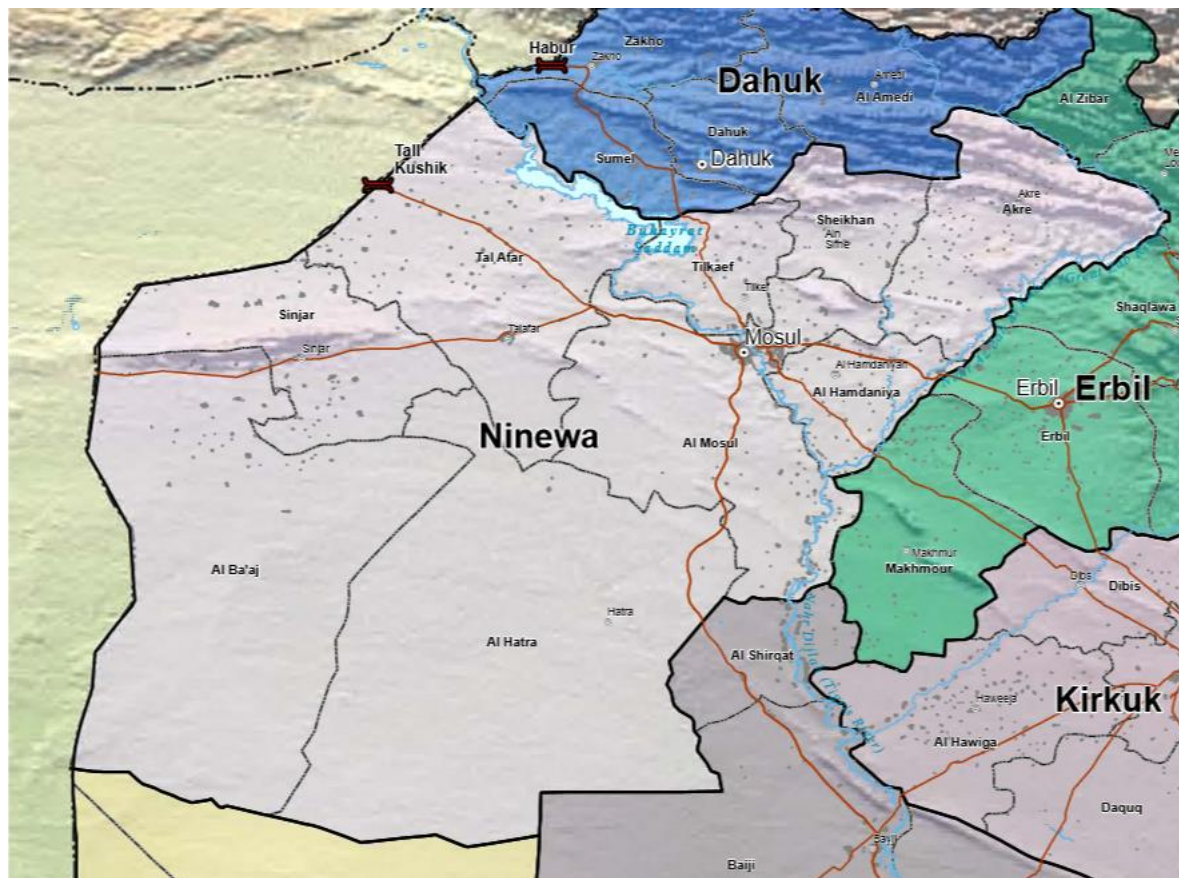


Some returnees to Hawija district reported concerns regarding potential ISIL attacks, blocked returns and non-state security actors in charge of checkpoints.¹³²⁹

¹³²⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Protracted Displacement In Iraq: District of Origin Profiles, August 2021, [url](#), p. 31



2.6 Ninewa



Map 15: Ninewa governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.¹³³⁰

2.6.1 General description of the governorate

The governorate of Ninewa is the third largest in Iraq,¹³³¹ and the second most populated governorate.¹³³² It shares borders with Syria, the governorates of Erbil and Dohuk, both part of the KRI, as well as the governorates of Anbar, Salah al-Din.¹³³³ The Capital is Mosul.¹³³⁴ Parts of the governorate incorporate the ‘disputed territories’, contested between the Iraqi government and the KRG. The governorate of Ninewa includes the districts of Mosul, Tel Afar, al-Hamdaniya, Al-Shikhan, Akre, Tel Kayf, al-Hatra, Sinjar, Makhmour and al-Ba’aj.¹³³⁵ The districts of al-Sheikhan and Akre fall under the administration of the KRG, which came about following the establishment of the Green Line amid the ceasefire between the Saddam regime and the Kurds in 1991.¹³³⁶

¹³³⁰ UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

¹³³¹ NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2

¹³³² IAU, Ninewa Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#)

¹³³³ EASO, Iraq: Security Situation (2019), 30 October 2020, [url](#), p. 118

¹³³⁴ UN Interagency Information and Analysis Unit (IAU), Ninewa Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#)

¹³³⁵ NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2

¹³³⁶ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5-6



Makhmour lies in disputed territory claimed by both Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi government. The Iraqi Army took control of Makhmour after the Kurdish independence referendum in September 2017. Peshmerga control up to the edge of Qara Chokh Mountain and the Iraqi Army maintains the flat area.¹³³⁷

Population

For 2021, the Iraqi Central Statistical Organization (CSO) estimated the governorate's population at 4 030 006.¹³³⁸

Ethnicity

Ninewa is characterised by its ethnoreligious diversity. Sunni Arabs constitute the majority of the population.¹³³⁹ Other ethnic groups include Arab Shias, Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Turkmens¹³⁴⁰ (both Sunni and Shia),¹³⁴¹ Shabaks, in addition to other smaller minorities.¹³⁴²

Economy

Agriculture was one of the main contributors to the economy in Ninewa governorate. Approximately 40 percent of the country's wheat and barley production was produced in the governorate.¹³⁴³ After the fall of Mosul in 2014, ISIL took control of larger parts of the agricultural sector. ISIL exported large parts of the agricultural production to Syria.¹³⁴⁴ The prevalence of landmines left behind by ISIL and security concerns, as well as smuggling of food and agricultural products were some of the challenges facing farmers after ISIL's fall. According to media outlet Diyaruna, government efforts to rehabilitate the agricultural sector has led to progress in agricultural activities.¹³⁴⁵ However, the drought and water crisis that struck governorate in 2021 resulted in a drop in production.¹³⁴⁶ As a consequence, farmers have left their lands to seek employment in urban areas.¹³⁴⁷ In addition, fishery and power production are other sectors affected by the depletion of water sources in the governorate.¹³⁴⁸ The governorate's industrial sector, which included phosphor, sulphur and cement, made up

a significant portion of job opportunities outside the agricultural sector. Much of the industrial sector came under ISIL control in 2014.¹³⁴⁹ The industrial sector, which suffered heavy damage and looting during ISIL's occupation, has shown signs of gradual recovery. In late August

¹³³⁷ Defense Post (The), 'it's very easy for ISIS- Peshmerga Commander warns of return to Iraq mountain town, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

¹³³⁸ Central Statistical Organization (CSO), 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021, [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] (table), n.d., [url](#)

¹³³⁹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹³⁴⁰ NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴¹ IOM, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Governorate profile: post-2006 IDP need assessment, June 2008, [url](#), p. 3

¹³⁴² NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴³ UN Habitat, City profile of Mosul city, Iraq: Multi-sector assessment of a city under siege, October 2016, [url](#), p. 29

¹³⁴⁴ RAND corporation, When the Islamic State comes to town, 2017 [url](#), p. 15

¹³⁴⁵ Diyaruna, Iraqi agricultural industry thriving after ISIS, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁶ Norwegian Refugee Council, Water crisis and drought threaten more than 12 million in Syria and Iraq, 23 August 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁷ Daily Sabah, Drought threatens disaster as Iraqi farmers forced to leave land, 14 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁸ Norwegian Refugee Council, Water crisis and drought threaten more than 12 million in Syria and Iraq, 23 August 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁹ RAND corporation, When the Islamic State comes to town, 2017 [url](#), p. 20





2020, Ninewa's governor announced the re-opening of 10 factories, including sugar, dairy products, as well as medical and Pharmaceutical products. In September 2020, Diyaruna reported that there were around 2 000 projects underway to rehabilitate the industrial sector.¹³⁵⁰

Road Security

According to iMMAP, the explosive risk level on the roads in Ninewa Governorate from August 2020 until February 2021 showed different stretches of the main roads from Mosul to Tal Afar, Sinjar (and the to the Syrian border), and to Dohuk, Erbil and Makhmour, as well as to Salah al-Din governorate as being primary risk roads in the governorate. The Mosul Sinjar road stands out as having more recurrent high-risk stretches during this period.¹³⁵¹

2.6.2 Conflict background

Conflict with ISIL

Mosul's geographic location, an important juncture to multiple major road networks, provided key lines of communication for ISIL fighters to cross from Syria. Its proximity to Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk made it a primary base for AQI to rebuild itself in the mid-2000s.¹³⁵²

In June 2014, an estimated 1300 ISIL fighters seized control of Mosul.¹³⁵³ Although many civilians fled, others stayed behind enduring the ISIL period of control.¹³⁵⁴ ISIL's continued attacks on Sinjar, Zummar and the Ninewa plains, led to the displacement of nearly one million people.¹³⁵⁵ ISIL deliberately targeted and killed those who refused to pledge allegiance to the organisation, including ethnic and religious minorities, ISF and government members. Ethnic and religious minorities who refused to convert were killed or forcibly expelled from their lands, 'women were turned into sexual slaves' and children were forcibly recruited.¹³⁵⁶

The battle to liberate Mosul (dubbed 'we are coming Mosul') began in October 2016. Intense and prolonged fighting caused massive destruction to the city, including the infrastructure and public services. ISIL fighters prevented many civilians from leaving the city, leaving many trapped in their homes. Notwithstanding ISIL's obstacles, an estimated 800 000 people were able to flee the city, amid ongoing fighting.¹³⁵⁷ In July 2017, after nine months of intense fighting, the then Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi formally declared victory over ISIL.¹³⁵⁸

¹³⁵⁰ Diyaruna, Ninawa's industrial sector gets back on track, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵¹ iMMAP, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din Governorates, 01-31 August 2020, 6 September 2020, [url](#), iMMAP, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din Governorates, 01-31 December 2020, 10 January 2021, [url](#), iMMAP, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din Governorates, 01-28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵² Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹³⁵³ Aljazeera, Iraqis flee Mosul after fighters seize city, 11 June 2014, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁴ BBC News, Inside Mosul: What's Life like under Islamic State, 9 June 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Humanitarian needs review, November 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹³⁵⁶ Minority Rights Group International, Mosul after the Battle: Reparations for civilian harm and the future of Ninewa, January 2020, [url](#) p. 7

¹³⁵⁷ Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), Iraq after ISIL: Mosul, 21 August 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁸ BBC News, Battle for Mosul: Iraq PM Abadi formally declared victory, 11 July 2017, [url](#)





ISIL's activities declined significantly after the loss of its capital, Mosul, in 2017. ISIL reverted to asymmetric attacks, targeting security forces and community leaders, in addition to destroying farms and residential buildings.¹³⁵⁹ In the end of 2018, the number of attacks steadily increased again¹³⁶⁰ and continued to rise throughout 2019 and 2020¹³⁶¹. In an article published in May 2020, Iraq experts Knights and Almeida assessed that ISIL's activity data and operating modus showed that ISIL obtained a wider range of operational attack cells within the governorate than the year before.¹³⁶² Military campaigns, led by Iraqi and US-led coalition forces, under the slogan 'Will of Victory', against ISIL's former heartlands pressured ISIL to step up its activities. ISIL further capitalized on the widespread protests in October 2019 and the subsequent redeployment of security forces to central and southern Iraq to launch attacks.¹³⁶³

In August 2014, ISIL's campaign of killings, abduction, and enslavement, targeting the Yazidi-majority district of Sinjar. The district's disputed status made it an epicentre for sectarian and political tensions and disputes. The expulsion of ISIL from Sinjar in 2015¹³⁶⁴ triggered a proliferation of armed groups and political influences. As a result, the district once again became an area of contention between various local and regional power players, including the Kurdish region, the federal government, KDP, PKK (including the Sinjar Resistance Units - Yekîneyên Brexwedana Sengalê (YBS)) and the PMU.¹³⁶⁵ This has deterred the recovery of local governance according to International Crisis Group.¹³⁶⁶

Turkish military incursion

Turkey's military ambition to eradicate PKK strongholds in Iraq have spilled over to Sinjar. The PKK have a presence in Sinjar since 2014, when they came to assist the Yazidis in driving out ISIL.¹³⁶⁷ Turkey launched military operations in January 2020, targeting PKK and its Yazidi affiliates, the YBS.¹³⁶⁸ In June 2020, Turkish forces launched operation Claw-Eagle, targeting PKK in northern Iraq, including Sinjar, Qandil, and Harkuk regions.¹³⁶⁹

2.6.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

This section aims at focusing on updated information on the status, and areas of operation of the various armed actors after 31 July 2020.

For more information on the main actors and their areas of control within the governorate, please see section 2.6.2 of the [EASO-COI report Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#).

¹³⁵⁹ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹³⁶⁰ EASO, Iraq: Security Situation, March 2019, [url](#), p. 125

¹³⁶¹ EASO, Iraq: Security Situation, 30 October 2020, [url](#), p. 128

¹³⁶² Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of the Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, 5 May 2020, [url](#), p.17

¹³⁶³ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, rightsizing the current 'Comeback', 12 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁴ New York Times (The) (NYT), Kurdish fighters retake city of Sinjar from ISIS, 13 November 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, Winning the Post-ISIS battle for Iraq in Sinjar, 20 February 2020, [url](#) p. 18

¹³⁶⁶ International Crisis Group, Winning the Post-ISIS battle for Iraq in Sinjar, 20 February 2020, [url](#), p. 15

¹³⁶⁷ Al-Monitor, Iran, Turkey have own plans for Iraq's strategic Sinjar, 13 November 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁸ Al-Monitor, Turkey bombs Yazidi militias in Iraq, 21 January 2020, [url](#), Al-Monitor, Turkey bombs PKK targets in northern Iraq as government's rating sag, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁹ Defense Post (The), Turkey deploys troops against Kurdish rebels in Iraq, 17 June 2020, [url](#)





Iraqi Security Forces

In 2014, Peshmerga forces advanced into Ninewa to fight ISIL and fill the security void after the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces at the time. In October 2017, the Iraqi army took control of areas held by Kurdish forces, after the federal government condemned the KRI's referendum for independence, prompting Kurdish forces to withdraw from areas outside the boundaries of the KRG.¹³⁷⁰

ISF forces continue to clear the area of ISIL, including with the arrest of prominent leaders within the organisation.¹³⁷¹ In November 2020, Iraqi forces arrested the organisation's 'military official', Abu Musab, the 'logistical official', Abu Sufyan, and the 'administrative emir' of the Badia and Al Jazeera state in Zummar.¹³⁷²

CJTF-OIR concluded in USDOD's report for the first quarter of 2021 that the ISF had the ability to 'sustain forces during longer operations', employing its own aircraft, but also with coalition air support. In March 2021, the ISF launched a 15-day operation, dubbed Ready Lion, including airstrikes, against ISIL in Makhmour Mountains, destroying caves and killing at least 27 ISIL militants.¹³⁷³

ISF have taken action to restrict cross-border infiltration of weapons and ISIL militants from Syria.¹³⁷⁴ In May 2021, Iraqi authorities launched a coordinated project, with participation of the Joint Command operations, US-led coalition, the Ministries of Defence and the PMU, to enhance security along the Syrian border, including digging of trenches, and installing watchtowers and advanced surveillance technologies.¹³⁷⁵

In May 2021, Raed al-Hamid, independent researcher, identified the locations of military activities carried out by the various security forces against ISIL in Iraq, as of March 2021. According to a map published by Newlines Institute, ISF's areas of operations in Ninewa governorate include the eastern and western parts of Mosul City, the Ninewa Plains, Tal Afar, Ba'aj, Hatra, Kairouan and all the western areas along the border with Syria and the border to the governorate of Anbar.¹³⁷⁶

In October 2020, the Iraqi government and the KRG, under the auspices of the UN, reached an agreement, focusing on stabilising governance and promoting reconstruction in Sinjar district, in order to help bolster the return of displaced families. As a condition, the agreement stipulates the removal of all armed factions from the area and the placing of the security sector under the Iraqi federal government.¹³⁷⁷ In December 2020, Iraqi forces deployed the first troops to the district,¹³⁷⁸ including two brigades of the federal police.¹³⁷⁹ Iraqi News

¹³⁷⁰ Reuters, Kurdish forces withdraw on June 2014 lines: Iraqi army commander, 18 October 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁷¹ Anadolu Agency (AA), Iraq Hunts down Daesh/ISIS terrorists in Ninevah, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷² Emirates Policy Center (EPC), ISIS Strategy in Iraq, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷³ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021-March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p.29 - 31

¹³⁷⁴ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISP), 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁵ Al-Monitor, Iraq ramps up border security via tunnels, surveillance, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁶ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISP), 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁷ Al-Monitor, Baghdad, Erbil reach security, administrative agreement in Sinjar district, 13 October 2020, [url](#), UN News, New agreement in Iraq signals 'a first and important step' toward a better future, 9 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁸ National Iraqi News Agency, [Joint operations confirm/NINA/ beginning of implementation of Sinjar agreement.. describes as important], 2 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁹ Iraq News Agency (INA), [Joint operations: All armed elements left Sinjar], 3 December 2020, [url](#)





Agency (IRNA) reported that local police took charge of security inside the district, whilst federal police and border guards took positions on the outskirts of the district. IRNA further asserted that the governorate was under the supervision of the Ninewa Operation Command.¹³⁸⁰ Notwithstanding these developments, armed groups continue to retain a presence in the district according to the Atlantic Council, reporting in April 2021.¹³⁸¹ According to Shafaq News, Sinjar has two local authorities, one appointed by the federal authorities, located in Sinjar, and the other led by the mayor, elected by the provisional council, operating from Dohuk.¹³⁸² The terms of the agreement call for the withdrawal of all armed factions from the borders of Sinjar and the appointment of 2 500 members of the internal security forces in Sinjar. The agreement also calls for the withdrawal of the PKK from the district of Sinjar.¹³⁸³

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

An intelligence briefing focusing on the emergence of Iraq's militia forces, published by Newline Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISP) in May 2021,¹³⁸⁴ reported that Ninewa governorate hosted the highest numbers of Shiite PMU fighters since liberation operations ended in 2017. The PMU have more than 30 000 fighters in various parts of the governorate.¹³⁸⁵ The briefing recorded 46 different PMU factions operating throughout the governorate. These factions consist of Shia, Sunni and other ethnically affiliated armed groups.¹³⁸⁶

According to NISP's briefing in May 2021, the PMU have a number of financial offices that engage in activities including imposing taxes on local businesses, public transportation vehicles, and parking space. Those who do not comply are subject to extortion, threats or possible attacks. Competition amongst the various offices is also prevalent. The key offices heading these activities are those affiliated to KH, AAH, Badr organisation, Harakat al-Nujaba', Saraya al-Khorasani and Kataib al-Imam Ali.¹³⁸⁷

Despite their role as protectors, the PMU remain a 'source of contention and polarisation'.¹³⁸⁸ Misconduct and harassment committed by the PMU affiliated factions triggered protests and demonstration amongst the local population in September 2020, demanding the withdrawal of the PMU forces and replacing them with local security forces.¹³⁸⁹ The Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael, reported that increased pressure on the PMU resulted in the removal of the founder of the Shabak-led 30th Brigade and the withdrawal of the Christian-led 50th Brigade from several towns, like Bashiqa and Batnaya.¹³⁹⁰ However, the

¹³⁸⁰ Iraq News Agency (INA), [جميع المظاهر المسلحة غادرت سنجار](#), [Joint operations: All armed elements left Sinjar], 3 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸¹ Atlantic Council, The Sinjar agreement is a good idea, but is it a dead end?, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁸² Shafaq News, Despite divisions .. One key to overcome the Sinjar crisis, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸³ Shafaq News, Text of Sinjar agreement, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁴ Newline Institution for Strategy and Policy, A thousand Hezbollah: Iraq's emerging militia state, May 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁵ Newline Institution for Strategy and Policy, A thousand Hezbollah: Iraq's emerging militia state, May 2021, [url](#), p. 24

¹³⁸⁶ Detailed information of the various factions are described in Newline Institution for Strategy and Policy, A thousand Hezbollah: Iraq's emerging militia state, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 24-28

¹³⁸⁷ Newline Institution for Strategy and Policy, A thousand Hezbollah: Iraq's emerging militia state, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 38, 39

¹³⁸⁸ Clingendael, Trapped in a vicious cycle: Factors of instability in the Ninevah Plains, May 2021, [url](#), p. 17

¹³⁸⁹ MECRA, Protests after PMU's 30th Brigade in Nineveh asked to withdraw, 1 September 2020, [url](#), Rudaw, Protestors demand PMF withdraw from Iraq's Nineveh, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁰ Clingendael, Trapped in a vicious cycle: Factors of instability in the Ninevah Plains, May 2021, [url](#), p. 18





factions were later re-installed, setting up new checkpoints in the area.¹³⁹¹ Clingendael also reported that the PMU prevented Iraqi forces, the Counter Terrorism Services (CTS), as well as coalition forces access to their areas of control.¹³⁹²

The attack on Erbil airport in October 2020, was reportedly launched from the Ninewa Plains, in an area controlled by the PMU.¹³⁹³ Other attacks have been reportedly launched from the same area, in February,¹³⁹⁴ and in September 2021.¹³⁹⁵ Both attacks targeted Erbil International Airport.¹³⁹⁶ (See [section 2.9 Erbil](#))

Sunni PMU groups are posted at security checkpoints to identify persons.¹³⁹⁷ According to Newline Institute, the government does not share intelligence data with them, making it difficult for them to carry out their duties. The tribal PMU factions are generally deployed to ISIS active areas, e.g. Al-Jazeera area, and areas that lack permanent security presence, e.g. south of Ba'a j, Tal Abta and Hatra. This has led to high numbers of casualties among the tribal PMU groups.¹³⁹⁸

PMU also have a large presence along the Iraqi-Syrian border, whereby their groups conduct joint operations with ISF to restrict ISIL infiltration across the border. The border area is also a lucrative source for PMU's illicit activities.¹³⁹⁹ Other areas, identified by researcher Raed al-Hamid (see map section 2.6.3), where PMU groups have operations include Tal Safuk, Ba'aj, Mosul, al-Qayrawan, Zummar, Rabia, al-Sakar, Tal Afar Ayathya, Sinjar, al-Zawiya, Tal Banat, Tal Qasab and Muhallabiya.¹⁴⁰⁰

Kurdistan Regional Government Security Forces

For information on the location and status of the Kurdish forces in Ninewa governorate, see section 2.6.2 of the [EASO-COI report Iraq: Security Situation \(2019\)](#).

Turkey's military operations against the PKK also include the district of Sinjar, and areas where the KDP 'enjoyed great influence'. This has put pressure on the KDP to balance its economic dependency on Turkey that funds the KRG's survival, with its 'pan-Kurdish sympathies'.¹⁴⁰¹ The PKK's continual efforts to consolidate a corridor between Qandil, Sinjar and northern Syria has escalated tensions between the PKK and KDP.¹⁴⁰² No information could be found amongst the source consulted about direct confrontation between the two parties within Ninewa governorate during the reference period for this report. Sources cited in

¹³⁹¹ Clingendael, Trapped in a vicious cycle: Factors of instability in the Ninevah Plains, May 2021, [url](#), p. 18

¹³⁹² Clingendael, Trapped in a vicious cycle: Factors of instability in the Ninevah Plains, May 2021, [url](#), p. 19

¹³⁹³ Rudaw, Rockets targeting Erbil launched more than 1,000 meters from PMF checkpoint, brigade commander, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁴ Jerusalem Post (The), Was Iran behind attack on US forces in Iraq's Erbil?, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁵ EPIC, Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor, September 9-September 16, 2021, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁶ Jerusalem Post (The), Was Iran behind attack on US forces in Iraq's Erbil?, 16 February 2021, [url](#), EPIC, Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor, September 9- September 16, 2021, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁷ Newline Institution for Strategy and Policy (NISP), A thousand Hezbollah's: Iraq's emerging militia state, May 2021, [url](#), p. 39

¹³⁹⁸ Newline Institution for Strategy and Policy (NISP), A thousand Hezbollah's: Iraq's emerging militia state, May 2021, [url](#), p. 39

¹³⁹⁹ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but agile, Newline Institution for Strategy and Policy (NISP), 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁰ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISP), 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰¹ Carnegie Middle East Center, The making of the Kurdish frontier: Power, conflict and governance in the Iraqi-Syrian borderlands, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 17, 18

¹⁴⁰² Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The) (TWI), 23 December 2020, Iraqi Yazidis: Trapped between the KDP and the PKK, [url](#)





al-Monitor and MENA Affairs indicated that the ongoing tensions and earlier confrontations, have raised concerns of a looming intra-Kurdish conflict if no measures are undertaken to curb PKK's advancements in northern Iraq, including Sinjar.¹⁴⁰³ The withdrawal of the armed factions from Sinjar, including the PKK, in accordance to the October 2020 agreement between the federal government and the KRG have so far not been implemented.¹⁴⁰⁴ KRG's advisor on Yazidi affairs, Sheikh Shamo, told the Atlantic Council in April 2021 that the PKK still controls bases on Mount Sinjar.¹⁴⁰⁵

ISIL

ISIL uses the governorates of Anbar and Ninewa as hubs to move fighters to other security areas. It relies on remote bases in the desert of Anbar and Ninewa to house fighters and establish command centres for training and logistics purposes. The desert areas of Ba'aj and Hatra districts, respectively southwest and south of Mosul, are one of ISIL's operational geographic sectors. Another sector is Makhmour, located in the southeast of the governorate, linking Ninewa with the neighbouring governorates of Erbil and Salah al-Din.¹⁴⁰⁶ Emirates Policy Center (EPC) stated in an analysis on ISIL's strategy in Iraq, published in January 2021, that ISIL continues to disrupt security within the governorate, intimidating and targeting civilians and members of the security, reportedly blowing up homes and assassinating local leaders (*Mukhtar*), tribal sheikhs, as well as officials and officers. EPC's analysis further indicated that ISIL still maintains sleeper cells, allowing operatives to move freely.¹⁴⁰⁷ The EPC asserted that the organisation has not been able to resume its former stature. According to EPC, this is partly due to extensive counter operations, carried out by security forces, which often lead up to arrests of ISIL members.¹⁴⁰⁸

Kurdistan workers Party- Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK)

In the post-ISIL era, PMU's endorsement of PKK has allowed the latter to establish itself in Sinjar. The group has concentrated its presence in Mount Sinjar and the sub-district of Sinuny, where it established secure locations and built tunnels, used to protect them from Turkish attacks, and to facilitate mobility and relocation of militants across the Iraqi-Syrian Border.¹⁴⁰⁹ Al-Monitor reported in October 2020, that PKK is involved in the abduction and forcible recruitment of youths under the age of 18 of both sexes. The source also cited that the PKK carried out unlawful arrests against those who oppose their ideology, detaining them in secret prisons in the mountains. In addition, they bring officers from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps to Mount Sinjar.¹⁴¹⁰

Al-Monitor reported in February 2021 that Turkey targeted the Sinjar area in pursuit of what it described as 'high-value' PKK targets.¹⁴¹¹ In June 2021, Turkish Intelligence targeted and killed two key PKK figures operating in Makhmour camp, one of which was the head of the camp, Salman Bozkur. The camp hosts 12 000 Kurds from Turkey who fled to northern Iraq in the

¹⁴⁰³ Al-Monitor, Deadly attacks stoke KDP-PKK tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 June 2021, [url](#), MENA Affairs, The inevitable conflict between PKK and KDP in Iraq, 9 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁴ New Humanitarian (The), Despite government promises, lives in Sinjar remain on hold, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁵ Atlantic Council, The Sinjar agreement is a good idea, but is it a dead end?, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁶ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISP), 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁷ EPC, ISIS Strategy in Iraq, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁸ EPC, ISIS Strategy in Iraq, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁹ Carnegie Middle East Center, The making of the Kurdish frontier: Power, conflict and governance in the Iraqi-Syrian borderlands, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁴¹⁰ Al-Monitor, Yazidis react to Sinjar accord amid growing KRG-PKK tensions in Iraq, 27 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹¹ Al-Monitor, Turkey escalates attacks against PKK rebels across northern Iraq, 10 February 2021, [url](#)



early 1990s.¹⁴¹² Turkey's campaign, commonly referred to as 'signature strikes', involve fly and search missions of PKK militants, assessing behavioral patterns of individuals on a drone screen, and targeting those who bear characteristics of certain militants.¹⁴¹³

2.6.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020- October 2021

Conflict with ISIL

The number of attacks in Ninewa governorate gradually declined in the second half of 2020,¹⁴¹⁴ but witnessed an increase in 2021, mainly during the summer months.¹⁴¹⁵ Joel Wing attributes the increase partly to ISIL's attacks on the power grid.¹⁴¹⁶

According to CJTF-OIR, ISIL is waging a 'low-level insurgency'. ISIL fighters are mainly organized in 'small cells, operating in rural areas and relying primarily on improvised explosive devices (IED) and small-arms fire to carry out attacks against both civilians and security forces'.¹⁴¹⁷ Iraqi expert, Husham Al-Hashimi, estimated in May 2020 that there were around 100 ISIL fighters operating from urban centers in Ninewa, further adding an additional 350 fighters operating from areas with high ISIL concentration, the so-called 'Triangles of Death', stretching over the governorates of Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninewa, including a second triangle stretching from Makhmour, Shirqat to Khanoukeh Mountains.¹⁴¹⁸

CJTF-OIR reported fewer attacks carried out in Ninewa governorate in the second quarter of 2020, 24 in total, compared to the liberated governorates of Diyala and Kirkuk that recorded 150 and 70 attacks respectively for the same period.¹⁴¹⁹ According to data collected from ACLED, Janes and EPIC, cited by CJTF-OIR, 12.3 % of ISIL attacks occurred in Ninewa during the last quarter of 2020.¹⁴²⁰ Clingendael Institute, based on collected data from ACLED, reported a decline in the number of incidents carried against ISIL by the ISF and the Global Coalition in the Ninewa Plains during 2020 compared to 2018 and the same level of engagement against ISIL by the PMF and TMF during 2018 and 2020.¹⁴²¹

In the first quarter of 2021, CJTF reported that ISIL cells continued small-scale attacks in the south of Mosul against ISF and PMU.¹⁴²² In March 2021, Iraqi forces and the US-led coalition

¹⁴¹² Jamestown Foundation (The), Turkey conducting targeted killings of PKK leaders in Iraq: what next?, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹³ Jamestown Foundation (The), Turkey conducting targeted killings of PKK leaders in Iraq: what next?, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁴ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Violence continues to decline in Iraq, winter 2020-21, 04 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁵ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Islamic State's summer offensive in Iraq ends in August, 6 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁶ Wing, J., Musings on Iraq, Islamic State's summer offensive in Iraq ends in August, 6 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁷ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 1, 2020 – December 31 2020, 5 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁴¹⁸ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS 2020: New structures and leaders in Iraq revealed, Newline Institute for Strategy and Policy (NISP), 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁹ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. April 1, 2020 – June 30 2020, 4 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 22, 23

¹⁴²⁰ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. October 1, 2020 – December 31 2020, 5 February 2021, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁴²¹ Clingendael, Trapped in a vicious cycle: Factors of instability in the Ninevah Plains, May 2021, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁴²² US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2021-March 31, 2021, 30 April 2021, [url](#), p. 17



carried out airstrikes, as part of the Operation Ready Lions, against 120 hideouts in Makhmour Mountains, killing 27 ISIL militants.¹⁴²³

ISIL continued to focus its activities on rural areas, exploiting areas with low security presence.¹⁴²⁴ The second quarter of 2021 witnessed multiple attacks, including a power transmission tower and power lines.¹⁴²⁵ In October 2021, J. Wing reported a drop in the number of ISIL attacks throughout the country, 103 in August and 70 in September, of which 10 took place in Ninewa. Wing added Ninewa is a logistic hub. Most attacks carried out in the governorate are usually to keep civilians and security forces away from ISIL's area of operations.¹⁴²⁶

Turkish military incursion

Al-Monitor observed that Turkey's military offensive against PKK elements in Sinjar resulted in targeted attacks against Yazidi Resistance Units, the YBS, which Turkey considers a local wing of the PKK. YBS has denied these allegations.¹⁴²⁷

The increased Turkish presence in Sinjar prompted Iranian-backed PMU factions to deploy more forces to the area. The PMU's control of Sinjar after the withdrawal of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in 2017 brought about a closer alliance between the PKK and several PKK-affiliated groups, like the YBS that officially joined the PMU in 2019.¹⁴²⁸ Jamestown Foundation reported in July 2021, that prominent-Iranian backed units, including AAH, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba'a and the Badr-organization threatened Turkey with military action if it launched operations in Sinjar. Jamestown Foundation assessed that the statements appeared, at least temporarily, to deter Turkey from launching a major operation in the area.¹⁴²⁹ However, on 17 August 2021, Turkey resumed their airstrikes, targeting a makeshift hospital in the village of Sikiniye. The attack resulted in five deaths. According to al-Monitor several of the victims were reportedly civilians and the rest members of the Yazidi militia, YBS, according to Al-Monitor.¹⁴³⁰

¹⁴²³ Air Force Magazine, Coalition aircraft, Iraqi forces continue large offensive targeting ISIS, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁴ US USDOD (US Department of Defense) Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve-Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. April 1, 2021 – June 30 2021, 30 July 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴²⁵ Anadolu Agency (AA), Bomb attack targets power line in Iraq's Ninevah province, 8 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁶ Wing, J, Musings on Iraq, Oct saw another drop in violence in Iraq, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁷ Al-Monitor, Turkey targets Yazidi militia in Iraq over PKK Links, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁸ Jamestown Foundation (The), Iranian-backed Iraqi militias deter Turkish intervention in Sinjar, 16 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁹ Jamestown Foundation (The), Iranian-backed Iraqi militias deter Turkish intervention in Sinjar, 16 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁰ Al-Monitor, Turkish airstrikes claim Yazidi lives in Iraq's Sinjar, 18 August 2021, [url](#)



Security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 44 battles, 204 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 33 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 281 security incidents in Ninewa governorate, the majority of which took place in Mosul district.¹⁴³¹ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 20 below.

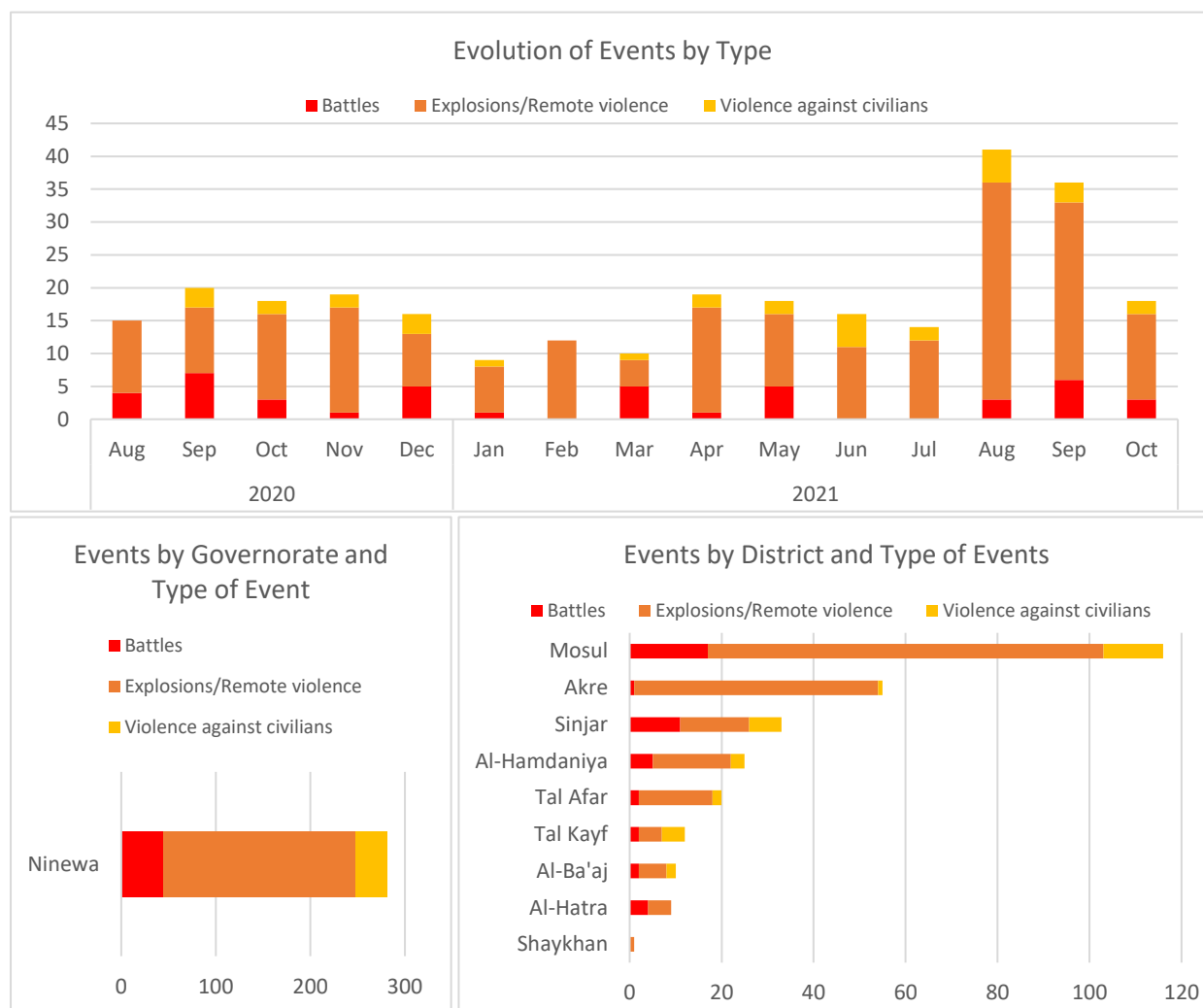


Figure 15: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Ninewa governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁴³²

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 13 September 2020, two IEDs exploded, targeting a civilian vehicle in al-Shoura district, south of Mosul. One civilian died.¹⁴³³

¹⁴³¹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

¹⁴³² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

¹⁴³³ National Iraqi News Agency (NINA), [مصدر أمني: إستشهاد مدني بانفجار عبوتين ناسفتين جنوب موصل], 12 September 2020, [url](https://www.nina.net.iq/)



- On 13 September 2020, another IED killed four civilians from one family on the Qayyara road southeast of Mosul.¹⁴³⁴ The same day another roadside IED wounded two civilians in the village of Ain al-Jash, south of Mosul.¹⁴³⁵
- In mid-January 2021, a bomb blast killed eight Iraqi soldiers and one civilian in the village Shara'ih al-Shimal, near the town of Sinjar. According to Bas News, the bomb was aimed at a commander and his bodyguards.¹⁴³⁶
- On 17 August 2021, Turkish airstrikes targeting a makeshift hospital in the village of Sikiniye, Sinjar district, killed five people. Several victims were reportedly civilians and the rest members of the Yazidi militia, YBS, according to Al-Monitor.¹⁴³⁷
- On 30 August 2021, Bas News reported that armed men opened fire at two civilians in the area of al-Qadisiya, Tal Afar district, killing one and abducting the other.¹⁴³⁸

2.6.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents¹⁴³⁹ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 10 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Ninewa	15	7	29	36	36	20	47	67

Table 10: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Ninewa governorate¹⁴⁴⁰

2.6.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

IOM ranks 33 locations in the governorate as being areas of high severity in terms of residential destruction. These locations are situated in the districts of Mosul, Tel Afar, Tilkaif, Sinjar and al-Hamdaniya.¹⁴⁴¹ The scale of the damage continues to hamper the return of IDPs who fled their homes during the fight against ISIL. The Covid-19 pandemic and imposed restrictions have delayed access and implementation of programming and monitoring.¹⁴⁴²

The medical NGO Médecins San Frontières (MSF) reported in July 2021, that the medical system has not recovered since the battle against ISIL ended.¹⁴⁴³ Patients lack adequate secondary health care services, skilled surgery staff and post-surgical care. People wounded

¹⁴³⁴ National Iraqi News Agency (NINA), الموصل، انفجار عبوة ناسفة جنوب شرق الموصل، [Four persons from one family injured by explosive ordinance southeast Mosul], 13 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁵ National Iraqi News Agency (NINA), الموصل، انفجار عبوة ناسفة جنوب الموصل، [Two civilians injured in explosion of explosive ordinance south Mosul], 13 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁶ Basnews, Bomb blast kills nine people in Sinjar, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁷ Al-Monitor, Turkish airstrikes claim Yazidi lives in Iraq's Sinjar, 18 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁸ Basnews, Multiple terrorist attacks reported in Iraq in 24 hours, 30 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁹ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

¹⁴⁴⁰ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

¹⁴⁴¹ IOM, Protracted Displacement in Iraq: Revisiting categories of return barriers, 25 January 2021, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁴⁴² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 21, 22 & 38

¹⁴⁴³ Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), Iraq: Providing much-needed post-operative care in Mosul, 19 July 2021, [url](#)





during the fighting were unable to receive care or follow-up treatment. Even those who could afford private health struggle to find adequate treatment. The public sector is also dependent on the services provided by NGOs, such as MSF. In June 2017, MSF opened a maternity hospital - Nablus - in western Mosul. In 2019, it opened a smaller facility at al-Rafidain Primary Health Care Centre, also in western Mosul. The MSF facility provides obstetric and neonatal care.¹⁴⁴⁴

The conflict against ISIL has caused widespread contamination through explosive ordnance. A common practice by ISIL fighters was to plant IEDs around public facilities as well as private property. The Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) reported in October 2020, that several areas in Sinjar remain effected, further delaying the return of IDPs. Areas south of Sinjar Mountain belong to the most affected. These include Sinjar city, al-Qahtaniya and Qaeyrrawan. Clearance operations are often delayed by long approval procedures, poor coordination, lack of adequate equipment and training.¹⁴⁴⁵

2.6.7 Displacement and return

Displacement

The highest numbers of IDPs in the country originate from Ninewa governorate, according to IOM's DTM report for August and September 2021.¹⁴⁴⁶ The majority of the IDPs in Ninewa governorate, estimated at 256 034 individuals as of October 2021, originated from the districts of Mosul, Sinjar and al-Ba'aj.¹⁴⁴⁷ The governorate itself hosts about 22 percent of the country's IDP population. The majority, about 77 percent, lives in out-of camp-settings. Mosul and Shekhan districts host the largest numbers of IDPs in the governorate.¹⁴⁴⁸

In January 2021 IOM produced an updated in-depth report on return barriers, "Protracted Displacement in Iraq: Revisiting categories of return barriers".¹⁴⁴⁹ IOM observed a change in the duration IDPs spent in displacement- so called protracted displacement- between September 2018 and August 2020. Findings show significant increase in the number of IDPs living in protracted displacement in August 2020 compared to September 2018,¹⁴⁵⁰ 92 percent and 57 percent respectively.¹⁴⁵¹ Return barriers such as lack of material resources, services and security, as well as political factors are some of the underlying factors behind protracted displacement noted the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.¹⁴⁵²

Almost 20 ,000 Yazidis in Iraq continue to live in displacement camps in Iraqi Kurdistan. Many of them originate from Sinjar, according to IOM.¹⁴⁵³ Living conditions in the camps are

¹⁴⁴⁴ Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), Iraq: Providing much-needed post-operative care in Mosul, 19 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁵ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Caught in the middle: The impact of security and political fragmentation on civilian protection in Sinjar, October 2020, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁴⁴⁶ IOM, DTM , Iraq master list report 123, August-September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁴⁷ IOM, DTM , Iraq master list report 123, August-September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁴⁸ IOM, Return dynamics in Ninewa governorate, May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁴⁹ IOM, Protracted Displacement in Iraq: Revisiting categories of return barriers, 9 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁰ For more details on the various return barriers and their impact on protracted displacement in Ninewa governorate see IOM's report - [Protracted displacement in Iraq: Revisiting categories of return barriers](#)

¹⁴⁵¹ IOM, Protracted Displacement in Iraq: Revisiting categories of return barriers, 9 January 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁴⁵² Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Iraq's internally displaced: A protracted crisis, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 3, 4

¹⁴⁵³ IOM, Iraq Mission, Six years after Yazidi genocide, investment in Service is crucial for returning Yazidi families, 16 July 2020, [url](#)





reportedly overcrowded.¹⁴⁵⁴ In June 2021, a fire broke out at the Sharaya camp, in Dohuk governorate, forcing over 200 families to seek shelter in nearby schools.¹⁴⁵⁵

The October 2020 agreement signed between the GOI and the KRG, aimed at restoring security and stability to Sinjar district, was set as an incentive for the Yazidis to return. ACAPS¹⁴⁵⁶ reported that 47 % of the Yazidis who had been displaced by ISIL six years ago had not returned to Sinjar district, as of October 2020.¹⁴⁵⁷ However, despite prevailing reluctance, the community noted a gradual increase in return since June 2020. The increase is mainly due to the economic consequences of the lockdown driven by the Covid-19 pandemic during displacement.¹⁴⁵⁸

Return

Ninewa governorate continues to receive returnees, previously dispersed across various locations (926 locations) around the country. The governorate has the highest number of returnees in the country, 1 922 496, according to IOM, DTM Master List Report for August-September 2021.¹⁴⁵⁹

Camp closure is another factor pertaining to return dynamic. IOM maintained that individuals originating from high severity areas often opted to remain in protracted displacement. This being the preferred option prior to the closure of the camps. Mosul and Sinjar districts witnessed the highest number of arrivals from camp settings (85 % and 77 % respectively), whereby the majority were arriving from camps in Dohuk governorate.¹⁴⁶⁰ Between November 2020-december 2020, IOM observed that at least 61% of the new arrivals from camps to non-camp setting returned in high-severity locations. IOM concluded that the protracted displacement in camps before their closure can be explained with the lack of favourable living conditions in the place of return.¹⁴⁶¹

The districts hosting the highest numbers of returnees living in high severity conditions are predominately Sinjar (88 %) and al-Ba'aj (81 %). Some of the drivers attributed to the severity conditions are poor services and lack of livelihood.^{1462 1463}

Mosul district is one of the areas with a high-level return migration. Conditions are reportedly 'more conducive' with a relatively low number of return to high severity areas (2%).¹⁴⁶⁴ REACH initiative's Returns and Durable Solutions (ReDS) Assessment for Mosul sub-district, including Mosul City, identified the following drivers for return: increased safety and security, camp closure, nostalgia, security clearance granted, job opportunities and difficult living conditions in area of displacement.¹⁴⁶⁵

¹⁴⁵⁴ Acaps, Iraq: the return to Sinjar, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁵ Middle East Eye, In pictures: Fire tears through Yazidi displacement camp in Iraq, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁶ ACAPS is an independent specialist in humanitarian need analysis and assessment.

¹⁴⁵⁷ ACAPS, Iraq: the return to Sinjar, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁸ ACAPS, Iraq: the return to Sinjar, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁹ IOM, DTM, Iraq master list report 123, August-september 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁴⁶⁰ IOM, Return dynamics in Ninewa governorate, May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁴⁶¹ IOM, Return dynamics in Ninewa governorate, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁴⁶² IOM, Return dynamics in Ninewa governorate, May 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁶³ For more information on the conditions in the various districts of return, see IOM's analysis of return in Ninewa governorate, see IOM, Return dynamics in Ninewa governorate, May 2021, [url](#).

¹⁴⁶⁴ IOM, Return dynamics in Ninewa governorate, May 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁶⁵ REACH, Markaz Mosul sub-district, March 2021, [url](#), p. 3





The Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), an international organization promoting the protection of civilians in conflict,¹⁴⁶⁶ reported in April 2021, that local authorities used coercive measures in Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Anbar to pressure IDPs to leave the camps. For example, in December 2020, returnees to Mosul reported that members of the Ministry of Migration and Displacement and the National Security Services threatened residents in the Hamam al-Alil camp if they did not leave. Other families, CIVIC spoke to reported that they were misinformed about conditions in their areas of origin.¹⁴⁶⁷ Families renting apartments in Mosul City reported that they were unable to return to their homes due to lack of services, livelihood opportunities, or due to opposition from community leaders and security actors in the areas of origin. Reportedly, Sunni Arabs from Sinjar faced threats due to ongoing community tensions or because of the presence of certain security actors.¹⁴⁶⁸

Tensions along the disputed areas are other contentious factors impeding return. The Hassan Sham area in the Ninewa Plains was one example. The area included eleven villages under the control of the Peshmerga forces. According to CIVIC report on displaced persons from April 2021, the KRG has denied around 4 000 Sunni Arabs permission to return. A similar situation occurred in the Rabee'a area of Tal Afar, where 1 200 Sunni Arabs cannot return.¹⁴⁶⁹

Sunni Arabs from Sinjar fear retaliation from security actors, authorities and members of the community, due to perceived affiliation to ISIL. Sunni leaders and civilians reported that they are harassed and threatened upon return. Members of the Sunni community are regularly stopped at checkpoints and kept for a long time for interrogation.¹⁴⁷⁰

In May 2021, the governorate received repatriated Iraqis from al-Hol camp in Syria. It was the first repatriation of Iraqis following ISIL's defeat in Baghuz, its last stronghold in Syria. The families arrived at the camp of Jeddah 1 near Mosul. The 94 families were the first group of 500 families cleared for return by the Iraqi government.¹⁴⁷¹ In September 2021, a second convoy of 115 families repatriated from al-Hol to al-Jeddah camp.¹⁴⁷² According to the New Humanitarian, the families will remain at the camp for several months before they return to their homes, located in different parts of Iraq. Iraqi authorities have kept a low profile on the repatriation in order to avoid security concerns and community backlash. Humanitarian workers at the camp told the New Humanitarian that they received short notice of the arrivals and were therefore not fully prepared to accommodate the returnees.¹⁴⁷³ An estimated 30 000 Iraqis remain held in the al-Hol camp.¹⁴⁷⁴

¹⁴⁶⁶ For more information on CIVIC, see home page, about us, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁷ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Ignoring Iraq's most vulnerable: The plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#) p. 9

¹⁴⁶⁸ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Ignoring Iraq's most vulnerable: The plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#) pp. 9, 10

¹⁴⁶⁹ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Ignoring Iraq's most vulnerable: The plight of displaced persons, April 2021, [url](#) p. 21

¹⁴⁷⁰ Center for Civilians in Conflict (The) (CIVIC), Caught in the middle: The impact of security and political fragmentation on civilian protection in Sinjar, October 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁴⁷¹ New Humanitarian (The), Inside the troubled repatriation of Iraqis from Syria's al-Hol camp, 7 June 2021, [url](#)

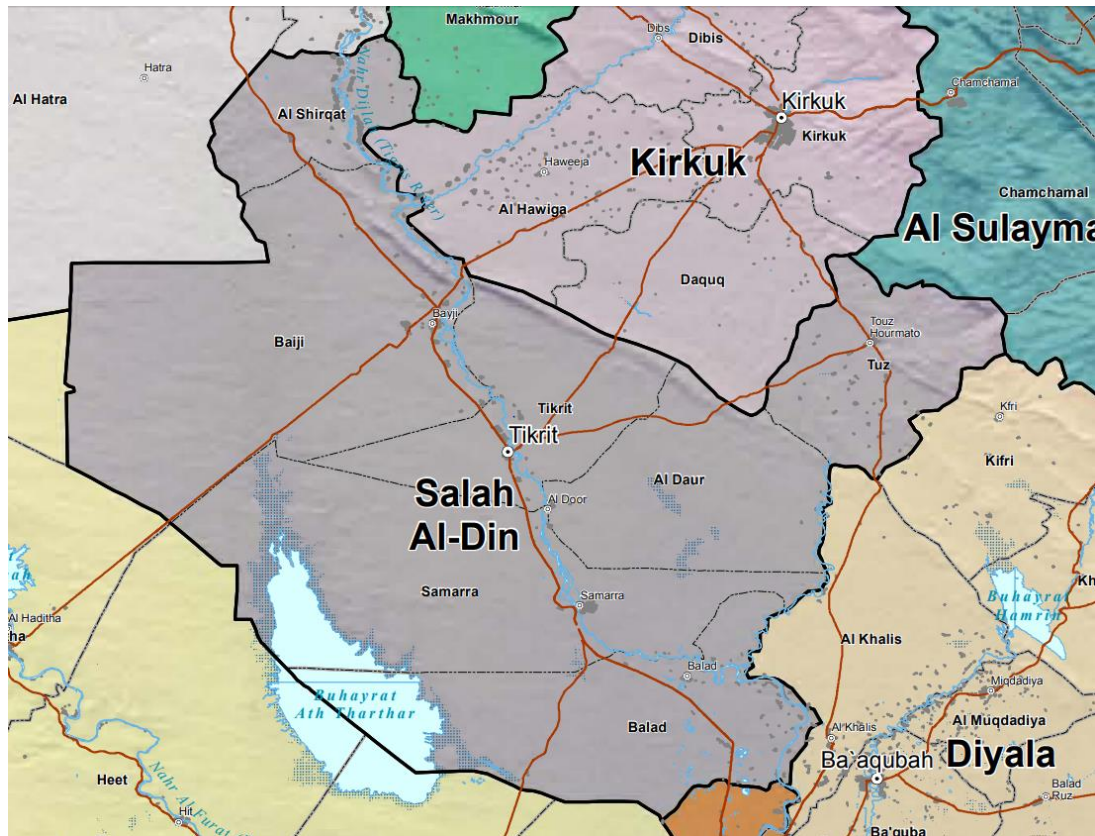
¹⁴⁷² VOA, Hundreds of Iraqi nationals leave al-Hol refugee camp in Syria, 30 September 2021, [url](#), Shafaq News, A second convoy of ISIS families enter Iraqi territory, 29 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷³ New Humanitarian (The), Inside the troubled repatriation of Iraqis from Syria's al-Hol camp, 7 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁴ National (The), Repatriation of ISIS-linked families from Syria to Iraq angers local, 26 May 2021, [url](#)



2.7 Salah Al-Din



Map 16: Salah Al-Din governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations¹⁴⁷⁵

2.7.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Salah Al-Din (Salah ad-Din, Saladin, Salahaddin, Salahuddin) is located in Iraq's north, directly bordering Baghdad in its south. Besides Baghdad, the governorate shares internal borders with Diyala, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Anbar, Ninewa and the disputed Makhmour district. It has no international borders.¹⁴⁷⁶ Salah Al-Din governorate comprises nine districts: Salah Al-Din's capital Tikrit,¹⁴⁷⁷ Shirqat (Al-Shirqat, Sharqat, Shirgat), Baiji (Beygee, Beji), Samarra, Daur (Al-Daur, Dour, Aldor), Tooz Khurmatu (Tuz Khormatu, Tuz Churmatu, Tooz, Tuz), Balad, Tharthar (Thethar) and Dujail (Al-Dujail, Fares, Al-Fares, Faris).¹⁴⁷⁸ However, some maps depict Tharthar and Dujail districts as forming part of Balad district.¹⁴⁷⁹ Tooz Khurmatu district falls within the so-called 'disputed territories' or 'disputed internal boundaries' between Erbil and Baghdad, an issue that should have been resolved as outlined in Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi

¹⁴⁷⁵ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁶ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁷ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Iraq: Salah Al-Din Governorate – Salah al-Din governorate, 19 July 2014, [url](#); UNOCHA, Iraq: Salah Al-Din Governorate Profile and Humanitarian Response, December 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Districts of Salah al-Din Governorate [page overview], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁹ UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Salah Al-Din Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#); UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)



constitution¹⁴⁸⁰ but have not been settled so far (see 2.7.2 Conflict background).¹⁴⁸¹ Due to its central location, the governorate connects many parts of the country, and is thus of strategic importance.¹⁴⁸² According to a senior intelligence officer stationed in the region, the triangle between Kirkuk in the north, Baiji in the west and Samarra in the south (both in Salah Al-Din) is very important for the ISIL group. The area connects the hills and mountains in the east, offering a perfect hiding place, with the deserts in the west leading to Syria. ISIL is assumed to strive to hold on to this area.¹⁴⁸³

Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated¹⁴⁸⁴ the governorate's population at 1 723 546 with around 946 000 people living in rural and around 777 000 in urban areas.¹⁴⁸⁵ In line with this, a 2019 survey found that 54 % of the governorate's population lived in rural areas, making the population of Salah Al-Din one of the most rural in Iraq.¹⁴⁸⁶

Ethno-religious composition

Salah Al-Din governorate is predominantly inhabited by Sunni Arabs¹⁴⁸⁷ but features a complex demography as it is also home to Shia Arabs, Kurds, and Shia Turkmen.¹⁴⁸⁸ In some places, the ethnic-sectarian majority ratio varies, with, for example, the towns of Balad and Dujail being reportedly Shiite-majority.¹⁴⁸⁹ The population in Tooz Khurmatu district is particularly multi-ethnic¹⁴⁹⁰ and is reported to be 'split almost evenly among Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen (Shia and Sunni)'.¹⁴⁹¹ For the town of Tooz Khurmatu, Kurds are, however, reported to be the largest group of inhabitants, while Turkmen and Arabs are living in the town as well.¹⁴⁹² As outlined in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from](#)

¹⁴⁸⁰ Iraq, Constitution of Iraq, 15 October 2005, [url](#), Article 140

¹⁴⁸¹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries after ISIS: Heterogenous Actors Vying for Influence LSE, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Meier, D., 'Disputed territories' in northern Iraq: The frontiering of in-between spaces, 23 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1-2.; Salih, D., Disputed territories in Iraq: Security Dilemma and geopolitics, EPC, 13 July 2021, [url](#); see also International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁸² Iraq, Ministry of Defence, With improved security and stability, people in Salah al Din can now focus on rebuilding their lives [Online video], Global Coalition, 2 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸³ Guardian (The), 'They will never let go': Isis fighters regroup in the heart of Iraq, 11 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁴ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁵ Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁶ PAX, Human Security Survey Salahaddin, Iraq - 2019, Summary of Key Findings, 12 December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁸⁷ Saleem, Z. A., The King of Salah al-Din: The Power of Iraq's Sunni Elites, January 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, The role of ethnicities, religions and sects in Iraq [Map], 27 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁴⁸⁹ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁴⁹⁰ Salih, D., Disputed territories in Iraq: Security Dilemma and geopolitics, EPC, 13 July 2021, [url](#); Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries after ISIS: Heterogenous Actors Vying for Influence, LSE, February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁹¹ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 52

¹⁴⁹² Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46





[October 2020](#) (see section 2.7.1), the governorate is also home to the Shiite Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra, one of the holiest sites in Shia Islam, which was the target of an attack by Al-Qaeda in 2006 and prompted widespread sectarian violence.¹⁴⁹³

Salah Al-Din governorate is also home to several Iraqi tribal confederations¹⁴⁹⁴ and is reported to be 'characterised by its tribal nature'¹⁴⁹⁵ and also in regard to religious affiliation culturally diverse¹⁴⁹⁶. The Al-Jabour tribes represent the largest and most influential confederation of Sunni Arab tribes and reside in Salah Al-Din's northern and central cities and towns¹⁴⁹⁷, including Shirqat, Baiji, Tikrit, Al-Alam¹⁴⁹⁸ and Al-Dhulu'ya. However, Baiji city is home to the Al-Qaissin (Al-Jisat), Al-Jawariyeen and Al-Janabiyeen tribes and Tikrit to the tribe of former president Saddam Hussein, the Albu Nasir, and the Albu Ajil.¹⁴⁹⁹ Balad district is home to tribe members of the Bani Tamim (Al-Tamim), Zubayd Albu Sultan, Al-Izza, Bani Assad, Al-Aaniyyin of the Al-Ubayd tribal confederation, and the Bani Sa'ad.¹⁵⁰⁰ Members of Bani Tamim tribe are also reported to live in Dujail district.¹⁵⁰¹

Economy

Salah Al-Din governorate hosts Alas (Allas) and Ajil oilfields in Tikrit district¹⁵⁰² and Baiji refinery in Baiji district. According to a 2017 study, Baiji is vital for the Iraqi economy as the country's largest oil refinery along with its auxiliary industries, including a fertilizer factory and a power plant, are located there. Baiji refinery was the scene of considerable levels of conflict and violence after ISIL took over control in June 2014.¹⁵⁰³ In January 2021, Iraq's Ministry of Oil announced that production of oil derivatives from Baiji refinery increased and nearly doubled to 140 000 barrels per day.¹⁵⁰⁴ However, a series of shutdowns and interruptions of the refinery occurred in July and August 2021 due to bottlenecks in the Iraqi grid system, potentially forcing the refinery to reduce its capacity.¹⁵⁰⁵

Alas oilfield was used by ISIL as a major source of revenue between 2014 and 2017. In 2019, the oilfield reportedly continued to be a target of ISIL attacks.¹⁵⁰⁶ According to an analyst of the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) these attacks aimed at destabilising security efforts by

¹⁴⁹³ Time, How the Fate of One Holy Site Could Plunge Iraq Back into Civil War, 26 June 2014, [url](#); New York Times (The), Blast Destroys Shrine in Iraq, Setting Off Sectarian Fury, 22 February 2006, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁴ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 46-48; Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of the 2019 EASO Report on Security Situation, 14 January 2019, cited from EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁵ Saleem, Z. A., The King of Salah al-Din: The Power of Iraq's Sunni Elites, January 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴⁹⁶ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁴⁹⁷ Saleem, Z. A., The King of Salah al-Din: The Power of Iraq's Sunni Elites, January 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴⁹⁸ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 46-48; Saleem, Z. A., The King of Salah al-Din: The Power of Iraq's Sunni Elites, January 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴⁹⁹ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 46-49

¹⁵⁰⁰ Watkins, J. and Hasan, M., Post-ISIL reconciliation in Iraq and the local anatomy of national grievances: the case of Yathrib, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁵⁰¹ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁵⁰² Shafaq News, A minefield in Alas oil fields area was found, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰³ Derzsi-Horváth, A. et al., Iraq after ISIL: Baiji, GPPI, 13 September 2017, [url](#); see also Iraq Oil Report, Once fixable, Baiji refinery plundered beyond repair, 28 January 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁴ EPIC, ISHM: January 7 – January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁵ Hellenic Shipping News, Refinery News Roundup: Upgrade completions in Middle East, 28 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁶ Business Insider, ISIS is staging attacks in symbolically important places to send a message: We're back, 24 October 2019, [url](#)





targeting ‘symbolic or economically vital targets’.¹⁵⁰⁷ For further information on these 2019 attacks, please see section 2.7.1 of [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#). In March 2021, it was reported that Iraqi security authorities dismantled a minefield in the Alas oilfield area, which still contains unexploited oil wells. The Alas and Ajil oilfields reportedly hold reserves of about three billion barrels¹⁵⁰⁸ in Salah Al-Din, along with gas and sulphur.¹⁵⁰⁹

Salah Al-Din’s capital Tikrit is reported to offer some employment opportunities as well as (educational) resources, such as Tikrit University.¹⁵¹⁰ Tooz Khurmatu represents the commercial centre and transportation hub in the northeast of the governorate.¹⁵¹¹ Samarra once also offered commercial as well as agricultural and fishing areas; however, these have been destroyed in the course of the conflicts since 2003.¹⁵¹²

Road security

As previously reported for 2018 and 2019,¹⁵¹³ ISIL continued to threaten road security in Salah Al-Din governorate during the reference period. Roadside bomb attacks targeted roads connecting Kirkuk, Tikrit and Tooz Khurmatu, and hit and run attacks occurred at checkpoints near the cities of Tikrit and Tooz Khurmatu.¹⁵¹⁴ According to the latest iMMAP publication on the risk of explosions on Salah Al-Din’s roads in February 2021, primary risk was reported to exist on the main road linking Mosul to Baghdad near the cities of Baiji, Samarra and Balad and on the road connecting Tooz Khurmatu with Tikrit, mainly in the vicinity of Tooz Khurmatu city.¹⁵¹⁵

2.7.2 Conflict background

In the summer of 2014, as part of its rapid expansion across Iraq, ISIL forces captured parts of Salah Al-Din governorate, including Tooz Khurmatu district, the oil town of Baiji and the governorate’s capital Tikrit as well as Shirqat,¹⁵¹⁶ as part of their rapid expansion across large swathes of Iraq.¹⁵¹⁷ The towns of Samarra and Amerli were reported to have been successfully

¹⁵⁰⁷ Business Insider, ISIS is staging attacks in symbolically important places to send a message: We’re back, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁸ Estimates tend to vary, however; see, for example, Financial Post, Blue Sky Energy: The Iraq Oil Opportunity, 11 April 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁹ Shafaq News, A minefield in Alas oil fields area was found, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁰ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq’s Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵¹¹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries after ISIS: Heterogenous Actors Vying for Influence, LSE, February 2019, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁵¹² Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq’s Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁵¹³ For examples of roadside bombs, IEDs and other attacks on roads in Salah al-Din governorate, see Basnews, IS Temporarily Seizes Control of Kirkuk-Baghdad Road, 15 September 2019, [url](#); National (The), ISIS attacks resurgent on Iraq’s ‘Highway of Death’, 7 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁴ UN Security Council, Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2021/655], 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 39; see also VOA, Islamic State Resilient as Ever in Iraq, Syria, 26 July 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Deadly ISIL attack north of Baghdad sparks anger, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁵ iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Salah al-Din Governorate 1-28 February 2021 [Map], 7 March 2021, [url](#). For previous monthly reports on explosive hazards risk level on roads in Salah Al-Din Governorate since 2019, please see iMMAP’s monthly updated maps.

¹⁵¹⁶ PAX, Human Security Survey Salahaddin, Iraq - 2019, Summary of Key Findings, 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵¹⁷ Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Salah al-Din provins - sikkerhetssituasjonen i perioden juli - september 2018 [Salah al Din Governorate – Security situation July-September 2018] [Informal Translation], 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 2;





defended against ISIL forces by PMU, which had emerged as a parallel force to the ISF in the fight against ISIL and consisted of pre-existing Shia militias as well as new groups and forces.¹⁵¹⁸ In Salah Al-Din governorate most of the key population centres were recaptured from ISIL control by mid-2015. Salah Al-Din was moreover one of the first governorates to see large numbers of IDPs return. By July 2015, 130 000 IDPs had returned, and by December 2016, 360 000, mostly Sunni Arab IDPs.¹⁵¹⁹

The UN reported that between 23 and 27 November 2017, ISF conducted a military offensive in central and northern Iraq, aimed at clearing remnants of ISIL from the Jazirah (Jazeera) desert expanse, which spans across the governorates of Anbar, Salah Al-Din and Ninewa; 14 000 square kilometres and 175 villages in the Jazirah and upper Euphrates areas were reportedly cleared.¹⁵²⁰ Following this operation, the Prime Minister of Iraq at the time, Haider Al-Abadi, declared final victory over ISIL in 2017.¹⁵²¹ However, despite this declaration, ISIL continued carrying out asymmetric attacks: ISIL militants reportedly roamed the countryside in late 2017, attacking villages at night.¹⁵²² Throughout 2018, security forces and civilians continued to be targeted by ISIL, including incidents that resulted in civilian casualties.¹⁵²³ The security vacuum in rural parts of Salah Al-Din governorate reportedly enabled ISIL militants to operate and control limited amounts of territory, leading to an increase in the number of attacks from 2017 to 2018 in the governorate.¹⁵²⁴ Reports on asymmetric ISIL attacks in Salah Al-Din continued throughout the period between 2019 and 2021.¹⁵²⁵ For information on recent incidents involving ISIL in the governorate, please see section [2.7.4 Recent security trends](#).

After ISIL's ousting in 2015, exceptionally high 'rates of abduction, killing, forced evictions, unlawful detentions, and property destruction' were reported in the governorate, especially against families and tribes accused of affiliation with ISIL. This development was primarily attributed to the dominant role that the PMU play in the governorate, further influencing

Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPi, March 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁵¹⁸ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPi, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 16-17

¹⁵¹⁹ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPi, March 2018, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁵²⁰ UNSG, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/42], 17 January 2018, [url](#), para. 25

¹⁵²¹ UNSG, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/42], 17 January 2018, [url](#), para. 2

¹⁵²² International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁵²³ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) [S/2019/101], 1 February 2019, [url](#), para. 14; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), para. 22, 43, 44; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/677], 9 July 2018, [url](#), para. 20; see also Flood, H. D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 33; Washington Post (The), ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁴ Markusen, M., The Islamic State and the Persistent Threat of Extremism in Iraq, CSIS, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

¹⁵²⁵ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/946], 11 November 2021, [url](#), para. 19; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 17; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 18; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 26; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/792], 11 August 2020, [url](#), para. 19; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 24; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 23; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2019/903], 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 29; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2019/365], 2 May 2019, [url](#), para. 18





existing political divisions.¹⁵²⁶ Reports of the difficulties faced by the Sunni population (in particular ‘ordinary Sunni citizens’ compared to the Sunni elites who ‘integrated themselves’ accessing ‘state resources and prerogatives via different tactics and mechanisms’)¹⁵²⁷ under pressure from Shiite militias and the ISF continued in 2020.¹⁵²⁸ In a March 2021 media report, Salah Al-Din residents were quoted as saying that security violations often arose due to the presence of non-local armed forces. Shiite-led PMU units reportedly caused many problems for residents, including restricting their freedom of movement as well as violent incidents.¹⁵²⁹

Following the expulsion of most of ISIL from the province in 2015, the northern part of the disputed area of Tooz Khurmatu district was held by Kurdish security forces, while local Shia Turkmen PMU factions controlled the remaining parts of the district. The district’s capital, Tooz Khurmatu, was also divided between Kurdish Security Forces and PMU and remained a hotbed for clashes between those groups as well as ‘tit-for-tat retaliation against civilians.’¹⁵³⁰ Following the September 2017 Kurdish independence referendum, Tooz Khurmatu district became caught up in high levels of violence during the military stand-off between the Iraqi government forces, including PMU, and Kurdish forces over the disputed territories.¹⁵³¹ In October 2017, violence escalated in the ethnically mixed city of Tooz Khurmatu.¹⁵³² Clashes and ensuing sporadic violence over the following two months led to civilian casualties, displacement as well as destruction of civilian property and infrastructure along ethnic lines.¹⁵³³ Tooz Khurmatu district was reported to have ‘suffered more violence than other disputed areas in the immediate aftermath of the October 2017 takeover by the Iraqi army and Hashd [PMU],’¹⁵³⁴ as outlined in [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#) (see section 2.7.2).

According to a June 2018 report, one of the Badr Organization’s longstanding top commanders established himself as the ‘strongman’ in Tooz Khurmatu, along with his ‘personal militia’ comprised of local Shiite Turkmen, allegedly involved in looting and arms- and drugs trafficking.¹⁵³⁵ In December 2018, it was reported that Tooz Khurmatu district’s rural areas were under complete control of the PMU, comprising one Sunni Arab brigade ‘held

¹⁵²⁶ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁵²⁷ Saleem, Z. A., The King of Salah al-Din: The Power of Iraq’s Sunni Elites, January 2021, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁵²⁸ Saleem, Z. A., The King of Salah al-Din: The Power of Iraq’s Sunni Elites, January 2021, [url](#), pp. 18-19; see also Al-Monitor, Flurry of Sunni Triangle ops sparks questions over Islamic State, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁹ Al-Monitor, Flurry of Sunni Triangle ops sparks questions over Islamic State, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁰ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 44; see also Al-Monitor, Why Tuz Khormatu clashes were more than just local skirmishes, 5 April 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵³¹ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 15, 17; UNAMI and OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4; AI, Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson, 24 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵³² UNAMI and OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4; AI, Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵³³ UNAMI and OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4; OHCHR, Press briefing notes on Iraq executions, Iraq: Tuz Khurmatu clashes and El Salvador, 15 December 2017, [url](#); AI, Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson, 24 November 2017, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Fighting in Disputed Territories Kills Civilians, 20 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁴ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁵³⁵ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)





under tight control’, while the district capital was held by local ISF and police.¹⁵³⁶ In February 2019, the city of Tooz Khurmatu was reported to be under effective control of the Badr Organisation which enjoyed local influence thanks to the Shia Turkmen community.¹⁵³⁷ According to a February 2019 report, toxic populism was still prevalent among the local population of Tooz Khurmatu and previous inter-community violence was still on residents’ minds, rendering the threat of a renewed outbreak of violence particularly imminent.¹⁵³⁸ The same report quotes former Minister of Migration, Darbaz Mohammed, stating that, ‘Tuz Khurmatu is like a time bomb that could explode at any minute. For Tuz to return to communal war, it only requires murdering a young Shia Turkmen, which would definitely ignite a civil war in the town. There are armed groups ready to take advantage of any development.’¹⁵³⁹ For further details on security developments in Salah Al-Din governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 2.7.3 in [EASO’s report on the Security Situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.7.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

The ISF in Salah Al-Din predominantly consist of units from the Iraqi army, federal police and to some extent special forces and share responsibility over the security in many places with PMU or other tribal forces.¹⁵⁴⁰ In many of the rural areas, the ISF are reportedly sparsely present, particularly since the summer of 2018 redeployment of many forces in order to curb anti-government protests in other parts of the country.¹⁵⁴¹ According to a 2019 report by the US-led Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJT-OIR), the ISF do not have sufficient forces to control large desert areas, have been unsuccessful in maintaining control over ISIL-cleared areas and have limited access to ISIL support zones in Salah Al-Din governorate.¹⁵⁴² As of December 2019, the presence of the ISF was reported in Samarra, Samarra Island, Dhulu’iya, Dujail, Ishaqi, Balad, Daur, Tikrit, Al-Alam, Baiji, Shirqat, Makhoul, Siniya, Salah Al-Din Desert, and the areas around Tooz Khurmatu.¹⁵⁴³

As outlined in [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#) (see section 2.7.2), regional operation commands in Iraq are reported to act as operational-level headquarters commanding and supervising different ISF units within a geographical area of responsibility.¹⁵⁴⁴ Following a December 2017 report, Salah Al-Din governorate is split between the Salah Al-Din Operations Command (SDOC), covering the northern part of the

¹⁵³⁶ International Crisis Group, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁵³⁷ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries after ISIS: Heterogenous Actors Vying for Influence, LSE, February 2019, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁵³⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries after ISIS: Heterogenous Actors Vying for Influence, LSE, February 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁵³⁹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries after ISIS: Heterogenous Actors Vying for Influence, LSE, February 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁵⁴⁰ Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Salah al-Din provins-sikkerhetssituasjonen i perioden juli-september 2018 [Salah al-Din Governorate - Security Situation July-September 2018] [Informal Translation], 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁵⁴¹ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Salah al-Din provins-sikkerhetssituasjonen i perioden juli-september 2018 [Salah al-Din Governorate - Security Situation July-September 2018] [Informal Translation], 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 7; Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries after ISIS: Heterogenous Actors Vying for Influence, LSE, February 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁵⁴² USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2019 – October 25, 2019, 19 November 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁵⁴³ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From abandoned villages to the cities [Map], Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁴ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 12





governorate, including Tikrit, Baiji and Shirqat,¹⁵⁴⁵ the Samarra Operations Command (SOC) covering Samarra, large parts of the Jazirah Desert west of Samarra and southern Salah Al-Din governorate,¹⁵⁴⁶ as well as the Dijla Operations Command (DOC), covering all of Diyala governorate, eastern Salah Al-Din governorate and Tooz Khurmatu town, Alas and Ajil oilfields, and the Hamrin Mountain Range.¹⁵⁴⁷ During 2019, 2020 and 2021 several sources reported on the involvement of ISF units in anti-ISIL military operations of various scales throughout Salah Al-Din governorate.¹⁵⁴⁸ In the run-up to the October 2021 parliamentary elections, it was reported that security forces, including SDOC, SOC and PMU units, were prepared to secure all polling stations in the governorate.¹⁵⁴⁹

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

In Salah Al-Din, there is a variety of armed groups operating under the PMF umbrella, including the Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH), Kata'ib Hezbollah, the Risaliyyoon, and Saraya Al-Salam.¹⁵⁵⁰ PMU played a significant role in the liberation of areas of Salah Al-Din governorate from ISIL, leading or accompanying ISF in the recapturing of Tooz Khurmatu, Tikrit, Daur, Al-Alam, Baiji, and parts of Shirqat district.¹⁵⁵¹ According to a 2017 ISW report on the Iraqi Orders of Battle, different factions of PMU operated freely throughout Salah Al-Din governorate, including in areas nominally under the Salah Al-Din Operations Command (SDOC), Dijla Operations Command (DOC) and the Samarra Operations Command (SOC), with limited or even without any coordination with the respective regional operations commands.¹⁵⁵² During the 2018 DIS/Landinfo Fact-Finding-Mission to KRI a source reported that there was a significant increase of militias and armed groups not under government control in Salah Al-Din,¹⁵⁵³ as outlined in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#) (see section 2.7.2). Present in large numbers across the governorate, Shia PMU exerted control over strategic locations and even areas beyond their official responsibility. Shia PMU also developed their own auxiliary forces, by mobilising a local Shia Turkmen PMU that controlled half of Tooz Khurmatu and by establishing several Sunni tribal PMU in Tikrit and surrounding areas, as well as in Baiji and Shirqat.¹⁵⁵⁴ PMU were reported to

¹⁵⁴⁵ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁵⁴⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁵⁴⁷ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁵⁴⁸ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#); NINA, Salah Al-Din Operations Command carries out a broad military operation, 27 July 2020, [url](#); INA, A combined force arrests two terrorists and finds a den in Salah al-Din, 8 May 2020, [url](#); USDOD, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, Defeating Daesh Highlights of the Week, 27 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

¹⁵⁴⁹ INA, Salah al-Din Ops: Army sectors are present in all the electoral centers, 8 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁰ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁵¹ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 43-44; see also Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁵⁵² ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 17; 22; 23

¹⁵⁵³ Denmark, DIS and Norway, Landinfo, Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) [source: an Iraqi analyst], 5 November 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁵⁵⁴ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 43-44; see also Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 48





be involved in various ISIL counter-operations in the governorate throughout the reference period.¹⁵⁵⁵

Although the province was liberated from ISIL in 2017, PMU were reported to be still both present and active, seeking to further a range of economic and political objectives. In some areas of the governorate, PMU have 'placed entire cities and rural zones under their direct control', where they influence displacement and return dynamics, with 'slow rates of return and frequent re-displacement' being reported.¹⁵⁵⁶ Returns have frequently been blocked particularly by Shia Arab tribes with political party affiliation with PMU, as was for example reported for Balad district.¹⁵⁵⁷ PMU in Salah Al-Din reportedly exercised coercion and violence against locals with apparent impunity.¹⁵⁵⁸

As reported in August 2017, a few Sunni tribal groups have mobilised their support to the PMU forces within the governorate as well. An estimated 2 000 to 3 000 Sunni fighters have been recruited by PMU, primarily by the Badr Brigades and the Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq, in Salah Al-Din governorate, which are relatively few, in comparison to Ninewa governorate (for further information on the situation in Ninewa governorate, see section **Error! Reference source not found.**) where an estimated 18 000 have been recruited into a Sunni Tribal Mobilization Force.¹⁵⁵⁹

One of these major Sunni tribal militia was Liwa' Salah Al-Din (Brigade 51), reportedly led by Yazan Al-Jabouri, the son of Iraqi MP and former Ba'athist insurgent leader Mishan Al-Jabouri. Brigade 51 was reported to closely collaborate with Iranian-affiliated Shia PMU and claimed to have received weapons and intelligence support from Iran.¹⁵⁶⁰ According to a 2017 study of the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), Brigade 51 enjoyed backing from the PMU when it engaged in illegal activities, such as when 'there were significant allegations of misconduct against the 51st Brigade, including looting (notably in Tikrit), robbery, abductions, and revenge killings, as well as smuggling goods to ISIL fighters.'¹⁵⁶¹ However, Brigade 51 also reportedly operated at the behest of Shiite PMU, such as in regular inspection tours and house searches.¹⁵⁶²

According to the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, each PMU faction present in the governorate holds an intelligence and security committee, a public relations and media committee, and an economic and financial committee. The PMU militias' reasons behind their

¹⁵⁵⁵ NINA, The PMF Repel A Terrorist Attack By ISIS In Hamrin Hills, East Of Salah Al-Din, 3 October 2021; INA, PMF fend off an ISIS attack east of Al-Dur district in Salah Al-Din, 11 May 2021, [url](#); INA, The launch of a security operation east of Salah al-Din, 6 May 2021, [url](#); NINA, The PMF Carries Out A Raid And Search Operation South Of Salah Al-Din, 4 April 2021; NINA, The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) seize a "ISIS" camp that includes a factory for booby-trapping, east of Salah Al-Din, 8 March 2021; NINA, The PMF Foil A Terrorist Plot And Arrest 5 ISIS Terrorists, South Of Samarra, 15 January 2021; NINA, The PMF Clear A Village In Eastern Of Salah al-Din, 21 December 2020

¹⁵⁵⁶ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 49

¹⁵⁵⁷ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁵⁵⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁵⁵⁹ Gaston, E., Sunni Tribal Forces, GPPI, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁰ IISS, Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East - Chapter Four: Iraq, November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶¹ Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 49.

¹⁵⁶² Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 49.





efforts to control certain areas of the governorate often vary from area to area. Thus, the PMU presence in Salah Al-Din can be divided broadly into two categories: first, there are PMU tribal groups in areas with no strategic importance in terms of religious affiliation, security, or economy, such as Shirqat, Al-Alam, and Daur, as well as PMU tribal fighters in areas of resistance that pose a security risk. Second, the PMF and the Peace Brigades (Saraya Al-Salam) operate in areas of religious, strategic, security, and economic importance, such as in Baiji with its oil refineries or in eastern Tikrit where the Alas and Ajil oil wells are located, and in Samarra where religious tourism and the shrines of the imams can be found. The relationship between the PMU and the provincial security apparatus is reportedly comparable to the relationship between a commander and a command receiver, with the PMU factions in complete control of sensitive locations in Salah Al-Din governorate.¹⁵⁶³

Tikrit

In contrast to Ramadi or Falluja, where the PMU have no physical presence within the city centre, in Salah al Din's capital Tikrit there were PMU party offices, including offices of Al-Nujaba', Badr, AAH and Jund Al-Iman,¹⁵⁶⁴ and armed PMU stationed in the old presidential place. This exerted a chilling effect resulting in the 'reality that no Tikriti, even one with the vaguest perceived ISIS affiliation, would consider returning home'.¹⁵⁶⁵ Tikrit is considered to be the PMU operations hub.¹⁵⁶⁶ According to an August 2019 report, Camp Speicher, a large and unused military base west of Tikrit, was controlled by Kata'ib Hezbollah, Kata'ib Al-Imam Ali, and Kata'ib Jund Al-Imam (PMU Brigade 6), while Alas oilfield in Tikrit district was reportedly controlled by militias, who engaged in diverting oil for trucking to Iran (and the Gulf ports) via the KRI.¹⁵⁶⁷ Awja town in Tikrit district is dominated by Al-Shaheed Al-Sadr Al-Awal, a PMF controlled by former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, which reportedly blocked returns and even settled families into the area to farm Sunni lands.¹⁵⁶⁸

Samarra

Since 2014, the city of Samarra has been controlled by the Saraya Al-Salam (the so-called Peace Brigades or PMU Brigades 313, 314 and 315), affiliated with Muqtada Al-Sadr.¹⁵⁶⁹ Saraya Al-Salam reportedly controls all of the city's gates. The group is reported to have treated local people harshly, caused ongoing displacement, and taken over farmland, yet denies involvement in these acts. Besides Saraya Al-Salam, other PMU are present and engaged in the Shrine activities, such as Ansar Al-Aqeeda and Saraya Ashura.¹⁵⁷⁰ In regard to Samarra's southern part, a Badr-affiliated river patrol, Quwat Al-Rusul Al-Nahriya, is reported to hold the

¹⁵⁶³ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 45-46

¹⁵⁶⁴ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁶⁵ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 52

¹⁵⁶⁶ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁶⁷ Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵⁶⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 51

¹⁵⁶⁹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 50; Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁵⁷⁰ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 50





river and maintain a base on the Samarra bridge.¹⁵⁷¹

Balad

In Balad, the AAH had taken over farmland from Sunni Arab families, whose return they blocked due to alleged ties to ISIL, and set up checkpoints aiming at controlling the strategically valuable area directly north of Baghdad.¹⁵⁷² Saraya Al-Salam reportedly controlled the southern sub-district Ishaqi, while the northern part of Balad is controlled by Brigade 43 Sab'a Al-Dujail, a PMU faction linked to Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq.¹⁵⁷³ Information on security incidents reportedly related to the PMU in Balad district, can be found in section [Developments August 2020 – October 2021](#) of section 2.7.4 Recent security trends.

Baiji

Brigade 51 was reported to be responsible for Baiji area.¹⁵⁷⁴ In Baiji, Risaliyoon (Brigade 31),¹⁵⁷⁵ under the command of Maliki, was reported to have blocked returns due to security threats and land mines and to be involved 'in operations against ISIS cells that have spilled over into reprisals against the local community, and particularly returnees, when Risaliyoon members are killed'.¹⁵⁷⁶ In the city of Baiji, Omar Al-Thamer Al-Sultan, who maintained ties to Risaliyoon reportedly oversaw several PMU consisting of a total of 200 people. Omar Al-Thamer Al-Sultan associated groups held the resistance line between Baiji and Haditha west of the city. AAH also maintained an office in Baiji. The tribal PMU, composed of locals, reportedly coordinated with the national security officer for Baiji.¹⁵⁷⁷

Shirqat

In Shirqat, the political and security scene is dominated by the Sunni tribal Brigade 51.¹⁵⁷⁸ The brigade's territory stretches between the southern border of Ninewa province and the Makhoul Mountains.¹⁵⁷⁹ Brigade 51 has eased returns in some cases and hindered them in others, mostly depending on the directives of the PMU.¹⁵⁸⁰ Attached to this brigade is

¹⁵⁷¹ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁵⁷² Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁵⁷³ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁵⁷⁴ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁵⁷⁵ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁵⁷⁶ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 51

¹⁵⁷⁷ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁵⁷⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 52; Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁷⁹ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁸⁰ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 52





Regiment 51. The Ministry of Defence affiliated Regiment 36 (Lions of the Tigris) were reported to be located on the west side of the city of Shirqat.¹⁵⁸¹

TooZ Khurmatu

In TooZ Khurmatu, Quwat Al-Shaheed Al-Sadr (Brigade 15), AAH and Kata'ib Hezbollah were reported to be present. The Shiite Turkmen PMU factions, Brigade 16 and Brigade 52, both affiliated with the Badr Organization, were located in the sub-district of Amerli.¹⁵⁸² In Sulaiman Bek town, both the AAH and Badr are based in the airbase, justifying the obstruction of IDP returns on security grounds while presumably acting in the interest of their support for the Shiite Turkmen community in nearby Amerli.¹⁵⁸³

Daur and Al-Alam

Daur was reported to fall under the command of the Brigade 9 from Karbala. In Daur, a tribal PMU exists, consisting of the town's residents. The area between Daur and Al-Alam, including the route leading to the oil wells, is primarily controlled by the Badr Organization, while the area inhabited by the Albu Ajil tribe is under the control of AAH. The Al-Alam area is located within the territory of Brigade 88, a Sunni PMF force led by Wanas Naji Al-Jabara and Khalid Abdullah Al-Jabara, members of a well-known family in Al-Alam.¹⁵⁸⁴

ISIL

According to UN reporting in 2020 and 2021, although overall violence associated with ISIL had declined, the group was reported to still pose a threat, with a shift to insurgent tactics and attacks continuing in various parts of the country,¹⁵⁸⁵ including 'remaining active' in Salah Al-Din governorate as of October 2021, according to Crisis Group¹⁵⁸⁶, during the reference period. Security vacuums caused by redeployments of ISF to anti-government protests, the COVID-19 lockdown, as well as the withdrawal of most US forces from Iraq, have reportedly been exploited by ISIL to gain strength and regroup in parts of Iraq, including in Salah Al-Din governorate in 2020.¹⁵⁸⁷ In July 2021, the UN Security Council noted that ISIL continued to 'threaten road links among Diyala, Salah Al-Din and Kirkuk', mentioning repeated roadside

¹⁵⁸¹ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁸² Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁵⁸³ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Displacement and Iraq's Political Marketplace: Addressing Political Barriers to IDP Return, IRIS, February 2021, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁵⁸⁴ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁵⁸⁵ UNSG, Thirteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2021/682], 27 July 2021, [url](#), para. 4; UNSG, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2020/95], 4 February 2020, [url](#), para. 4

¹⁵⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Will Iraq's Early Elections Solve Its Legitimacy Crisis?, 5 October 2021, [url](#); See also: UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 24; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 23

¹⁵⁸⁷ New York Times (The), ISIS Attacks Surge in Iraq Amid Debate on U.S. Troop Levels, 10 June 2020, [url](#); SIPRI, The resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq: Political and military responses, 9 June 2020, [url](#); Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#); CNBC, America is ignoring Iraq's turbulent protests at its peril, security experts say, 14 November 2019, [url](#)





bomb attacks and hit-and-run attacks against checkpoints in the area.¹⁵⁸⁸ Intelligence agencies of UN member states reportedly perceived the terrorist group as regaining strength in the governorates of Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah Al-Din.¹⁵⁸⁹ Reports published in 2020 referred to ISIL's campaign in rural Salah Al-Din as an 'assassination campaign'¹⁵⁹⁰ and indicated that the group's attacks in the region had become 'more assertive'¹⁵⁹¹ in the first half of 2020.¹⁵⁹² It was also reported that ISIL had demonstrated its adaptability in the first half of 2020 by gradually having moved from 'hiding in remote areas to alarmingly establishing a foothold in rural and suburban areas.'¹⁵⁹³ According to the ISIL affiliated media outlet Amaq, ISIL militants were responsible for the deaths of 643 people in Salah Al-Din governorate in 2020.¹⁵⁹⁴ Salah-Al Din is described as being of particular interest to the insurgent group due to its strategic location¹⁵⁹⁵ and as it depicts ISIL's primary 'land communication node' linking Anbar, which neighbours Syria with the 'northern belt of Baghdad, east to Diyala, north to Kirkuk, and to the northwest reaching Ninewa.'¹⁵⁹⁶ ISIL was reported to use mountain ranges, valleys, and orchards in Salah Al-Din and its neighbouring governorates to shelter its fighters and set up checkpoints to safeguard its supply routes. In addition, these bases were used to 'establish command centers and small camps for training, digging tunnels, and exploiting caves in mountainous areas.'¹⁵⁹⁷ According to the security media cell, five tunnels and military equipment were discovered in the Makhoul mountain range in November 2020,¹⁵⁹⁸ while a July 2021 UN Security Council report indicated that ISIL militants were entrenched in the neighbouring Hamrin mountain range¹⁵⁹⁹.

In addition to the Makhoul and Hamrin mountain range, as of May 2021, the presence of ISIL militants was reported specifically in the area of Al-Tharthar lake, between Anbar and Salah Al-Din governorates, in parts of Shirqat district, in the cities of Balad and Samarra, and in the south of the governorate.¹⁶⁰⁰ In a May 2020 article, Iraq policy and security experts Michael Knights and Alex Almeida identified ISIL's strongest operating environment in Salah Al-Din to be the Jallam Desert, from where the group had access to a range of target areas, including Samarra,¹⁶⁰¹ the Alas oilfield, Tooze Khurmatu, and the governorate borders with southern

¹⁵⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2021/655], 21 July 2021, [url](#); para. 39

¹⁵⁸⁹ VOA, Islamic State Resilient as Ever in Iraq, Syria, 26 July 2021, [url](#); see also USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁵⁹⁰ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹¹ International Crisis group, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹² Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#); International Crisis Group, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹³ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁴ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁵ Iraq, Ministry of Defence, With improved security and stability, people in Salah al Din can now focus on rebuilding their lives [Online Video], Global Coalition, 2 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁶ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁷ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁸ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2021/655], 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 39

¹⁶⁰⁰ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰¹ 'ISIS's encroachment on Samarra city aims to force Salah al-Din province to further rely on PMF divisions, which ISIS hopes will worsen Sunni-Shiite tensions.' Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)





Kirkuk and western Diyala. The authors moreover identified the following areas in Salah Al-Din governorate as housing active ISIL attack cells: eastern Tharthar in Balad district, southern Jallam Desert, Udham and northeastern Tharthar in Tikrit district, Baiji, Siniyah, Makhoul, and northern Jallam Desert, Tooze Khurmatu, Pulkhana, and Zarga.¹⁶⁰²

According to a May 2020 report by security expert Husham al-Hashimi, ISIL had around 350 to 400 active fighters in the Salah Al-Din ‘sector’,¹⁶⁰³ who were supported by 400 inactive fighters or ‘ sleeper cells ’ and mainly dealt with logistics. In March 2020, ISIL reportedly adopted a new approach by activating ‘ autonomous sleeper cells to carry out attacks in rural areas south of Samarra and north of Baghdad. ’¹⁶⁰⁴ For further information on ISIL’s activity in the governorate, please see section 2.7.2 of [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.7.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Throughout the reference period, the UN Secretary-General continued to report that ISIL remnants frequently carried out asymmetric attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, especially in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din governorates.¹⁶⁰⁵ In August 2021, an escalation of ISIL attacks was reported for the areas between Salah Al-Din, Kirkuk and Diyala.¹⁶⁰⁶ In an October 2021 blog post, Joel Wing referred to Salah Al-Din as a major target during ISIL’s summer 2021 offensive. For August 2021 alone, he referred to 31 ISIL-related incidents in the governorate, which again sharply declined in September 2021 with eight such incidents. According to Wing, the insurgent group holds a presence in the governorate, that manifests itself mostly during spring and summer campaigns.¹⁶⁰⁷ Serious ISIL attacks that caused numerous deaths and/or injuries of security personnel as well as civilians in Salah Al-Din were, however, also reported during autumn and winter 2020/2021.¹⁶⁰⁸

As was already reported in 2019¹⁶⁰⁹ (for further details please see section 2.7.3 of [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#)), villagers, farmers, and community

¹⁶⁰² Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 16; 23

¹⁶⁰³ Remnants of ISIL in Iraq have reportedly established 11 sectors in what it calls its Wilayat (Province of) Iraq in accordance with its organizational structure. See map of 11 ‘sectors’: Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁴ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁵ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/946], 11 November 2021, [url](#), para. 19; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 16; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 17; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 18; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 26

¹⁶⁰⁶ MEMO, Daesh militants attack oilfield in Iraq’s Kirkuk, 15 August 2021, [url](#); AA, Daesh/ISIS militants attack oilfield in Iraq’s Kirkuk, 15 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁷ Wing, J., Islamic State Ends Its Summer Offensive In Iraq, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 4 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁸ For examples of such ISIL-related incidents, see Al Jazeera, Deadly ISIL attack north of Baghdad sparks anger, 22 November 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 19 – December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 12 – November 19, 2020, 19 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁹ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2019 - March 31, 2019, 7 May 2019, [url](#), p. 46





leaders continued to be targeted by the insurgent group during the reference period.¹⁶¹⁰ ACLED data indicates that ISIL was involved in 90 incidents as ‘Actor1’ in Salah Al-Din governorate between August 2020 and October 2021. These incidents reportedly caused 125 fatalities in total. 20 of these security incidents involved acts against civilians, in sum causing 31 fatalities.¹⁶¹¹ IED attacks were reported in various districts of the governorate throughout the reference period.¹⁶¹² International coalition (supply) convoys proved to be a popular target of such IED attacks.¹⁶¹³

Following continued ISIL activity, including in parts of Salah Al-Din governorate, the ISF have launched several major coordinated counter-terrorism military operations in response.¹⁶¹⁴ An anti-ISIL operation was announced in the Makhoul and Khanouka mountain ranges in the governorate’s north in November 2020. In the course of the operation, which involved the ISF, PMU and federal police, airstrikes and searches were conducted, tunnels destroyed, and weapons seized.¹⁶¹⁵ In February 2021, the so-called ‘Lions of al-Jazeera’ operation was announced, which targeted ISIL remnants in Salah Al-Din, Al-Anbar and Ninewa and involved the SDOC, Army Brigade 91, PMU Brigades 51, 21, 6 and 35, and Salah Al-Din SWAT regiment and Salah Al-Din Emergency Police regiment.¹⁶¹⁶ This search operation was reported to cover an area of 150 square kilometres in total.¹⁶¹⁷ In June 2021, the start of the second part of the ten-pronged ‘Lions of al-Jazeera’ operation was announced.¹⁶¹⁸

In a March 2021 interview, Salah Al-Din’s tribal council chief mentioned a tense atmosphere between the local communities and Shiite-led PMU, referring to five recent attacks in the Tikrit area, which left dozens of villagers dead but remained unsolved despite the establishment of an investigative committee. The tribal council chief expressed serious doubts regarding ISIL’s involvement in all these incidents.¹⁶¹⁹ In October 2020, it was reported that eight people had been executed and four others kidnapped in Farhatiya in Balad district. The incident prompted an investigation by the Ministerial Council for National Security. Initially, unknown militants were mentioned as being the perpetrators. The following days, however, PMU Brigade 42, associated with Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq, declared ISIL responsible for the crime,¹⁶²⁰

¹⁶¹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: August 12 – August 19, 2021, 19 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 18 – March 25, 2021, 25 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 1 – April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Islamic State increases attacks in Iraq’s Sunni areas, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹¹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹² EPIC, ISHM: September 30 – October 7, 2021, 7 October 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 19 – December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 24 – October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 27 – September 3, 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 20 – August 27, 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹³ EPIC, ISHM: July 1 – July 8, 2021, 8 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 24 – July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 10 – June 17, 2021, 17 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 20 – May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 29 – May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 15 – April 22, 2021, 22 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 8 – April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 25 – April 1, 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 18 – March 25, 2021, 25 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 24, 2020 – January 7, 2021, 7 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 17 – September 24, 2020, 24 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 10 – September 17, 2020, 17 September 2020, [url](#); see also UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 19

¹⁶¹⁴ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 16

¹⁶¹⁵ EPIC, ISHM: November 5 – November 12, 2020, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁶ Shafaq News, Joint Operations Command reveals the circumstances of “Lions of al-Jazeera”, 1 February 2021, [url](#); see also EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁷ Diyaruna, Iraq launches campaign to secure western desert, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁸ INA, SMC: the second Operation Lions of Al-Jazeera has launched, 15 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁹ Al-Monitor, Flurry of Sunni Triangle ops sparks questions over Islamic State, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁰ EPIC, ISHM: October 15 – October 22, 2020, 22 October 2020, [url](#)



while others, including Salah Al-Din's governor, blamed Brigade 42 itself for the attack¹⁶²¹. In May 2021, the USDOS stated that the families of the victims claimed that Brigade 42 was responsible for the crime.¹⁶²²

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 125 battles, 131 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 28 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 284 security incidents in Salah Al-Din governorate, the majority taking place in Balad district, followed by Samarra district.¹⁶²³ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 21 below.

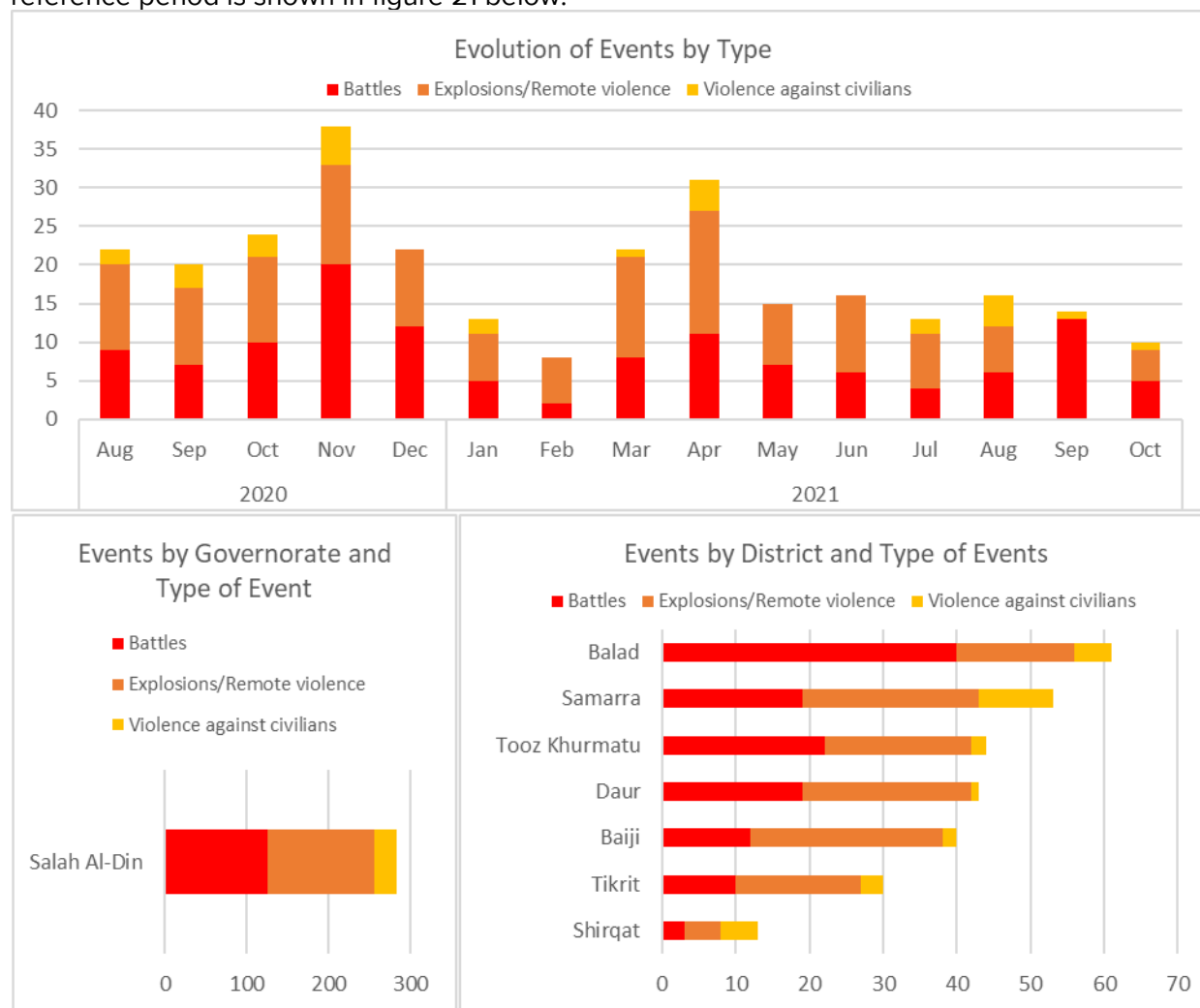


Figure 16: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Salah Al-Din governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁶²⁴

¹⁶²¹ EPIC, ISHM: October 15 – October 22, 2020, 22 October 2020, [url](#); USDOS, Attacks on Civilians in Salah al-Din Governorate, Iraq, 19 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶²² USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁶²³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



Illustrative examples of incidents

- In an ISIL attack on a PMU checkpoint manned by AAH southwest of Balad on 16 October 2020, one AAH member was killed and another one wounded. The following day, another four PMU members were killed in a nearby ISIL attack.¹⁶²⁵
- On 21 November 2020, a suspected ISIL ambush killed nine¹⁶²⁶ or ten¹⁶²⁷ people in Al-Zouiya, north of Tikrit. According to reports, the attackers initially targeted a civilian vehicle and killed three¹⁶²⁸ or four¹⁶²⁹ civilians. When members of the Iraqi police and PMU arrived, they came under fire, resulting in the deaths of four PMU members and two police officers. Although ISIL did not claim responsibility for the attack, Iraqi security forces attributed the attack to the insurgent group.¹⁶³⁰
- At least 11 PMU members were killed, including the commander of the 6th regiment of PMU Brigade 22, in two ISIL suicide bombings near Tikrit on 24 January 2021. Between eight¹⁶³¹ and twelve¹⁶³² PMU members were wounded in the attack.¹⁶³³
- On 31 January 2021, an explosion in the Tooze Khurmatu district killed one person and wounded another, according to Iraqi police sources.¹⁶³⁴
- On 11 March 2021, eight people, including six members of a family, were killed in three separate ISIL-attacks in Albu-Dour, a Sunni-majority village in southern Salah Al-Din. Among the victims of the attacks were women, a policeman and a lawyer, as well as people that ISIL accused of spying.¹⁶³⁵ According to a security source, one of the perpetrators was a former resident of the village who had been expelled from it due to his affiliation with ISIL.¹⁶³⁶
- On 3 April 2021, ISIL fighters abducted four fishermen northeast of Tikrit; they later released two of the abductees and executed the other two. In the aftermath of the incident, tribal mobilization fighters clashed with the group suspected of being responsible for the killings, leaving three of them wounded.¹⁶³⁷
- On 22 May 2021, ISIL militants killed Majid Al-Obeidi, a tribal leader in Salah Al-Din province. The militants reportedly entered Al-Obeidi's home and shot him during a brief firefight in which one of the attackers was killed as well.¹⁶³⁸

¹⁶²⁵ EPIC, ISHM: October 15 – October 22, 2020, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁶ GardaWorld, Iraq: Islamic State ambush reported in Salah al Din governorate November 21, 21 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁷ Al Jazeera, Deadly ISIL attack north of Baghdad sparks anger, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁸ GardaWorld, Iraq: Islamic State ambush reported in Salah al Din governorate November 21, 21 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁹ Al Jazeera, Deadly ISIL attack north of Baghdad sparks anger, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁰ GardaWorld, Iraq: Islamic State ambush reported in Salah al Din governorate November 21, 21 November 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Deadly ISIL attack north of Baghdad sparks anger, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³¹ EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³² Kurdistan24, Suspected ISIS attack leaves 11 PMF fighters dead, 12 injured in Iraq's Salahuddin, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³³ EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); see also Kurdistan24, Suspected ISIS attack leaves 11 PMF fighters dead, 12 injured in Iraq's Salahuddin, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁴ EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁵ CNN, ISIS behind brutal attack in Salah al-Din province, Iraq military says, 14 March 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Flurry of Sunni Triangle ops sparks questions over Islamic State, 15 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 11 – March 18, 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁶ EPIC, ISHM: March 11 – March 18, 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁷ EPIC, ISHM: April 1 – April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁸ EPIC, ISHM: May 20 – May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#)



- On 30 July 2021, a suspected ISIL attack on a funeral procession killed between five¹⁶³⁹ and eight¹⁶⁴⁰ people and wounded at least 19 others.¹⁶⁴¹ The attack reportedly sparked renewed debate about security in the predominantly Sunni areas that are mainly controlled by Shia PMU.¹⁶⁴²
- On 30 September 2021, unidentified gunmen killed three people in an attack on a house in the Qasr Al-Ashiq area of Samarra.¹⁶⁴³
- On 7 October 2021, unidentified assailants ‘lobbed a hand grenade at an election rally in Baiji district’ which left one child dead and five others injured.¹⁶⁴⁴

2.7.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents¹⁶⁴⁵ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 11 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Salah Al-Din	8	16	18	34	23	37	36	73

Table 11: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Salah Al-Din governorate¹⁶⁴⁶

2.7.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

As outlined in [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#) (see section 2.7.3), Salah Al-Din was one of the governorates with particularly high scores of infrastructure damage as a result of conflict, especially in relation to damage to housing,¹⁶⁴⁷ to the agricultural sector,¹⁶⁴⁸ and to the water, sanitation and hygiene sectors.¹⁶⁴⁹ According to a 2018 study conducted by the Iraqi government in collaboration with the World Bank, damages to the housing sector in Salah Al-Din governorate amounted to 20 % of the share of total housing damage. The governorate sustained the highest percentage of destruction to rural

¹⁶³⁹ GardaWorld, Iraq: Bombing kills at least five people, wounds as many as 25 others in Yathrib, Salah al-Din Governorate, July 30, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁰ INA, Terrorist Attack on Funeral South of Salah Al-Din Kills 8, Wounds 19 Citizens, 31 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴¹ INA, Terrorist Attack on Funeral South of Salah Al-Din Kills 8, Wounds 19 Citizens, 31 July 2021, [url](#); GardaWorld, Iraq: Bombing kills at least five people, wounds as many as 25 others in Yathrib, Salah al-Din Governorate, July 30, 30 July 2021, [url](#); ACLED, ACLED-Religion Overview, 24-30 July 2021, 6 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴² ACLED, ACLED-Religion Overview, 24-30 July 2021, 6 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴³ EPIC, ISHM: September 30 – October 7, 2021, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁴ EPIC, ISHM: September 30 – October 7, 2021, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁵ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report’s [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI’s methodology.

¹⁶⁴⁶ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

¹⁶⁴⁷ World Bank (The), Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁶⁴⁸ World Bank (The), Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. XVIII-XIX

¹⁶⁴⁹ World Bank (The), Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 94



housing assets across the seven governorates affected by conflict, which were assessed.¹⁶⁵⁰ In September 2021, an inter-agency mission to Baiji district assessed that 80 % of buildings were destroyed during the conflict against ISIL and that the reconstruction needs of the district equalled those of Mosul.¹⁶⁵¹

Based on data last updated in August 2020, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) reported the area contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 77 865 968 square metres and the area being contaminated by IEDs as 8 6777 016 square meters.¹⁶⁵² According to a January 2021 report, Salah Al-Din, Anbar, Ninewa, and Kirkuk were the most affected by ‘new’ mine contamination due to post-2003 internal conflict and ISIL occupation in 2014-2017.¹⁶⁵³ As of April 2021, it was reported that schools, houses and public infrastructure had been rebuilt in Salah Al-Din under a UNDP stabilisation program, following an effective demining effort. However, in other areas such as Baiji, there were still major challenges due to continued substantial levels of contamination from explosives.¹⁶⁵⁴ In Salah Al-Din governorate, demining remained a challenge due to the volatile security situation, particularly in the Hamrin mountain region, where ISIL reportedly still held a presence. Humanitarian workers reportedly faced the risk of being targeted when conducting mine action activities. In addition, conditions in disputed areas were restricting demining operations.¹⁶⁵⁵

The governorate’s population continued to struggle with water infrastructure damaged by the conflicts of the past 20 years, parts of which have still not been rebuilt. In many areas, water treatment plants were destroyed and access to clean drinking water remained irregular. The problematic, irregular power supply exacerbated these issues by curbing the use of water pumps. As a result of these shortages, land disputes have reportedly increased in the southern part of the governorate close to water sources, causing further instability.¹⁶⁵⁶ Throughout the reference period, several IED and missile attacks on electricity or oil infrastructure were documented in Salah Al-Din: ISIL had claimed responsibility or been blamed for some of these attacks,¹⁶⁵⁷ for others, it remained unclear who was responsible.¹⁶⁵⁸ In July 2021, a high-level security source accused PMU of being responsible for the attacks on power pylons.¹⁶⁵⁹ Especially for the period between June and August 2021, several IED attacks targeted various power pylons, among others in Samarra district, Al-Shirqat district and Hamrin region.¹⁶⁶⁰ During the reference period, two attacks were reported targeting

¹⁶⁵⁰ World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁶⁵¹ UNOCHA, [Twitter], posted on: 16 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵² iMMAP, Recorded Explosive Ordnance Contamination in Iraq - Overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵³ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine action, 22 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁵⁴ UNDP, In Salah al Din and Anbar: Rebuilding comes after mine clearance, 4 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁵ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine action, 22 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4-5

¹⁶⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁵⁷ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 14; GardaWorld, Iraq: Rocket attack targets Salah al Din Thermal Power Station in Samarra late June 27, 27 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 19 – December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Rocket attack causes fire at oil refinery in northern Iraq, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁸ AA, Missile attack targets oil company in northern Iraq, 31 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 5 – August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 24 – July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁹ INN, مصدر أممي: ميليشيا الحشد الشعبي وراء تفجير الأبراج الكهربائية بأمر إيراني [Security source: PMU is behind the blowing up of power pylons by order of Iran], 1 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁰ EPIC, ISHM: June 17 – June 24, 2021, 24 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 24 – July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 5 – August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 22 – August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); see also USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 14





military facilities in the governorate, namely Balad Air Base and Camp Speicher north of Tikrit.¹⁶⁶¹

2.7.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 58 578 IDPs were registered in Salah Al-Din governorate, originating mainly from within the governorate (91 %), but also from Kirkuk (7 %), as well as Diyala, Anbar and Ninewa governorates. Within Salah Al-Din governorate, the IDP population primarily concentrates in the districts of Tooz Khurmatu (35 %), Samarra (27 %) and Tikrit (26 %).¹⁶⁶² As of March 2021, the city of Tooz Khurmatu reportedly had one of the highest IDP to host population ratios in federal Iraq, with most of the IDPs residing in the neighbourhoods of Hay Al-Taiyar, Hay Al-Askari and Hay Komari.¹⁶⁶³ For the city of Tikrit, which hosted 8 868 IDPs not living in camps, it was reported that about 900 IDPs were living in the outskirts of the city and that displacement was continuing in the city. Most of the IDPs in Tikrit were documented in the neighbourhoods of Hay Al-Firdous, Hay Al-Zuhour and Hay Al-Qalaa.¹⁶⁶⁴

In Salah Al-Din governorate, 17 382 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses or unowned or uninhabitable houses), most of them in Samarra, Tikrit and Tooz Khurmatu districts.¹⁶⁶⁵ An IOM assessment for the period between March and April 2021 found that the situation of IDPs in the governorate was highly severe¹⁶⁶⁶ in terms of infrastructure, safety, livelihood, social inclusiveness and housing.¹⁶⁶⁷ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 90 and 99.9 % of IDP households in Baiji and Balad district live in 'severe or extreme need', as well as between 80 and 90 % of those living in Tikrit, Tooz Khurmatu and Samarra districts.¹⁶⁶⁸

IOM documented 86 616 IDPs from Salah Al-Din governorate in other parts of the country, most of them in Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Kirkuk.¹⁶⁶⁹ According to IOM, as of 30 September 2021, 731 820 returnees to Salah Al-Din governorate were reported.¹⁶⁷⁰ A study published in February 2021 reported that 17 % of interviewed households that departed from camps and returned to Salah Al-Din governorate stated feeling unsafe at their arrival location. This was particularly the case in the districts of Tikrit, Balad and Shirqat.¹⁶⁷¹ The same study, which was conducted between December 2020 and January 2021, mentioned serious protection incidents in areas of return, including a grenade attack on a returning family in Shirqat district,

¹⁶⁶¹ EPIC, ISHM: August 13 – August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 17 – September 24, 2020, 24 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶² EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶³ IOM Iraq, DTM: Urban Displacement in Federal Iraq, 14 March 2021, [url](#), p. 30

¹⁶⁶⁴ IOM Iraq, DTM: Urban Displacement in Federal Iraq, 14 March 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁶⁶⁵ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁶ IOM's 'index ranges from 0 (where all essential living conditions are met) to 100 (where no essential living conditions are met). Higher scores denote more severe living conditions for IDPs. The scores of the DI [displacement index] are grouped into three categories: low, medium and high (which also includes the identified 'very high' locations).' IOM Iraq, DTM: Findings Round One, Data Collection Period: March-April 2021, October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁶⁷ IOM Iraq, DTM: Findings Round One, Data Collection Period: March-April 2021 [Table], October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁶⁶⁸ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁶⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁰ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷¹ Protection Cluster, Iraq – Protection Monitoring System, Report 1, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6





which was seen ‘as a warning to deter families with perceived affiliation with extremist groups from returning’.¹⁶⁷²

According to IOM, Salah Al-Din saw a ‘gradual decrease in the number of returnees living in locations classified as high severity’, during 2020. Nevertheless, the governorate was home to the second largest number of returnees living in severe conditions (143 682 individuals). Indicating that around 21 % of returnees in Salah al-Din came back to places classified as highly severe, followed by 59 % to medium severity, and 20 % to low severity places.¹⁶⁷³ As of February 2021, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) classified all governorate districts to suffer from at least moderate severity in terms of perceived safety and social cohesion upon return, with Balad and Samarra districts even being rated with ‘high severity’.¹⁶⁷⁴ In July 2021, the Iraqi army reportedly unlawfully evicted 91 families from Al-Aetha, a village in Salah al-Din governorate. In an apparent family feud involving a government minister, the families were sent to a displacement camp without any of their belongings.¹⁶⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷² Protection Cluster, Iraq – Protection Monitoring System, Report 1, February 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁶⁷³ IOM Iraq, DTM: Return Dynamics in Salah Al-Din Governorate, May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Iraq: 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview [Map], 7 February 2021, [url](#), p. 24; see also Protection Cluster, Iraq – Protection Monitoring System, Report 1, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-5

¹⁶⁷⁵ HRW, Iraq: Apparent Familial Feud Drives Illegal Evictions, 11 August 2021, [url](#)



2.8 Dohuk



Map 17: Dohuk governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations

2.8.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Dohuk (Dahuk, Duhok, Dihok) governorate is a part of the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI) and Iraq's northernmost governorate. It is located in the north-west of Iraq and shares an international border with Turkey and Syria.¹⁶⁷⁶ Internally, Dohuk has borders with the governorates of Ninewa and Erbil.¹⁶⁷⁷ The area of the governorate is 6 553 square kilometres, its capital is Dohuk (Dahuk, Duhok, Dihok), and it has four districts: Amedi (Amedeye, Al-Amadiya, Al Amedi), Dohuk (Dahuk, Duhok, Dihok), Sumel (Sumail, Semeal, Semel, Summel) and Zakho.¹⁶⁷⁸ Akri and Sheikhhan districts are parts of Ninewa governorate but have been administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since the establishment of the 'Green Line' after the ceasefire between the Iraqi government and the Kurds in 1991.¹⁶⁷⁹ The administrative centre of the KRI lies formally in Erbil but the control of the region is divided between KRI's two main dominant political parties. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) exercises its power over Dohuk and Erbil governorates and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) controls Sulaymaniyah governorate.¹⁶⁸⁰

¹⁶⁷⁶ UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Duhok Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#); NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁷⁷ UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Duhok Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁸ Cardiff University, IDPs and the Informal Economy: Innovations in Dahuk, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶⁷⁹ Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#); pp. 5-6

¹⁶⁸⁰ Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018; Adel Bakawan is a French Kurdish sociologist and researcher with the Kurdistan Centre for Sociology at Soran University. He is also an Associate Research Fellow with the Institut Francais des Relations Internationales (IFRI). OFPRA invited him as a guest speaker in December and the source confirmed the notes via email, cited in: EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, October 2020, [url](#), p. 156; see also Abdullah, F. H. and Hama, H. H., The nature of the political system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 29 April 2019, [url](#), p. 2; NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#); p. 2; Iraq, KRG, Facts & Figures, n.d., [url](#)



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated¹⁶⁸¹ the governorate's population at 1 396 480 with around 362 000 people living in rural areas and around 1 034 000 in urban areas.¹⁶⁸²

Ethno-religious composition

The main ethnic group in Dohuk governorate are Kurds; small minority groups comprise Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arabs, Armenians and Yazidis.¹⁶⁸³ As of 2016, Dohuk governorate was home to an important part of Iraq's Christian population;¹⁶⁸⁴ adherents of Zoroastrianism were also found in Dohuk, mainly in Zakho district¹⁶⁸⁵ and the Armenian community predominantly lived in Zakho city.¹⁶⁸⁶ According to the Dohuk Governorate website, the city of Dohuk has a population of 340 000, the majority of which are Kurds, but a significant Assyrian community lives in the city as well. Additionally, Assyrian and Yazidi IDPs moved to the city in the aftermath of the 2014 ISIL invasion of their home areas.¹⁶⁸⁷ Meanwhile, as of 2019, the Arab version of the governorate's website stated that the city of Dohuk had a population of 421 858.¹⁶⁸⁸ According to IOM assessments of 2019, 50 % of IDPs in Dohuk were Sunni or Shia Kurds and 9 % Sunni Muslim Arabs; 35 % were Yazidis, 4 % belonged to other minorities (Christians, Kaka'i, Shabaks) and 1% were Sunni or Shia Turkmens.¹⁶⁸⁹

Economy

The KRI has been experiencing a severe financial crisis as a result of loss in oil revenue, the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁶⁹⁰ and the fight against ISIL.¹⁶⁹¹ In addition, the economic crisis is fuelled by disagreements between the regional and central governments over the management of their oil wealth.¹⁶⁹² Civil servants in the KRI have suffered for years from irregular income for these reasons.¹⁶⁹³

As of 2015, the economy of Dohuk was described as being comprised of foreign investment, bilateral trade with Turkey, tourism, construction, some agriculture and some oil

¹⁶⁸¹ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997. However, the population of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah was not included and only estimates were provided. UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#); IOM, Demographic Survey, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 9, 14

¹⁶⁸² Iraq, CSO, 2021 [تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021](#) [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁸³ American University of Kurdistan, Life in Dohuk, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁴ USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), pp. 17, 18

¹⁶⁸⁵ USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶⁸⁶ USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁶⁸⁷ Iraq, Duhok Province, Demographics, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁸ Iraq, Duhok Province, [التركيبة السكانية](#) [Demographics], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁹ IOM, Iraq, Integrated Location Assessment IV, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 62

¹⁶⁹⁰ AW, Unrest spreads to Iraqi Kurdistan over socioeconomic woes, 25 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹¹ Al-Monitor, Dozens killed, injured in Iraq's Kurdistan protests as some consider leaving, 11 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹² EPC, Differences between Baghdad and Erbil: Economic and Political Consequences and Early Elections, 18 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹³ Al-Monitor, Dozens killed, injured in Iraq's Kurdistan protests as some consider leaving, 11 December 2020, [url](#)





exploration.¹⁶⁹⁴ In September 2020, an IOM study found that key informants¹⁶⁹⁵ regarded agriculture and industry as the main sectors in Sumel district¹⁶⁹⁶ and trade, manufacturing, agriculture, and construction as the main sectors in Zakho district.¹⁶⁹⁷ After a slowdown due to COVID-19 restrictions, the economy in Dohuk was recovering step by step as of August 2020, with merchandise trade between the KRI and Turkey via the Ibrahim Khalil checkpoint gradually reviving.¹⁶⁹⁸ Reportedly, the Ibrahim Khalil checkpoint is among Iraq's and KRI's most important border crossings and has strategic importance as a connection between KRI and Europe.¹⁶⁹⁹ Recurrent protests and social unrest related to delayed payment of employees, teachers and students, have been reported in KRG governorates. Protests led to the arrest of a number of activists by Kurdish authorities.¹⁷⁰⁰

Road security

Only little information on road security and checkpoints in Dohuk governorate could be found for the reference period. In November 2020, according to OCHA, which assessed the district access difficulty levels as perceived by humanitarian actors in Iraq, there are moderate access constraints in Zakho and Amedi districts, and low access constraints in Sumel and Dohuk districts.¹⁷⁰¹ Moreover, according to French journalist Sylvain Mercadier, following the presence of Turkish drones, access to emptied villages has been described as 'very hard' due to the conflict between Turkey and the PKK.¹⁷⁰²

As for the reference period for the current report, ACLED reported ten incidents related to road security, five of which were incidents of explosions/remote violence, three were related to battles, and two to violence against civilians.¹⁷⁰³

2.8.2 Conflict background

In 1998, Dohuk and Erbil came under the control of the KDP with the end of the Kurdish civil war¹⁷⁰⁴ and, based on Iraq's 2005 Constitution, the federal Kurdistan region was established in the governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah.¹⁷⁰⁵ From the beginning of the ISIL conflict in 2014 until 2017, Dohuk governorate reportedly enjoyed a 'stable security situation'.¹⁷⁰⁶ While Dohuk governorate was not affected by ISIL attacks, the security situation

¹⁶⁹⁴ NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁶⁹⁵ Ten representatives of the business community in Sumel district took part in key informant interviews. IOM Iraq, Labour Market Assessment: Sumel District, Dohuk Governorate, September 2020, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁹⁶ IOM Iraq, Labour Market Assessment: Sumel District, Dohuk Governorate, September 2020, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁶⁹⁷ IOM Iraq, Labour Market Assessment: Zakho District, Dohuk Governorate, September 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁶⁹⁸ Basnews, *رئيس غرفة تجارة وصناعة دهوك : الحركة التجارية بدأت تستعيد عافيتها* [Head of Dohuk Chamber of Commerce and Industry: Economy is starting to recover], 22 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁹ WFP, [url](#), November 2017, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 17 – September 24, 24 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁰ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Kurdistan: Authorities should stop suppressing demonstrations, 25 November 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Non-contracted teachers from Duhok's refugee camps protest, 2 November 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, At least 100 arrested in Duhok ahead of protest against government wage delays: lawmaker, 16 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰¹ UNOCHA, Iraq: 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 7 February 2021, [url](#), p.31

¹⁷⁰² Mercadier, S., Turkish Incursion Wreaks Havoc in Iraqi Kurdistan, Orient XXI, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#); The analysis was carried out by filtering out the events containing the search terms 'road' and 'checkpoint' in the 'notes'-column of the data sheet. Please note that his methodology might underreport the number of road incidents since security incidents linked to bombings or battles might potentially implicitly affect road security.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Abdullah, F. H., PUK–KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷⁰⁵ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁰⁶ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 38



in the governorate was continuously disturbed by ‘criminality, civil unrest, and cross-border smuggling’ during that time.¹⁷⁰⁷ However, as observed in [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), the security situation in the northern border areas of Dohuk governorate deteriorated during 2019 and 2020 due to Turkish activities and activities of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK),¹⁷⁰⁸ which have been taking place since the 1990s.¹⁷⁰⁹ This development has continued through the reference period.¹⁷¹⁰

In August 2019, the Turkish Defence Ministry launched phase three of Operation Claw against the PKK in the Sinat-Haftanin region in Dohuk governorate.¹⁷¹¹ In 2020, Turkish forces further advanced into the KRI and set up 12 new military bases and checkpoints. Due to the alleged presence of PKK elements in KRI’s border areas with Turkey, these areas were heavily targeted in mid-2020 by Turkish airstrikes and shelling. According to the Secretary-General of the KRG’s Peshmerga Ministry, almost 100 villages were evacuated in Zakho and Amedi districts.¹⁷¹² As reported by the Arab Weekly (AW), based on the statement by Iraqi security officials, the Iraqi army started ‘enforcing positions along the border with Turkey to prevent Turkish forces from advancing deeper into Iraqi territory’.¹⁷¹³ At the same time it was reported that Turkey asked the Iraqi border guards for cooperation in the border areas.¹⁷¹⁴ Alongside the deployment of the Iraqi border guards, Peshmerga forces were deployed as well, reportedly in the district of Amedi, with the aim of maintaining security in this area and distancing the villagers from regional conflicts.¹⁷¹⁵ The Turkish aerial operations targeting the PKK in the KRI continued in 2021.¹⁷¹⁶ According to the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT), at least 99 civilians have been killed and 109 injured as a result of Turkish airstrikes between 2015 and February 2021 in northern Iraq.¹⁷¹⁷ The Guardian described the Turkish military operations launched in the summer of 2020 as its ‘most intense military action in Iraq in the last six years’.¹⁷¹⁸ The Turkish military operations in the region caused displacement from 2019 to 2021.¹⁷¹⁹

¹⁷⁰⁷ NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷⁰⁸ IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 13, 37, 55

¹⁷⁰⁹ Al-Monitor, Baghdad’s row with Ankara could benefit each side, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁰ Terzi, T., Turkey increases military presence in Iraq amid Kurdish infighting, Turkish Minute, 14 June 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Baghdad’s row with Ankara could benefit each side, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹¹ Kurdistan24, Turkey begins ‘Operation Claw 3’ against PKK in Kurdistan’s Duhok province, 24 August 2019, [url](#); UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2019/903], 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 35

¹⁷¹² Al-Monitor, Baghdad’s row with Ankara could benefit each side, 8 July 2020, [url](#); Irfaa Sawtak, .. قتلى ونازحون وحرائق. [Deaths, Displaced, and Fires... Losses of Kurdistan during ‘Tiger’s Claw in Numbers’], 23 June 2020, [url](#); Shafaq News, المدفعية التركية تقصف قرية في دهوك [Turkish Artillery Targets a Village in Dohuk], 4 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹³ AW, Iraq enforces border positions to prevent Turkish advance, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁴ Rudaw, Iraqi border forces to cooperate with Turkey to ‘secure’ border areas, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁵ Al-Taakhi Press, وزارة البشمركة تنشر قوات في جبل متين شمال دهوك [Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs Deploys Forces in the Matin Mountain to the North of Dohuk], 9 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁶ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021), 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 64; EPIC, ISHM: June 24 – July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); see also Rudaw, Kurdistan areas deforested by Turkey used to be so dense one could barely see the sky: witnesses, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁷ Von Laffert, B., Das Grauen aus der Luft, Al, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁸ Guardian (The), Kurds in ‘mountain prison’ cower as Turkey fights PKK with drones in Iraq, 4 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁹ EPIC, ISHM: May 27 – June 3, 2021, 3 June 2021, [url](#); Pukmedia, القصف التركي يخلي ثالث قرية بدهوك [Turkish airstrike leaves three villages in Dohuk empty], 25 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 6 – May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Turkish airstrikes empty villages in Kani Masi, 14 July 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Zakho Kurds vacate another village as Turkey deploys more troops: officials, 10 July 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Over 10 Christian villages evacuate as PKK-Turkey clashes intensify, 1 July 2020, [url](#); AP, Iraqis flee border areas as Turkey strikes Kurdish militants, 22 June 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Evacuation of villages continues in Kurdistan as Turkish shellings intensify against PKK, 23 August 2019, [url](#)



For further details on security developments in Dohuk governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 3.1.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.8.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Kurdistan Region security forces

Under the federal constitution, the KRG has the right to maintain internal security forces. However, the KDP and PUK separately controlled additional Peshmerga military units¹⁷²⁰ next to the integrated Peshmerga brigades of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA).¹⁷²¹ According to the MoPA, as of June 2021, the Peshmerga's main objectives were 'to ensure the security of the Kurdistan Region and eliminate ISIS terrorist threats'.¹⁷²² As of 2019, 14 Peshmerga brigades, also known as Regional Guards Brigades (RGB), were operating under the MoPA.¹⁷²³ Furthermore, as of 2021, militarised police forces outside the command of the MoPA, called Zeravani, were reportedly operating under the Kurdish Interior Ministry.¹⁷²⁴ In 2017, the KRG, backed by the US and its Western allies, agreed to plans for reforming, modernising and uniting the Peshmerga forces, but progress has been slow.¹⁷²⁵

The KDP and PUK were reported to have separately maintained Asayish internal security forces, police forces, nominally under control of the Kurdish Ministry of Interior, and intelligence services, namely Parastin (affiliated with the KDP) and Zenyari (affiliated with the PUK),¹⁷²⁶ nominally organised under the Kurdistan Region Security Council (KRSC).¹⁷²⁷ Based in an interview with a journalist, it was reported that the loyalty of the forces of the Kurdish Ministry of Interior and the KRSC to their affiliated parties was 'stronger' than that of the Peshmerga and that they were 'heavily involved in the region's day-to-day security and administrative affairs'.¹⁷²⁸

In 2020, 'certain units' of the KRG's Asayish internal security forces were reported to have effective impunity when it came to human rights abuses such as torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.¹⁷²⁹ As noted by USDOS, human rights organisations reported that Peshmerga and Asayish forces acted against the law, including conducting arbitrary arrests.¹⁷³⁰

¹⁷²⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷²¹ Bakr, M. J., The War at Home: The Need for Internal Security Sector Reform in Iraqi Kurdistan, MEI, July 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁷²² Iraq, KRG, Statement by the Ministry of Peshmerga on the Mount Matin attack, 5 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷²³ MERI, Institutionalisation of the Peshmerga: tipping the balance of Iraq's stability, 17 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷²⁴ Rudaw, Zeravani receive training to protect diplomatic missions in Erbil, 29 January 2018, [url](#); NRT, KDP protecting Zeravani accused of involvement in artist's death: Lawyer, 1 September 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Zeravani Peshmerga ammunitions depot catches fire in Erbil, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁵ Aziz, S. and Cottey, A., The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga: military reform and nation-building in a divided polity, 15 February 2021, [url](#), p. 226

¹⁷²⁶ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2; MERI, Institutionalisation of the Peshmerga: tipping the balance of Iraq's stability, 17 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷²⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷²⁸ Bakr, M. J., The War at Home: The Need for Internal Security Sector Reform in Iraqi Kurdistan, MEI, July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷²⁹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁷³⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10



Tensions between the Peshmerga and the PKK were rising in northern Iraq during the reference period, with clashes between them occurring in Dohuk governorate¹⁷³¹. As of December 2020, the Peshmerga forces were establishing new bases in the KRI in order to curb PKK activities.¹⁷³²

For an overview of the structure of Peshmerga in the KRI, please refer to [Actors in the KRI](#).

Turkish military forces

As of September 2019, Turkey had set up about 13 military bases in key areas such as Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Zakho¹⁷³³ and targeted PKK strongholds in northern Iraq and the KRI in 2020.¹⁷³⁴ In July 2020, the Turkish Presidency's Communications Directorate confirmed the existence of 37 Turkish military points across the KRI, including two inside the cities of Dohuk and Zakho.¹⁷³⁵ Reportedly, Turkish military points also existed in the towns and villages of Kuna Masi, Sheladiz, Amedi and Zakho Valley.¹⁷³⁶ According to a map by CPT of 2021, 30 Turkish military bases out of 42 military bases in the KRG were located in Dohuk governorate.¹⁷³⁷ In April 2021, Middle East scholar Arzu Yilmaz estimated that 5 000 Turkish forces were deployed in Iraqi Kurdistan and in Bashiqa area, which is under the Iraqi government control.¹⁷³⁸ According to Al-Monitor, since 2020, Turkey has established around 80 checkpoints to support its military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁷³⁹ In April 2021, 'Operation Claw-Lightning', a large-scale PKK-targeted Turkish operation, was launched by the Turkish Army, when Turkish forces started a military offensive targeting PKK fighters in the districts of Amedi and Zakho as well as on Mount Kesta and Mount Matin.¹⁷⁴⁰ Reportedly, the operation began with a bombardment of the outskirts of the village Kesta.¹⁷⁴¹ A visit by the Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar to a Turkish military base in northern Iraq in May 2021 provoked angry reactions from the Iraqi government.¹⁷⁴² The Iraqi government reportedly disapproved of the presence of the PKK as well as of Turkish forces in Iraq and the KRI, calling on the Turkish government to stop its operations.¹⁷⁴³ According to several media reports, Turkey was

¹⁷³¹ AA, PKK terrorist attacks in KRG region on the rise, 8 June 2021, [url](#); NINA, Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee: The PKK's Targeting Of Peshmerga Must Be Stopped, 8 June 2021; DW, Turkish drone strike on Iraqi refugee camp kills three, 5 June 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kurd vs Kurd: Fears of full-scale war rise in northern Iraq, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³² Al Jazeera, Fighting intensifies between Peshmerga and PKK in northern Iraq, 14 December 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kurd vs Kurd: Fears of full-scale war rise in northern Iraq, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³³ Shafaq, American report: Turkey has set up 13 military bases in Kurdistan region, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁴ Ahval, Turkish offensive in north Iraq extends beyond usual anti-PKK campaign – analysis, 22 July 2020, [url](#); TRT World, Turkey begins fresh anti-terror Operation Claw-Tiger in northern Iraq, 16 June 2020, [url](#); AA, Turkey launches operation Claw-Eagle, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁵ Rudaw, Ankara has built nearly 40 'military points' in Kurdistan Region: Turkish presidency, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁶ BBC News, القواعد العسكرية التركية في إقليم كردستان العراق وأهدافها [The Turkish Military Bases in the KRI and Their Purposes], 29 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁷ CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁷³⁸ Al-Monitor, Turkey to establish new military base in Iraqi Kurdistan, 30 April 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Middle East Scholar Arzu Yilmaz says limits of Turkish military activity in Iraq are mostly set by Iran [Podcast episode 48], [url](#)

¹⁷³⁹ Al-Monitor, Massive Turkey-led logging in Iraqi Kurdistan causes outcry, 11 June 2021, [url](#)

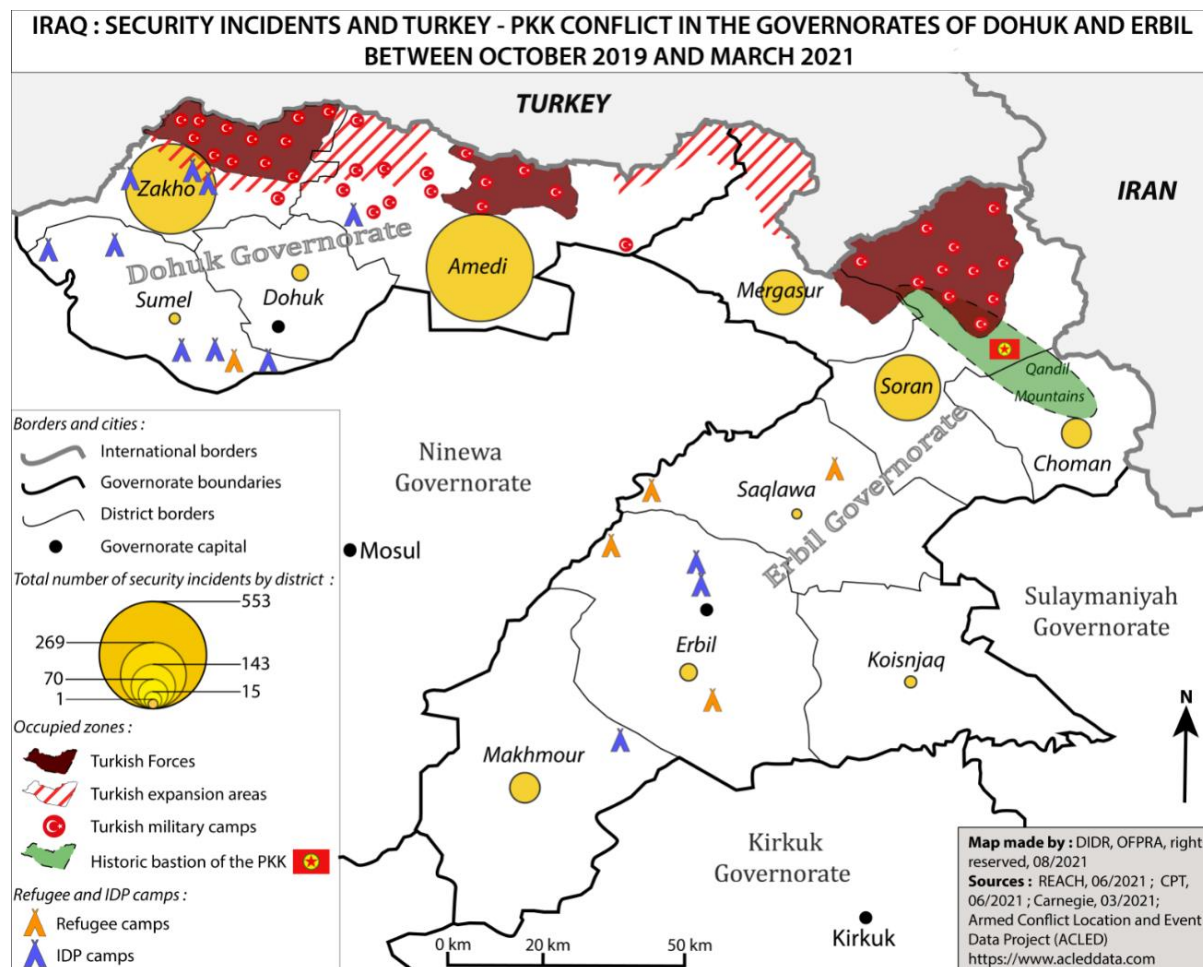
¹⁷⁴⁰ EPIC, ISHM: April 22 – April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, تركيا تتوغل في جبل كيسنة بمحافظة دهوك من ثلاثة محاور [Turkey enters Mount Kista in Dohuk governorate from three axes], 25 April 2021, [url](#); see also CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Al-Hurra, تركيا تطلق عملية عسكرية في شمال العراق وإردوغان يوضح أهدافها [Turkey starts military operation in northern Iraq and Erdogan explains its goals], 24 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴¹ CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷⁴² Terzi, T., Turkey increases military presence in Iraq amid Kurdish infighting, Turkish Minute, 14 June 2021; [url](#)

¹⁷⁴³ Mehr News Agency, Baghdad stresses need for withdrawal of Turkish troops, 6 June 2021; Defense Post (The), Iraq Fumes Against Turkey Over Drone Strike That Killed Two Iraqi Officers, 12 August 2020, [url](#)

accused of using chemical weapons during its military operations.¹⁷⁴⁴ However, according to Eliot Higgins, founder of independent international collective of researchers, investigators and citizen journalists Bellingcat, allegations of chemical attacks led by Turkish forces in Iraqi Kurdistan lack documentation, despite claims that Kurdish authorities have verified the authenticity of 300 of such attacks.¹⁷⁴⁵



Map 18: Violent incidents and Turkey-PKK conflict in the governorates of Dohuk and Erbil © DIDR¹⁷⁴⁶

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a Marxist-Leninist group founded in the 1970s that launched an armed struggle against the Turkish government in 1984 and called for an independent Kurdish state in Turkey.¹⁷⁴⁷ It has been designated as a terrorist organisation by

¹⁷⁴⁴ Morning Star, Demonstrations say Turkey's use of chemical weapons against Kurds are a war crime, 6 October 2021, [url](#); Medyanews, Turkey: 323 chemical weapons attacks in 6 months in cross-border operations, 24 October 2021, [url](#); Hawar news Agency, Jurist: International silence encourages Turkey to bomb Kurds with chemical weapons, 29 October 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Duhok family suffers from ill health after suspected chemical attack, 19 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁵ Eliot Higgins, [Twitter], posted on: 4 December 2021, [url](#); Eliot Higgins, [Twitter], posted on: 3 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁶ France, OFPRA, DIDR, Iraq: Map of Security Incidents and Turkey-PKK conflict in Dohuk and Erbil governorates", 1 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁷ BBC News, Who are Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

the U.S., EU and Turkey and had an estimated 5 000 fighters stationed largely in the KRI's mountainous areas,¹⁷⁴⁸ particularly in the Qandil mountains.¹⁷⁴⁹ The PKK developed its territorial presence and control over mountainous areas in the KRI including in the Zab Mountains in Dohuk governorate along the Iraq-Turkey border and the mountainous region of Avashin¹⁷⁵⁰, east of Kesta, as well as in the sub-district Chamanke of Amedi district.¹⁷⁵¹ During the reference period, PKK presence and clashes between the PKK and the Turkish military were reported in the border regions of KRI and Turkey.¹⁷⁵² Local officials interviewed by Rudaw in 2016 estimated that around 650 communities were living under PKK control in the KRI, although some of the villages were reported to have been evacuated due to the conflict.¹⁷⁵³ With reference to a report of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, Rudaw stated in September 2020 that 504 villages have been emptied in the KRI due to Turkish, and to a lesser extent, Iranian incursions since 1992. Reportedly, Amedi district was the most affected region with 198 villages of 348 villages emptied.¹⁷⁵⁴ According to one analyst, in September 2019, the PKK 'has become a new and effective player within the Iraqi political arena' since 2014.¹⁷⁵⁵

As mentioned above, tensions between the PKK and the KRG were rising, particularly in Dohuk governorate and the northern areas of Erbil governorate.¹⁷⁵⁶ According to Al Jazeera, the assassination of a security official on 8 October 2020 at a border crossing in Dohuk governorate caused tensions between the KRG and the PKK as the KDP accused the PKK of the killing. However, the PKK denied responsibility.¹⁷⁵⁷

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

In July 2020, the Iraqi border guard force 1 established bases in five strategic points in Zakho District in order to de-escalate the situation between Turkish forces and the PKK. The deployment of the Iraqi border guard took place on 1 July 2020 and was coordinated with the Kurdish Peshmerga forces.¹⁷⁵⁸ In April 2021, the Iraqi border guard again sent forces to areas in Dohuk governorate, near the villages Harur and Kesta in Kani Masi sub-district of Amedi district with the goal of restoring stability in the area affected by the clashes between the

¹⁷⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, Kurd vs Kurd: Fears of full-scale war rise in northern Iraq, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁹ FP, Iraqi Kurds Turn Against the PKK, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁰ A map by CPT depicts Avashin as a region extending between Dohuk and Erbil governorate; CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning [Map], 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁷⁵¹ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., Actors and territories in northern Iraq after the Baghdad offensive (October 2017) [Map], Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#); CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 12; Baghdad Today, مسؤول محلي في العمادية يعلن مقتل احد عناصر البيشمركة بهجوم للعمال الكردستاني [Local Official in Amedi announces killing of Peshmerga fighter in PKK attack], 4 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵² EPIC, ISHM: April 22 – April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, تركيا تتوغل في جبل كيسنة بمحافظة دهوك من ثلاثة محاور [Turkey enters Mount Kista in Dohuk governorate from three axes], 25 April 2021, [url](#); see also CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Al-Hurra, تركيا تطلق عملية عسكرية في شمال العراق وإردوغان يوضح أهدافها [Turkey starts military operation in northern Iraq and Erdogan explains its goals], 24 April 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 24-30 April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Over 65 villages in Kurdistan Region's Mergasur district unable to access public services due to PKK: Official, 1 November 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Turkish-PKK clashes cause residents of 117 villages to flee from Kurdistan Region's Sidakan, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵³ Rudaw, PKK bases in border areas provoke Turkish airstrikes, local mayors say, 14 April 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁴ Rudaw, 504 villages emptied due to Turkey-PKK war: Kurdistan parliament report, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁵ 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, The PKK in Iraq: A Geopolitical Reading, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁶ US, OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁷ Al Jazeera, Kurd vs Kurd: Fears of full-scale war rise in northern Iraq, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁸ Rudaw, Iraqi border guards set up bases in five 'strategic' positions in Zakho: commander, 2 July 2020, [url](#)



Turkish army and the PKK.¹⁷⁵⁹

2.8.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Out of the 1702 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Duhok governorate during the reference period, more than 98 % (1673 security incidents) were linked to Turkish forces and more than 87 % were linked to the PKK (1484 security incidents).¹⁷⁶⁰ ACLED described the conflict as 'increasingly aerial' and 'asymmetrical'.¹⁷⁶¹ Chris Woods from the NGO Airwars analysed that the incidents affecting civilians had risen by 31 % in 2020 in comparison to the previous year, with a minimum of 27 civilians killed.¹⁷⁶² The security incidents mainly took place in the districts of Amedi and Zakho.

In August 2020, Turkish bombardments and airstrikes took place on several occasions, killing a resident of Kani Masi sub-district in Amedi. It was stated that the intensification of Turkey's operations against the PKK in the KRI lead to 'heightened tensions with Iraqi authorities'.¹⁷⁶³ In September 2020, two Turkish military offensives were reported. One offensive consisted of a number of airstrikes and artillery bombardments and the other consisted of a series of airstrikes.¹⁷⁶⁴

In October and November 2020, a number of airstrikes by Turkish forces took place in Dohuk governorate, killing more than a dozen of PKK fighters. Between January 2021 and July 2021, the Turkish defense Minister claimed that 1 581 PKK militants were either killed or captured by Turkish forces. Between April 2021 and July 2021, the PKK affirmed that PKK fighters killed 494 Turkish soldiers and injured 63 others, while acknowledging the death of 63 PKK members.¹⁷⁶⁵ The attacks occurred in Metina¹⁷⁶⁶, Avashin¹⁷⁶⁷, Gara¹⁷⁶⁸ and Harkurk¹⁷⁶⁹ regions. One bombardment in the border areas between Dohuk governorate occurred close to a Yazidi IDP camp but caused no casualties.¹⁷⁷⁰ Furthermore, it was reported that the PKK targeted a Peshmerga vehicle and, in another instance, the 'KRG forces protecting an oil well in Amedi. The two attacks lead to the killing of one Peshmerga soldier and the wounding of two Peshmerga soldiers and two police officers'.¹⁷⁷¹

¹⁷⁵⁹ NRT, Iraqi's Border Guard stationed in 'strategic' areas in Dohuk governorate: Official, 4 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#); The analysis was carried out by filtering out the relevant actors in the columns 'Actor 1' and 'Actor 2' of the data sheet.

¹⁷⁶¹ Guardian (The), Kurds in 'mountain prison' cower as Turkey fights PKK with drones in Iraq, 4 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶² Von Laffert, B., Das Grauen aus der Luft, AI, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶³ EPIC, ISHM: August 13 – August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁴ EPIC, ISHM: September 24 – October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 3 – September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁵ Rudaw, More than 1,000 'terrorists neutralized' in northern Iraq since January: Turkish defense minister, 27 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁶ EPIC, ISHM: November 19 – December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 8 – October 15, 2020, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁷ EPIC, ISHM: November 19 – December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁸ EPIC, ISHM: October 29 – November 5, 2020, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁹ EPIC, ISHM: October 29 – November 5, 2020, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁰ EPIC, ISHM: November 5 – November 12, 2020, 12 November 2020, [url](#); NINA, Artillery shelling of Dohuk by Turkish army, [الجيش التركي يمتطى مناطق في دهوك بقذائف مدفعية], 10 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷¹ EPIC, ISHM: October 29 – November 5, 2020, 5 November 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 5 – November 12, 2020, 12 November 2020, [url](#)



In December 2020, several Turkish warplane attacks were reported, killing eleven PKK members and causing property damages. The affected areas included the Barwari Bala and Karish mountain areas, several positions near Zakho and the villages of Karkash and Sbandari.¹⁷⁷² Furthermore, two armed clashes between the KRG and the PKK were reported ‘amid rising tensions and friction’¹⁷⁷³ between the two. On 14 December 2020, clashes between Peshmerga fighters and the PKK were reported at a checkpoint near Amedi district; on 16 December 2020, clashes were reported to occur between the Peshmerga and the Syrian PKK affiliate YPG. Referring to a statement of KRG’s Peshmerga Ministry, the source stated that the incident occurred when YPG members were trying to cross the Kurdistan region border from Syria. However, it also stated that according to the YPG, the group had ‘respected the sovereignty’¹⁷⁷⁴ of the KRI.¹⁷⁷⁵

Following Turkish warplane bombardments on suspected PKK positions in the Chamanke sub-district near Amedi on 22 January 2021, which reportedly injured three civilians and damaged a number of homes,¹⁷⁷⁶ Turkey’s operation Claw-Eagle 2 was launched on February 10 in the area of Mount Kara.¹⁷⁷⁷ Turkish army forces and airstrikes on uninhabited villages were deployed in the sub-districts of Dinarta and Chamanke as part of the operation, which led to clashes between Turkish forces and PKK fighters on 12 February 2021. The Turkish deployment aimed at freeing 13 kidnapped Turkish citizens held hostage by the PKK. Referring to Turkish officials, the source stated that the 13 hostages and 3 Turkish soldiers were killed by the PKK and that the Turkish forces killed 48 PKK members.¹⁷⁷⁸ The Guardian reported in an article that ‘12 Turkish hostages and one Iraqi Kurdish hostage were killed’ and that the PKK denied the accusations and claimed that Turkish airstrikes killed the 13 hostages.¹⁷⁷⁹

Between April and May 2021, a number of Turkish airstrikes took place in Dohuk governorate, among others in the villages of Atoush, Bibadi, Kista, Harur, Jalki, Disheesh, Korko and Banafi and near the village of Membri. One casualty was reported in Disheesh.¹⁷⁸⁰ A number of villages were evacuated due to the shelling.¹⁷⁸¹

In June 2021, eight Turkish military offensives, including warplane and artillery bombardments, with no reported fatalities, were launched in Dohuk governorate, mainly in the districts Zakho and Amedi,¹⁷⁸² along with ‘intense clashes’ between Turkish military and

¹⁷⁷² EPIC, ISHM: December 24, – January 7, 2021, 7 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 17 – December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 3, – December 10, 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷³ EPIC, ISHM: December 17 – December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁴ EPIC, ISHM: December 17 – December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁵ EPIC, ISHM: December 17 – December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 10 – December 17, 2020, 17 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁶ EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁷ EPIC, ISHM: February 11 – February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 – February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁸ EPIC, ISHM: February 11 – February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, الدفاع التركية تعلن إطلاق عملية عسكرية ضد [Turkish Defense Ministry announces launch of military operation against PKK fighters on Mount Kara in KRI], 10 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁹ Guardian (The), Kurds in ‘mountain prison’ cower as Turkey fights PKK with drones in Iraq, 4 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁰ EPIC, ISHM: May 20 – May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 15 – April 22, 2021, 22 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, 20-year-old civilian injured in Turkish bombardment of Duhok village, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸¹ EPIC, ISHM: May 20 – May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); Pukmedia, القصف التركي يخلي ثالث قرية بدهوك [Turkish airstrike leaves three villages in Dohuk empty], 25 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸² EPIC, ISHM: June 24 – July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 17 – June 24, 2021, 24 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 3 – June 10, 2021, 10 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 27 – June 3, 2021, 3 June 2021, [url](#)



the PKK on 12 June in Kani Masi.¹⁷⁸³ In July 2021, several Turkish military operations, mainly airstrikes, were reported to have occurred in Dohuk governorate, largely in Amedi and Zakho districts, with no fatalities reported.¹⁷⁸⁴ In August 2021, Turkish artillery shelling in Zakho district killed two Iraqi tourists from Mosul¹⁷⁸⁵ and a civilian was killed during fighting between the Turkish military and the PKK in the village of Disheesh.¹⁷⁸⁶

In September 2021, Banka Sare village, located in Batifa sub-district of Zakho district, was shelled by Turkish forces, with no casualties reported. According to Rudaw, 'half of the residents of Banka Sare have fled the village' due to the bombardments and Batifa area has 'regularly been targeted by Turkish shelling'.¹⁷⁸⁷ The same month, Turkish forces also bombed a village in Amedi district.¹⁷⁸⁸

In August 2021, a roadside IED exploded in Duhok governorate, injuring a Peshmerga fighter.¹⁷⁸⁹ On 27 April 2021, an IED exploded in the Kani Masi sub-district reportedly wounded three people.¹⁷⁹⁰ In September 2021, two IED explosions occurred in Dohuk governorate. One of them killed two Peshmerga fighters in a border area within the Dinarta sub-district¹⁷⁹¹ and the other happened at a security guard trailer at the Qadya IDP camp, killing two children.¹⁷⁹²

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 380 battles, 1 314 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 8 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 1 702 security incidents in Dohuk governorate, the majority taking place in Amedi district.¹⁷⁹³

¹⁷⁸³ EPIC, ISHM: June 10 – June 17, 2021, 17 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁴ EPIC, ISHM: July 22 – August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 8 – July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 1 – July 8, 2021, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁵ EPIC, ISHM: August 19 – August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁶ EPIC, ISHM: August 12 – August 19, 2021, 19 August 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Family mourns Duhok civilian killed in Turkey-PKK clash, 14 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁷ Rudaw, Turkish shelling damages houses in Duhok village: resident, 15 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁸ Shafaq News, Turkey targets PKK sites in Kurdistan, 29 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁹ EPIC, ISHM: August 12 – August 19, 2021, 19 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: April 22 – April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹¹ EPIC, ISHM: September 9 – September 16, 2021, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹² EPIC, ISHM: August 26 – September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 22 below.

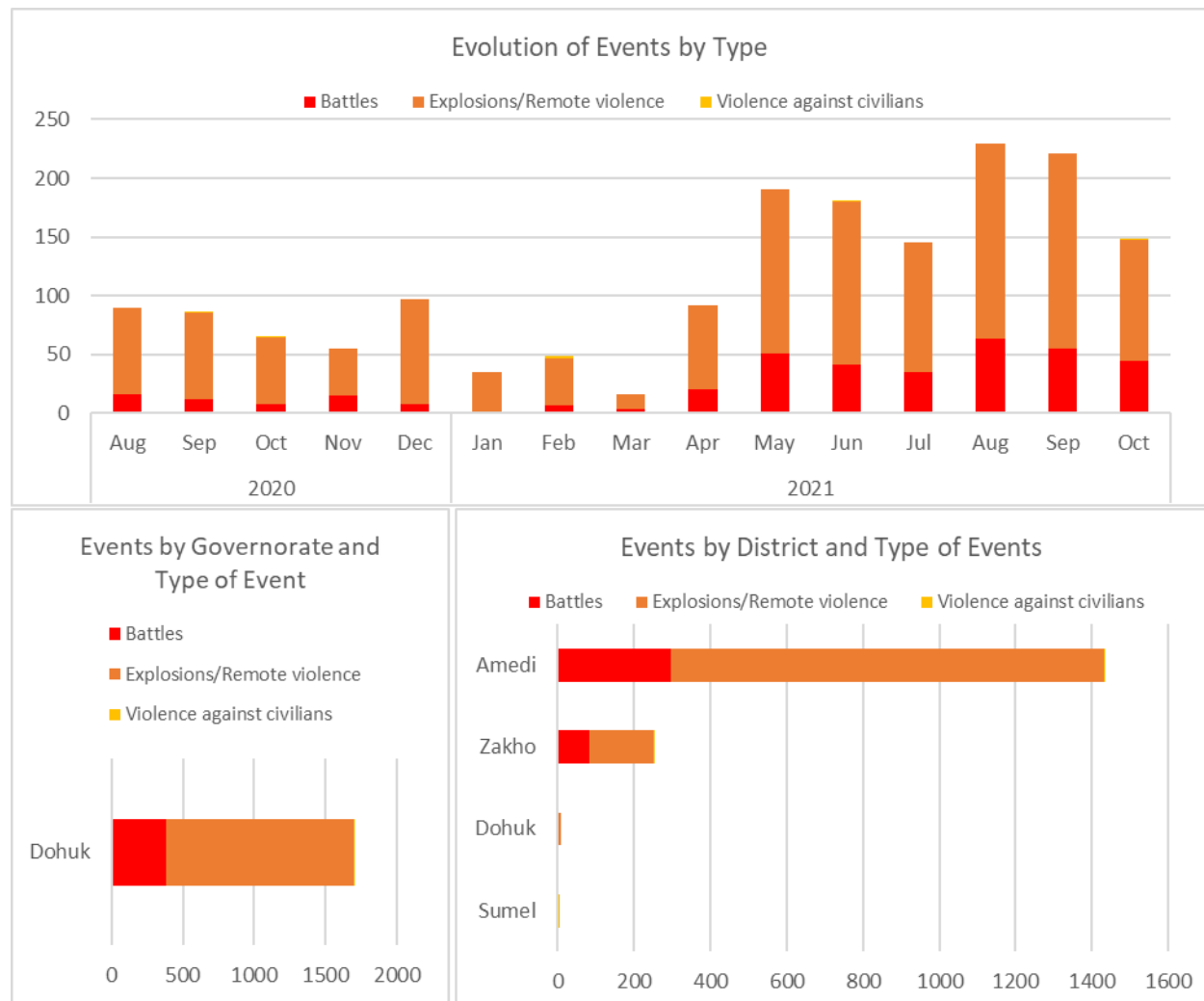


Figure 17: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dohuk governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁷⁹⁴

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 18 September 2020, a village in Amedi district, 70 km north of Dohuk city, was attacked by Turkish artillery targeting PKK forces. The attack led to the outbreak of fire in large agricultural areas and forests.¹⁷⁹⁵
- On 29 September 2020, Turkish warplanes bombed the sub-district Direlok in Amedi district. Referring to statements from Turkey's Defence Ministry, the source stated that two PKK members were killed.¹⁷⁹⁶

¹⁷⁹⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁵ Shafaq News, Turkish army attacks a village in Dohuk with heavy machine gun, 18 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁶ Baghdad Today, طائرات تركية تقصف قرية في قضاء العمادية بدهوك [Turkish warplanes bomb village in Amedi district in Dohuk], 29 September 2021, [url](#)

- On 4 November 2020, the PKK carried out an attack on Peshmerga forces in Chamanke sub-district in Amedi. Reportedly, one Peshmerga fighter was killed and two others were injured.¹⁷⁹⁷
- On 14 December 2020, following clashes between Peshmerga forces and the PKK one PKK member and one Peshmerga fighter were killed.¹⁷⁹⁸
- On 15 April 2021, Turkish warplanes bombed the surroundings of the village Jalki in the Kani Masi sub-district of Amedi and on 19 April, Turkish warplanes launched two raids near a village in Akre district. No casualties or injuries were reported according to a local official but agricultural land was damaged.¹⁷⁹⁹
- On 20 May 2021, a week of shelling between the PKK and Turkish forces had forced the residents of more than 13 villages in Amedi district to flee according to a local official interviewed by the source.¹⁸⁰⁰
- On 24 June 2021, Turkish warplane and artillery bombing was carried out in several areas of the Kani Masi sub-district in Amedi in response to PKK activities. No casualties were reported.¹⁸⁰¹
- On 9 August 2021 Turkish artillery shelling in Zakho district led to material damages, the outbreak of a large fire and the displacement of some families.¹⁸⁰²
- On 13 August 2021 an Iraqi Kurdish farmer was killed by Turkish army in Kani Masi sub-district in Amedi.¹⁸⁰³
- On 22 August 2021, two Iraqi tourists from Mosul got killed by Turkish army bombings in Zakho district.¹⁸⁰⁴
- On 3 October 2021 Turkish army bombing in the sub-district Chamanke in Amedi targeting PKK forces close to oil wells resulted in the burning of large agricultural areas. No casualties were reported.¹⁸⁰⁵

¹⁷⁹⁷ Baghdad Today, العمادية يعلن مقتل احد عناصر البيشمركة بهجوم للعمال الكردستاني [Local Official in Amedi announces killing of Peshmerga fighter in PKK attack], 4 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁸ Al Jazeera, Fighting intensifies between Peshmerga and PKK in northern Iraq, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁹ ICSSI, Turkish planes launch two raids near a village in Aqra district of Dohuk, 19 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁰ Baghdad Today, مسؤول محلي: تهجير سكان 13 قرية جراء القصف التركي بقضاء العمادية في دهوك [Local Official: Residents of 13 villages displaced due to Turkish shelling in Amedi district in Dohuk], 5 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰¹ INA, Again.. The Turkish army striking Dohuk, 24 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰² ROJ news, اندلاع حريق واسع في دهوك إثر قصف الاحتلال التركي [Large fire breaks out as a result of bombing by Turkish occupation], 8 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰³ Al-Arabiya, Turkish army fire kills Iraqi Kurdish farmer in northern Iraq, says local official, 13 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁴ ROJ news, بالصور.. مقتل سائحين اثنين من الموصل بقصف للاحتلال التركي شمالي دهوك [In pictures: Two tourists from Mosul were killed in bombing by Turkish occupation north of Dohuk], 22 August 2021 [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁵ SyriacPress, Iraq: Continuous Turkish bombardment on areas in Nohadra (Dohuk), 3 October 2021, [url](#)

2.8.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents¹⁸⁰⁶ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 12 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Dohuk	45	4	0	4	36	5	23	28

Table 12: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Dohuk governorate¹⁸⁰⁷

2.8.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

During the reference period, Turkish military operations against the PKK in Dohuk affected the lives of villagers in the areas targeted by airstrikes. CPT reported that a Turkish bombardment destroyed a water project in the city of Adne at the beginning of operation Claw-Lightning, launched in April 2021. The project distributed water to nine villages.¹⁸⁰⁸ Airstrikes in May 2021 led to the destruction of a number of farms and of large agricultural lands and damaged the area's main water pipe, which cut off the residents of the village of Bazif from the water supply.¹⁸⁰⁹ Fires caused by the Turkish operations reportedly burnt down almost 5 500 acres of agricultural land in Kani Masi sub-district of Amedi district.¹⁸¹⁰ The primary income source of more than half of the residents of Kani Masi derived from 'farming agriculture and beekeeping'. At least 800 beehives were destroyed, and many families sold their livestock out of fear to never be able to get back to their farms.¹⁸¹¹ Furthermore, damages caused by the attacks led to 'serious electricity outages 8 times'.¹⁸¹² As of May 2021, clashes between the PKK and Turkish forces led to the destruction of the electricity system in Amedi district according to a local official interviewed by the source.¹⁸¹³

With regard to mines, the KRI recorded mine contamination of 211 square kilometres at the end of 2020, which makes the KRI one of the areas in the world with the highest number of mines. This data did not include areas on the Turkish border, which have never been surveyed due to continued fighting and airstrikes, as reported Mine Action Review, that suggests that the actual number could even be higher. At the end of 2021, an area of 20 268 239 square metres was contaminated with mines specifically in Dohuk governorate.¹⁸¹⁴

¹⁸⁰⁶ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

¹⁸⁰⁷ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

¹⁸⁰⁸ CPT, Updates on Turkish Military Operation: Claw-Lightning, September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁹ Rudaw, النيران تتصاعد في أربع قرى كوردية جراء العمليات العسكرية التركية [Fire escalates in four Kurdish villages as a result of Turkish military operations], 21 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁰ CPT, Updates on Turkish Military Operation: Claw-Lightning, September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹¹ CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁸¹² CPT, Updates on Turkish Military Operation: Claw-Lightning, September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹³ Baghdad Today, مسؤول محلي: تهجير سكان 13 قرية جراء القصف التركي بقضاء العمادية في دهوك [Local Official: Residents of 13 villages displaced due to Turkish shelling in Amedi district in Dohuk], 5 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁴ Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 158-159



2.8.7 Displacement and return

OCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan, published in February 2021, reported that the KRI still hosted many IDPs displaced from 2014 to 2017 due to ISIL-related attacks. Although the number of IDPs who had fled to Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah had dropped from over 1 million people to about 700 000, the three governorates were still reported to host a large part of IDPs who had arrived in the first displacement waves in 2014 and 2015. Nonetheless, the number of IDPs in the KRI saw a decline in 2020, because many Yazidi families returned to their areas of origin in Ninewa governorate¹⁸¹⁵ The Turkish military operations in the region caused displacement as residents of several villages fled their homes to seek safety, continuing the trend observed in the previous reference period.¹⁸¹⁶

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 249 513 IDPs were registered in Dohuk governorate, the second highest number among Iraq's governorates, almost all (99.7 %) originating from Ninewa governorate. Within Dohuk governorate, the IDP population was largely concentrated in the districts of Sumel (55 %), Zakho (32 %) and Dohuk (11 %). There were 21 276 IDPs in the governorate living in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses or unfinished or abandoned houses), 17 274 of them in Sumel district, 2 820 in Zakho district and 1 080 of them in Dohuk district. Overall, 8.5 % of IDPs in Dohuk governorate were assessed to be living in critical shelters.¹⁸¹⁷ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 90.1 % and 99.9 % of IDP households in Dohuk governorate lived in severe or extreme need.¹⁸¹⁸ IOM did not document any IDPs originating from Dohuk governorate in other parts of the country.¹⁸¹⁹ As of September 2021, 762 returns to Dohuk governorate, namely to Zakho district, were documented.¹⁸²⁰ With regard to Dohuk city, IOM stated, based on data collected between March and December 2020, that '91% of households reported feeling completely safe' and about 90 % of the IDPs in Dohuk city was likely to stay there for the coming two years.¹⁸²¹

Between 16 June and 4 August 2021, REACH conducted an intentions survey in 11 IDP camps in Dohuk governorate and interviewed 1 021 households. REACH found that 97 % of IDPs intended to remain in displacement for the three months following the survey, and 86 % for the 12 months following the survey. According to the report, the reasons behind the IDPs' intention to remain in displacement were lack of security forces in the areas of origin (30 %), fear and trauma associated with the areas of origin (26 %) and a damaged and destroyed house (11 %).¹⁸²²

The Guardian mentions in April 2021 an unspecified number of IDPs linked to the PKK-Turkey conflict that have 'sought refuge in district centres such as Deraluk' and are facing issues linked to 'overcrowding' and 'underemployment'. According to the source, due to restricted

¹⁸¹⁵ UNOCHA, Iraq: 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, 7 February 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁸¹⁶ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, October 2020, [url](#), p. 165

¹⁸¹⁷ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁸ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸¹⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁰ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#); Please note, the date of the dataset does not indicate the period of the survey, but the date of the last update. Therefore, the figures do not only refer to September 2021.

¹⁸²¹ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, DTM: Urban Displacement in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 25 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 1, 7

¹⁸²² REACH, Intentions Survey, September 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6, 11



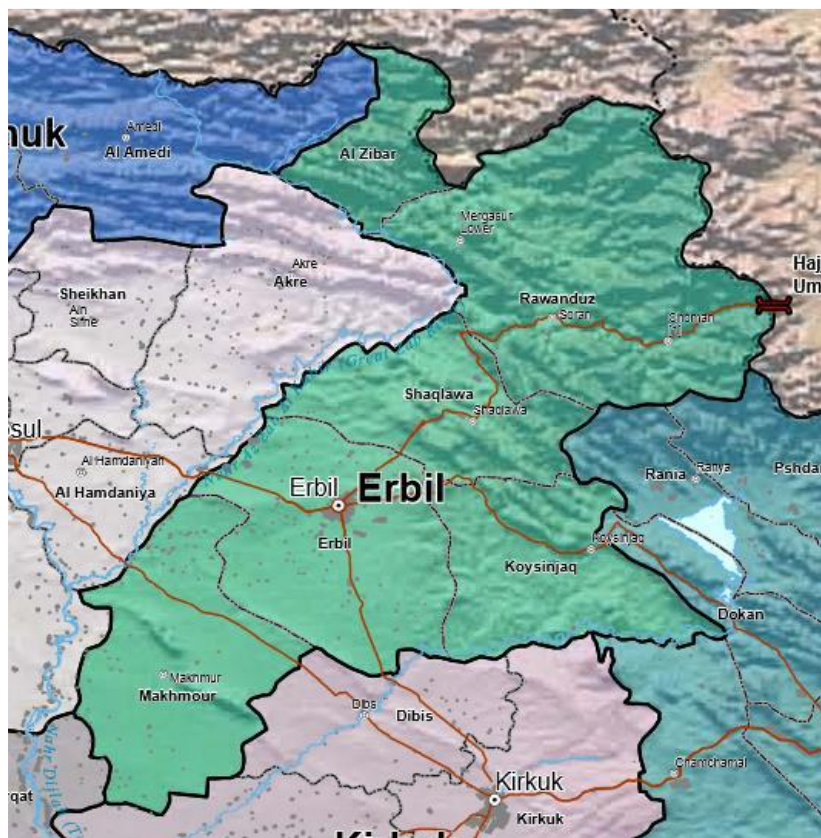


economic opportunities in district centres, ‘many people are compelled to return’ in remote mountainous areas despite fears of being targeted by Turkish bombings.¹⁸²³

¹⁸²³ Guardian (The), Kurds in 'mountain prison' cower as Turkey fights PKK with drones in Iraq, 4 April 2021 [url](#); see also Rudaw, Turkey's defense minister visits base inside Kurdistan Region, 2 May 2021, [url](#)



2.9 Erbil



Map 19: Erbil governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations¹⁸²⁴

2.9.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

The governorate is part of the KRI and located in the north-eastern part of Iraq and has internal borders with Dohuk, Ninewa, Salah Al-Din, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah governorates and international borders with Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁸²⁵ The governorate's capital is the city of Erbil, which is also the Kurdistan Region's capital city.¹⁸²⁶ Erbil governorate is divided into the following districts: Erbil, Al-Zibar, Rawanduz, Shaqlawa, Koysinjaq (Koysinjaq), and Makhmur (Makhmour).¹⁸²⁷ There are, however, also maps that show a slightly different district order for the north of the province: instead of districts Al-Zibar and Rawanduz, they show three districts called Mergasur (Mergasor, Mergesor), Soran and Choman, with Mergasur taking up the area of Al-Zibar and parts of Rawanduz, and the remaining part of Rawanduz being split into the districts of Soran and Choman.¹⁸²⁸ Makhmur

¹⁸²⁴ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁵ UNOCHA, Iraq: National Reference Map [Map], 28 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁶ IAU, Erbil Governorate Profile, November 2010., [url](#)

¹⁸²⁷ UNOCHA, Iraq: National Reference Map [Map], 28 September 2021, [url](#); REACH, Iraq – Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 23 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁸ NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 1; UNHCR, Iraq: Erbil Governorate Map - Refugee Density per District June 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#); The actual district order is unclear, since the official



District has been part of Erbil governorate since 1932, though the district has been administered by the Ninewa governorate since 1991 and is therefore ‘generally considered outside those districts administered by the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) as of 19 March 2003’.¹⁸²⁹ There has not been an official decree transferring it to Ninewa thus its administrative status remains to be determined.¹⁸³⁰ For more information, see the section **Error! Reference source not found..**

Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated¹⁸³¹ the governorate’s population at 2 003 963.¹⁸³² More than half of Erbil governorate’s population lives in the city of Erbil.¹⁸³³

Ethno-religious composition

The main ethnic group in Erbil governorate are Kurds. Other ethnic groups comprise Assyrians, Arabs and Turkmens. Most of the inhabitants of Erbil governorate are Sunni Muslims. Additional religious minorities include Christians (Chaldeans, Assyrians and Armenians), Yazidis and Kaka’i.¹⁸³⁴ According to IOM assessments of 2019, 90% of IDPs in Erbil were Arab Sunni Muslims, 7% Kurdish Sunni Muslims, 1% Yazidis, 1% Turkmens (Sunni and Shia Muslims), and 1% other minorities (Christians, Kaka’is, Shabak).¹⁸³⁵

Economy

The KRI has been experiencing a severe financial crisis as a result of loss in oil revenue, the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁸³⁶ and the fight against ISIL.¹⁸³⁷ In addition, the economic crisis is fuelled by disagreements between the regional and central governments over the management of their oil wealth.¹⁸³⁸ Civil servants in the KRI have suffered for years from irregular income for these reasons.¹⁸³⁹ Security forces prevented demonstrators in Erbil from taking to the streets to voice their discontent about the economic hardship.¹⁸⁴⁰

website of Erbil governorate lists both Rawanduz as well as Soran, Choman and Mergasur as districts while not listing Al-Zibar, see Iraq, KRG, Erbil Governorate, Districts, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸²⁹Sweden, Lifos, Irak – Makhmour, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸³⁰Sweden, Lifos, Irak – Makhmour, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 4; IAU, Erbil Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#)

¹⁸³¹It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997. However, the population of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah was not included and only estimates were provided; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq’s population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#); IOM, Demographic Survey, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 9, 14

¹⁸³²Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸³³NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸³⁴NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸³⁵IOM, Iraq, Integrated Location Assessment IV, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 62

¹⁸³⁶AW, Unrest spreads to Iraqi Kurdistan over socioeconomic woes, 25 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁷Al-Monitor, Dozens killed, injured in Iraq’s Kurdistan protests as some consider leaving, 11 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁸EPC, Differences between Baghdad and Erbil: Economic and Political Consequences and Early Elections, 18 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁹Al-Monitor, Dozens killed, injured in Iraq’s Kurdistan protests as some consider leaving, 11 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁰MEMO, Economic crisis threatens stability of Kurdistan Region, 14 August 2020, [url](#); MEI, Simmering frustration and a demand for change: Public service protests in the Kurdistan Region, 10 November 2021, [url](#)





Road security

For August 2020, iMMAP documented the explosive hazards risk level on roads in the South of Erbil governorate (Makhmur and parts of Erbil district) and found that several sections of roads in the district of Makhmur were considered ‘Secondary Risk’ roads.¹⁸⁴¹ A map depicting the explosive hazard risk level for the month of February 2021 did not show any risk roads within the south of Erbil governorate (Makhmur district).¹⁸⁴² In November 2020, OCHA assessed the district access difficulty levels in Iraq as perceived by humanitarian actors and found that there were low access constraints in most districts in Erbil. The only exception was Makhmur district which was estimated to have high level constraints because of armed actor presence, checkpoints, high levels of insecurity as well as other impediments.¹⁸⁴³ In July 2021 residents of Koisinjaq district in Erbil governorate blocked a main road as part of a protest.¹⁸⁴⁴ In August 2021, according to a PUK official, ISIL members set up a fake checkpoint on the Erbil-Makhmur road near the village of Kendal and used it to seize vehicles and kidnap civilians.¹⁸⁴⁵ No further reports of such incidents could be found within the reference period.

2.9.2 Conflict background

KDP-PUK Relations

Following the US-brokered agreement that put an end to the Kurdish civil war in 1998, Erbil governorate came under the control of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), together with Dohuk, whilst Sulaymaniyah came to be administered by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).¹⁸⁴⁶ The KRI has remained a confederacy between the two main parties, which are led by two powerful families,¹⁸⁴⁷ and the KRI’s stability depends on the relationship between the PUK and the KDP.¹⁸⁴⁸ In February 2020, the PUK selected two party co-leaders following the death of founder Jalal Talabani three years earlier. Rivalries between the two PUK leaders is likely to drive continued regional instability, with disunity and infighting between the PUK and KDP having long been causing instability in the KRI.¹⁸⁴⁹

Presence of PKK and Turkish military

The PKK arrived in Iraq after a military coup in Turkey in 1980. A deal was struck between the KDP and the PKK in 1983, allowing the PKK control of territory near the Turkish border. By the 1990s relations soured and the KDP and PKK fought a deadly war over the control of land. The relationship between the PKK and PUK fluctuated over time, with PUK-controlled areas today serving as a relatively safe haven for PKK fighters.¹⁸⁵⁰ The relationship between the KDP

¹⁸⁴¹ iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Erbil Governorate 01-31 August 2020, 6 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴² iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Erbil Governorate 1-28 February 2021, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴³ UNOCHA, Iraq: 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 7 February 2021, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁸⁴⁴ Shafaq News, Demonstrators in Erbil block a vital road protesting the lack of services, 4 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁵ North Press Agency, ISIS members set up checkpoint, kidnap civilians on Iraqi’s Erbil-Makhmur road, 7 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁶ Abdullah, F. H., PUK–KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸⁴⁷ Aydoğan, B. and Alaca, M., A Family Affair: Rifts in the Talabani Family Highlight the Kurdistan Region of Iraq’s Political Weaknesses, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 25 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁸ National Interest (The), Game of Thrones in Iraqi Kurdistan, 24 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁹ Aydoğan, B. and Alaca, M., A Family Affair: Rifts in the Talabani Family Highlight the Kurdistan Region of Iraq’s Political Weaknesses, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 25 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁰ Rudaw, Will KDP-PKK tensions ever end in reconciliation?, 25 November 2020, [url](#)





and PKK have remained precarious,¹⁸⁵¹ and the KDP has called on the PKK to leave the KRI.¹⁸⁵² At the same time, the KRG has close ties with Ankara and relies on Turkey to export oil,¹⁸⁵³ in addition to strong ties in other areas of the economy.¹⁸⁵⁴ The KRG has accepted expanding Turkish operations against the PKK to take place within Iraqi Kurdish territory.¹⁸⁵⁵

Iranian Kurdish armed groups and Iran

The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), one of the main Kurdish Iranian groups, with their headquarters in the KRI was banned in Iran after the 1979 Islamic revolution.¹⁸⁵⁶ The group consequently declared war against the Iranian government and has been attacking Iranian and Turkish forces from their bases in the border areas of the KRI.¹⁸⁵⁷ The PJAK (Party for Free Life in Kurdistan¹⁸⁵⁸), the PKK's Iranian wing, was founded in the mid-1990s inside Iran, but moved its military wing to the Mount Qandil area inside the KRI, from where it has conducted on and off insurgent campaigns against Iran since the early 2000s.¹⁸⁵⁹ The Iranian government forces have reportedly launched aerial attacks against Iranian Kurds since 1993.¹⁸⁶⁰ While the level of conflict changed over the years, it has recently intensified with frequent clashes occurring in the mountainous border region.¹⁸⁶¹

Disputed territories and ISIL

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the issue of the 'disputed territories' has flared up between the central government of Iraq and the KRG. Despite being addressed in Article 140 of the 2005 constitution,¹⁸⁶² the two governments have to date failed to find a mutually acceptable solution for long-term administrations of these territories. While from 2003 to 2017, the Kurds assumed de facto authority over many areas, the aftermath of the Kurdish referendum on independence in 2017 led to the central government assuming nearly exclusive control over the disputed territories.¹⁸⁶³ One of these areas is Makhmur, south of Erbil, from which Peshmerga forces withdrew in 2017.¹⁸⁶⁴ As a result of the security gap between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces, it has become a safe haven for ISIL sleeper cells.¹⁸⁶⁵ In addition, US forces based in Erbil city were targeted by drone strikes, with the US suspecting pro-Iranian militia to be responsible.¹⁸⁶⁶

For further details on security developments in Erbil governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 3.2.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

¹⁸⁵¹ Rudaw, Will KDP-PKK tensions ever end in reconciliation?, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵² Al-Monitor, Deadly attacks stoke KDP-PKK tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵³ Al-Monitor, Deadly attacks stoke KDP-PKK tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁴ Mena Affairs, The inevitable conflict between the PKK and KDP in Iraq, 9 August 2021, [url](#); Medyanews, Reflections on the nature of relations between the KDP and Turkey, 23 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁵ Al-Monitor, Deadly attacks stoke KDP-PKK tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁶ MEE, Iran launches air strikes on Kurdish separatist group in northern Iraq, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁷ National (The), Iran shells Kurdish insurgents in Iraq, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁸ Jamestown Foundation, Party for Free Life in Kurdistan: The PKK's Iranian Wing Bides Its Time, 15 January 2018, available at: [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁹ Brandon, J., Party for Free Life in Kurdistan: The PKK's Iranian Wing Bides Its Time, 15 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁰ Global Security, Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), 19 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶¹ Al-Monitor, Iranian security official tells Iraq to expel Iranian Kurdish groups, 13 September 2021, [url](#); National (The), Iran shells Kurdish insurgents in Iraq, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶² EPC, Disputed territories in Iraq: Security Dilemma and geopolitics, 13 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶³ Van den Toorn, C., Public Authority and Iraq's Disputed Territories, LSE [Blog], 4 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁴ Kurdistan24, Coalition airstrikes hit 39 ISIS positions in Qarachogh near Makhmour, 23 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁵ Rudaw, Two hostages released by ISIS in Makhmour, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁶ Basnews, Security Vacuum in Disputed Areas Cause of Continued Drone Attacks on Erbil: Governor, 12 September 2021, [url](#)





2.9.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Kurdistan Region security forces

Under the federal constitution, the KRG has the right to maintain internal security forces. However, the KDP and PUK separately control additional Peshmerga military units¹⁸⁶⁷, next to the integrated Peshmerga brigades of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA).¹⁸⁶⁸ The two parties furthermore control separate Asayish internal security services¹⁸⁶⁹ as well as separate intelligence services, the Zanyari (PUK) and the Parastin (KDP).¹⁸⁷⁰ The Kurdish Ministry of Interior and KRSC forces are said to be particularly loyal to their affiliated parties and they are heavily involved in the region's day-to-day security and administrative affairs.¹⁸⁷¹ In 2017 the KRG, backed by the US and its Western allies, agreed to plans reforming, modernising and uniting the Peshmerga forces, but progress has been slow.¹⁸⁷²

'Certain units' of the KRG's Asayish internal security services were reported to have effective impunity when it came to human rights abuses such as torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.¹⁸⁷³ Human rights organisations reported that Peshmerga and Asayish forces acted against the law, including conducting arbitrary arrests.¹⁸⁷⁴ It was further reported in February 2021 that activists and trade unionists detained in an Asayish prison in Erbil were suffering from physical and psychological torture and inhuman detention conditions.¹⁸⁷⁵

For an overview of the structure of Peshmerga in the KRI, please refer to [Actors in the KRI](#).

Turkish military forces

Turkish forces are stationed in the KRI¹⁸⁷⁶, including in Erbil governorate, such as in Bradost region,¹⁸⁷⁷ and Erbil city.¹⁸⁷⁸ In July 2020, the Turkish Presidency's Communications Directorate confirmed the existence of 37 Turkish military points across the KRI, including in the Hakurk and Basyan areas of Erbil governorate and in Erbil city.¹⁸⁷⁹ Turkey was said to be in the process of establishing additional bases within KRI territory.¹⁸⁸⁰ In April 2021, Middle East scholar Arzu Yilmaz estimated that 5 000 Turkish forces were deployed in Iraqi Kurdistan and in Bashiqa area, which is under control of the central government.¹⁸⁸¹ The following map

¹⁸⁶⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁶⁸ Bakr, M. J., The War at Home: The Need for Internal Security Sector Reform in Iraqi Kurdistan, MEI, July 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁸⁶⁹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁷⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 - Iraq, 20 April 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸⁷¹ Bakr, M. J., The War at Home: The Need for Internal Security Sector Reform in Iraqi Kurdistan, MEI, July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸⁷² Aziz, S. and Cottey, A., The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga: military reform and nation-building in a divided polity, 15 February 2021, [url](#), p. 226

¹⁸⁷³ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸⁷⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10

¹⁸⁷⁵ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Protesters unlawfully detained and tortured in Iraqi Kurdistan, 8. February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁶ Rudaw, Ankara has built nearly 40 'military points' in Kurdistan Region: Turkish presidency, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁷ Ahval, Turkish military digs deeper into Iraqi Kurdistan, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁸ Rudaw, Ankara has built nearly 40 'military points' in Kurdistan Region: Turkish presidency, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

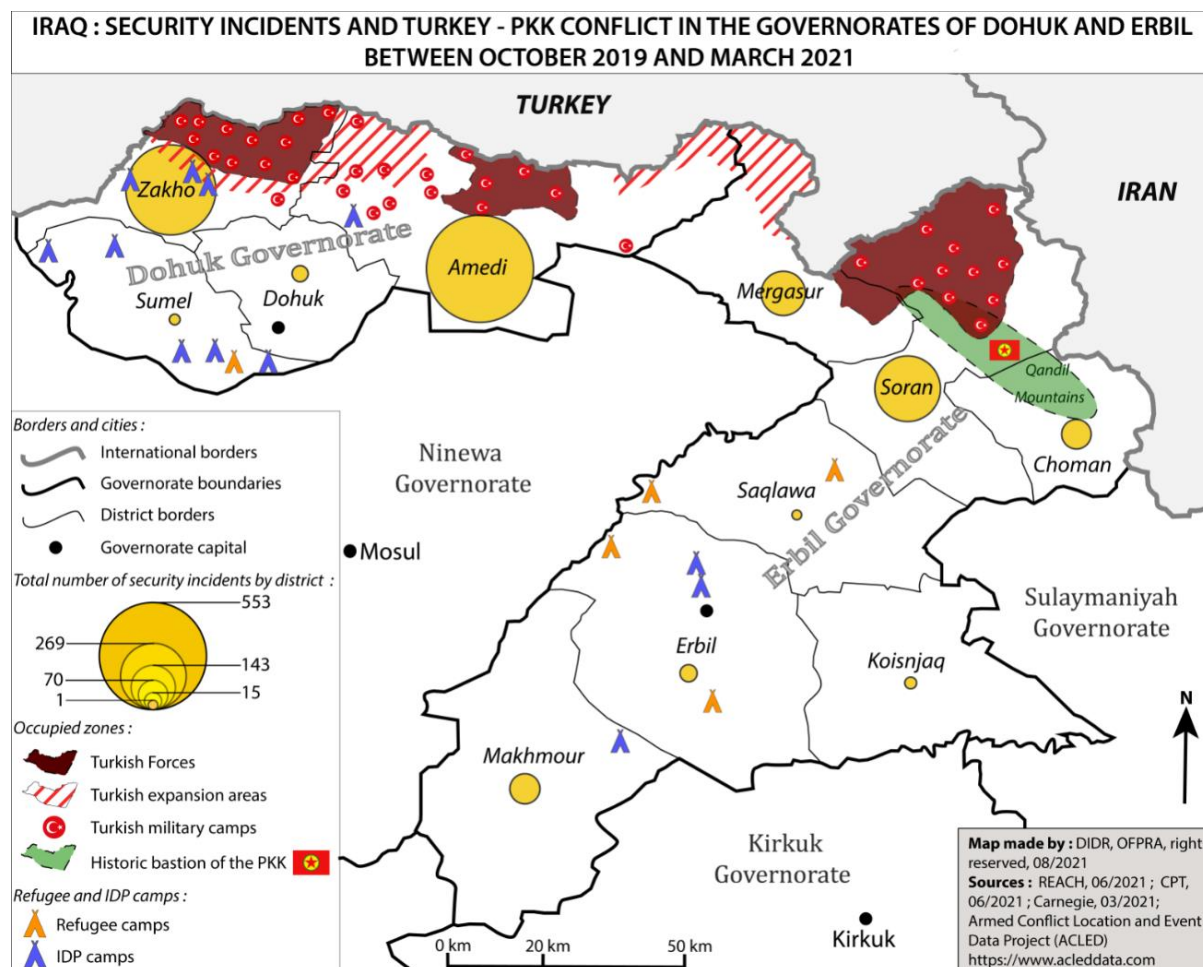
¹⁸⁷⁹ Rudaw, Ankara has built nearly 40 'military points' in Kurdistan Region: Turkish presidency, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁰ Ahval, Turkish military digs deeper into Iraqi Kurdistan, 18 May 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Turkey sets up new military bases in Kurdistan Region, as air campaign continues: sources, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸¹ Al-Monitor, Turkey to establish new military base in Iraqi Kurdistan, 30 April 2021, [url](#)



shows the locations of Turkish military bases and zones of recent Turkish expansion in Erbil and Dohuk governorates:



Map 20: Violent incidents and Turkey-PKK conflict in the governorates of Dohuk and Erbil © DIDR¹⁸⁸²

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a Marxist-Leninist group founded in the 1970s that launched an armed struggle against the Turkish government in 1984 and called for an independent Kurdish state in Turkey.¹⁸⁸³ It has been designated a terrorist organisation by the U.S., EU and Turkey and had an estimated 5 000 fighters stationed largely in the KRI's mountainous areas,¹⁸⁸⁴ particularly in the Qandil mountains.¹⁸⁸⁵ During the reference period, PKK presence and clashes between the PKK and the Turkish military were reported in the border regions of KRI and Turkey, specifically in Mergasur¹⁸⁸⁶ and Soran districts¹⁸⁸⁷. According

¹⁸⁸² France, OFPRA, DIDR, Iraq: Map of Security Incidents and Turkey-PKK conflict in Dohuk and Erbil governorates", 1 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸³ BBC News, Who are Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁴ Al Jazeera, Kurd vs Kurd: Fears of full-scale war rise in northern Iraq, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁵ FP, Iraqi Kurds Turn Against the PKK, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁶ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 24-30 April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Over 65 villages in Kurdistan Region's Mergasur district unable to access public services due to PKK: Official, 1 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁷ Kurdistan24, Turkish-PKK clashes cause residents of 117 villages to flee from Kurdistan Region's Sidakan, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the PKK is also present in Makhmur refugee camp located in Makhmur district. Makhmur refugee camp has been described by Erdogan as a recruiting spot for the PKK.¹⁸⁸⁸ It was further reported that fighting between the PKK and Kurdish regional authorities had increased in 2020, particularly in Dohuk governorate and the northern areas of Erbil governorate.¹⁸⁸⁹

Iranian state forces

Operations by Iranian state forces took place in Erbil governorate during the timeframe of this report.¹⁸⁹⁰ The attacks were launched in mountainous areas¹⁸⁹¹, such as Sidakan, Choman and Haj Omran in Erbil governorate.¹⁸⁹² An Iranian IRGC commander, cited by Rudaw, called on civilians in 'these regions to stay away from the bases of these terrorist groups so they do not come to any harm'.¹⁸⁹³

Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups

A number of Iranian Kurdish armed groups opposed to Iran are headquartered in the KRI, with their bases sporadically shelled by Iranian forces.¹⁸⁹⁴ These include, among others, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI)¹⁸⁹⁵ and the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK).¹⁸⁹⁶ The KDPI relocated to Koisinjaq district in Erbil governorate in the 1990s. It is politically active in the KRI and is training members, but has refrained from military campaigns inside Iraq.¹⁸⁹⁷ It was targeted by Iranian state forces with drones in 2021 with no casualties being reported.¹⁸⁹⁸ In August 2021 Musa Babakhani, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran's (KDP-I) central committee, a splinter group from the KDPI, was found dead, with signs of torture, in a hotel room in Erbil.¹⁸⁹⁹ It was further reported in July 2021 that the military wing of the Iranian Kurdish political group, *Komala*, attended military training in Erbil's sub-district Sidakan and clashed with PKK members during the training.¹⁹⁰⁰

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

Qarachogh mountains, near Makhmur district, were described as a 'safe haven' for ISIL sleeper cells, as a result of a security gap between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces.¹⁹⁰¹ According to Abdullah Tahir, a KDP representative in Makhmur, ISIL came down Mount Qarachogh on

¹⁸⁸⁸ Cantenar, Ö. F., Turkey Conducting Targeted Killings of PKK Leaders in Iraq: What's Next?, Jamestown Foundation, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁹ US, OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁰ MEE, Iran launches air strikes on Kurdish separatist group in northern Iraq, 9 September 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iran strikes Kurdish Iranian group in Iraqi territory, 3 August 2020, [url](#); National (The), Iran shells Kurdish insurgents in Iraq, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹¹ New Arab (The), Iran destroyed headquarters of 'counter-revolutionaries' in Iraqi Kurdistan, 21 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹² Rudaw, Iran attacks Kurdish groups in Iraq using warplanes, suicide drones: official, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹³ Rudaw, Iran attacks Kurdish groups in Iraq using warplanes, suicide drones: official, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁴ Rudaw, Official from Iran's KDP-I killed in Erbil: party statement, 7 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁵ Also known as the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI)

¹⁸⁹⁶ AW, Iran urges Iraq to expel Iranian rebels from Kurdish region, 11 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁷ Okuducu, I., Iranian Kurdish Opposition in Erbil May Suffer as a Result of a US Withdrawal, LSE [Blog], 3 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁸ Rudaw, KDPI says will not be forced out of Kurdistan Region, 13 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁹ Rudaw, Official from Iran's KDP-I killed in Erbil: party statement, 7 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁰ Rudaw, Clashes between PKK, Iranian Kurdish opposition group in Erbil province, 4 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰¹ Rudaw, Two hostages released by ISIS in Makhmour, 12 August 2021, [url](#); see also Kurdistan24, Coalition airstrikes hit 39 ISIS positions in Qarachogh near Makhmour, 23 March 2021, [url](#)



the Makhmur side and conducted kidnappings and other activities.¹⁹⁰² Coalition forces conducted operations against ISIL in the Makhmur mountain areas.¹⁹⁰³

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

Pro-Iranian PMU have been accused of targeting a US base near Erbil International airport¹⁹⁰⁴, with one attack striking the airport and killing a civilian contractor.¹⁹⁰⁵

US-led coalition forces

U.S. forces are stationed in Erbil, close to Erbil International Airport, where during the reference period they were repeatedly attacked by rockets and drone strikes purportedly carried out by PMU.¹⁹⁰⁶

2.9.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

According to the US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) Iraq Country Security Report of February 2021, the KRI remained ‘relatively secure’, despite existing internal political divisions, Turkish military activity targeting the PKK and an ongoing threat from ISIL.¹⁹⁰⁷ In addition to the lingering ISIL threat, there was furthermore a particular risk in the mountainous areas of Qandil, Makhmur, and near the border with Turkey because of Turkey’s regular military actions.¹⁹⁰⁸ However, according to ACLED’s database, Erbil governorate recorded the second highest number of security incidents in Iraq after Dohuk governorate during the reference period. The recorded security incidents were concentrated in Rawanduz and Makhmur districts.¹⁹⁰⁹

Turkey-PKK conflict

From August 2020 to October 2021, ACLED reported 399 incidents of Turkish strikes against the PKK or clashes between Turkish forces and PKK fighters in Erbil governorate.¹⁹¹⁰ The UN regularly reported on the continuation of Turkish operations against the PKK in the KRI during

¹⁹⁰² Rudaw, Two hostages released by ISIS in Makhmour, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰³ Guardian (The), RAF engaged in 10-day attack on Isis in Iraq this spring, 8 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Ten ISIS militants killed in raids on Qarachogh mountain: Peshmerga commander, 11 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁴ Al Jazeera, Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq’s disputed regions, 8 May 2021, [url](#); VOA, Iraqi Kurds Fear Escalation of Iran-Backed Rocket Attacks, 27 April 2021, [url](#); Forbes, Iraqi Militia Attacks Against Kurdish Peshmerga Benefit The Islamic State, 31 March 2021, [url](#); MEE, Erbil attack a warning to Iraqi Kurds, not the US, say Shia commanders, 23 February 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Rockets targeting Erbil launched more than 1,000 meters from PMF checkpoint: brigade commander, 1 October 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Iran-backed groups behind Erbil rocket attack: Iraqi Kurdish security agency, 30 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁵ MEE, Erbil attack a warning to Iraqi Kurds, not the US, say Shia commanders, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁶ Rudaw, US to reduce combat troops in Erbil, Anbar by month’s end: Iraqi military, 17 September 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Explosives-laden drone targets U.S. forces at Iraq’s Erbil airport, 14 April 2021, [url](#); AW, Erbil rocket attacks send Iranian threatening message, 2 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁷ US, OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁸ UK, gov.uk, Foreign travel advice Iraq, as of October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)





the reference period.¹⁹¹¹ The Turkish Minister of Defence claimed that 1 581 PKK militants were either killed or captured by Turkish forces between January 2021 and July 2021. Between April 2021 and July 2021, the PKK affirmed that PKK fighters killed 494 Turkish soldiers and injured 63 others, while acknowledging the death of 63 PKK members.¹⁹¹² As a result of the conflict between Turkey and PKK, civilians have been displaced, suffered injury and death, as well as damage to their farms, livestock or other property.¹⁹¹³

In April 2021, Turkish forces started operation Claw-Lightning to target the PKK inside the KRI. As part of the operation, Turkey advanced into the KRI and built more bases while clashes between Turkey and the PKK intensified. According to CPT, civilians living in the border regions were critically impacted by Turkish bombings. Civilians had to evacuate their villages, land and beehives were destroyed.¹⁹¹⁴ ACLED recorded airstrikes targeting Avashin and Qandil mountain regions of Erbil governorate, as part of the Turkish Claw-Lightning operation.¹⁹¹⁵ On 23 April 2021, Turkish Armed Forces conducted heavy aerial bombings in Avashin. Such bombings as part of operation 'Claw-Lightning' led to 16 villages being abandoned in the area.¹⁹¹⁶

Within the governorate of Erbil, Turkish president Erdogan at the beginning of June 2021 named Qandil mountains and Makhmur camp,¹⁹¹⁷ a camp for Kurdish refugees having fled Turkey during the 1990s¹⁹¹⁸, as safe havens of the PKK; both locations were subsequently targeted by Turkish security forces.¹⁹¹⁹ It was reported that three people were killed and two wounded in a Turkish drone attack on Makhmur refugee camp in June 2021.¹⁹²⁰

In November 2020, the mayor of Mergasur district, Ghafour Ahmed, alleged that 'more than 65 villages in the district's outskirts have been denied access to basic services... because of the PKK presence of in the area'.¹⁹²¹ The same month it was reported that ongoing clashes between Turkish forces and the PKK had resulted in the evacuation of 117 villages in the sub-district of Sidakan, in the northern part of Erbil governorate. Residents reported material damage to houses and farmland as well as injured civilians. According to local official Ehsan Chalabi, 'since 2019, more than 1 400 *donums* of land have been burned, including farmland and orchards'. Residents were also forced to leave villages in the area of Bradost, which was described as another severely affected area by the Turkey-PKK conflict.¹⁹²²

¹⁹¹¹ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 20; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 23; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 21; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 30

¹⁹¹² Rudaw, More than 1,000 'terrorists neutralized' in northern Iraq since January: Turkish defense minister, 27 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹³ Kurdistan24, Kurdistan Region calls on PKK, Turkey to stop endangering civilians, 25 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁴ CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹¹⁵ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 24-30 April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁶ CPT, No Return: The Civilian Impact of Turkey's Operation Claw-Lightning, 3 June 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁹¹⁷ Cantenar, Ö. F., Turkey Conducting Targeted Killings of PKK Leaders in Iraq: What's Next?, Jamestown Foundation, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁸ France 24, Turkish drone attack kills three civilians in northern Iraq Kurdish refugee camp, 5 June 2021, [url](#), Rudaw, Turkey bombs Makhmour camp, killing three: Peshmerga commander, 5 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁹ Cantenar, Ö. F., Turkey Conducting Targeted Killings of PKK Leaders in Iraq: What's Next?, Jamestown Foundation, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁰ France 24, Turkish drone attack kills three civilians in northern Iraq Kurdish refugee camp, 5 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²¹ Kurdistan24, Over 65 villages in Kurdistan Region's Mergasur district unable to access public services due to PKK: Official, 1 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹²² Kurdistan24, Turkish-PKK clashes cause residents of 117 villages to flee from Kurdistan Region's Sidakan, 7 November 2020, [url](#)





Furthermore, rising tensions were reported between the KDP and the PKK, as a result of PKK operations in the KRI, which raised fears of an intra-Kurdish escalation.¹⁹²³

Iranian activity

In August 2020, Iranian drones and artillery shells struck bases of the KDPI in the mountainous Barbzin area of Erbil governorate, with no casualties reported.¹⁹²⁴ In October 2020 the district's mayor Ehsan Chalabi reported border villages in the Erbil sub-district of Sidakan being shelled by Iranian forces.¹⁹²⁵ In the beginning of September 2021, Iran conducted airstrikes against the KDPI in the Sidakan and Choman areas of Erbil governorate.¹⁹²⁶ The shelling continued for a couple of days, and according to the district's mayor the Iranian artillery bombed a village in Sidakan twice.¹⁹²⁷ In mid-September 2021, the area of Sidakan was once again shelled by the Iranian military. Local officials reported resulting damage to farms and wildlife in the area.¹⁹²⁸ Days later, the chief of staff of Iran's armed forces voiced plans to expand its military operations inside the KRI against the presence of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups.¹⁹²⁹

ISIL activity

Residents of Makhmur district in October 2021 reported a deteriorating security situation in the area, due to threats posed by ISIL as well as PMU. Residents alleged that they could not 'rely on Iraqi forces and armed militias for protection'. ISIL is said to have appeared in the area after the takeover of the area by Iraqi national forces following the Kurdistan referendum of independence in 2017 and three years later, ISIL fighters were reported to continue to threaten local villagers and farmers.¹⁹³⁰ In 2020 and 2021, several airstrikes were conducted by coalition forces in Qarachogh mountain, near Makhmur, with the aim to drive out ISIL.¹⁹³¹

In August 2021, ISIL members set up a fake checkpoint on the Erbil-Makhmur road and kidnapped nine civilians from Makhmur, four of whom managed to flee.¹⁹³² One week later, two of the kidnapped persons were released, but another person, a young shepherd, was abducted by ISIL. According to a Peshmerga commander, ISIL targeted civilians and essential infrastructure.¹⁹³³ Pukmedia further reported a beheading and a kidnapping, with ISIL activities rising in Makhmur district and the nearby Qarachogh mountain.¹⁹³⁴ In September 2021, Kurdish security forces announced the arrest of ISIL members, who allegedly planned terror

¹⁹²³ Al Jazeera, Kurd vs Kurd: Fears of full-scale war rise in northern Iraq, 2 December 2020, [url](#); FP, Iraqi Kurds Turn Against the PKK, 29 November 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Deadly attacks stoke KDP-PKK tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 June 2021, [url](#); Mena Affairs, The inevitable conflict between the PKK and KDP in Iraq, 9 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁴ Rudaw, Iran strikes Kurdish opposition party base in Kurdistan Region territory, 3 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁵ Rudaw, Iran shells border villages in Erbil province, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁶ MEE, Iran launches air strikes on Kurdish separatist group in northern Iraq, 9 September 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Iran attacks Kurdish groups in Iraq using warplanes, suicide drones: official, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁷ Shafaq News, Iran intensified its artillery shells north of Erbil, 11 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁸ Basnews, Iran Bombards Kurdistan Border Areas Again, 13 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁹ EPIC, ISHM: September 16 – September 23, 2021, 23 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁰ Kurdistan24, Residents, officials say security in disputed Makhmour deteriorating due to ISIS, militias, 9 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³¹ Guardian (The), RAF engaged in 10-day attack on Isis in Iraq this spring, 8 April 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Coalition airstrikes hit 39 ISIS positions in Qarachogh near Makhmour, 23 March 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Ten ISIS militants killed in raids on Qarachogh mountain: Peshmerga commander, 11 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³² North Press Agency, ISIS members set up checkpoint, kidnap civilians on Iraqi's Erbil-Makhmur road, 7 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³³ Rudaw, Two hostages released by ISIS in Makhmour, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁴ Pukmedia, Makhmur: ISIS terrorists behead man, abduct another, 9 August 2021, [url](#)



acts in Erbil city.¹⁹³⁵ The same month, four persons were killed and seven injured in an ISIL attack in Makhmur district, among them both militia fighters and civilians. This was said to be the second ISIL attack in Makhmur district in less than a week.¹⁹³⁶

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 188 battles, 457 incidents of explosions remote/violence and 19 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 664 security incidents in Erbil governorate, the majority taking place in Rawanduz district.¹⁹³⁷ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 23 below.

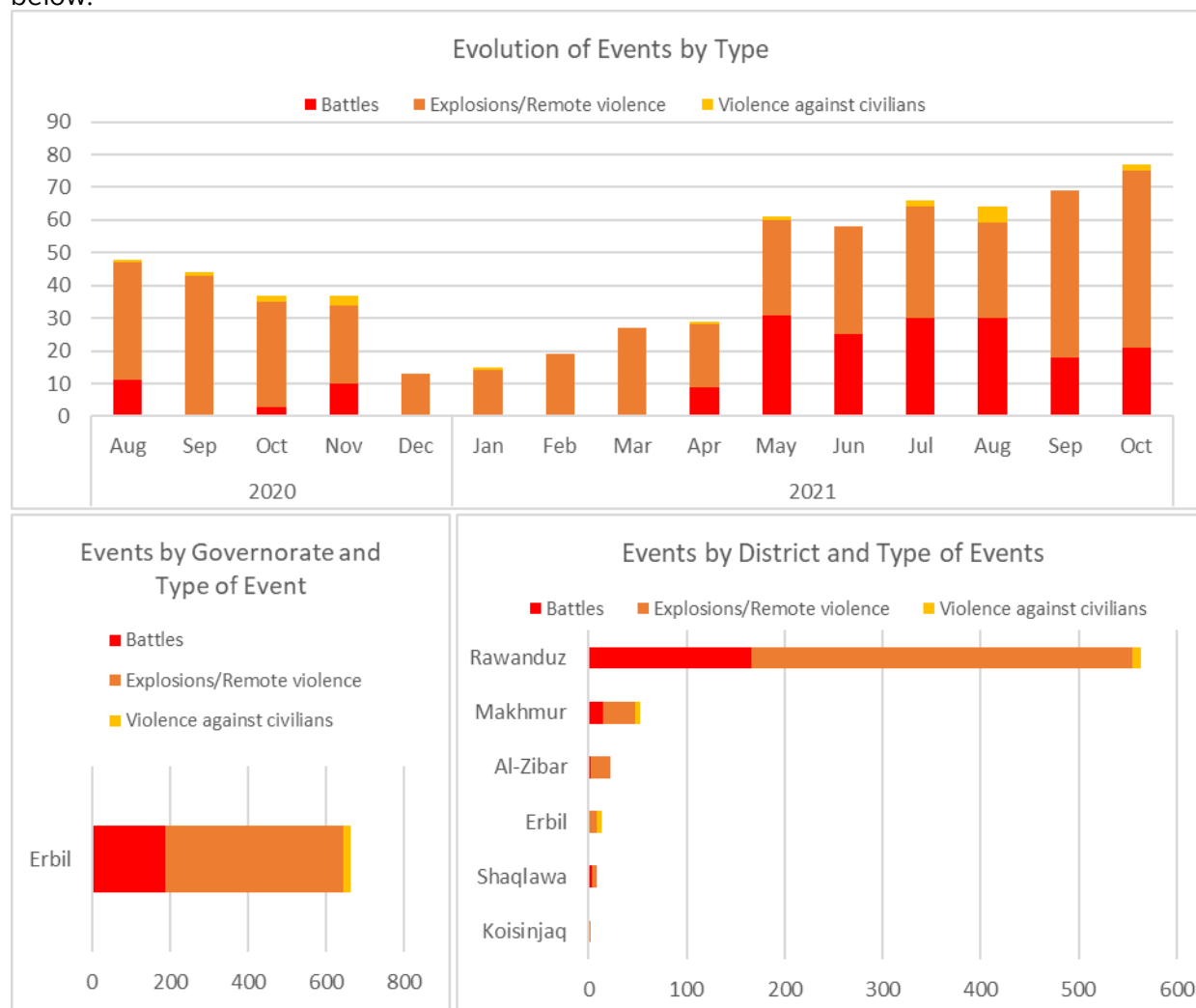


Figure 18: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Erbil governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁹³⁸

¹⁹³⁵ Rudaw, Kurdish forces arrest ISIS suspects plotting attacks in Erbil, 5 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁶ Shafaq News, Four deaths in ISIS attack on Makhmur, Nineveh, 11 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>; please note that as explained under 2.9.1, some sources refer to a different district order, where the area making up Rawanduz district is instead split into several districts and referred to as either Soran, Choman, or Mergasur.

¹⁹³⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>



Illustrative examples of incidents

- In October 2020, three civilians were killed and one wounded by an IED explosion in Makhmur district.¹⁹³⁹
- On 15 February 2021, missiles targeted Erbil international airport, killing a contractor and wounding nine others, including a US soldier.¹⁹⁴⁰
- On 18 April 2021, the explosion of a roadside IED, allegedly placed by the PKK, injured a civilian in their vehicle in the Sidakan sub-district.¹⁹⁴¹
- On 5 June 2021, three civilians were killed and two injured in a Turkish drone attack on Makhmur refugee camp.¹⁹⁴²
- On 26 June 2021, three ‘explosive-laden drones’ hit a house near Bragh in the northeast of Erbil and caused material damage only. According to security sources and eyewitnesses cited by Rudaw, the attacks took place ‘a few kilometres away from where the new US consulate is under construction’.¹⁹⁴³
- On 6 August 2021, ISIL set up a fake checkpoint on the Erbil-Makhmur road and kidnapped nine civilians from Makhmur, four of whom managed to flee.¹⁹⁴⁴
- The week of 9 August 2021, ISIL kidnapped an 18-year-old Kurdish shepherd in Makhmur.¹⁹⁴⁵
- On 11 September 2021, two explosive-laden drones attacked Erbil International Airport in which US military forces are stationed. No casualties were reported.¹⁹⁴⁶
- On 30 September 2021, three people were killed and three others injured, including policemen, in a fight over a plot of land in the context of a feud between two families in Erbil’s Harir sub-district near Shaqlawa town.¹⁹⁴⁷

2.9.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents¹⁹⁴⁸ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 13 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Erbil	5	0	1	1	6	1	11	12

Table 13: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Erbil governorate¹⁹⁴⁹

¹⁹³⁹ KirkukNow, Father, two sons killed in IED explosion: Makhmur district, 20 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁰ MEE, Erbil attack a warning to Iraqi Kurds, not the US, say Shia commanders, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴¹ EPIC, ISHM: April 15 – April 22, 2021, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴² France 24, Turkish drone attack kills three civilians in northern Iraq Kurdish refugee camp, 5 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴³ Rudaw, Multiple drones hit northeast of Erbil, no casualties: sources, 26 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁴ North Press Agency, ISIS members set up checkpoint, kidnap civilians on Iraqi’s Erbil-Makhmur road, 7 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁵ Rudaw, Two hostages released by ISIS in Makhmour, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁶ Reuters, Drone attack hits near U.S. forces in Erbil, northern Iraq – officials, 11 September 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Iraq’s Erbil airport targeted in drone attack: Kurdish officials, 11 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁷ Rudaw, Three shot dead in family feud in Erbil province, 1 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁸ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report’s [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI’s methodology.

¹⁹⁴⁹ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021





2.9.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

iMMAP published monthly risk level monitoring maps regarding explosive hazard incidents in northern Iraq for the period August 2020 to February 2021. In August, October and November 2020 as well as in January and February 2021, Makhmur district was considered as having a low risk of explosive hazard incidents (one to four incidents), in December 2020 it was classified as carrying a moderate risk (five to eight incidents) and in September 2020 it was ranked as high risk with nine to thirteen recorded incidents.¹⁹⁵⁰

On several occasions in 2020 and 2021, airborne attacks were launched purportedly by pro-Iranian PMU against Erbil International Airport and the military section of the airport, where US-led international coalition forces are deployed, resulting in significant property damage.¹⁹⁵¹ It was reported that Turkish¹⁹⁵² and Iranian¹⁹⁵³ airstrikes caused material damage in and around villages in Erbil governorate during the reference period.

According to Mine Action Review at the end of 2020 there were 335 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in Erbil governorate, covering an area of approximately 48 million square metres.¹⁹⁵⁴ Rabar Anwar, head of Erbil's Mine Action Agency's media office, stated in an interview that Erbil governorate 'is around 65 % demined'. In 2020 at least 18 people were killed or injured by landmines in the KRI. Between January and May 2021 six people had been struck by mines, two of them fatally.¹⁹⁵⁵ Landmines were reported to be a hazard in the Sidakan area of Erbil governorate, with one person injured in an explosion in April 2021.¹⁹⁵⁶ The same month, a man was killed by a mine explosion in Erbil's Choman district.¹⁹⁵⁷ In October 2021 a farmer was killed by a landmine in the Haji Omran area of Soran district, in Erbil governorate. There were reportedly still millions of unexploded landmines in border areas and an estimated 3 000 minefields in the KRI, as a result of the 1980s Iraq-Iran war.¹⁹⁵⁸ The US OSAC's Crime & Safety Report for Erbil of December 2020 noted that whilst roadside IEDs were 'not common' in the KRI, smaller handheld explosives and unexploded ordnance (UXO) 'are present, especially in areas previously under ISIS control'.¹⁹⁵⁹

2.9.7 Displacement and return

A large number of IDPs residing in Erbil governorate was reportedly displaced by ISIL between 2014 and 2017.¹⁹⁶⁰ On 8 November 2020, the Iraqi government decided to close camps for IDPs who had been displaced during the conflict with ISIL outside the KRI.¹⁹⁶¹ The KRG agreed with the Iraqi government in December 2020 that IDPs' return from camps in the

¹⁹⁵⁰ iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Risk level Monitoring Maps of the "Explosive Hazard Incident" on the District level for the 7 Governorates (Nov. 2019 - Feb. 2021), 1 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵¹ US, OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵² Rudaw, Suspected Turkish airstrikes damage homes in Erbil village, 5 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan Region calls on PKK, Turkey to stop endangering civilians, 25 August 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Turkish-PKK clashes cause residents of 117 villages to flee from Kurdistan Region's Sidakan, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵³ Basnews, Iran Bombards Kurdistan Border Areas Again, 13 September 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Iran intensified its artillery shells north of Erbil, 11 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁴ Mine Action Review, Iraq Clearing the Mines 2021, n.d., [url](#), p. 159

¹⁹⁵⁵ Rudaw, Man killed by mine in Erbil's Choman district, 10 Mai 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁶ Rudaw, Suspected Turkish airstrikes damage homes in Erbil village, 5 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁷ Rudaw, Man killed by mine in Erbil's Choman district, 10 Mai 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 6 – May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁸ Rudaw, Landmine kills one on Kurdistan Region-Iran border, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁹ US, OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Erbil, 5 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Iraq: 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, 7 February 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁹⁶¹ VOA, Aid Agencies Blast Iraqi Decision to Close IDP Camps During Pandemic, 15 November 2020, [url](#)





KRI to their regions of origin should not be forced.¹⁹⁶² For the Baharka camp (housing 4 528 IDPs) and the Harshm camp (1 434 IDPs) in Erbil district as well as the Debaga 1 camp (7 450 IDPs) in Makhmur district in Erbil governorate no closures were announced as of 14 January 2021.¹⁹⁶³

The Protection Cluster identified 5 informal IDP sites in Erbil between August and October 2020, housing an estimated number of 1 254 people.¹⁹⁶⁴ According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 231 638 IDPs were registered in Erbil governorate, originating from the governorates of Ninewa (47 %), Anbar (30 %), Salah Al-Din (10 %), Baghdad (5 %), Kirkuk (4 %) and Erbil (3 %) as well as Diyala and Babil (together less than 1 %).¹⁹⁶⁵ Within Erbil governorate, the IDP population was largely concentrated in the district of Erbil (93 %). A smaller part resided in the districts of Makhmur (3 %), Shaqlawa (2 %), Koisinjaq (1 %) and Soran (1 %), as well as in Mergasur district (210 individuals).¹⁹⁶⁶ 786 IDPs lived in critical shelters, such as tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses, unfinished or abandoned buildings, public buildings or collective shelters.¹⁹⁶⁷

In August and September 2021, IOM documented 1 749 IDPs from Erbil governorate in Kirkuk and Ninewa governorates.¹⁹⁶⁸ During the same period, according to IOM, 60 432 IDPs returned to Erbil governorate.¹⁹⁶⁹ Safety concerns prevented IDPs from return.¹⁹⁷⁰ Reportedly, disputed areas claimed by both Erbil and Baghdad were still prone to harbour ISIL militants and sleeper cells, which caused IDPs to be concerned regarding their potential return.¹⁹⁷¹ An assessment between March and April 2021 showed that the severity level regarding safety and security of IDPs in Erbil governorate was low.¹⁹⁷²

In the north of the governorate, clashes between Turkish forces and PKK fighters during autumn 2020 led to the evacuation of more than 100 villages in Sidakan sub-district¹⁹⁷³ and more than 50 villages were abandoned in Mergasur sub-district.¹⁹⁷⁴

¹⁹⁶² KirkukNow, Erbil and Baghdad agree on voluntary return of IDPs, 4 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶³ CCCM Cluster and UNOCHA, IRAQ: Camp Closure Status – Date: 14 January 2021 [Map], 17 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁴ Protection Cluster, Strategic and Operational Guidance for Humanitarian Response in Informal Sites/Settlements: Strategic Guidance and Principles for the Response in Informal Sites, 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁹⁶⁵ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁶ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁷ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁸ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁰ Protection Cluster, Iraq – Protection Monitoring System, Report 1, February 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁹⁷¹ Zhyran, 200 displaced families returned to their areas of origin: Saladin deputy governor, 14 July 2021, [url](#)

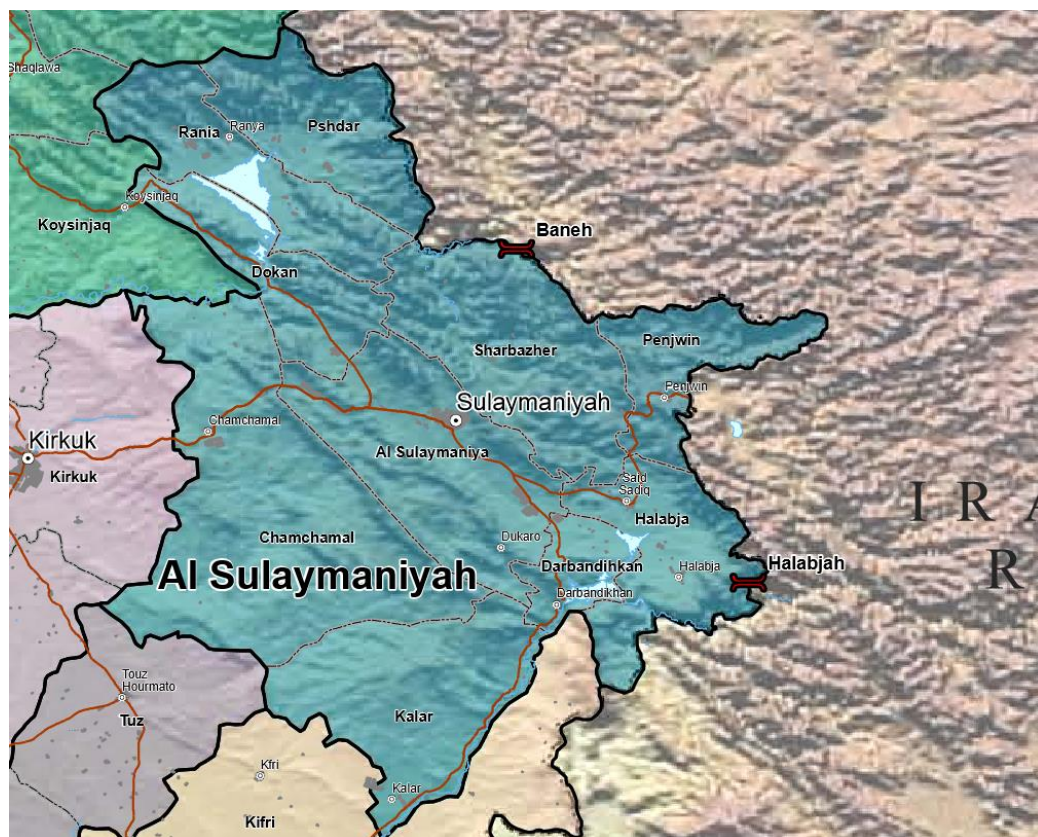
¹⁹⁷² IOM Iraq, DTM: Findings Round One, Data Collection Period: March-April 2021 [Table], October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹⁷³ Rudaw, 504 villages emptied due to Turkey-PKK war: Kurdistan parliament report, 5 September 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Turkish-PKK clashes cause residents of 117 villages to flee from Kurdistan Region's Sidakan, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁴ Rudaw, 504 villages emptied due to Turkey-PKK war: Kurdistan parliament report, 5 September 2020, [url](#)



2.10 Sulaymaniyah



Map 21: Sulaymaniyah governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations¹⁹⁷⁵

2.10.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Sulaymaniyah (Al-Sulaymaniyah, Sulaimany, Sulaimaniya, Sulaimaniyya, Slemani) governorate forms part of the KRI and is located in the north-eastern part of Iraq. It has internal borders with Erbil, Kirkuk, Salah Al-Din and Diyala governorates and international borders with the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁹⁷⁶ Sulaymaniyah governorate comprises the governorate's capital Al-Sulaymaniyah as well as the districts Pshdar (Bashder), Rania, Dukan (Dokan), Sharbazher (Sharbazer), Chamchamal, Kalar, Darbandikhan (Derbendikhan), Halabja, Penjwen (Penjwin, Bejween).¹⁹⁷⁷ Chamchamal and Kalar districts are part of Garmiyan administrative region, which is a part of the disputed territories between Baghdad and Erbil.¹⁹⁷⁸ Halabja (Halabcha), located in the south-east of the governorate, was acknowledged as a separate governorate

¹⁹⁷⁵ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁶ IAU, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p.1; UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Al-Sulaymaniyah Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#); NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2; UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Iraq: National Reference Map [Map], 28 September 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Al-Sulaymaniyah Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#); IOM Iraq, Cities as Home: Location Factsheets and Case Studies of Local Integration, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 18; UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#); NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁸ Al-Monitor, Iran's shadow looms large over southeastern Iraqi Kurdistan, 21 September 2020, [url](#)

by the Iraqi government in December 2013¹⁹⁷⁹ and by the KRG in March 2014.¹⁹⁸⁰ On a map published by UNOCHA and iMMAP in May 2020, however, Halabja is still depicted as a district of Sulaymaniyah governorate.¹⁹⁸¹

Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated¹⁹⁸² the governorate's population at 2 336 191 with around 357 000 people living in rural and around 1 979 000 in urban areas.¹⁹⁸³ Based on a January 2021 estimate by the KRG Planning Department's Statistics Division, the population in Sulaymaniyah amounted to 2 152 717 and in Halabja to 115 333.¹⁹⁸⁴ In 2018, Sulaymaniyah governorate was reported to have an urbanisation rate above 80 %, as the capital and medium-sized cities of this governorate have absorbed a large number of Iraqis who migrated for economic reasons or due to displacement from other governorates.¹⁹⁸⁵

Ethno-religious composition

The main ethnic group in the governorate are Sunni Kurds¹⁹⁸⁶, however Sulaymaniyah also hosts Shia Kurds¹⁹⁸⁷ and Sunni and Shia Arabs¹⁹⁸⁸ are also present. In addition, (ethno-)religious groups including Christians¹⁹⁸⁹, Yarsan (including Kaka'i),¹⁹⁹⁰ Zoroastrians¹⁹⁹¹ as well as a small Jewish community¹⁹⁹² are also present in the governorate.

Economy

As outlined in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#) (see section 3.3.1), it was reported in 2015 that the relatively stable security situation attracted foreign

¹⁹⁷⁹ Rudaw, Years on, Halabja still waiting for full province status, 26 June 2017, [url](#); Rudaw, Halabja gets official approval to open federal offices, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁰ Iraq, KRG, Kurdistan Region Presidency, Kurdistan Region President Signs Halabja Province Directive, 16 March 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸¹ UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Al-Sulaymaniyah Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸² It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997. However, the population of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah was not included and only estimates were provided; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#); IOM, Demographic Survey, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 9, 14

¹⁹⁸³ Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁴ Rudaw, 6.17 مليون نسمة، عدد سكان إقليم كوردستان: وزارة التخطيط: [Planning ministry: population of Kurdistan Region is 6.17 million], 18 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁵ IOM et al., Demographic Survey: Kurdistan Region of Iraq, July 2018 [url](#), p. 14

¹⁹⁸⁶ NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2; USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq [Map], May 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹⁸⁷ NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2; IOM Iraq, Cities as Home: Location Factsheets and Case Studies of Local Integration, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁹⁸⁸ IOM Iraq, Cities as Home: Location Factsheets and Case Studies of Local Integration, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁹⁸⁹ IOM Iraq, Cities as Home: Location Factsheets and Case Studies of Local Integration, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 18; USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq [Map], May 2017, [url](#), p. 13; NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁹⁰ USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq [Map], May 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹⁹¹ USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq [Map], May 2017, [url](#), p. 19; Szanto, E., Islam in Kurdistan: Religious Communities and Their Practices in Contemporary Northern Iraq, 2021, p. 375

¹⁹⁹² MEE, Iraq's Kurdish Jews look to the future with hope and scepticism, 15 August 2018, [url](#)



investments, tourism and a ‘construction boom’. Sulaymaniyah also has large supplies of water and fertile plains contributing to agricultural production.¹⁹⁹³ Yet, in the same year, the KRG faced a ‘severe economic crisis’ due to ‘corruption, mismanagement, disputes’ with the Central Iraqi government, and the fights against ISIL.¹⁹⁹⁴ The January 2018 report of the UN Secretary General noted that ‘dire economic conditions’ in the KRI led to widespread protests in the governorate of Sulaymaniyah.¹⁹⁹⁵

Protests in Sulaymaniyah in response to the deteriorating economic situation were also reported during the reference period, some of which escalated and resulted in injuries and deaths.¹⁹⁹⁶ Moreover, in spring 2021, the economically tense situation reportedly increased frictions between the central government and the KRG, but also within the KRG between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, after Sulaymaniyah announced its intention to negotiate directly with Baghdad - separately from the KRG - in the event that Erbil cannot reach an agreement with the central government on the budget and oil revenues.¹⁹⁹⁷

Road security

Only little information on road security and checkpoints in Sulaymaniyah governorate could be found for the reference period. ACLED reported five incidents related to road security, two being related to battles, two to violence against civilians and one to explosions/remote violence.¹⁹⁹⁸ Protests involving roadblocks occurred throughout the reference period: in the course of the December 2020 protests, main squares were closed and roads were blocked by burning tyres.¹⁹⁹⁹ In August and October roadblocks were set up during protests in Sulaymaniyah’s Tanjero (Tangro) area.²⁰⁰⁰ Although reportedly an area not frequently targeted, in September 2021, a vehicle was ambushed by Islamic State fighters along a main road between Kifri and Kalar within the borders of Sulaymaniyah governorate.²⁰⁰¹

2.10.2 Conflict background

With the end of the Kurdish civil war in 1998, Sulaymaniyah came under the control of the PUK, while Erbil and Dohuk came under the leadership of the Kurdistan Democratic Party

¹⁹⁹³ NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁹⁴ Carnegie Middle East Center, Kurdistan’s Politicized Society Confronts a Sultanistic System, 18 August 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁵ UNSG, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/42], 17 January 2018, [url](#), para. 17

¹⁹⁹⁶ MEI, Beyond the elite: Taking protest and public opinion seriously in the Kurdistan Region, 24 February 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Dozens killed, injured in Iraq’s Kurdistan protests as some consider leaving, 11 December 2020, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Protests flare in Iraq’s Kurdish north, adding new front in national crisis, 12 December 2020, [url](#); AA, Iraq: Teenager killed in Sulaymaniyah protests, 7 December 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Intel: Unpaid salaries fuel protests in Iraqi Kurdistan, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁷ EPC, Sulaymaniyah-Erbil Disagreement: Scenarios of Division in Iraqi Kurdistan, 21 March 2021, [url](#); AA, Baghdad, Erbil dispute pushes Sulaymaniyah to leave KRG, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁹ Washington Post (The), Protests flare in Iraq’s Kurdish north, adding new front in national crisis, 12 December 2020, [url](#); GCHR, General: Iraqi Kurdistan: Authorities use lethal force against peaceful protesters, 10 December 2020, [url](#); MEMO, Protestors set fire to Kurdish government headquarters over delay in salary payment, 7 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁰ MEI, Simmering frustration and a demand for change: Public service protests in the Kurdistan Region, 10 November 2021, [url](#); NRT, Residents in Sulaimani’s Tanjero block road to protest pollution, government neglect, 6 October 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Sulaimani protests pollution, lack of drinking water, 15 August 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Demonstrators in al-Sulaymaniyah block roads to protest potable water shortage, 15 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁰¹ IHS Markit, Attacks on electricity infrastructure likely to increase due to delay in establishing joint Iraq-KRG security patrols, 27 September 2021





(KDP).²⁰⁰² Based on Iraq's 2005 Constitution, the federal Kurdistan region was established in the governorates Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah.²⁰⁰³ As outlined in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), attempts to unify the two Kurdish administrations under one government in Erbil since 2005 have failed so far and the cooperation between the two parties has proved to be difficult.

Sources have described Sulaymaniyah's security situation as 'relatively stable' since 2003.²⁰⁰⁴ However, during the reference period, the eastern mountain ranges of Sulaymaniyah governorate were affected by Turkey's airstrikes aiming at PKK members in the KRI.²⁰⁰⁵ For further details on security developments in Sulaymaniyah governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 3.3.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.10.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Kurdistan Region security forces

Under the federal constitution, the KRG has the right to maintain internal security forces. However, the KDP and PUK separately controlled additional Peshmerga military units²⁰⁰⁶ next to the integrated Peshmerga brigades of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA)²⁰⁰⁷. According to the KRG as of June 2021, the Peshmerga's main objectives were 'to ensure the security of the Kurdistan Region and eliminate ISIS terrorist threats'.²⁰⁰⁸ In 2010, the first integrated Peshmerga Brigade, the Regional Guard Brigade (RGB), was created by the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, eventually amounting to a total of 14 RGBs.²⁰⁰⁹ Furthermore, there were militarised police forces outside the command of the MoPA, called *Zeravani*, operating under the Kurdish Interior Ministry.²⁰¹⁰

The two parties controlled separate Asayish internal security services, separate police forces, which are nominally under the Kurdish Ministry of Interior control, and separate intelligence services, namely *Parastin* (affiliated with the KDP) and *Zenyari* (affiliated with the PUK)²⁰¹¹, which were nominally organized under the Kurdistan Region Security Council (KRSC).²⁰¹² The forces of the Kurdish Ministry of Interior and the KRSC were particularly loyal to their affiliated

²⁰⁰² Abdullah, F. H., PUK–KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3; USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 5; Century Foundation (The), Kurdish Nationalism at an Impasse, 29 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰³ International Crisis Group, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰⁰⁴ NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2; IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 55, 57; IOM, Reasons to Remain (Part 2): Determinants of IDP integration into host communities in Iraq, 18 April 2019, [url](#), p. 12

²⁰⁰⁵ Rudaw, Turkey carries out large air operation in eastern Sulaimani, 24 August 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Four dead in Turkish airstrike in Sulaimani: local mayor, 13 June 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Mountain range bombed in Sulaimani, 8 May 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Turkish planes bomb Sulaimani province, no casualties reported: mayor, 2 February 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, 504 villages emptied due to Turkey-PKK war: Kurdistan parliament report, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁶ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁰⁷ Bakr, M. J., The War at Home: The Need for Internal Security Sector Reform in Iraqi Kurdistan, MEI, July 2021, [url](#), p. 8

²⁰⁰⁸ Iraq, KRG, Statement by the Ministry of Peshmerga on the Mount Matin attack, 5 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁹ MERI, Institutionalisation of the Peshmerga: tipping the balance of Iraq's stability, 17 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²⁰¹⁰ Rudaw, Zeravani receive training to protect diplomatic missions in Erbil, 29 January 2018, [url](#); NRT, KDP protecting Zeravani accused of involvement in artist's death: Lawyer, 1 September 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Zeravani Peshmerga ammunitions depot catches fire in Erbil, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹¹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2; MERI, Institutionalisation of the Peshmerga: tipping the balance of Iraq's stability, 17 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²⁰¹² USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2



parties and heavily involved in the region's day-to-day security and administrative affairs.²⁰¹³ In 2017 the KRG, backed by the US and its Western allies, agreed to plans reforming, modernising and uniting the Peshmerga forces, but progress has been slow.²⁰¹⁴

Certain units of the KRG's Asayish internal security services were reported to have effective impunity when it came to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.²⁰¹⁵ Human rights organisations reported that Peshmerga and Asayish forces acted against the law, including conducting arbitrary arrests.²⁰¹⁶

Peshmerga and Asayish forces from Sulaymaniyah governorate continued to conduct security operations to pursue ISIL members.²⁰¹⁷

For an overview of the structure of Peshmerga in the KRI, please refer to [Actors in the KRI](#).

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

As of September 2021, Iraqi state forces and Peshmerga forces had established several joint units and were planning to form additional joint brigades to combat ISIL in the territories disputed between the KRI and the Iraqi government.²⁰¹⁸

Turkish state forces

In the reference period, Turkish forces carried out several attacks in Sulaymaniyah governorate, for example in Sulaymaniyah city, in the Asos region and in Chamchamal, Mawat, Sharbazher and Pshdar districts.²⁰¹⁹

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a Marxist-Leninist group founded in the 1970s that launched an armed struggle against the Turkish government in 1984 and called for an independent Kurdish state in Turkey.²⁰²⁰ The PKK has developed its territorial presence and

²⁰¹³ Bakr, M. J., The War at Home: The Need for Internal Security Sector Reform in Iraqi Kurdistan, MEI, July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰¹⁴ Aziz, S. and Cottey, A., The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga: military reform and nation-building in a divided polity, 15 February 2021, [url](#), p. 226

²⁰¹⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 3

²⁰¹⁶ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10

²⁰¹⁷ Rudaw, Peshmerga foils ISIS attack in Kifri: ministry, 5 November 2021 [url](#); Rudaw, 22 suspected ISIS members arrested in past three months: Sulaimani Asayish, 20 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Kurdistan security forces arrest 10 in connection with bomb hidden under ISIS flag, 4 February 2021, [url](#);

²⁰¹⁸ KP, Iraqi forces, Peshmerga to form joint brigades to combat ISIS, 17 September 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Iraqi military, Kurdistan's Peshmerga conduct anti-terror operations in disputed areas, 17 September 2021, [url](#);

Kurdistan24, Peshmerga, US delegation talk formation of 'joint brigades' with Iraqi army, 25 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁹ Baghdad Today, الطيران التركي يقصف منطقة زراعية في السليمانية [Turkish warplanes attack agricultural land in Sulaymaniyah], 2 February 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan24, VIDEO: Turkish warplanes strike Sharbazher area in Sulaimani province, 7 August 2020, [url](#); Baghdad Today, الطائرات الحربية التركية تقصف جبل "أسوس" في السليمانية [Turkish warplanes attack Mount Asos in Sulaymaniyah], 8 May 2021, [url](#); Daily Sabah, Turkey's message to PKK with strike near Iran border, 25 June 2021, [url](#); Daily Sabah, PKK terrorist on Interpol's list killed in Turkish op in N. Iraq, 22 June 2021, [url](#); Basnews, Turkey Claims It Destroyed 28 PKK Positions in Kurdistan Region Border Areas, 24 August 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Airstrike targets alleged PKK outpost in Kurdistan Region's Sulaimani, 4 October 2021, [url](#); Baghdad Today, الطيران العراقي يجدد قصف الأراضي العراقية [Sulaymaniyah under fire .. Turkish warplanes renew airstrikes on Iraqi ground], 15 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰²⁰ BBC News, Who are Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)



control over mountainous areas along the Turkish and Iranian borders, including along the border between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates as well as Iran.²⁰²¹ Local officials interviewed by Rudaw in 2016 estimated that as many as 650 communities might live under PKK control in the entire KRI, although some of the villages were said to have been evacuated due to the conflict.²⁰²² In September 2020, Turkey's Minister for Foreign Affairs reportedly accused the PUK and the Gorran movement²⁰²³ of allowing the PKK to hide out in Sulaymaniyah governorate.²⁰²⁴

The PKK had an estimated 5 000 fighters stationed largely in the KRI's mountainous areas,²⁰²⁵ and was headquartered in the Qandil mountains.²⁰²⁶

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

During the ISIL conflict, Sulaymaniyah did not see any direct military operations within its boundaries.²⁰²⁷ Although ISIL was territorially defeated in 2017, the group still carried out attacks and abductions in several provinces and was particularly active in parts of northern Iraq which are disputed by the KRG and the Iraqi central government, such as Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah Al-Din.²⁰²⁸ Reportedly, the Qouri al-Shay valley, 'one of the most important' supply routes for ISIL in northern Iraq crosses the Hamrin mountain range, which to the east and west stretches between Salah al-Din governorate and Sulaymaniyah governorate.²⁰²⁹ Furthermore, a number of ISIL members were arrested on several occasions in Sulaymaniyah governorate in 2021.²⁰³⁰

Iranian state forces

Iran has deployed forces to Sulaymaniyah governorate's border region and has violated the frontier on several occasions.²⁰³¹ As of December 2020, reportedly shelling of KRI's mountains by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) that targeted Kurdish opposition parties occurred 16 times, the source not indicating the precise locations.²⁰³² ACLED data covering the reference period includes two cases of civilians wounded by Iranian border guards in the border area of Sulaymaniyah province in August 2020.²⁰³³ No further Iranian incursions in Sulaymaniyah governorate in the reference period were found during research for this report.

²⁰²¹ Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., Actors and territories in northern Iraq after the Baghdad offensive (October 2017) [Map], Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁰²² Rudaw, PKK bases in border areas provoke Turkish airstrikes, local mayors say, 14 April 2016, [url](#)

²⁰²³ The Gorran movement is a pro-reform opposition party; Rudaw, Gorran leader Nawshirwan Mustafa dies at 73 after long battle with illness, 19 May 2017, [url](#)

²⁰²⁴ EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁵ Al Jazeera, Kurd vs Kurd: Fears of full-scale war rise in northern Iraq, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁶ Cantenar, Ö. F., Turkey Conducting Targeted Killings of PKK Leaders in Iraq: What's Next?, Jamestown Foundation, 30 July 2021, [url](#); FP, Iraqi Kurds Turn Against the PKK, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁷ IOM, Reasons to Remain (Part 2): Determinants of IDP integration into host communities in Iraq, 18 April 2019, [url](#), p. 13

²⁰²⁸ Rudaw, Peshmerga foils ISIS attack in Kifri: ministry, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁰²⁹ MEE, Islamic State regrouping in northern Iraq and relying on women operatives, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁰ Rudaw, 22 suspected ISIS members arrested in past three months: Sulaimani Asayish, 20 April 2021, [url](#)

Rudaw, Kurdistan security forces arrest 10 in connection with bomb hidden under ISIS flag, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³¹ Rudaw, 504 villages emptied due to Turkey-PKK war: Kurdistan parliament report, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³² Hengaw Organisation for Human Rights, War in Kurdistan: Hengaw's statistical report on casualties of Iranian Kurdistan's parties in conflicts during 2020, December 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁰³³ ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Iraq, IRQ26464 [source: Basnews], event date 8 August 2021; ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Iraq, IRQ26325 [source: Basnews], event date 10 August 2021





Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups

A number of Iranian Kurdish armed groups opposed to Iran are headquartered in the KRI, whose bases were sporadically shelled by Iranian forces.²⁰³⁴ These include, among others, the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), which is reportedly based in the Quandil mountains not too far from the Iranian border.²⁰³⁵ It was further reported in June 2021 that the Iranian Kurdish political party, *Komala*, was based in Sulaymaniyah.²⁰³⁶

2.10.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

According to the US OSCA's Iraq Country Security Report from February 2021, the KRI remains relatively secure, despite internal political divisions, Turkish military activity targeting the PKK and an ongoing threat from ISIL.²⁰³⁷ During the reference period, Sulaymaniyah governorate's security situation, according to ACLED data, was characterised by 40 explosions that mainly took place in the districts Pshdar, Sharbazher, Penjwen and Rania. More than half of the explosions were related to Turkish airstrikes. A smaller part of the recorded explosions was related to attacks of unidentified armed groups, unidentified explosive devices and explosive remnants of war. Furthermore, around 20 cases of violence against civilians occurred, mainly in Sulaymaniyah district, and around ten battles, mainly in the districts Sulaymaniyah and Chamchamal (see section on [please refer](#) to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals (January 2022)).

Security incidents).²⁰³⁸

The UN reported on a number of protests which took place in Sulaymaniyah governorate in the reference period. Some of them turned violent with protestors setting fire to state buildings.²⁰³⁹ In December 2020, at least four protestors were killed and another eight were injured as a result of clashes with security forces around protests.²⁰⁴⁰

²⁰³⁴ Rudaw, Official from Iran's KDP-I killed in Erbil: party statement, 7 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁵ AW, Iran urges Iraq to expel Iranian rebels from Kurdish region, 11 August 2021, [url](#); Global Security, PJAK/PEJAK, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰³⁶ Green left, Iran's Komala: Guns and social democratic roses, 28 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁷ US, OSAC, Iraq Country Security Report, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁹ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 14; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 16; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/792], 11 August 2020, [url](#), para. 15, 49; see also MEMO, Economic crisis threatens stability of Kurdistan Region, 14 August 2020, [url](#); AW, Unrest spreads to Iraqi Kurdistan over socioeconomic woes, 25 August 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Dozens killed, injured in Iraq's Kurdistan protests as some consider leaving, 11 December 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, It is time for a system overhaul in Iraq's Kurdish region, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁰ EPIC, ISHM: December 3 – December 10, 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#)



Turkey-PKK conflict

The Turkish aerial operations targeting the PKK in the KRI continued in 2021.²⁰⁴¹ Within the governorate of Sulaymaniyah, Turkey conducted several airstrikes in the past years, occasionally causing civilian casualties and material damage,²⁰⁴² including the destruction of farms,²⁰⁴³ or causing fires.²⁰⁴⁴ From August 2020 to October 2021, ACLED reported 31 incidents of Turkish strikes against the PKK in Sulaymaniyah governorate. Such airstrikes were reported in Sulaymaniyah governorate in February,²⁰⁴⁵ May,²⁰⁴⁶ June,²⁰⁴⁷ August²⁰⁴⁸ and October²⁰⁴⁹ 2021. The airstrikes occurred in the districts Pshdar,²⁰⁵⁰ Mawat,²⁰⁵¹ Penjwen,²⁰⁵² Sharbazher,²⁰⁵³ Chamchamal²⁰⁵⁴ and in Sulaymaniyah city.²⁰⁵⁵ The KRG repeatedly expressed its disapproval of the fact that Turkey and the PKK were carrying out their conflict on KRG's territories.²⁰⁵⁶ In a statement issued by the PUK as a reaction to a Turkish UAV attack in Chamchamal district on 8 October 2021, which caused civilian casualties, reportedly the PUK called for an immediate halt of border transgressions by Turkish forces, describing the attack

²⁰⁴¹ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021), [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 64; EPIC, ISHM: June 24 – July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); see also Rudaw, Kurdistan areas deforested by Turkey used to be so dense one could barely see the sky: witnesses, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴² Rudaw, 504 villages emptied due to Turkey-PKK war: Kurdistan parliament report, 5 September 2020, [url](#); Baghdad Today, [قصف تركي يستهدف قضاء جمجمال بمحافظة السليمانية](#) [Turkish airstrike targets Chamchamal district in Sulaymaniyah governorate], 4 October 2021, [url](#); Basnews, Turkey Claims it “Neutralized” Four PKK Fighters in Kurdistan, 5 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Airstrike targets alleged PKK outpost in Kurdistan Region's Sulaimani, 4 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴³ EPIC, ISHM: August 19 – August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Turkey conducted an attack 200 kilometers inside Iraq, Ministry of Defense says, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁴ Kurdistan24, VIDEO: Turkish warplanes strike Sharbazher area in Sulaimani province, 7 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁵ EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#); Baghdad Today, [الطيران التركي يقصف منطقة زراعية](#) [Turkish warplanes attack agricultural land in Sulaymaniyah], 2 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁶ Baghdad Today, [الطائرات الحربية التركية تقصف جبل "أسوس" في السليمانية](#) [Turkish warplanes attack Mount Asos in Sulaymaniyah], 8 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁷ Daily Sabah, Turkey's message to PKK with strike near Iran border, 25 June 2021, [url](#); Daily Sabah, PKK terrorist on Interpol's list killed in Turkish op in N. Iraq, 22 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 10 – June 17, 2021, 17 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁸ EPIC, ISHM: August 19 – August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); Basnews, Turkey Claims It Destroyed 28 PKK Positions in Kurdistan Region Border Areas, 24 August 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, 20 Turkish warplanes strike Sulaimani's Penjwen district: Defense ministry, 24 August 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, VIDEO: Turkish warplanes strike Sharbazher area in Sulaimani province, 7 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁹ Baghdad Today, [الطيران التركي يجدد قصف الأراضي العراقية](#) [‘Sulaymaniyah under fire’ .. Turkish warplanes renew airstrikes on Iraqi ground], 15 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Turkish warplanes allegedly strike Kurdistan Region's northern Sulaimani province, 15 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Airstrike targets alleged PKK outpost in Kurdistan Region's Sulaimani, 4 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁰ EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#); Baghdad Today, [الطيران التركي يقصف منطقة زراعية](#) [Turkish warplanes attack agricultural land in Sulaymaniyah], 2 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵¹ Baghdad Today, [الطائرات الحربية التركية تقصف جبل "أسوس" في السليمانية](#) [Turkish warplanes attack Mount Asos in Sulaymaniyah], 8 May 2021, [url](#); Baghdad Today, [الطيران التركي يجدد قصف الأراضي العراقية](#) [‘Sulaymaniyah under fire’. Turkish warplanes renew airstrikes on Iraqi ground], 15 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Turkish warplanes allegedly strike Kurdistan Region's northern Sulaimani province, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵² EPIC, ISHM: August 19 – August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); Basnews, Drone Strikes Target Villages in Sulaymaniyah, 24 August 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, 20 Turkish warplanes strike Sulaimani's Penjwen district: Defense ministry, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵³ Kurdistan24, VIDEO: Turkish warplanes strike Sharbazher area in Sulaimani province, 7 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁴ Baghdad Today, [قصف تركي يستهدف قضاء جمجمال بمحافظة السليمانية](#) [Turkish airstrike targets Chamchamal district in Sulaymaniyah governorate], 4 October 2021, [url](#); Basnews, Turkey Claims it “Neutralized” Four PKK Fighters in Kurdistan, 5 October 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Airstrike targets alleged PKK outpost in Kurdistan Region's Sulaimani, 4 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁵ Daily Sabah, Turkey's message to PKK with strike near Iran border, 25 June 2021, [url](#); Daily Sabah, PKK terrorist on Interpol's list killed in Turkish op in N. Iraq, 22 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁶ Kurdistan24, 20 Turkish warplanes strike Sulaimani's Penjwen district: Defense ministry, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

as a 'bad development' and asking the Iraqi federal government 'to perform its constitutional and national tasks in defending the territory of Iraq and the Kurdistan region through its diplomatic channels and to alert the Turkish government about this breach'.²⁰⁵⁷

ISIL

In the reference period, several arrests of individuals suspected of being associated with ISIL occurred in the governorate²⁰⁵⁸. On 5 November 2021, it was reported that ISIL militants attacked Peshmerga forces in Kifri, causing a quick reaction by Peshmerga forces. The attack occurred on the Sulaymaniyah-Diyala border.²⁰⁵⁹

For further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq, please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 11 battles, 40 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 17 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 68 security incidents in Sulaymaniyah governorate, the majority taking place in Pshdar

²⁰⁵⁷ Hawar News Agency, PUK decries Turkish occupation shelling on Southern Kurdistan lands, 9 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁸ Rudaw, Kurdistan security forces arrest 10 in connection with bomb hidden under ISIS flag, 4 February 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, 22 suspected ISIS members arrested in past three months: Sulaimani Asayish, 20 April 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, 22 "والى الفلوجة" بينهم "كوردستان تفكك شبكة لداعش وتعتقل أفرادها" [Among them the Wali of Fallujah: Kurdistan dismantles ISIL network and arrests its 22 members], 20 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁹ Rudaw, Peshmerga foils ISIS attack in Kifri: ministry, 5 November 2021, [url](#)

district.²⁰⁶⁰ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 24 below.

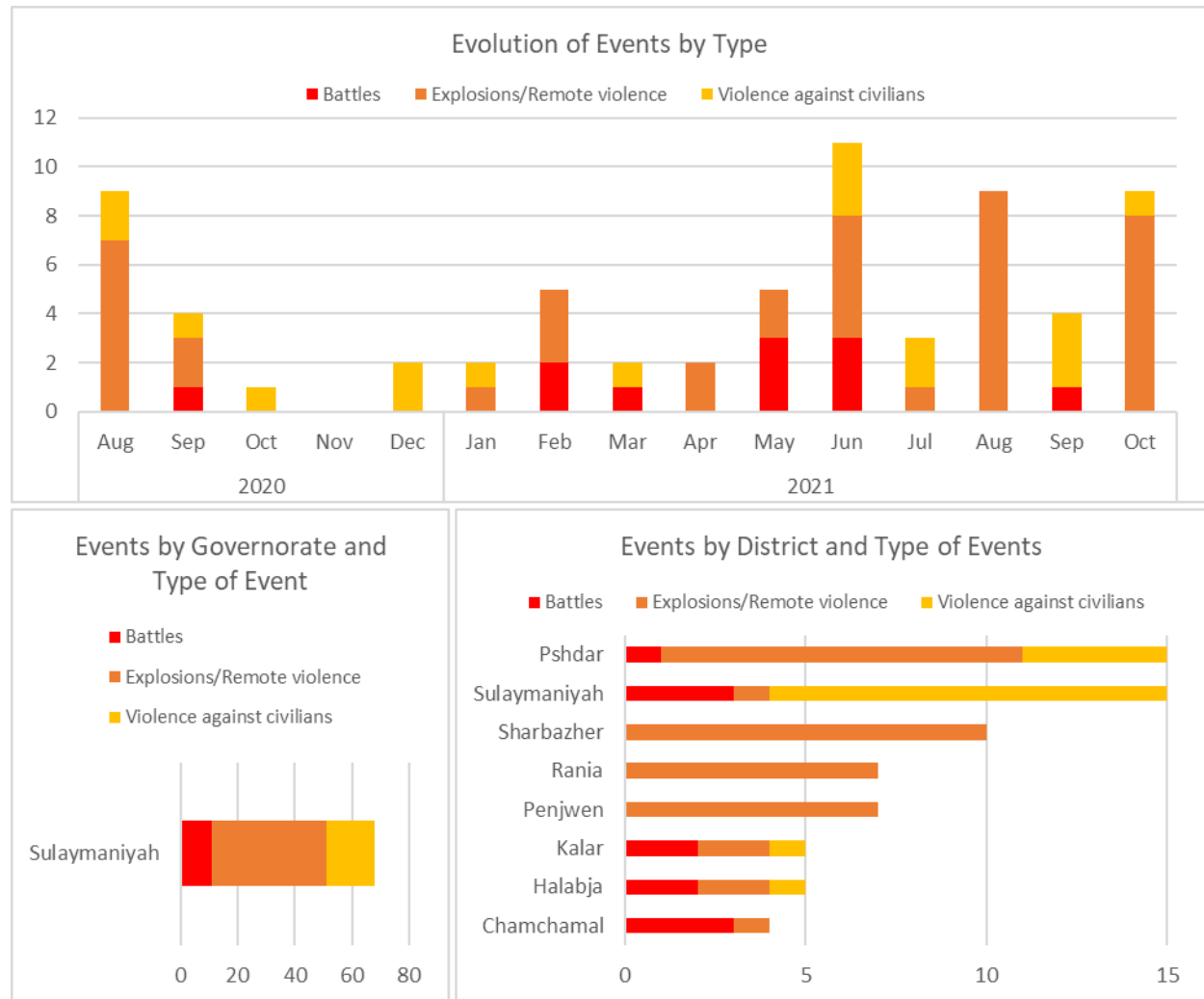


Figure 19: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Sulaymaniyah governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²⁰⁶¹

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 2 January 2021, an IED explosion occurred near Said Sadiq district, when Asayish forces were trying to remove an ISIL flag that was set out on hills. Two Asayish members were injured.²⁰⁶²

²⁰⁶⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶¹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶² Pukmedia, [سید صادق.. إصابة عنصرين من قوات الآسايش بانفجار](#) [Said Sadiq: Two Asayish members injured in explosion], 2 January 2021, [url](#)

- On 2 February 2021, Turkish warplanes bombed targets in the Pshdar district. The airstrikes injured one civilian and damaged several homes.²⁰⁶³
- On 29 June 2021, it was reported that unknown gunmen killed the owner of a gas station while he was walking his child to school.²⁰⁶⁴
- On 21 September 2021, ISIL militants set up a fake checkpoint on the road between Kifri and Kalar. The ISIL militants killed two civilians and injured three more. The incident was reportedly the first incident of this kind in these surroundings.²⁰⁶⁵
- On 4 October 2021, Turkish warplanes attacked Chamchamal district. Reportedly, one civilian was killed and two civilians were wounded.²⁰⁶⁶ Another source stated that two civilians and three PKK fighters were wounded, while Turkey's Defense Ministry claimed that four PKK fighters were killed. The source furthermore states that this was the first Turkish airstrike in these surroundings.²⁰⁶⁷
- On 17 November 2021, it was reported that unknown gunmen attacked a physician in Sulaymaniyah city, who was severely injured.²⁰⁶⁸
- On 24 June 2021, a landmine explosion in Mawat district killed one civilian and caused a large fire.²⁰⁶⁹

2.10.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²⁰⁷⁰ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 14 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Sulaymaniyah	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Table 14: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Sulaymaniyah governorate²⁰⁷¹

²⁰⁶³ EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#); Baghdad Today, الطيران التركي يقصف منطقة زراعية في [Turkish warplanes attack agricultural land in Sulaymaniyah], 2 February 2020, [url](#); Shafaq News, السلطات الأمنية تعلن إصابة امرأة بجروح بالقصف التركي لشمال السليمانية [Security forces declare injury of a woman due to Turkish airstrikes in northern Sulaymaniyah], 2 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁴ NAS News, مسلحون مجهولون يغتالون صاحب محطة بنزين في السليمانية [Unknown gunmen kill gas station owner in Sulaymaniyah], 29 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁵ Shafaq News, مسؤول كوردي: كمين داعش في كرميان هو الأول من نوعه وهذا سببه [Kurdish Official: ISIL trap is first of its kind in Garmian and this is the reason], 22 September 2021, [url](#); Baghdad Today, استشهاد وإصابة ثلاثة اشخاص بكمين لداعش في [Death and injury of three people in ISIL trap in Kifri district], 21 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁶ Baghdad Today, قصف تركي يستهدف قضاء جمجمال بمحافظة السليمانية [Turkish airstrike targets Chamchamal district in Sulaymaniyah governorate], 4 October 2021; [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁷ Basnews, Turkey Claims it "Neutralized" Four PKK Fighters in Kurdistan, 5 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁸ Shafaq News, مسلحون مجهولون يعتدون على طبيب وسط السليمانية [Unknown gunmen attack physician in Sulaymaniyah city], 17 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁹ Shafaq News, صور .. مصرع شخص واحترق 100 دونم بانفجار لغم في قضاء "مات" بالسليمانية [Pictures: One person killed and 100 dunams of land burnt due to fire caused by landmine in Mawat district in Sulaymaniyah], 24 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁰ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²⁰⁷¹ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021



2.10.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

At the end of 2020, the KRI recorded a mine contaminated area of 211 square kilometres, making the KRI one of the most mine-affected areas in the world. In Halabja alone, an area of 12 331 899 square metres and 100 387 755 square metres in the rest of Sulaymaniyah governorate were reported to be confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs), ranking Sulaymaniyah as the most contaminated governorate in the KRI. Compared to the previous year, by the end of 2020 a significant reduction in the number and extent of confirmed hazardous areas in the governorate was reported.²⁰⁷²

An October 2021 report classified Sulaymaniyah governorate's contamination with anti-personnel mines, improvised mines and IEDs rather high, assigning the third highest level on a seven-level scale to Sulaymaniyah.²⁰⁷³ In the reference period, ACLED reported two incidents related to explosions of landmines causing two fatalities in sum.²⁰⁷⁴ One of the incidents, which occurred in Mawat district, reportedly caused a fire that destroyed 100 dunam (ten hectares) of land.²⁰⁷⁵

It was reported that Turkish airstrikes caused material damage, such as the destruction of homes, farms or agricultural lands, in Sulaymaniyah governorate during the reference period.²⁰⁷⁶

2.10.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 140 237 IDPs were registered in Sulaymaniyah governorate, originating from Salah Al-Din (24 %), Baghdad (21 %), Diyala (18 %), Anbar (16 %), Ninewa (10 %) as well as Babylon (7 %) and Kirkuk (3 %) governorates. Within Sulaymaniyah governorate, the IDP population was largely concentrated in Sulaymaniyah district (66 %) and Kalar district (14 %).²⁰⁷⁷ As of February 2021, it was reported for Sulaymaniyah city that most IDPs lived in the urban centre in out-of-camp-settings. As a result, nearly one-tenth of the city's residents were IDPs, with most of the IDPs residing in the Markaz Sulaymaniyah neighbourhood. The city of Sulaymaniyah continued to host a diverse population of IDPs who fled their homes during various waves of displacement. The majority were Arab Sunnis, as opposed to the local population. However, there were also many minority groups, including Kurdish Sunnis and Shiites, Arab Shiites, Chaldean, Assyrian and non-denominational Christians, Shabak and Turkmen Shiites among the IDPs.²⁰⁷⁸

In Sulaymaniyah governorate, 210 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses or unowned or uninhabitable houses), 138 of

²⁰⁷² Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 158-159

²⁰⁷³ HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, Report 2021, [Map], 13 October 2021, [url](#), p. 16

²⁰⁷⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, Iraq, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁵ Shafaq News, بالسليمانية "ماوت" قضاء "مات" شخص واحد 100 دونم بانفجار لغم في قضاء "ماوت" [Pictures: One person killed and 100 dunams of land burnt due to fire caused by landmine in Mawat district in Sulaymaniyah], 24 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁶ Kurdistan24, 20 Turkish warplanes strike Sulaimani's Penjwen district: Defense ministry, 24 August 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Turkey conducted an attack 200 kilometers inside Iraq, Ministry of Defense says, 24 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 28 – February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#); Baghdad Today, الطيران التركي يقصف منطقة زراعية في السليمانية [Turkish warplanes attack agricultural land in Sulaymaniyah], 2 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁷ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁸ IOM Iraq, DTM: Urban Displacement in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 25 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 15-16





them in Sulaymaniyah district.²⁰⁷⁹ According to a September 2020 assessment by REACH, in most districts of the governorate, between 80% and 90% of IDP households lived in severe or extreme need.²⁰⁸⁰

IOM did not document any IDPs from Sulaymaniyah governorate in other parts of the country.²⁰⁸¹ According to IOM, no returns to Sulaymaniyah governorate were documented, as of September 2021.²⁰⁸²

²⁰⁷⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁰ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁸¹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁸² IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.11 Basrah



Map 22: Basrah governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²⁰⁸³

2.11.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Basrah (Basra, Al-Basrah, Al-Basra) is Iraq's southeasternmost governorate and has internal borders with Muthanna, Thi-Qar (Dhi Qar) and Missan governorates. It is situated along the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which connects to the Persian Gulf.²⁰⁸⁴ Basrah has international borders with Iran to the east and Kuwait to the south. It also borders Saudi-Arabia at the tripoint with Kuwait.²⁰⁸⁵ The capital of the governorate is Basrah City.²⁰⁸⁶ The governorate is divided into seven districts: Abu Al-Khaseeb (Abu Khaseeb, Abi Khasib), Al-Midaina (Al-Mahoudiya, Al-Madina), Al-Qurna (Al-Qarna), Al-Zubair, Basrah, Fao (Al-Faw), and Shatt Al-Arab.²⁰⁸⁷

²⁰⁸³ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁴ US, CIA, The World Factbook, Iraq, last updated 16 November 2021, [url](#); UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁵ Shelley, F. M., Nation Shapes, 2013, p. 409; NCCI, Basrah governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2; UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁶ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁷ UN-Habitat, Basra Urban Profile, October 2020, [url](#), p.14; NCCI, Basrah governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²⁰⁸⁸ the governorate's population at 3 142 449 with around 590 000 people living in rural and around 2 552 000 in urban areas.²⁰⁸⁹ Another source dated April 2020 estimated the population at over five million and emphasised its high growth rate.²⁰⁹⁰ Most of the governorate's urban population lives in its capital Basrah City. Basrah governorate is considered to be of strategic importance, as it is home to around 7 % of Iraq's population.²⁰⁹¹

Ethno-religious composition

Shia Arabs constitute the majority of the governorate's population, but there is also a significant Sunni minority.²⁰⁹² Other groups present are small Christian communities²⁰⁹³ and Sabeen Mandeans,²⁰⁹⁴ However, both groups were reported to have diminished considerably after 2003.²⁰⁹⁵ Additionally, the African Iraqi minority (Black Iraqis) also predominantly lives in Basrah.²⁰⁹⁶

Economy

Basrah governorate contains a significant proportion of Iraq's oil reserves, including the largest oilfield in Iraq, Rumaila.²⁰⁹⁷ The port of Basrah and the port of Umm Qasr (Um Qasr), Iraq's only deep water port, are both located in the governorate, making Basrah a centre for trade, transportation and storage.²⁰⁹⁸ In spite of being considered Iraq's economic capital,²⁰⁹⁹ Basrah's population suffers from 'grinding poverty' and high unemployment.²¹⁰⁰ Despite

²⁰⁸⁸ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁹ Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁰ Jiyad, S., Failure of Governance in Basra puts all of Iraq at Risk, LSE [Blog], 2 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁹¹ UN-Habitat, Basra Urban Profile, October 2020, [url](#), p.14

²⁰⁹² Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, The role of ethnicities, religions and sects in Iraq [Map], 27 February 2021, [url](#); Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 18; NCCI, Basrah governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁹³ Al-Monitor, Basra church restored, but few Christians left to worship there, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁴ USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 23

²⁰⁹⁵ Al-Jaffal, O. and Khalaf, S., Basra governorate: Local government crisis and conflict with the federal government, LSE, 1 May 2021, [url](#), p. 7; Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 18; see also Al-Monitor, Basra church restored, but few Christians left to worship there, 7 August 2019, [url](#); Van Zoonen, D. and Wirya, K., The Sabeen-Mandaeans, MERI, July 2017, [url](#), p. 6

²⁰⁹⁶ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 51; IRI, Living in the Shadows – The Enduring Marginalization of Black Iraqis, 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰⁹⁷ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#), see also Al Jazeera, France's Total signs mega oil and gas deals with Iraq, 6 September 2021, [url](#); New Arab (The), Clan violence in Iraq: Oil companies targeted as poverty reigns, 13 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁸ NCCI, Basrah governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2; see also Al-Monitor, Iraqi port revenue surges as anti-corruption move bears fruit, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁹ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 18

²¹⁰⁰ New Arab (The), Clan violence in Iraq: Oil companies targeted as poverty reigns, 13 September 2021, [url](#); see also OIES, Compounding crises: Iraq's oil and energy economy, July 2020, [url](#), p. 6





Basrah governorate generating billions of dollars for the country, a lack of basic services prevails in the area.²¹⁰¹

Road security

As was the case in 2019,²¹⁰² protests involving roadblocks occurred throughout 2020 and in the summer of 2021 in Basrah governorate: in November 2020, clashes broke out between security forces and protesters after they had set up tents on Bahariya (Bahriya) square.²¹⁰³ In June, July and August 2021, there were more recent reports of protesters blocking roads,²¹⁰⁴ including the main road between Thi-Qar and Basrah on 2 June 2021²¹⁰⁵ and the road leading to Umm Qasr port on 14 August 2021.²¹⁰⁶

2.11.2 Conflict background

Basrah governorate is marked by 'political, legal, bureaucratic and administrative crises'²¹⁰⁷ and suffers from a lack of political transparency, accountability and rampant corruption. These factors impede necessary developments, have led to a deterioration of livelihoods and subsequently triggered protests, some of which have escalated since summer 2018.²¹⁰⁸ Rich resources coupled with high corruption and unemployment spark tribal conflicts over access to employment in oil companies or compensation if oil is discovered on tribal lands. As weapons are proliferated within tribes and the security apparatus reportedly being absent, families, many of whom have no stake in the dispute, are increasingly displaced as a consequence of such tribal conflicts.²¹⁰⁹

Increasing drug trafficking and smuggling in Basrah's ports²¹¹⁰ as well as the worsening water crisis²¹¹¹ also account for sometimes fatal tribal conflicts²¹¹². Currently, tribal disputes related to water scarcity are responsible for about 10 % of all such conflicts. However, these conflicts are expected to increase in the future due to more intense periods of drought.²¹¹³ In Basrah, tribal disputes 'often feature the use of heavy weaponry such as machine guns, mortars and anti-armour missiles, with armoured vehicles and reconnaissance drones often turning the governorate into a battleground.'²¹¹⁴

²¹⁰¹ Jiyad, S., Failure of Governance in Basra puts all of Iraq at Risk, LSE [Blog], 2. April 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰² Jiyad, S., Failure of Governance in Basra puts all of Iraq at Risk, LSE [Blog], 2. April 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Iraqi protesters block major port near Basrah as unrest continues, 2 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Arabiya, Protesters block roads, bridges in Iraq's Basrah, announce general strike, 17 November 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁰³ Arab News, Protester killed in southern Iraq as tensions flare again, 6 November 2020, [url](#); Alkhundary, T. and Al-Shakeri, H., There can be no 'going back to normal' in Iraq, Al Jazeera, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁴ AW, Hundreds protest over power, water cuts across Iraq, 2 July 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁵ Shafaq News, Angry protestors block the Dhi Qar-Basra road, 2 June 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁶ Shafaq News, Protestors block the road leading to Umm Qasr port in Basra, 14 August 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁷ Al-Jaffal, O. and Khalaf, S., Basra governorate: Local government crisis and conflict with the federal government, LSE, 1 May 2021, [url](#), p. 6

²¹⁰⁸ Al-Jaffal, O. and Khalaf, S., Basra governorate: Local government crisis and conflict with the federal government, LSE, 1 May 2021, [url](#), p. 6; Jiyad, S., Failure of Governance in Basra puts all of Iraq at Risk, LSE [Blog], 2. April 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁹ New Arab (The), Clan violence in Iraq: Oil companies targeted as poverty reigns, 13 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹¹⁰ Amwaj Media, Tribal disputes cripple Iraq's oil-rich Basra, 27 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹¹¹ Planetary Security Initiative, Drought ignites tribal conflicts in Southern Iraq, 17 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹² Amwaj Media, Tribal disputes cripple Iraq's oil-rich Basra, 27 March 2021, [url](#); Planetary Security Initiative, Drought ignites tribal conflicts in Southern Iraq, 17 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹³ Planetary Security Initiative, Drought ignites tribal conflicts in Southern Iraq, 17 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁴ Amwaj Media, Tribal disputes cripple Iraq's oil-rich Basra, 27 March 2021, [url](#)





A corrupt customs evasion cartel that funnels billions of dollars into the pockets of armed groups, political parties and, above all, Shiite paramilitaries allied with Iran, is reported to operate along Iraq's borders, particularly at the lucrative port of Umm Qasr in Basrah. Those who stand in the way of these schemes reportedly face intimidation and death threats.²¹¹⁵ In a September 2019 report on Basrah's mounting drug problem, the New York Times stated that the fact that significant traffickers either never get caught or escape from prison soon after capture added to suspicions of PMU involvement in the drug trade.²¹¹⁶ A November 2020 article points out that Iraq's tribal structures hamper the tackling of the drug problem. Some tribe members are reportedly involved in drug trafficking and its combating, which in turn fuels tribal conflicts.²¹¹⁷

For further details on security developments in Basrah governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 4.1.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.11.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

The ISW reported in December 2017 that the Basrah Operations Command (BasOC) was responsible for ensuring security in the governorate of Basrah. However, the BasOC has not been able to assert command over the governorate due to lack of manpower.²¹¹⁸ As of December 2019, the ISF in Basrah governorate consisted of the BasOC, a Counter Terrorism (CT) regiment, a Commandos brigade, emergency regiments, rapid reaction forces, local police, a brigade of the federal police and a battalion from the 9th Armoured Division.²¹¹⁹ In July 2020 the Iraqi Joint Operations Command announced that BasOC would control the Shalamchah border crossing with Iran and the Safwan crossing with Kuwait.²¹²⁰ According to a February 2020 article, Basrah was one of the governorates where security is managed by the Joint Operations Command.²¹²¹ In August 2020, Iraq's Interior Minister announced new security measures for Basrah, following attacks on activists in the city. He ordered the Joint Operations Command to establish a robust plan to resolve tribal disputes and called for the creation of a committee to pursue outstanding arrest warrants to crack down on criminal elements operating across the governorate.²¹²²

In the context of the crackdown on the escalating demonstrations starting in the summer of 2018, Renad Mansour and Ben Robin-D'Cruz, researchers on Iraqi politics, referred to 'tight-knit relationships between Iraqi security forces, local tribes and militias' that have resulted in the formation of a 'more cohesive apparatus of repression' in Basrah than elsewhere in Iraq. Moreover, these groups are reported to be deeply entrenched among locals due to a combination of tribal structures and aggressive militia recruitment strategies in Basrah.²¹²³

²¹¹⁵ AFP, 'Worse than a jungle': the cartel controlling Iraqi borders, 29 March 2021

²¹¹⁶ New York Times (The), Iraq faces a new adversary: crystal meth, 14 September 2019, [url](#)

²¹¹⁷ Al-Monitor, Drug smuggling, abuse on the rise in Iraq, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 16

²¹¹⁹ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From abandoned villages to the cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹²⁰ MEMO, Iraq army to control border crossings with Iran, Kuwait, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹²¹ MEMO, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

²¹²² GardaWorld, Iraq: Authorities announce new security measures in Basra following recent attacks on activists August 20 /update 1, 21 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹²³ Mansour, R. and Robin-D'Cruz, B., The Basra Blueprint and the Future of Protest in Iraq, Chatham House, 8 October 2019, [url](#)





Robin-D'Cruz discussed the entanglements between security forces and PMU using the example of the failure of a Baghdad special intelligence unit (Falcons Cell) to arrest a member of the Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH) on 12 May 2021 in Basrah. In the course of the attempted arrest, AAH militiamen attacked the intelligence unit's offices in Basrah. The dispute was eventually transformed into a tribal conflict and resolved by the BasOC's Major General with a tribal truce, which ultimately led to the failure of the arrest mission.²¹²⁴

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

In May 2021, the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy reported that all PMU factions in Basrah have offices that function as agencies rather than military bases. These offices play a role in 'mobilization and logistical support, in addition to ideological and developmental training in Iran' and military training courses.²¹²⁵ Most agencies and party offices have reportedly been closed since the October 2019 protests.²¹²⁵

The same source reported that the Badr forces have a notable presence in the governorate and that state security agencies are weaker and do not have the power to interfere with PMU activities. Consequently, there have been no attempts by the security forces to counter the PMU in the governorate. Although the Badr forces are not involved in any security activities, their weapons are available and can be used if required. Badr forces are present in the PMU operational command base. The main camp and only base in Basrah is located in Al-Deir (Al-Dair, Al-Dayr) sub-district. However, the organisation maintains offices throughout the governorate and is present in the districts of Abu Al-Khaseeb, Al-Qurna, Al-Midaina, Shatt Al-Arab, Al-Zubair and Fao, the centre of Basrah, Lebanon Casino Street and the sub-districts of Safwan and Umm Qasr.²¹²⁶

PMU Faction	Brigade	Location (Facility)	Additional Information
Saraya Al-Salam (Peace Brigades)	313, 314, 315	Al-Tuwaisa area (base) Al-Zubair district (base)	no security functions in Basrah; focus on mobilisation and support of affiliated brigades outside the governorate
Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada	14	Al-Hakimiya area (base)	
Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH)	45	Al-Hakimiya area (base)	
Quwat Wa'ad Allah	33	Al-Jam'iyat area in Basrah (office)	
Saraya Ansar Al-Aqeeda	28	Al-Jam'iyat area in Basrah (office)	
Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH)	41, 42, 43	Al-Qurna, Shatt Al-Arab, Abu Al-Khaseeb, Al-Deir, Al-Zubair, Bariha area (offices)	
Saraya Al-Khorasani	18	Al-Jabaliya area (office)	

²¹²⁴ Robin-D'Cruz, B., The Social Logics of Protest Violence in Iraq, LSE, August 2021, [url](#), p. 7, footnote 2

²¹²⁵ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 43

²¹²⁶ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 42



Al-Nujaba'	12	Manawi Lajm area (office)	
Saraya Al-Difa' Al-Sha'bi	46, 47	Naval Academy in Al-Najibiya area (base)	loyal to Hezbollah
Saraya Al-Jihad	18	Al-Mashraq Al-Jadid area (office)	
Harakat Ansar Allah Al-Awfiya	19	Al-Janina area (office)	
Liwa' Al-Muntadhar (Quwat al-Muntadhir)	7	Al-Zubair district (office)	
Saraya Ashura	8	Basrah governorate, not further specified (offices)	
Quwat Al-Shaheed Al-Sadr Al-Awal	15	Basrah governorate, not further specified (offices)	associated with Da'wa party
Imam Ali Division	2	Basrah governorate, not further specified (offices)	
Al-Abbas Division	26	Basrah governorate, not further specified (offices)	

Table 15: PMU factions in Basrah²¹²⁷

A variety of Shiite political parties, among them the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), Hikma, Da'wa and the Fadila party, as well as PMU networks such as Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (AAH) and the Sadrist network are competing to secure their interests in the local oil economy. Unlike in Baghdad, in Basrah the various parties, including the PMU, are focusing less on controlling neighbourhoods and ministries rather than on acquiring assets.²¹²⁸ Each of Basrah's ports has been divided among political parties according to ever-changing political arrangements.²¹²⁹ A July 2021 report more specifically stated that Hikma controls the northern Rumaila oil fields, the Safwan border crossing with Kuwait, and the port of Al-Maqal in Shatt Al-Arab, while Maliki's branch of the Da'wa party runs around 60% of the port of Umm Qasr, the southern Rumaila oil fields, the Barjisiya oil and gas fields, Basrah airport and a petrochemical factory in Barjisiya. The Sadrists exert control over the port city, the ministry of electricity departments and stations, Al-Jumhuriya hospital, as well as over the Shalamchah border crossing with Iran. Badr and the AAH control the western Qurna oil fields, the Abu Flous port, and the companies responsible for controlling goods passing through the Shalamchah border crossing. The Fadila party has control over government factories in northern Basrah, and a fertilizer plant in the district of Abu Al-Khaseeb and holds vast political and security influence over Basrah.²¹³⁰

²¹²⁷ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 42-43

²¹²⁸ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 20

²¹²⁹ Mansour, R., Networks of power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state in Iraq, Chatham House, February 2021, [url](#), p. 31

²¹³⁰ Skelton, M. and Saleem, Z. A., Living among the Hashd, IRIS, July 2021, [url](#), p. 20



2.11.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Attacks against protesters

In Mid-August 2020, at least four separate attacks by unknown gunmen on Iraqi activists were reported within five days,²¹³¹ killing between two²¹³² and five people and injuring at least two others. The fatalities included prominent activists such as Tashin Osama and Reham Yacoub.²¹³³ Following the killings, protests erupted again in the governorate on 21 August 2020, in which the local parliamentary office was set on fire and the governor's resignation was demanded. A few days later, Prime Minister Kadhimi visited the families of the victims in Basrah and promised better protection by the security forces and the capture of the attackers.²¹³⁴ Commenting on the violence faced by activists, researcher on Iraqi politics Ben Robin-D'Cruz noted in an August 2020 LSE blog entry:

'Sporadic anti-protest violence from Iraqi police and armed groups continues, but not, so far, in the systematic pattern of repression that emerged during the chaotic protests in Basra in the summer of 2018. Nevertheless, the killing of civil activist Tahseen Osma by unknown gunmen in Basra on 14 August, serves as a reminder that violence remains a strategic tool, particularly against those involved in the October 2019 movement.'²¹³⁵

Human rights organisations also denounced the impunity in regard to attacks on and even killings of civil society members and protesters in Basrah.²¹³⁶ Concerning the targeted killings of particular activists, Ben Robin-D'Cruz argues that these victims tend to have a slightly different profile from the typical protesters involved in violent encounters with security forces. They tend to be a bit older, come from middle-class families, have university education, a job and are disproportionately female. Robin-D'Cruz attributed this to the fact that these protest movement members advocated for a more peaceful approach and had the potential to take the protest movement to a new political level which made them more threatening. Moreover, unlike the typical young male protest participants, they did not have strong networks, tribally engaged families and lived mostly in less precarious economic circumstances that made it much harder to buy them off with promises of money or job offers.²¹³⁷

In November 2020, an anti-government protester was killed by the Basrah police, between 7²¹³⁸ and 40²¹³⁹ others were injured during a demonstration in the city of Basrah.²¹⁴⁰ The killing depicted the first death of a protester by security forces in Basrah since Prime Minister Kadhimi took office in May 2020.²¹⁴¹ In the aftermath of the incident, the Interior Ministry termed the killing to be an individual act by a disobeying member of the security forces, who

²¹³¹ EPIC, ISHM: August 13 – August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³² HRW, Iraq: Basra Political Group Targeted, 26 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³³ EPIC, ISHM: August 13 – August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁴ EPIC, ISHM: August 20 – August 27, 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Protesters set fire to Iraq parliament's regional office in Basra, 21 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁵ Robin-D'Cruz, B., Violence and Protests in South Iraq, LSE [Blog], 18 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁶ OHCHR, UN experts call on Iraq to investigate attacks on women human rights defenders, 2 October 2020, [url](#);

HRW, Iraq: Basra Political Group Targeted, 26 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁷ Robin-D'Cruz, B., Why Did They Kill Riham Yacoub? The Murder of a Civil Society Activist in Basra, LSE [Blog], 24 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁸ EPIC, ISHM: November 5 – November 12, 2020, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁹ Al Jazeera, Iraq: Anti-government demonstrator killed in Basra protests, 6 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁰ EPIC, ISHM: November 5 – November 12, 2020, 12 November 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Iraq: Anti-government demonstrator killed in Basra protests, 6 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴¹ Al Jazeera, Iraq: Anti-government demonstrator killed in Basra protests, 6 November 2020, [url](#)





was arrested later on. Kadhimi was quoted to not be willing to ‘tolerate any security officials’ who use live ammunition against protesters. The incident occurred about one week after security forces had burned down tents of protesters to free blocked roads.²¹⁴² In February and March 2021, six individuals accused of several targeted killings, including those of two journalists who had covered the demonstrations, were arrested and detained in Basrah.²¹⁴³

In February 2021, families of killed protesters demonstrated in front of the Basrah police headquarter and demanded justice for killed protesters, activists and journalists.²¹⁴⁴ In summer 2021, Basrah citizens suffering under power cuts and scorching temperatures again took to the streets where protests erupted including blocked highways and burning tires.²¹⁴⁵ For further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

Tribal disputes

Various sources indicate that violent tribal disputes remain a significant problem in Basrah governorate.²¹⁴⁶ The recurrent and intense wave of protests as well as the COVID-19-related health and economic crisis further exacerbated existing societal tensions.²¹⁴⁷ In an attempt to curb the outbreaks of tribal violence, the government launched a Joint Operation Command operation to seize unlicensed weaponry in areas characterised by armed tribal conflicts in September 2020. While some residents of the governorate welcomed these efforts,²¹⁴⁸ others doubted its effectiveness and questioned whether some tribes would give up their vested interests, influence, money and weapons that easily. In March 2021, the Basrah operation command announced the resolution of 42 tribal disputes.²¹⁴⁹ For more information about tribal feuds in Iraq, please refer to chapter 8: Persons involved in and affected by blood/land feuds in the context of tribal conflict of [the EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

IED attacks

Between August 2020 and July 2021, at least nine IED attacks were reported that targeted supply convoys or shipping stations of the International Coalition against ISIL in Basrah governorate.²¹⁵⁰ Another two reported IED explosions targeted the property of an ISF officer and a law office in Basrah city.²¹⁵¹

²¹⁴² EPIC, ISHM: November 5 – November 12, 2020, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴³ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 13; see also EPIC, ISHM: February 11 – February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁴ EPIC, ISHM: February 11 – February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, Basra protests erupt as power cuts hit scorching Iraq, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁶ USIP, The Current Situation in Iraq: A USIP Fact Sheet, 4 August 2020, [url](#), p. 2; Amwaj Media, Tribal disputes cripple Iraq's oil-rich Basra, 27 March 2021, [url](#); see also Shafaq News, Tribal conflict kills a man and wounded four others in Basra, 23 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁷ USIP, The Current Situation in Iraq: A USIP Fact Sheet, 4 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²¹⁴⁸ Diyaruna, Southern Iraq tribes back crackdown on unlicensed weapons, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁹ Amwaj Media, Tribal disputes cripple Iraq's oil-rich Basra, 27 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁰ EPIC, ISHM: August 13 – August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 – February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 29 – May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 3 - June 10, 2021, 10 June 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 10-16 July 2021, 21 July 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵¹ EPIC, ISHM: November 19 – December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 6 – May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#)



Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 65 battles, 58 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 44 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 167 security incidents in Basrah governorate, the majority taking place in Basrah district.²¹⁵² The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 25 below.

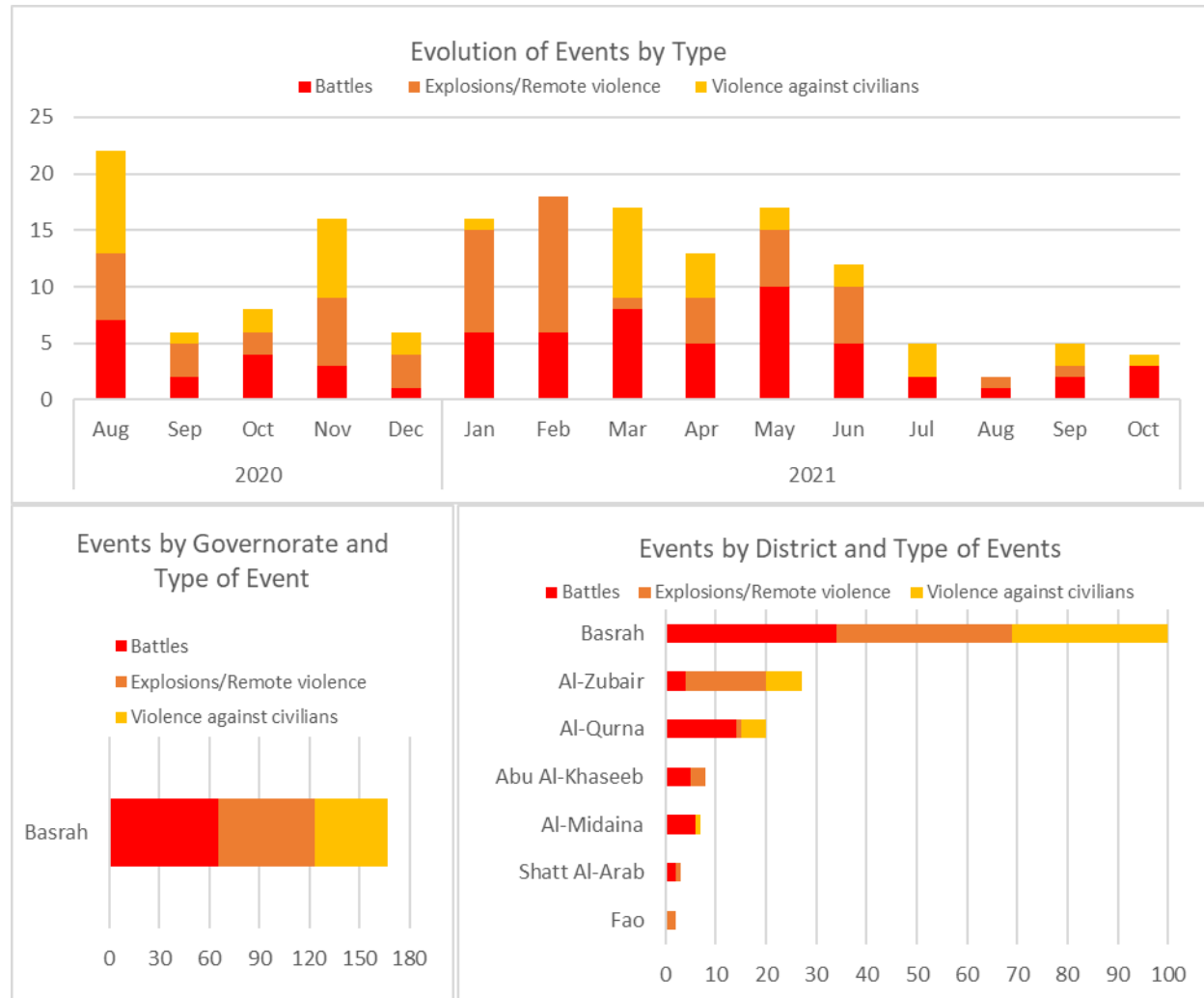


Figure 20: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Basrah governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²¹⁵³

²¹⁵² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 19 August 2020, unknown gunmen on a motorbike killed a prominent female activist and injured three others in Basrah city.²¹⁵⁴
- On 22 August 2020, it was reported that an old tribal conflict led to gunmen shooting and injuring one person in central Basrah.²¹⁵⁵
- Following the eruption of an armed clan conflict in Al-Dayr district, north of Basra, one person was reportedly killed on 28 November 2020.²¹⁵⁶
- On 5 May 2021 the detonation of a war remnant killed two Iraqi soldiers and wounded a third in the Jaweeda area of Basrah province.²¹⁵⁷
- On 21 May 2021, unidentified gunmen reportedly opened fire on two brothers at a central Basrah market due to an old tribal dispute. One of the victims was killed, the other one was injured and taken to hospital.²¹⁵⁸
- On 15 July 2021 an armed conflict erupted between Al-Karamsheh and Beit Wafi tribal militias at a fish market in Basrah City, killing two people and injuring ten others. The police arrested six suspects related to the incident.²¹⁵⁹

2.11.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²¹⁶⁰ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 16 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Basrah	2	0	1	1	12	6	15	21

Table 16: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Basrah governorate²¹⁶¹

2.11.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Basrah governorate, particularly Basrah district, is reportedly one of the most affected areas in regard to landmine and war remnant contamination in Iraq.²¹⁶² During the reference period,

²¹⁵⁴ Reuters, Female protest leader gunned down in Iraq's Basra, 19 August 2020, [url](#); MEE, Iraqi women's rights campaigner latest activist killed in Basra, 20 August 2020, [url](#); AW, Female Iraqi activist gunned down as US-connected activists targeted, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁵ NINA, A citizen was hit by gunmen in central Basra due to an ancient tribal conflict, 22 August 2020

²¹⁵⁶ NINA, A citizen killed in a tribal conflict north of Basra, 28 November 2020

²¹⁵⁷ EPIC, ISHM: April 29 – May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁸ NINA, A person was killed and his brother was wounded by gunfire in central Basra, 21 May 2021

²¹⁵⁹ Shafaq News, "بسبب سمكة" بـ 12 وإصابة مقتل [Because of a "fish", 12 people were killed and injured in a violent clan conflict in Basra], 15 July 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁰ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²¹⁶¹ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

²¹⁶² ACAPS, Iraq: Mine action, 22 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; see also Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59



two cases of such explosions were documented, in which two people were killed and a total of two others were injured, one of them severely.²¹⁶³ By the end of 2020, 36 365 119 square metres of the governorate were reported to be cluster munition-contaminated²¹⁶⁴ and 842 950 454 square metres contaminated with anti-personnel mines²¹⁶⁵.

2.11.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 5 616 IDPs were registered in Basrah governorate, originating from Salah Al-Din (35 %), Ninewa (28 %), Anbar (19 %), Kirkuk (10 %) as well as Diyala, Baghdad and Babylon (8 %) governorates. Within Basrah governorate, the IDP population largely concentrates in the districts of Basrah (41 %), Al-Zubair (22 %) and Abu Al-Khaseeb (21 %). In Basrah governorate, 198 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses or unowned or uninhabitable houses), 162 of them in Basrah district.²¹⁶⁶ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 60 and 80 % of IDP households in Basrah district live in severe or extreme need.²¹⁶⁷ IOM did not document any IDPs from Basrah governorate in other parts of the country.²¹⁶⁸ According to IOM, no returns to Basrah governorate were documented, as of September 2021.²¹⁶⁹

²¹⁶³ EPIC, ISHM: February 11 – February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 29 – May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁴ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59

²¹⁶⁵ Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 159

²¹⁶⁶ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁷ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁶⁸ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.12 Karbala



Map 23: Karbala governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²¹⁷⁰

2.12.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Karbala (Kerbala, Kerbela) governorate is located in the central part of Iraq and has borders with Anbar, Najaf and Babil governorates. Karbala governorate is divided into the following districts: Ain Al-Tamur, Al-Hindiya and Karbala. The provincial capital is Karbala.²¹⁷¹ Karbala city is located about 88 kilometres southwest of Baghdad.²¹⁷² The governorate is affected by considerable water shortages and droughts, leading to displacements.²¹⁷³

²¹⁷⁰ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²¹⁷¹ NCCI, Kerbala Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 1

²¹⁷² Encyclopædia Britannica, Karbala, n.d., [url](#); Urban Iraq, Karbala – Karbala Governorate, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁷³ Rudaw, Farmers head for Iraq's cities in the face of drought, 11 May 2021, [url](#)



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²¹⁷⁴ the governorate's population at 1 316 750 with around 436 350 people living in rural and around 880 400 in urban areas.²¹⁷⁵

Ethno-religious composition

Most of Karbala's inhabitants are Shia Muslims. The governorate is also home to a small Sunni community.²¹⁷⁶ Karbala is a holy city to Shia Muslims and attracts millions of pilgrims and visitors twice a year²¹⁷⁷ due to the existence of the tomb of Hussein, one of the most important Shia shrines.²¹⁷⁸

Economy

Religious tourism is a major economic factor in Karbala. After insecurity and attacks on pilgrims as well as the ISIL conquests in 2014 scared many visitors away,²¹⁷⁹ in 2020 and 2021 intensified security efforts were made to ensure pilgrimage to Karbala on the Shia commemorations of Ashura were not disrupted by violence.²¹⁸⁰ The number of pilgrims and visitors decreased again due to closed borders and travel restrictions as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020²¹⁸¹ and 2021. Business owners, supported also by a parliamentarian pressured the government to ease the border crossing and provide more visas for visitors to boost the economy in the private sector.²¹⁸²

Road security

In April 2020, the Iraqi army started erecting a dirt barrier and announced plans to dig a trench along the highway between Karbala, Anbar and Al-Nukhayb. The plans to secure the road from ISIL activities involved the installation of checkpoints and ambushes as well as operating security patrols in cooperation with PMU.²¹⁸³ As outlined in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#) (see section 4.2.1), most of the checkpoints along the main road from Karbala to the border with Saudi Arabia were controlled by the Shia militia Al-Abbas Combat Division.²¹⁸⁴ The plan to secure safe travel on the highway leading to Saudi

²¹⁷⁴ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁵ Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁷⁶ NCCI, Kerbala Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁷⁷ Urban Iraq, Karbala – Karbala Governorate, n.d., [url](#); AW, Shia pilgrims throng to Karbala under shadow of pandemic, 20 August 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica, Karbala, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁷⁹ NCCI, Kerbala Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁸⁰ USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 19; INA, Baghdad Operations Command announces success of security plan for Arbâeen pilgrimage, 27 September 2021, [url](#); National (The), Arbâeen draws thousands of Shiites to Iraq's Karbala, 28 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁸¹ AW, Violent clashes mar Shia pilgrimage in Iraq, 7 October 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸² Al-Monitor, Iraq under pressure to open borders for Shiite pilgrims despite pandemic, 25 August 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁸³ Diyaruna, Iraqi army secures international highway leading to Saudi Arabia, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁴ Al-Monitor, Abbas Combat Division, an example of Iran-independent faction, 23 August 2019, [url](#)





Arabia was linked to the reopening of the Arar border crossing on the Iraqi-Saudi Arabian border in November 2020.²¹⁸⁵ The border had been closed since summer 1990.²¹⁸⁶

In September 2021, Iraqi authorities stationed security personnel and allied Shia militias in Karbala and on roads leading to the city to protect annual *Arba'een*²¹⁸⁷ pilgrimage. A high threat of attacks was expected on routes to Karbala.²¹⁸⁸

2.12.2 Conflict background

Karbala city has become a hotspot for conflict caused by the presence of dozens of powerful Iranian-backed militias and the competition of armed groups and political interests.²¹⁸⁹ Insecurity in Karbala was mostly linked to religious uprisings and protests of the Shiite population against the Government of Iraq (see [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), section 2.12.2).²¹⁹⁰ In summer 2018 and since October 2019, continuing anti-government protests in Karbala governorate claimed fatalities and casualties.²¹⁹¹ Impunity for politically motivated crimes against pro-reform activists aroused public anger.²¹⁹² On 26 May 2021, Qassim Musleh, the commander of the Liwa' Al-Tafuf, the 13th Brigade of Iraq's PMU, was arrested in Baghdad on terrorism charges²¹⁹³ but released again on 9 June 2021.²¹⁹⁴ His release for lack of evidence reportedly followed the pressure on the head of Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council, Faik Zeidan.²¹⁹⁵ Qassim Musleh was suspected of being involved in the murder of several activists in Karbala, including prominent figures such as Ihab Al-Wazny (killed in May 2021) and Fahim Al-Tai (killed on 8 December 2019²¹⁹⁶).²¹⁹⁷

²¹⁸⁵ Diyaruna, Iraqi army secures international highway leading to Saudi Arabia, 6 May 2020, [url](#); Die Presse, Irak und Saudiarabien öffnen erstmals seit 1990 regulären Grenzübergang [Iraq and Saudi Arabia open regular border crossing for the first time since 1990], 18 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁶ Die Presse, Irak und Saudiarabien öffnen erstmals seit 1990 regulären Grenzübergang [Iraq and Saudi Arabia open regular border crossing for the first time since 1990], 18 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁷ 'Arba'een marks the end of the 40-day mourning period for Imam Hussain ibn Ali, whose martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala led to the schism between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.' GardaWorld, Iraq: Iraqi authorities increase security nationwide for Arba'een pilgrimage Sept. 27-28, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁸ GardaWorld, Iraq: Iraqi authorities increase security nationwide for Arba'een pilgrimage Sept. 27-28, 20 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁹ New York Times (The), 'There Is Chaos': Iran-Backed Militias Battle Activists in a Holy Iraqi City, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁰ CFR, Remembering the Iraqi Uprising Twenty-Five Years Ago, 5 March 2016, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#); AW, Karbala's pilgrimage between spiritual rites and pro-Iranian exploitation, 8 October 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹¹ IPI, Protests in Southern Iraq Intensify, Is Instability to Follow?, 24 July 2018, [url](#); National (The), Over 800 killed, wounded since south Iraq protests began, 23 July 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Protesters storm provincial government building in Iraqi city of Kerbala: local sources, 14 July 2018, [url](#); Arab News, Masked men attack protesters in Iraq's Karbala, killing 18, 29 October 2019, [url](#); DW, Iraq protests: Deadly clashes in Karbala, 29 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Arabiya, At least 10 Iraqi protesters injured in clashes with security forces in Karbala, updated 20 May 2020, [url](#); MEE, Iraq: Activist's murder sparks protests at Iranian consulate in Karbala, 9 May 2021, [url](#); MEMO, Iraq: Hundreds of protesters storm Karbala power plant, 10 July 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹² Al-Arabiya, Murder of city official sparks anger over Iraq impunity, 11 August 2021, [url](#); MEE, Iraq sentences to death killer of Karbala official, 22 August 2021, [url](#); Arab News, Iraqi activist's killing sparks protests against impunity, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹³ Al-Monitor, Arrest of an Iraqi PMU commander puts militias on notice, 27 May 2021, [url](#); MEE, Iraq: Arrest of paramilitary commander sparks fears of violent confrontation, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁴ Washington Post (The), Iraq releases Iran-linked militiaman in blow to efforts to check impunity, 9 June 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iraqi judiciary releases PMU leader, citing lack of evidence, 10 June 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁵ Al-Monitor, Iraqi judiciary releases PMU leader, citing lack of evidence, 10 June 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁶ Al Jazeera, Iraqis rally for slain activist as Baghdad summons Western envoys, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁷ Al-Monitor, Arrest of an Iraqi PMU commander puts militias on notice, 27 May 2021, [url](#)





For further details on security developments in Karbala governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 4.2.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.12.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

The Iraqi military's Middle Euphrates Operations Command (MEOC) is operating in Karbala and chiefly responsible for ensuring the security of Shia pilgrims.²¹⁹⁸ As of December 2019, ISF in Karbala also included the 9th Armoured Division, commandos brigade, emergency regiments as well as local and federal police.²¹⁹⁹ Officially, local police are responsible for security outside the shrines of Karbala. However, the police are the weakest element in the security chain. Local security forces include paramilitary groups, such as the Iranian-backed militia Kata'ib Hezbollah.²²⁰⁰ (Please refer also to [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), section 4.2.2.)

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

As stated in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#) (section 4.2.2), PMU operating in Karbala were reportedly the Shia militias Liwa' Ali Al-Akbar (Brigade 11) and the Al-Abbas Combat Division (Brigade 26). It is these two factions of which the MEOC, responsible for Karbala and the regions to the southwest, is largely composed.²²⁰¹ The Al-Abbas Combat Division 'is affiliated with the al-Abbas Shrine religious establishment in Karbala' and follows the Shia Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani. The relation between this group and other Iran-linked factions has become tense after 2017.²²⁰² Hashd Al-Marji'i²²⁰³ or Hashd Al-Atabat are unofficial labels for PMU groups affiliated to the holy shrines of Karbala and Najaf. They are loyal to Al-Sistani.²²⁰⁴

In 2020, there existed training camps for the Badr Organisation, the Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq, the Al-Abbas Combat Division and smaller factions, such as Saraya Talia Al-Khurasani (Brigade 18), Liwa' Al-Tafuf (Brigade 13) or Kata'ib Jund Al-Imam (Brigade 6), in Karbala governorate.²²⁰⁵

In May 2020, the Al-Abbas Combat Brigade and the Brigade 3 reportedly repelled an attack by ISIL in Iraq's Karbala province.²²⁰⁶ In September 2021, clashes between PMU and Karbala

²¹⁹⁸ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19

²¹⁹⁹ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²²⁰⁰ New York Times (The), 'There Is Chaos': Iran-Backed Militias Battle Activists in a Holy Iraqi City, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰¹ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), p. 41; Smyth, P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project [Interactive Map], The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, updated April 2020, [url](#)

²²⁰² Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#), p. 9

²²⁰³ 'A marji' is a source of emulation and religious authority in Shia Islam. The unofficial label al-hasd al-marji'i is a reference to these groups' ties to the holy shrines of Karbala and Najaf.' Haddad, F., 'Case 1: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units: A Hybrid Actor in a Hybrid State', 2020, [url](#), p. 41

²²⁰⁴ Haddad, F., 'Case 1: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units: A Hybrid Actor in a Hybrid State', 2020, [url](#), p. 41; Badawi, T., The Popular Mobilisation Units as a Relief Agency: Can the Coronavirus Pandemic Accelerate Institutional Transformation?, June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁰⁵ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), p. 68

²²⁰⁶ Shia Waves, PMU repels ISIS attack in Karbala desert, 3 May 2020, [url](#)



police were reported in which six people were injured.²²⁰⁷ During the *Arba'een* commemorations in September 2021, PMU were responsible to secure the protection of Shia pilgrims to Karbala.²²⁰⁸

2.12.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Anti-government protests continued in 2020 and 2021. Impunity for political killings and poor public services were among the protesters' dominant motifs.²²⁰⁹ In the course of the protests, demonstrators blocked roads.²²¹⁰

Protest activities sparked particularly following the assassination of the prominent reform activists Ihab Al-Wazny in May 2021²²¹¹ as well as after electricity cuts on hot summer days in July 2021.²²¹² Then, hundreds of people protested in Al-Hindiya district against power outages, blocking the main street between the district and the governorate and threatening the government to close the Al-Khayrat power station if their demands were not met.²²¹³ In December 2020, delay in payment of salaries and wages as well as employment conditions led to protests by employees at the Ministry of Electricity in Karbala governorate in Al-Hindiya district.²²¹⁴

Protesters condemned 'continued killings of activists and the Government's inability to hold perpetrators to account' in May 2021.²²¹⁵

In October 2021, violent clashes between paramilitary groups (PMU) guarding the shrines as well as dispatched police and a group of anti-government protesters at the visitation area between the Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas shrines in the city of Karbala impacted the annual *Arba'een* pilgrimage.²²¹⁶

For further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 3 battles, 3 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 4 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of

²²⁰⁷ Shafaq News, Six injured in clashes between the PMF and the Police in Karbala, 28 September 2021, [url](#);

Basnews, Hashd al-Shaabi Clashes with Karbala Police, Wounding Six, 28 September 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰⁸ Iraq News Gazette, The Minister of Interior Visits The Command And Control HQs Of The PMF In Karbala To Review The Procedures For Securing The Protection Of Pilgrims, 26 September 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰⁹ UNAMI and OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq: October 2019 to April 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#), p. 16; AFP, 'Pyramid' of corruption pushes Iraq family to emigrate, 29 March 2021; Jiyad, S., Struggling Iraq Faces Another Crisis in COVID-19, IAI, 13 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 5

²²¹⁰ Al Jazeera, Activist's killing triggers protests in Iraq's Karbala, 9 May 2021, [url](#); INA, The electricity cuts spark protests in Karbala as summer temperatures scorch the country, 4 July 2021, [url](#)

²²¹¹ MEE, Iraq: Activist's murder sparks protests at Iranian consulate in Karbala, 9 May 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Activist's killing triggers protests in Iraq's Karbala, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

²²¹² MEMO, Iraq: Hundreds of protesters storm Karbala power plant, 10 July 2021, [url](#)

²²¹³ INA, The electricity cuts spark protests in Karbala as summer temperatures scorch the country, 4 July 2021, [url](#)

²²¹⁴ Shafaq News, Electricity employees in Karbala protest eight-month delay in their dues, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁵ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 5

²²¹⁶ Independent (The), Dozens injured in clashes in Iraq's south during pilgrimage, 6 October 2021, [url](#)



10 security incidents in Karbala governorate, the majority taking place in Karbala district.²²¹⁷ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 26 below.

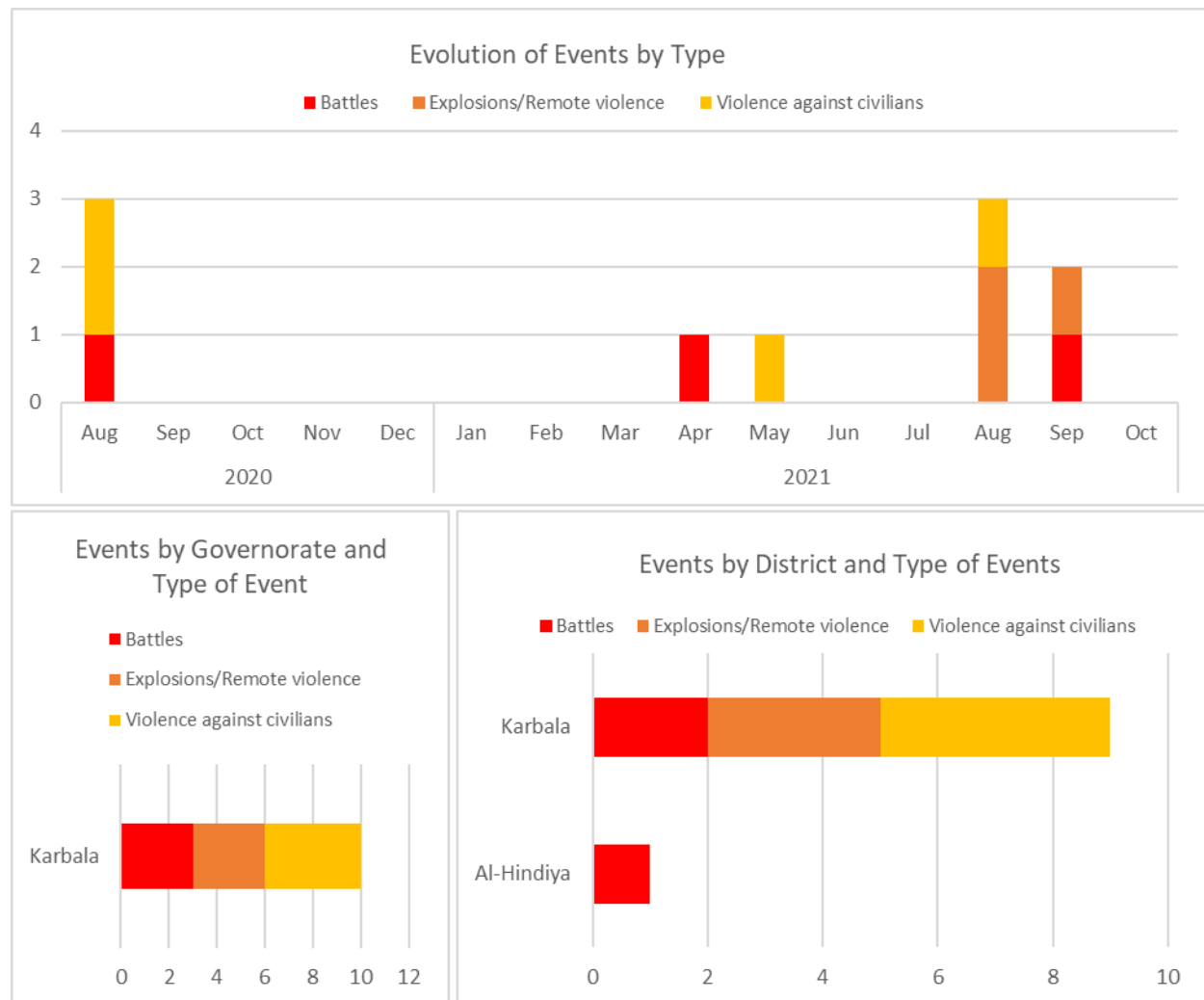


Figure 21: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Karbala governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²²¹⁸

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 26 October 2020, clashes between protesters and riot police occurred in Karbala city, when protesters marched from the Zaid square to the Baladiyah neighbourhood and the Education square. The police released shots with live bullets in the air to disperse the protesters.²²¹⁹ Reportedly, 11 security forces were injured.²²²⁰

²²¹⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²²¹⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²²¹⁹ Al Jazeera, Police fire tear gas as Iraq protesters rally for a second day, 26 October 2020, [url](#)

²²²⁰ Al-Sumaria TV, Two protesters killed, 60 injured in three Iraqi provinces, 27 October 2020



- On 8 or 9 May 2021, gunmen on a motorbike shot dead Ihab Al-Wazny, reform activist and leading figure of the Karbala Coordination for the Civil Movement, on the street close to his home in Karbala city centre.²²²¹
- On 20 June 2021, Ammar Al-Rabi'i, a candidate running for the October legislative elections was reportedly wounded by the gunshot of an unknown assailant in Karbala governorate.²²²²
- On 10 August 2021, Abeer Salim Al-Khafaji, the mayor of Karbala was killed by gunmen while supervising a municipal campaign in Al-Mamlji area.²²²³ No one has claimed responsibility for the assassination.²²²⁴ On 22 August, the suspect Hussein Abd Al-Amir was sentenced to death.²²²⁵
- On 19 August 2021, two electrical power transmission towers in the northern regions of Karbala governorate were damaged by an explosive device explosion resulting in a power outage in some areas.²²²⁶
- On 11 September 2021 two policemen and one other person were injured in three bomb explosions Karbala governorate. Two explosions happened at a police patrol and in a civilian vehicle in Al-Khanafesa, the third explosion was a roadside bomb on a highway in Karbala governorate.²²²⁷
- In September 2021, the Al-Abbas Combat Division reportedly shot down four drones approaching the area between the two shrines of Imam Hussein and Al-Abbas in Karbala city. They stated that the planes didn't have official approval.²²²⁸

2.12.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²²²⁹ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 17 below.

²²²¹ CIVICUS Monitor, Journalists and civil society activists face kidnapping, detention and killing in Iraq, 17 May 2021, [url](#); MEE, Iraq: Activist's murder sparks protests at Iranian consulate in Karbala, 9 May 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Activist's killing triggers protests in Iraq's Karbala, 9 May 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Arrest of an Iraqi PMU commander puts militias on notice, 27 May 2021, [url](#)

²²²² Shafaq News, Karbala police clarifies the details of Sunday's shooting incident, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²²²³ INA, Karbala Governor announces the arrest of the killer of engineer Abeer Selim, 11 August 2021, [url](#); Arab News, Gunmen in Iraq assassinate mayor of Karbala, 10 August 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁴ AA, Gunmen assassinate Karbala mayor in Iraq, 10 August 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁵ MEE, Iraq sentences to death killer of Karbala official, 22 August 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁶ Al-Sharqiya, Two towers north of Karbala were damaged by an explosive device explosion, 19 August 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁷ AA, Bomb blasts injure 3 in Iraq's Karbala, 11 September 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁸ RT, فرقّة العباس القتالية "تعلن إسقاط أربع طائرات مسيرة بالقرب من مرقد الإمامين الحسين والعباس", [Al-Abbas Combat Division' announces the shooting down of four drones near the shrines of Imam Hussein and Abbas], 28 September 2021 [url](#)

²²²⁹ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.





Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Karbala	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1

Table 17: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Karbala governorate²²³⁰

2.12.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Attacks on power plants spread from Iraq's north to the south in August 2021. In Karbala centre, explosives hit power supply lines and impacted two transmission towers. Ongoing attacks on power transmission towers were often attributed to ISIL.²²³¹

As of August 2020, 4 074 337 square metres in Karbala governorate were contaminated by explosive remnants of war.²²³² By the end of 2020, around 2.1 square kilometres of the governorate were reported to be cluster munition contaminated.²²³³

As reported on 16 June 2021, one person died and another one was injured in an explosion of a bomb from war remnants in Karbala, while searching among piles of scrap. The explosion was registered near a cement factory on the western Karbala border with Anbar governorate.²²³⁴

2.12.7 Displacement and return

Reportedly, on 8 November 2020, the Iraqi government decided to close camps for IDPs who had been displaced during the conflict with ISIL, affecting more than 250 000 IDPs.²²³⁵ In Karbala governorate, all existing formal camps had been closed by the end of October 2020.²²³⁶ Of those people having been forced to leave camps in Karbala, nearly half were unable to return to their areas of origin and lived 'precariously on the edges of towns in damaged or unsafe buildings without basic necessities.'²²³⁷ The Protection Cluster identified 2 informal IDP sites in Karbala between August and October 2020, housing an estimated number of 264 people.²²³⁸

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 11 358 IDPs were registered in Karbala governorate, originating from Ninewa (85 %) and Babil (11 %) as well as Kirkuk, Anbar, Diyala, Salah Al-Din and Baghdad (4 %). Within Karbala governorate, the IDP population largely concentrates in the districts of Karbala (90 %), Al-Hindiya (8 %) and Ain Al-Tamur (1 %). No IDPs

²²³⁰ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

²²³¹ Al-Monitor, Electrical towers again become targets in Iraq, 18 August 2021, [url](#)

²²³² iMMAP, Recorded Explosive Ordnance Contamination in Iraq - Overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

²²³³ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59

²²³⁴ Al-Sharqiya, A civilian was killed and another injured in an explosion of war remnants in Karbala, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

²²³⁵ VOA, Aid Agencies Blast Iraqi Decision to Close IDP Camps During Pandemic, 15 November 2020, [url](#)

²²³⁶ KirkukNow, Authorities close down all IDP camps in Baghdad and Karbala, 31 October 2020, [url](#); INA, Immigration: No IDPs camps in Baghdad and Karbala, 28 October 2020, [url](#)

²²³⁷ VOA, Aid Agencies Blast Iraqi Decision to Close IDP Camps During Pandemic, 15 November 2020, [url](#)

²²³⁸ Protection Cluster, Strategic and Operational Guidance for Humanitarian Response in Informal Sites/Settlements: Strategic Guidance and Principles for the Response in Informal Sites, 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 3





lived in camps. In Al-Hindiya district, 222 IDPs lived in critical shelter, such as tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses or religious buildings.²²³⁹

IOM did not document any IDPs from Karbala governorate in other parts of the country.²²⁴⁰

According to IOM, no returns to Karbala governorate were documented as of September 2021.²²⁴¹

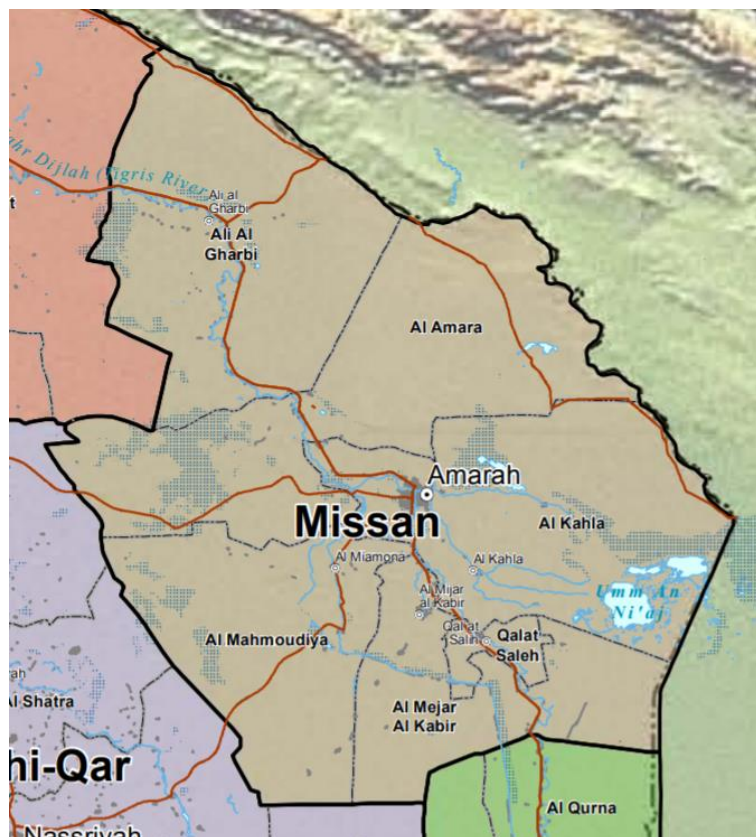
²²³⁹ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴⁰ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴¹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.13 Missan



Map 24: Missan governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²²⁴²

2.13.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Missan (Maysan) governorate is located in south-east Iraq and has borders with Wassit, Basrah and Thi-Qar governorates as well as with Iran to the east.²²⁴³ The governorate is divided into six districts: Ali Al-Gharbi, Al-Mejar Al-Kabir, Al-Maimouna, Al-Kahla, Amarah and Qal'at Saleh. The capital is Amarah.²²⁴⁴

²²⁴² UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²²⁴³ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#); UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15; IAU, Missan Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁴⁴ NCCI, Missan governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²²⁴⁵ the governorate's population at 1 202 175, with around 314 220 people living in rural and around 887 960 in urban areas.²²⁴⁶

Ethno-religious composition

The vast majority of Missan's population is composed of Arabs. As reported in February 2018, about 95 % of Missan's population were Shia Muslims. Missan is home to a Sunni minority of about 2.5 %, as well as other minorities such as Mandeans, Chaldean Christians and Sabians. Most minority communities live in the capital Amarah. A small Kurdish Feyli community is located close to the border with Iran. Their number is estimated to be less than 30 000 individuals.²²⁴⁷

Tribal affiliations and identity play an important role. Tribal affiliations are believed to prevail in approximately two thirds of the population. Tribal branches in Missan are the Al-Azeirij, Al-Bahadil, Al-Maryan, Al-Sabi'a Al-Manda'iya, Al-Sada, Al-Sarai, Al-Sawa'id, Al-Sudan, Albu Darraj, Albu-Muhammad, Bani Lam, Banu Malik, Ka'ab, Khafaja, Kinana, Ubada and Tameem groups. The marshlands of Missan are the ancestral homeland of Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs, who engaged in traditional methods of agriculture, water buffalo breeding and fishing. Many have been displaced during the draining campaign that started in 1991 and destroyed 90 % of the marshes within less than a decade.²²⁴⁸

Economy

Missan was once known as an agricultural and industrial centre. However, the economy has declined due to difficulties in access to resources and deteriorating infrastructure.²²⁴⁹ Successive years of drought have affected agriculture, reduced crop coverage and threatened water security.²²⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Missan ranks among the poorest regions in Iraq.²²⁵¹ In Missan and its neighbouring governorates, water scarcity, pollution and soil salinity had a major impact on farming activities, particularly in the marshlands. Deteriorating environmental

²²⁴⁵ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴⁶ Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

²²⁴⁷ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 30

²²⁴⁸ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), pp. 22-23, 26, 30, 47; Alkhoury, F. and Shetye, A., The Ma'dan Tribes of Iraq: A case for Environmental Refugees, Student Project, Spring 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴⁹ UNDP, From the earliest farming sites in Europe to the historical Mesopotamian wetlands: Efforts to improve agriculture in Missan and the Marshes, 3 August 2021, [url](#); IAU, Missan Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1; see also ITC, Climate change risks and opportunities in Iraqi agrifood value chains: Strengthening the Agriculture and Agrifood Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy in Iraq (SAAVI), n.d., [url](#), p. 19

²²⁵⁰ IAU, Missan Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1; see also ITC, Climate change risks and opportunities in Iraqi agrifood value chains: Strengthening the Agriculture and Agrifood Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy in Iraq (SAAVI), n.d., [url](#), p. 19; Fanack, War, Mismanagement and Climate Change: Iraq's Environment Pushed to the Brink, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵¹ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), pp. 32-33





circumstances drove people to abandon farming and engage in daily wage labour,²²⁵² as well as induced displacement and triggered inter-tribal conflicts over livelihoods and resources.²²⁵³

As reported in November 2010, people lacked adequate access to electricity in all districts except Al-Maimouna.²²⁵⁴ In 2019, the electricity supply was described as ‘unpredictable’ throughout the country;²²⁵⁵ and, in 2020, ‘severe power cuts and rolling blackouts’ were characterised as ‘endemic’, ‘sparking mass protests in southern Iraq’.²²⁵⁶ Power outages triggered protests particularly in June and July 2021,²²⁵⁷ which resulted in confrontations between protesters and security forces.²²⁵⁸

The marshland²²⁵⁹ inhabitants are the poorest population group of south Iraq.²²⁶⁰ They suffer from damage affecting marsh-eco-systems, on which they are reliant for water and livelihoods.²²⁶¹

Road security

Deadly clashes between drug dealing gangs and security forces have reportedly occurred on transportation routes as well as in urban settings in the context of smuggling and drug dealing in Missan²²⁶² and other southern Iraqi governorates.²²⁶³ Narcotic drug trafficking, predominantly crystal meth, is an increasing issue in Missan.²²⁶⁴ Its southern areas bordering Iran are active in the drug trade from Iran into the central Euphrates areas, Baghdad and the northern regions.²²⁶⁵

2.13.2 Conflict background

Since 2008, Missan has been a relatively calm governorate²²⁶⁶ and it was not among the regions taken by ISIL in 2014.²²⁶⁷ However, Shia factions such as the Muqtada Al-Sadr’s Sadrist Trend and its Mahdi Army militia competed for power. Tribal affiliations played into

²²⁵² ITC, Climate change risks and opportunities in Iraqi agrifood value chains: Strengthening the Agriculture and Agrifood Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy in Iraq (SAAVI), n.d., [url](#), pp. 17, 19-21; Walker, K., In Iraq’s marshlands, researchers are racing to document a disappearing dialect, Equal Times, 6 September 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵³ SWEDO and WFP, Restoring the Marshlands of Iraq: drivers of crisis [Map], 1 June 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵⁴ IAU, Missan Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Iraq: 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 12

²²⁵⁶ Ashwarya, S., Iraq’s Power Sector: Problems and Prospects, 13 January 2020, GJIA, [url](#)

²²⁵⁷ GardaWorld, Iraq: Protests against power outages in Maysan Governorate, overnight June 2/3, 3 July 2021, [url](#); Al-Sharqiya, Worsening electricity: Protesters in Maysan block the Baghdad road, 5 July 2021, [url](#); AFP, Iraqis protest round-the-clock blackouts as mercury soars, 9 July 2021; National (The), Iraqis protest at round-the-clock power cuts as temperatures soar, 9 July 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵⁸ GardaWorld, Iraq: Protests against power outages in Maysan Governorate, overnight June 2/3, 3 July 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵⁹ ‘The marsh complex (marshlands and seasonally inundated plains) is part of the ancient Tigris-Euphrates Delta’ in Missan governorate. UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 16

²²⁶⁰ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 47

²²⁶¹ IAU, Missan Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁶² Shafaq News, An officer killed by a drug gang in Maysan, 9 September 2020, [url](#); MEE, In south Iraq, political murders are dismissed as ‘personal’ to quash investigations, 1 April 2021, [url](#); see also Niqash, Hash, pills and speed: Drug smuggling In Iraq supported by Maysan’s tribes, 26 January 2016, available at: [url](#)

²²⁶³ Al-Monitor, Drug smuggling, abuse on the rise in Iraq, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶⁴ Al-Monitor, Drug smuggling, abuse on the rise in Iraq, 4 November 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Iraq has seen major increase in drug trafficking, use in post-Saddam era: official, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶⁵ Al-Monitor, Drug smuggling, abuse on the rise in Iraq, 4 November 2020, [url](#); Independent (The), Breaking Baghdad: How Iraq’s crystal meth epidemic is ravaging the nation, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

²²⁶⁶ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 27

²²⁶⁷ NCCI, Missan governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 4



inter-Shia fighting, frequently resulting in armed confrontations,²²⁶⁸ such as between the Sadrist group Saraya Al-Salam and members of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq in the context of the nationwide protests in October 2019.²²⁶⁹ Clashes also involved Shia militias confronting coalition and security forces.²²⁷⁰ Tribal disputes were another reason for violent clashes and killings in Missan.²²⁷¹

For further details on security developments in Missan governorate in 2019-2020, please refer also to section 4.3.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.13.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

As previously reported, ISF units mentioned in Missan consisted of Al-Rafidain Operations Command (ROC), Commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local police and a brigade of the federal police (see section 4.3.2 on armed actors in Missan in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#)).²²⁷²

Meanwhile, the Sumer Operations Command (SuOC) replaced the ROC. In Missan, Muthanna and Thi-Qar SuOC is led by Major General Imad Al-Silawi, who is the administrative commander of the 15th Army Division.²²⁷³

As reported on 14 February 2021, according to General Abdul Karim Khalaf, the spokesman for the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces, the army forces handed over the security file in six governorates to the Police Command, including in Missan.²²⁷⁴

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

In Missan, the Ansar Allah Al-Awfiya controls important government offices and businesses.²²⁷⁵ The armed group is a component of the PMU faction Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq. Both are reportedly loyal to Iran.²²⁷⁶ Two of Ansar Allah Al-Awfiya's loyalists have a seat in the national parliament. The group derives major revenues from cross-border trade with Iran.²²⁷⁷ Powerful pro-Iranian factions are linked to businesses involved in drug trafficking.²²⁷⁸ Moreover, benefits from the Al-Shayeb (Al-Sheeb) crossing as well as from crossings in Wassit and Basrah on the border with Iran are shared between smaller armed factions, among them

²²⁶⁸ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 27

²²⁶⁹ Wielgos, A., Iraq's Two Rivers, Warsaw Institute, 25 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 6, 19

²²⁷⁰ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 27

²²⁷¹ Shafaq News, Clan conflicts erupt in Baghdad, al-Muthanna, and Maysan, 11 April 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, 1000 Iraqi dinars ignites a violent battle in Iraq's Maysan, 29 May 2021, [url](#)

²²⁷² Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷³ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Kadhim's Rolling Reshuffle (Part 1): Military Command Changes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 14 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 2-3

²²⁷⁴ MEMO, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#); see also EPIC, ISHM: January 7 - January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁷⁵ AP, In Iraq a father faces militia power as he seeks missing son, 2 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁶ Diyaruna, Iran-aligned factions targeted in Iraq's Amara, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

²²⁷⁷ AP, In Iraq a father faces militia power as he seeks missing son, 2 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁸ Al-Arabiya, Iraq drug trafficker escapes police custody, accomplices pose as soldiers, 15 March 2021, [url](#)



Ansar Allah Al-Awfiya, Ansar Al-Aqeedah, Harakat Al-Nujaba, Sayyid Al-Shuhada, Saraya Al-Jihad, Saraya Al-Khorasani, and the Imam Ali Division.²²⁷⁹ Also, militias have violently targeted protesters and killed activists with impunity. Ansar Allah Al-Awfiya were allegedly involved in the abduction of an activist and responsible for killing his father in Amarah in March 2021.²²⁸⁰

As stated in section 4.3.2 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), Shia militias recruited fighters in Missan.²²⁸¹ The nominal PMU director of intelligence in Basrah, Abu Iman Al-Darraj is allegedly playing an important role in hosting and training foreign fighters, running what is believed to be the largest Iran-backed training site in Kumayt in Missan governorate.²²⁸²

Besides, tribal elements have been involved in planning protest tactics and have shut down roads and retaliated against Iran-backed groups in Missan and other regions.²²⁸³

2.13.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Protests that erupted in October 2019 with Amarah as the main arena within Missan²²⁸⁴ continued in the governorate in 2020 and 2021. People demanded basic services and job creation,²²⁸⁵ condemned foreign interference,²²⁸⁶ corruption²²⁸⁷ and the killing of reform activists²²⁸⁸ as well as protested against power outages during periods of hot weather.²²⁸⁹

²²⁷⁹ EPC, Regulation of Border Crossings in Iraq: The Economic Necessity and Political Motivations, 13 August 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁰ Kaiss, R., Iraq draft law places undue limits on the right to protest, MEE, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

²²⁸¹ International Crisis Group, Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000", 8 August 2016, [url](#), p. 16

²²⁸² Knights, M., Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 14-15

²²⁸³ Smyth, P., Iran Is Losing Iraq's Tribes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4 December 2019, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁸⁴ Berman, C. et al., Patterns of Mobilization and Repression in Iraq's Tishreen Uprising, November 2020, [url](#), p. 23; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq, 1-9 October 2019, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁸⁵ Kasim, R., Renewed calls for demonstrations on October 25 in Iraq come with hurdles, Atlantic Council [Blog], 20 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 3 – June 10, 2021, 10 June 2021, [url](#)

²²⁸⁶ Kasim, R., Renewed calls for demonstrations on October 25 in Iraq come with hurdles, Atlantic Council [Blog], 20 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁷ Kasim, R., Renewed calls for demonstrations on October 25 in Iraq come with hurdles, Atlantic Council [Blog], 20 October 2020, [url](#); HRW, Impunity for Killings Will Cast a Pall Over Iraq's Elections, 20 May 2021, [url](#); CIVICUS Monitor, Thousands attend demonstrations marking the one-year anniversary of the popular movement, 7 December 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁸ Kasim, R., Renewed calls for demonstrations on October 25 in Iraq come with hurdles, Atlantic Council [Blog], 20 October 2020, [url](#); HRW, Impunity for Killings Will Cast a Pall Over Iraq's Elections, 20 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 11 – March 18, 18 March 2021, [url](#); CIVICUS Monitor, Thousands attend demonstrations marking the one-year anniversary of the popular movement, 7 December 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁹ GardaWorld, Iraq: Protests against power outages in Maysan Governorate, overnight June 2/3, 3 July 2021, [url](#); Al-Sharqiya, Worsening electricity: Protesters in Maysan block the Baghdad road, 5 July 2021, [url](#); AFP, Iraqis protest round-the-clock blackouts as mercury soars, 9 July 2021; National (The), Iraqis protest at round-the-clock power cuts as temperatures soar, 9 July 2021, [url](#)





As reported in November 2010, people lacked adequate access to electricity in all districts except Al-Maimouna.²²⁹⁰ Power outages triggered protests particularly in June and July 2021,²²⁹¹ which resulted in confrontations between protesters and security forces.²²⁹²

Activists, protesters and critics of armed groups were violently targeted (for further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq, please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#)).²²⁹³ Local police were reportedly not able to defend activists against these attacks by armed groups.²²⁹⁴ Between the outbreak of the protests in October 2019 and the beginning of March 2021, 299 cases of ‘killing, attempted killings of protestors and burning of governmental buildings’ were filed in Missan governorate. As of May 2021, 159 cases related to attempted killings were closed without trial as the perpetrators were unknown.²²⁹⁵

Particularly, the above-mentioned killing of the father of an activist who was abducted on the street in Amarah in October 2019 and is still missing, caused unrest.²²⁹⁶ The 21-year-old activist and lawyer Ali Jasb was an open critic of the power of militias, which in his case meant the Ansar Allah Al-Awfiya in Missan. He furthermore reportedly supported the wife of a militiaman in getting a divorce. After Jasb’s abduction, his father was campaigning for justice and demanded to bring the militia’s commander to trial.²²⁹⁷ On 10 March 2021, he was shot dead by two gunmen on motorcycles.²²⁹⁸ The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reported that a suspect was arrested and detained shortly after the incident.²²⁹⁹

In June 2021, repeated deadly clashes between tribal factions occurred.²³⁰⁰ Another incident of tribal conflict was reported in October 2021.²³⁰¹

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 36 battles, 10 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 39 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 85 security incidents in Missan governorate, the majority taking place in Al-Kahla

²²⁹⁰ IAU, Missan Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁹¹ GardaWorld, Iraq: Protests against power outages in Maysan Governorate, overnight June 2/3, 3 July 2021, [url](#); Al-Sharqiya, Worsening electricity: Protesters in Maysan block the Baghdad road, 5 July 2021, [url](#); AFP, Iraqis protest round-the-clock blackouts as mercury soars, 9 July 2021; National (The), Iraqis protest at round-the-clock power cuts as temperatures soar, 9 July 2021, [url](#)

²²⁹² GardaWorld, Iraq: Protests against power outages in Maysan Governorate, overnight June 2/3, 3 July 2021, [url](#)

²²⁹³ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 14-17

²²⁹⁴ Impunity Watch et al., End impunity for violations against Iraqi protest movement, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²²⁹⁵ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 22

²²⁹⁶ EPIC, ISHM: March 11 – March 18, 18 March 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Outspoken father of missing activist killed in Iraq’s south, 11 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁹⁷ AP, In Iraq a father faces militia power as he seeks missing son, 2 October 2020, [url](#); see also UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 13, 15-17

²²⁹⁸ Rudaw, Father of kidnapped activist Ali Jaseb assassinated in Maysan, 10 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 11 – March 18, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁹⁹ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 13

²³⁰⁰ AFP, Tribal Iraq: where petty squabbles turn lethal, 27 June 2021

²³⁰¹ Shafaq News, Violent tribal clashes erupt in Maysan, 10 October 2021, [url](#)



district.²³⁰² The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 27 below.

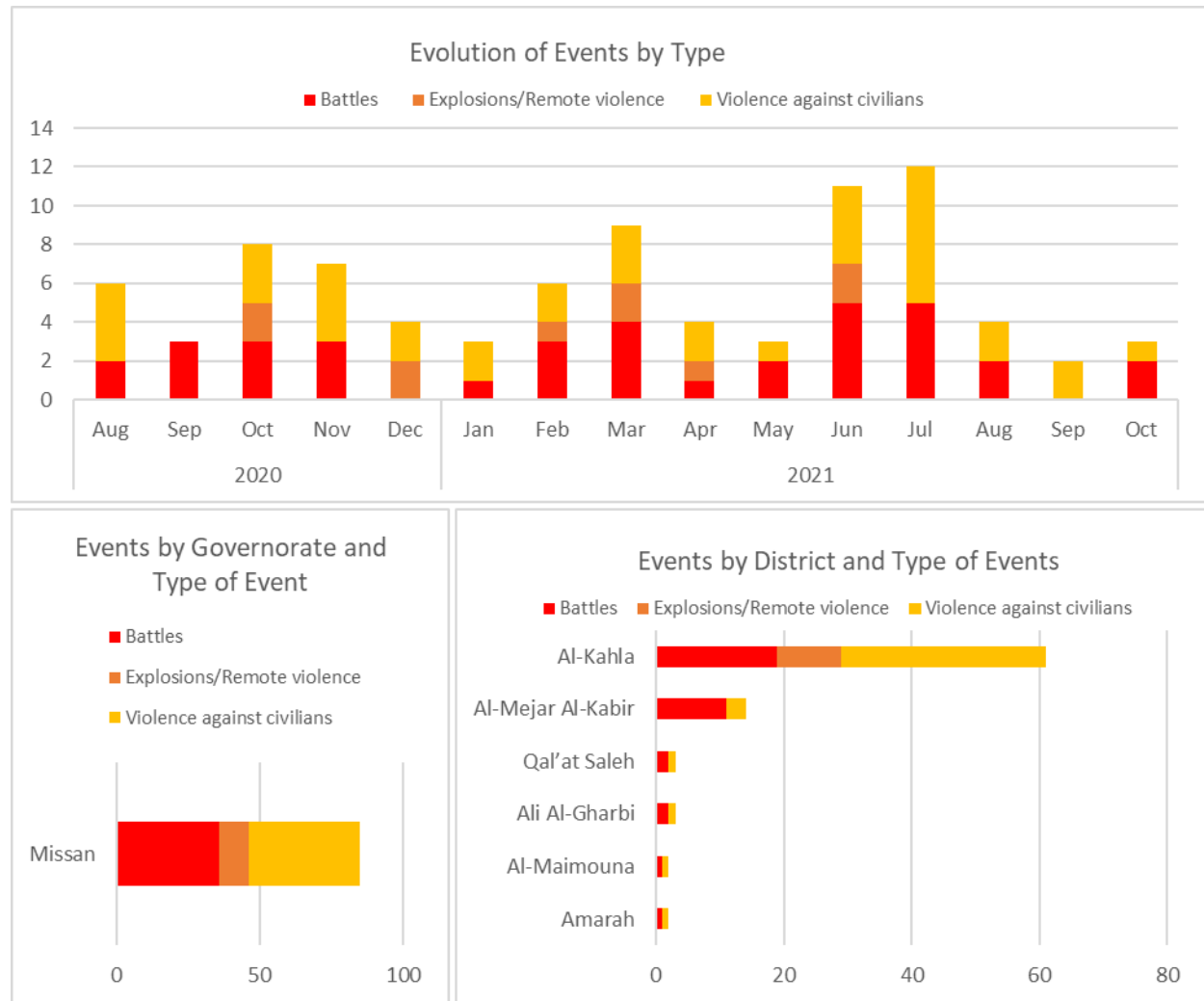


Figure 22: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Missan governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²³⁰³

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 25 October 2020, 14 people protesting outside the headquarters of the Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq militia were killed by state or non-state security agents.²³⁰⁴

²³⁰² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²³⁰³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²³⁰⁴ Berman, C. et al., Patterns of Mobilization and Repression in Iraq's Tishreen Uprising, November 2020, [url](#), p.

- On 1 November 2020, tribal leader Abd Al-Nasser Al-Tarfi, a supporter of Iraq's protest movement, was killed by unidentified gunmen in the Abu Rummana area of the city of Amarah.²³⁰⁵
- On 22 November 2020, it was reported that four people were killed in a tribal fight in the Al-Askari neighbourhood of Amarah.²³⁰⁶
- On 16 December 2020, unidentified gunmen reportedly killed a professor at Al-Manara College in the centre of Amarah.²³⁰⁷ On the same day it was reported that the house of the president of Maysan University in the University Quarter area of the city was targeted with a stun grenade.²³⁰⁸
- On 11 January 2021, two members of the Saraya Al-Salam militia were killed and another injured by unknown assailants on the road between Al-Mejar Al-Kabir and Amarah.²³⁰⁹
- On 10 March 2021, the father of an anti-government activist was shot dead by unidentified men on a motorbike in Amarah (see above section Developments August 2020 - October 2021).²³¹⁰
- In May 2021, armed clashes erupted between the Al-Fraijat and Al-Suwaidin tribes in the Al-Mejar Al-Kabir district, southeast of Amarah. Initially, the death of a child was reported but later was not confirmed by the police.²³¹¹
- In the night from 2 to 3 June 2021, security forces fired on people protesting power outages in Qal'at Saleh, killing at least one and injuring three others.²³¹²
- On 15 June 2021, a security source reported the assassination of one of the tribal leaders²³¹³ of Bani Malik by unidentified gunmen in the Umm Gharba area of Amarah.²³¹⁴
- On 18 June 2021, a police captain in charge of local anti-corruption investigations was killed by gunmen in front of his home in Amarah.²³¹⁵
- On 21 July 2021, a clan dispute in the district of Al-Mejar Al-Kabir in Missan resulted in the killing of one person, while two others were injured.²³¹⁶

²³⁰⁵ Al-Sharqiya, Gunmen assassinate Sheikh Abdel Nasser al-Tarfi in Maysan, 1 November 2020, [url](#); SyriacPress, Iraqi tribal sheikh and prominent supporter of mass demonstrations Abdul Nasser al-Tarfi assassinated in Maysan Province, 2 November 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 29 – November 5, 2020, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰⁶ NINA, 4 People Killed In A Clan Fight In Maysan Governorate, 22 November 2020

²³⁰⁷ Shafaq News, Unidentified gunmen assassinate a professor in Maysan, 16 December 2020, [url](#); see also EPIC, ISHM: December 10 – December 17, 2020, 17 December 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰⁸ NINA, Targeting the house of the President of Maysan University with a sound bomb, 16 December 2020, [url](#); see also EPIC, ISHM: December 10 – December 17, 2020, 17 December 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰⁹ EPIC, ISHM: January 7 – January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁰ EPIC, The Long Game: Iraq's "Tishreen" Movement and the Struggle for Reform, October 2021, [url](#), p. 65; Kaiss, R., Iraq draft law places undue limits on the right to protest, MEE, 15 April 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Outspoken father of missing activist killed in Iraq's south, 11 March 2021, [url](#)

²³¹¹ Kurdistan24, 1000 Iraqi dinars ignites a violent battle in Iraq's Maysan, 29 May 2021, [url](#)

²³¹² GardaWorld, Iraq: Protests against power outages in Maysan Governorate, overnight June 2/3, 3 July 2021, [url](#)

²³¹³ EPIC, ISHM: June 10 – June 17, 2021, 17 June 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁴ Shafaq News, اغتيال أحد شيوخ بني مالك جنوبي العراق [One of the sheikhs of Bani Malik was assassinated in southern Iraq], 15 June 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁵ AFP, Iraqi anti-graft officer shot dead: police, 18 June 2021; AW, Gunmen kill anti-graft officer in Iraq, in challenge to government, 19 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 17 – June 24, 2021, 24 June 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁶ NINA, One person was killed and two others were injured in a clan dispute in the district of Al-Majar Al-Kabeer in Maysan, 21 July 2021

- On 9 September 2021, engineering graduates and security forces clashed at a demonstration calling for job opportunities in Amarah. Reportedly, dozens of protesters were injured.²³¹⁷
- On 10 October 2021, a violent tribal conflict has reportedly occurred in Al-Uzair district as a candidate's success in the parliamentary elections that had ended on the same day was celebrated with heavy shooting, injuring a member of another tribe. As a result, the two tribes clashed.²³¹⁸
- On 26 October 2021, activist Amjad Al-Lami was assassinated by unidentified gunmen as he participated in anti-government protests in central Amarah, despite heavy presence of security forces.²³¹⁹

2.13.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²³²⁰ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 18 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Missan	0	0	0	0	4	5	2	7

Table 18: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Missan governorate²³²¹

2.13.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to the Regional Mine Action Center (RMAC) South, clearance of cluster munition remnants in the southern governorates is challenged by the fact that 'national efforts are focused primarily on areas liberated from the Islamic State'. Meanwhile, it is particularly in the south that 'new contaminated areas continue to be found through survey'.²³²² At the end of 2020, a total of 795 825 square metres were still contaminated by cluster munition in Missan. This figure had remained unchanged since the end of 2019.²³²³

On 28 October 2020, the Beautiful Missan Project, a cooperation initiative between the European Union (EU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Governorate

²³¹⁷ NINA, اشتباكات بين مهندسي ميسان المعتصمين والقوات الامنية تتسبب باصابة العشرات [Clashes between protesting engineers of Maysan and security forces cause dozens of injuries], 9 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 2 – September 9, 2021, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁸ Shafaq News, Violent tribal clashes erupt in Maysan, 10 October 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁹ EPIC, ISHM: October 22 – October 29, 2020, 29 October 2021, [url](#)

²³²⁰ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²³²¹ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

²³²² ICBL-CMC, Cluster Munition Monitor 2021, September 2021, [url](#), p. 67; see also p. 40

²³²³ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59



of Missan and Oxfam, aiming at the rehabilitation of recreational infrastructure and job creation, was launched in Missan.²³²⁴

On 2 January 2021, an alleged leftover landmine from the Iraq-Iran war period exploded in Missan's Al-Tayeb area near the border with Iran, killing two civilians and injuring one other.²³²⁵

UNDP reported in February 2018 that infrastructures were mostly functioning in all of Missan's districts. However, road damages reportedly concerned all districts and, particularly, Amarah. In Amarah, schools, youth centres, fire stations and markets were also damaged or malfunctioning. Rubble removal was needed in 5 % of IDP sites.²³²⁶

2.13.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 1 974 IDPs were registered in Missan governorate, originating from Ninewa (46 %), Kirkuk (20 %), Salah Al-Din (14 %), Baghdad (7 %), Anbar (7 %), Diyala (4 %) and Babil (2 %). Within Missan governorate, the IDP population is largely concentrated in the district of Amarah (81 %). 168 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., tents, makeshift shelters, mud or block houses or religious buildings), all of them in Amarah district.²³²⁷

IOM did not document any IDPs from Missan governorate in other parts of the country.²³²⁸ According to IOM, no returns to Missan governorate were documented as of September 2021.²³²⁹

²³²⁴ Oxfam et al., Beautiful Missan Project: Working towards rehabilitation of recreational infrastructure and job creation, 28 October 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²³²⁵ EPIC, ISHM: December 24, 2020 – January 7, 2021, 7 January 2021, [url](#); Al-Sumaria TV, مقتل وإصابة ثلاثة اشخاص بانفجار لغم شرقي ميسان [Three people were killed and injured in a mine explosion east of Maysan], 2 January 2021, [url](#)

²³²⁶ UNDP, Local Area Development Programme in Iraq: Provincial Development Strategy Missan Governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 27

²³²⁷ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²³²⁸ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²³²⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.14 Muthanna



Map 25: Basrah governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²³³⁰

2.14.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Muthanna (Al-Muthanna) governorate is located in south-western Iraq and has borders with Najaf, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar and Basrah governorates and an international border with Saudi-Arabia.²³³¹ It is the country's second largest governorate and mostly composed of desert and dry land.²³³² The governorate is divided into four districts:²³³³ Al-Samawa (Samawa, Samawah),²³³⁴ Al-Khidhir,²³³⁵ Al-Rumaitha,²³³⁶ and Al-Salman.²³³⁷ The capital of the governorate is Al-Samawa in the governorate's north.²³³⁸

²³³⁰ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²³³¹ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²³³² UNICEF, WASHing back hope for the people of southern Iraq, 18 April 2021, [url](#)

²³³³ NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²³³⁴ UNOCHA, Iraq: Muthanna Governorate, Samawa District, 9 August 2014, [url](#)

²³³⁵ UNOCHA, Iraq: Muthanna Governorate, Khidhir District, 9 August 2014, [url](#)

²³³⁶ UNOCHA, Iraq: Muthanna Governorate, Rumaitha District, 9 August 2014, [url](#)

²³³⁷ UNOCHA, Iraq: Muthanna Governorate, Salman District, 9 August 2014, [url](#)

²³³⁸ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#); UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²³³⁹ the governorate's population at 879 874 with around 471 000 people living in rural and around 408 000 living in urban areas.²³⁴⁰ The northern areas around the Euphrates river are more densely populated than the desert districts in the governorate's south.²³⁴¹

Ethno-religious composition

The majority of Muthanna's inhabitants are Shia Arabs,²³⁴² while an estimated 2 % of the governorate's population is Sunni Muslims (see section 4.4.1 on ethnicity in Muthanna in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#)).²³⁴³ Muthanna's desert areas are inhabited by Bedouins who engage in pastoralist subsistence. Tribal elders estimated in April 2021 that only hundreds of them have remained.²³⁴⁴

Economy

Economic development of the governorate has been neglected by the Ba'ath regime since the 1980s and hindered further by the UN sanctions and the 2003 invasion.²³⁴⁵ For years, Muthanna suffered from water scarcity. Furthermore, because of chronic underdevelopment and lack of maintenance, the quality of the governorate's water networks is very poor.²³⁴⁶ Deteriorating water supplies and rising salinity have turned large swaths of agricultural land infertile and led to protests.²³⁴⁷ Water scarcity has pushed almost half of Muthanna's population, which largely depends on agriculture, below the national poverty line.²³⁴⁸ The governorate's provincial government followed the objective to take advantage of the border with Saudi Arabia and to develop Muthanna into 'a major thoroughfare for trade and pilgrims'.²³⁴⁹

In October 2020, a potential deal between Iraq and Saudi Arabia to turn hundreds of thousands of acres in Iraq's western and southern deserts into agricultural lands, from which Muthanna would have benefitted, was torpedoed by pro-Iran groups, who launched a social media campaign employing 'electronic armies' against it. Spearheads Nouri Al-Maliki and Qais

²³³⁹ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴⁰ Iraq, CSO, 2021 [تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021](#) [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

²³⁴¹ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴² EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#); NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²³⁴³ SIGIR, Interactive map of Iraq, 2010, [url](#)

²³⁴⁴ Al Jazeera, 'There's no rain': Climate change threatens Iraq's Bedouins, 28 April 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴⁵ NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#)

²³⁴⁶ UNICEF, WASHing back hope for the people of southern Iraq, 18 April 2021, [url](#); UNICEF, Multi-Tiered Approaches to Solving the Water Crisis in Basra, Iraq, WASH Field Note FN/19/2019, 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²³⁴⁷ Schweitzer, M., Protests in Southern Iraq Intensify, Is Instability to Follow?, IPI, Global Observatory, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

²³⁴⁸ UNICEF, WASHing back hope for the people of southern Iraq, 18 April 2021, [url](#); Khalaf, S., Iraq. "Without Water, We Have No Life", Orient XXI, 11 November 2021, [url](#); see also Daraj, Poverty In Southern Iraq: the 'Protectors of the Doctrine' Are Starving, 12 July 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, ISIS caused massive spike in Iraq's poverty rate, 16 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴⁹ IAU, Muthanna Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1





Al-Khazali attacked the Iraqi government denouncing the deal as a ‘cover for Saudi “occupation”, ‘a plan for “normalization with Iraq’s eternal enemy”’ and ‘a threat to Iraq’s groundwater reserves’.²³⁵⁰ As stated again in June 2021, plans for economic cooperation, particularly a proposed Saudi investment project in ranching and livestock in Muthanna governorate, were met with criticism by Shia groups out of rivalry between the neighbouring states.²³⁵¹

As reported in January 2021, the Iraqi government assigned construction projects in Muthanna worth 20 billion US dollars to Chinese companies; among them there is the construction of a power station.²³⁵²

Road security

On 30 September 2021, Iraqi authorities announced the opening of the Jamima border crossing between Muthanna and Saudi Arabia. The border crossing had been closed in 1991 following the Second Gulf War. It is the second border crossing opening between Iraq and Saudi Arabia after the opening of the Arar border crossing further north in Anbar governorate (see section [2.1 Anbar](#)).²³⁵³

During the reference period in 2020 and 2021, roadside bombs targeted International Coalition convoys in Muthanna governorate (please see also section [2.14.4 Recent security trends](#) in this report).²³⁵⁴

2.14.2 Conflict background

Like other southern Iraqi regions, after the reign of Saddam Hussein, Muthanna became a ‘hotbed’ for Shia groups and militias, including the Sadrist movement Saraya Al-Salam (SS) and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). Although some Shia groups competed for primacy,²³⁵⁵ ‘during the past few years peace returned to the province, making Muthanna one of the safest provinces of Iraq.’ The governorate was not exposed to the onslaught from ISIL.²³⁵⁶

Since 2015, protests spurred by lack of economic opportunities and of service provision²³⁵⁷ as well as the killing of protesters and activists²³⁵⁸ erupted repeatedly in Muthanna (for more information on the protest as well as the targeting of protesters and activists in Muthanna,

²³⁵⁰ EPIC, The Long Game: Iraq’s “Tishreen” Movement and the Struggle for Reform, October 2021, [url](#), p. 87

²³⁵¹ Hasan, H., Border Crossings, Roads, and Regional Politics in Iraq, X-Border Local Research Network, 23 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²³⁵² AA, Iraq grants \$20B projects to Chinese companies, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵³ Al-Arabiya, العراق يفتح ثاني منافذه الحدودية مع السعودية [Iraq opens its second border crossing with Saudi Arabia], 30 September 2021, [url](#); AA, Iraq reopens Jamima border crossing with Saudi Arabia, 30 September 2021, [url](#); Middle East in 24, Iraq opens the second border crossing with Saudi Arabia, 30 September 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iraq, Saudi Arabia to reopen border crossings after 27 years, 18 August 2017, [url](#)

²³⁵⁴ StrategyPage, Iraq: Affordable Corruption And Disruption, n.d., [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 29 – May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021, [url](#); ABNA, Two US military convoys attacked in Iraq, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵⁵ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#); Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

²³⁵⁶ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵⁷ EPIC, The Long Game: Iraq’s “Tishreen” Movement and the Struggle for Reform, October 2021, [url](#), p. 33, MEMO, Iraq: Protesters continue to call for dismissal of Al-Muthanna Governor, 9 March 2021, [url](#); Alkhudary, T. and Al-Shakeri, H., There can be no ‘going back to normal’ in Iraq, Al Jazeera, 25 November 2020, [url](#); see also ILO and CCI, Assessment of Economic Needs in Southern Iraq - Overview, 18 April 2021, [url](#), p. 1

²³⁵⁸ AA, 30 killed, hundreds injured in Iraq protests, 25 October 2019, [url](#); Rudaw, Iraqi protesters condemn killing of missing activist’s father, 12 March 2021, [url](#)





please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

A cause of tribal conflict in Muthanna and other southern governorates was the water scarcity affecting the region.²³⁵⁹

For further details on security developments in Muthanna governorate in 2019-2020, please refer also to section 4.4.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.14.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

As previously reported, security in Muthanna was overseen by Rafidain Operations Command (ROC), Brigade 9, a Commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local police and a brigade of the federal police (see section 4.4.2 on armed actors in Muthanna in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#)).²³⁶⁰ As of September 2019, ISF's Fallujah Operations Command, Jazira Operations Command, Anbar Operations Command and Babil Operations Command were present in the south-western Iraqi governorates of Anbar, Babil, Karbala, Najaf, Qadisiya and Muthanna.²³⁶¹ Michael Knights and his co-authors assessed in March 2020 that all eight southern governorates should be considered areas of shared control between the Iraqi army or police, and the PMU.²³⁶²

Since May 2020, the Iraqi security forces' headquarters responsible for exercising operational control in the governorate has been restaffed, including the Sumer Operations Command (SuOC). The SuOC replaced the ROC. In Muthanna, Missan and Thi-Qar SuOC is led by Major General Imad Al-Silawi, who is the administrative commander of the 15th Army Division.²³⁶³

In September 2020, the Joint Operations Command (JOC) carried out operations against unlicensed weapons in tribal areas on the outskirts of cities and districts in Muthanna, Basrah, Missan, Thi-Qar and in tribal areas in Baghdad.²³⁶⁴

On 8 January 2021, Iraqi Joint Operations Command spokesman announced the withdrawal of Iraqi Army forces from Muthanna and four other governorates as well as their replacement by Ministry of Interior forces. Reportedly, Iraqi Army bases outside the cities remained manned.²³⁶⁵

²³⁵⁹ Al-Monitor, Tribal disputes flare in southern Iraq over water scarcity, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

²³⁶⁰ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶¹ Mansour, R. and Salisbury, P., Between Order and Chaos: A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen, Chatham House, September 2019, [url](#), p. 8;

²³⁶² Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 128-129

²³⁶³ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Kadhimi's Rolling Reshuffle (Part 1): Military Command Changes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 14 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 2-3

²³⁶⁴ Diyaruna, Southern Iraq tribes back crackdown on unlicensed weapons, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶⁵ EPIC, ISHM: January 7 – January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#); ISW, ISIS and Iranian-backed Militias Compete to Control Baghdad Region, 7 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9, Footnote 38





Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

The PMU Commission maintains administrative offices in Muthanna.²³⁶⁶ SS and ISCI have a continuous presence in Muthanna governorate.²³⁶⁷ The Badr organisation influences PMU in the governorate and provides the administrative head of the PMU in Muthanna.²³⁶⁸ As of September 2019, PMU Brigades 13, 14, 19, 26, 27, 31, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 74, 513, Haditha, Al-Furat, Ameriyat Al-Samoud and Karma were present in the south-west of Iraq, including in Muthanna (see section 4.4.2 on armed actors in Muthanna in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#)).²³⁶⁹ The 19th Commando Division, whose first commander was Major General Jawad Abbas Abdullah, has been disbanded in the meantime.²³⁷⁰

2.14.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Widespread corruption, mismanagement and the poor level of services spurred protests in 2020 and 2021.²³⁷¹ Furthermore, protests of employees in Muthanna against the parliament's vote on the federal budget for 2021 resulted in violent clashes between protesters and ISF.²³⁷² Also, partly violent demonstrations occurred after the Iraqi parliamentary elections took place in October 2021 in Muthanna and other governorates.²³⁷³

A series of explosions and rocket attacks targeted the US-led military coalition forces, particularly military convoys, throughout the reference period.²³⁷⁴ In some of these incidents, supply lorries were damaged by roadside bomb attacks.²³⁷⁵

²³⁶⁶ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 36

²³⁶⁷ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶⁸ Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 7; Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 36-37; Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²³⁶⁹ Mansour, R. and Salisbury, P., Between Order and Chaos: A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen, Chatham House, September 2019, [url](#), p. 8; see also Al-Tamimi, A. J., Hashd Brigade Numbers Index, Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog [Blog], 31 October 2017, [url](#); '44th Brigade: Liwa Ansar al-Marja'iyya. Led by Hamid al-Yasiri, who is a representative of Ayatollah Sistani in the southern province of al-Muthanna.'

²³⁷⁰ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Kadhimi's Rolling Reshuffle (Part 1): Military Command Changes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 14 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²³⁷¹ GardaWorld, Iraq: Nationwide anti-government protests to continue through at least January /update 11, 4 January 2021, [url](#); MEMO, Iraq: Protesters continue to call for dismissal of Al-Muthanna Governor, 9 March 2021, [url](#); Alkhudary, T. and Al-Shakeri, H., There can be no 'going back to normal' in Iraq, Al Jazeera, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷² Shafaq News, Security Forces clash with protestors in Muthanna and Al-Diwaniyah, 3 April 2021, [url](#);

²³⁷³ Basnews, Unhappy about Election Results, Protesters Block Baghdad-Kirkuk Highway, 18 October 2021, [url](#)

²³⁷⁴ MEE, Explosives target coalition convoy in southern Iraq, 13 September 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, انفجار يستهدف رتل [An explosion targets a supply convoy of the international coalition in southern Iraq], 12 September 2021, [url](#); GardaWorld, Iraq: Improvised explosive device reportedly targeted a convoy carrying military supplies in Al-Muthanna Governorate, May 27, 27 May 2021, [url](#); UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 20; AA, Roadside bomb hits US-led coalition convoy in Iraq, 13 April 2021, [url](#); GardaWorld, Iraq: Supply convoy for US-led forces struck by an improvised explosive device near Samawah March 18, 18 March 2021, [url](#); ABNA, US-led military convoy targeted in Iraq's Al-Diwaniyah, 13 March 2021, [url](#); Al Bawaba, Roadside Bomb Targets US Military Convoy in Baghdad, 12 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 29 – May 6, 2021, 6 May 2021 [url](#)

²³⁷⁵ ABNA, US-led military convoy targeted in Iraq's Al-Diwaniyah, 13 March 2021, [url](#); Al Bawaba, Roadside Bomb Targets US Military Convoy in Baghdad, 12 October 2020, [url](#); Shafaq News, تفجيران يستهدفان رتلي دعم لوجستي للتحالف [Two explosions target logistical supply convoys for the International Coalition in Iraq], 2 May 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, انفجار جديد يستهدف رتلاً للتحالف الدولي في العراق [A new explosion targets a convoy of the International Coalition in Iraq], 10 December 2020, [url](#)



Clashes between tribal groups in Muthanna were reported in April 2021.²³⁷⁶

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 9 battles, 14 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 3 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 26 security incidents in Muthanna governorate, the majority taking place in Al-Samawa district.²³⁷⁷ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 28 below.

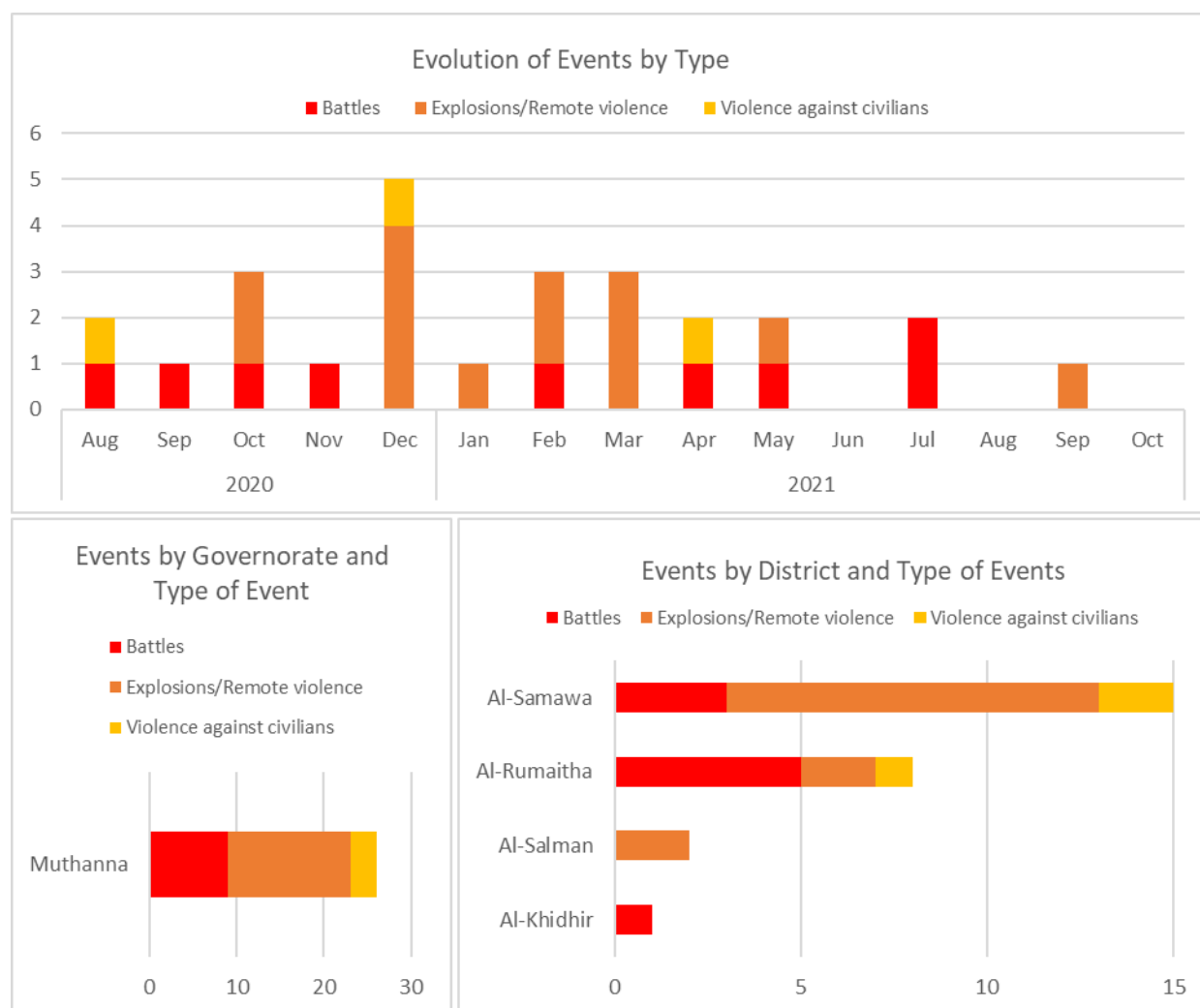


Figure 23: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Muthanna governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²³⁷⁸

²³⁷⁶ Basnews, Clashes Erupt Among Tribes in Baghdad, Maysan, Muthanna, 12 April 2021, [url](#)

²³⁷⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

²³⁷⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 31 October 2020, 3 people,²³⁷⁹ 2 of which were children, were killed,²³⁸⁰ and between 28²³⁸¹ and 50²³⁸² people were injured, in a blast hitting an oil pipeline near Al-Samawa in Muthanna governorate.²³⁸³
- On 26 March 2021, a roadside IED exploded near a security checkpoint in the Al-Jarbou'ia area in the centre of Al-Samawa. Two civilians were injured.²³⁸⁴
- On 1 April 2021, activist Haider Al-Kashan from Al-Samawa was kidnapped and threatened by unidentified gunmen. He was released after several hours on the same day.²³⁸⁵

2.14.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²³⁸⁶ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 19 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Muthanna	0	0	0	0	5	5	4	9

Table 19: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Missan governorate²³⁸⁷

2.14.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

On 31 October 2020, an oil pipeline blast occurred near Al-Samawa in Muthanna governorate. The reasons behind it remained unclear.²³⁸⁸

Based on data last updated in August 2020, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) defined the area contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 10 481 185 square metres.²³⁸⁹

²³⁷⁹ NS Energy, Gas pipeline blast in Iraq kills three people, injures more than 50, 2 November 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁰ NS Energy, Gas pipeline blast in Iraq kills three people, injures more than 50, 2 November 2020, [url](#); MEE, Two children killed in oil pipeline explosion in southern Iraq, 31 October 2021, [url](#); AFP, Two children killed in blast targeting Iraq pipeline, 31 October 2021

²³⁸¹ MEE, Two children killed in oil pipeline explosion in southern Iraq, 31 October 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸² NS Energy, Gas pipeline blast in Iraq kills three people, injures more than 50, 2 November 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸³ MEE, Two children killed in oil pipeline explosion in southern Iraq, 31 October 2021, [url](#); NS Energy, Gas pipeline blast in Iraq kills three people, injures more than 50, 2 November 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁴ Shafaq News, جريحان بانفجار عبوة ناسفة وسط السماوة [Two injured in an explosive device explosion in Samawa], 26 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸⁵ Rudaw, Iraqi activist returns to protest day after kidnapping, threats, 2 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Calls for protests in southern Iraqi city of Samawah after activist kidnap, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸⁶ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²³⁸⁷ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

²³⁸⁸ NS Energy, Gas pipeline blast in Iraq kills three people, injures more than 50, 2 November 2020, [url](#); MEE, Two children killed in oil pipeline explosion in southern Iraq, 31 October 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸⁹ iMMAP, Recorded explosive ordnance contamination in Iraq - overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

In 2020, in Basrah and Muthanna cluster munition remnants covered 17.14 square kilometres and 220 contaminated areas were discovered.²³⁹⁰ As reported in September 2021, nomadic communities in southern Iraq, including the Bedouin people in the Samawa Badia desert in Muthanna, were ‘particularly at risk from cluster munition remnants’. When Bedouins gathered to graze livestock in spring, a rise in ERW accidents had been registered.²³⁹¹

The level of contamination of cluster munition in Muthanna governorate was rated ‘high’ in October 2021.²³⁹²

On 20 February 2021, three siblings were struck by a landmine blast as they were in a picnic in the desert in Muthanna. Two of them were children who died immediately, the third one sustained serious injuries.²³⁹³

On 15 or 16 June 2021, three family members including a child were killed in a landmine blast in the Samawa desert’s Al-Shakra area in Muthanna.²³⁹⁴

2.14.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 900 IDPs were registered in Muthanna governorate, originating from Ninewa (57 %), Baghdad (14 %), Anbar (10 %), Kirkuk (9 %), Salah Al-Din (7 %) and Diyala (3 %) governorates. Within Muthanna governorate, the IDP population largely concentrates in the districts of Al-Samawa (63 %), and Al-Rumaitha (33 %). In Muthanna governorate, 36 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g., unfinished, abandoned or religious buildings), 24 of them in Al-Rumaitha district.²³⁹⁵

IOM did not document any IDPs from Muthanna governorate in other parts of the country.²³⁹⁶ According to IOM, no returns to Muthanna governorate were documented as of September 2021.²³⁹⁷

The displacement of Shia Arabs, who arrived in Muthanna after 2006, was caused by the violence in Baghdad and Diyala.²³⁹⁸

²³⁹⁰ ICBL-CMC, Cluster Munition Monitor 2021, September 2021, [url](#), p. 40

²³⁹¹ ICBL-CMC, Cluster Munition Monitor 2021, September 2021, [url](#), p. 69

²³⁹² HI, No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq, Report 2021, 13 October 2021, [url](#), p. 16

²³⁹³ Shafaq News, Three child victims to a landmine in al-Muthanna, 20 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹⁴ Iraq, SMC [Twitter], posted on: 15 June 2021, [url](#); Zhyran, 3 killed in landmine explosion in Samawah desert, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

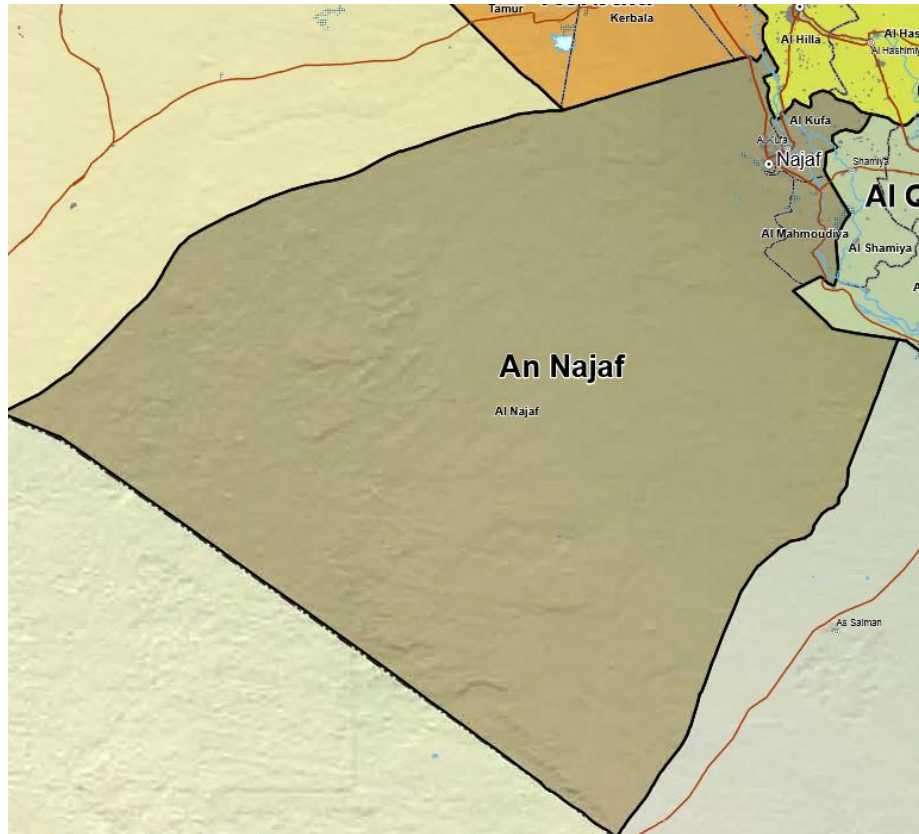
²³⁹⁵ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹⁶ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹⁷ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹⁸ IAU, Muthanna Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#)

2.15 Najaf



Map 26: Najaf governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²³⁹⁹

2.15.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Najaf (Al-Najaf, An-Najaf) governorate is located in the southwestern part of Iraq, bordering the governorates of Anbar, Babil, Kerbala, Qadissiya and Muthanna. It shares an international border with Saudi Arabia to the south. Large parts of Najaf governorate are dominated by desert and it has a dry desert climate. There is a stretch of irrigated agricultural land along the Euphrates River that passes through the governorate close to its north-eastern borders. The capital of the governorate is Najaf city. The governorate is divided into three districts: Al-Najaf, Al-Kufa and Al-Manathira.²⁴⁰⁰

²³⁹⁹ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁰ NCCI, Najaf governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²⁴⁰¹ the governorate's population at 1 589 961, with around 1 135 500 people living in urban and around 454 460 people living in rural areas.²⁴⁰² Except for the northeastern region near the Euphrates River, the governorate is sparsely populated.²⁴⁰³

Ethno-religious composition

Shia Arabs are the largest ethnic-religious group in Najaf.²⁴⁰⁴ Najaf city is a centre of Shia learning and of the Shia religious establishment in Iraq.²⁴⁰⁵

Economy

The governorate hosts some of the most important holy sites of Islam such as the Ali Ibn Abi Talib shrine in Najaf city and the Great Mosque in the city of Kufa (Kufah) or the Wadi Al-Salam (Valley of Peace) burial ground at Najaf city.²⁴⁰⁶ These sites are important destinations for pilgrims and religious tourists, making tourism one of the main sectors of Najaf's economy. In 2015, tourism made up for almost 30 % of the governorate's GDP.²⁴⁰⁷ However, the sector suffered considerable losses due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions.²⁴⁰⁸

Road security

In some cases, road blocks by protesters²⁴⁰⁹ or checkpoints by a militia group²⁴¹⁰ were set up during anti-government protests that continued in 2020²⁴¹¹ and 2021. In May and July 2021, protesters blocked roads with burning tires and organised a sit-in on the roads in front of Al-Haidariyah power plant in order to protest power outages.²⁴¹² In September 2021, Najaf's governor announced that special security measures would be implemented by the army, police forces and PMU to ensure the security of pilgrims during the religious gathering of *Arba'een*.²⁴¹³

²⁴⁰¹ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁰² Iraq, CSO, 2021 لِسنة والجنس والبيئة المحافظات حسب العراق سكان تقديرات [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates of Iraq's population by governorates, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

²⁴⁰³ NCCI, Najaf governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁰⁴ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁵ Alshamary, M., The pope goes to Najaf: The person and the institution of Sistani, The Brookings Institution, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁶ NCCI, Najaf governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2; EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁷ NCCI, Najaf governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁰⁸ IOM Iraq, Labour Market assessment: Kufa District, Najaf Governorate, September 2021, [url](#), p. 7; National (The), Coronavirus: Najaf governor predicts economic collapse, 2 April 2020, [url](#); AFP, Virus strikes another blow at religious tourism in Iraq, 27 February 2020

²⁴⁰⁹ EPIC, ISHM: March 11, 2021 – March 18, 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: February 4, 2021 – February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴¹¹ MEMO, Iraq: Najaf protestors clash with police in Najaf, 8 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹² EPIC, ISHM: July 1, 2021 – July 8, 2021, 8 July 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Demonstrators protest poor services in Najaf and Babel, 23 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁴¹³ IQNA, Special Security Measures Planned for Arbaeen in Najaf, 2 September 2021, [url](#)





2.15.2 Conflict background

Following the 2003 invasion, Najaf became a stronghold for the influential Shia cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, which he founded in 2003 to fight the US-led coalition forces. JAM was disbanded in 2008, however, a small armed branch, the Promised Day Brigade, remained active. In 2014, Muqtada Al-Sadr formed another militia group, Saraya Al-Salam (Peace Brigades or Peace Companies), to fight the advance of ISIL,²⁴¹⁴ but also to protect Shia shrines and religious sites.²⁴¹⁵ The group, which is also referred to as 'Blue Hats' because of their characteristic headwear, was involved in fatal clashes with protesters in February 2020, where 23 protesters were killed and 182 injured when members of the militia group attacked a protest camp.²⁴¹⁶ While at first, both the religious authority of Najaf and Muqtada Al-Sadr supported the demands of the protest movement, the latter withdrew his support in January 2020.²⁴¹⁷ According to some reports this decision was connected to the nomination of Mohammed Allawi as new prime minister,²⁴¹⁸ others attributed it to internal power-struggles.²⁴¹⁹

For further details on security developments in Najaf governorate in 2019-2020, please refer to section 4.5.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.15.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

As of March 2021, ISF in Najaf governorate included the Middle Euphrates Operation Command (MEOC), commandos brigade and emergency regiments as well as local and federal police.²⁴²⁰ The MEOC was reportedly mainly responsible for protecting the holy shrines of Najaf and Karbala²⁴²¹ and the adjacent desert area and was largely composed of Ali Al-Akbar Brigade (Brigade 11) and the Al-Abbas Division (Brigade 26).²⁴²² In February 2020, the MEOC conducted a large search mission in the desert straddling Najaf, Karbala and Anbar governorates in collaboration with federal police, border guard forces, PMU and in coordination with the Anbar Operations Command and army aircraft, following reports on attempts by ISIL to establish a presence in the region.²⁴²³ In the same month, Iraqi Armed Forces handed over to the police forces of Najaf and four other governorates all security duties for their respective governorates.²⁴²⁴

²⁴¹⁴ CISAC, Mahdi Army, May 2019, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁵ DW, Who is Muqtada al-Sadr, Iraq's influential Shiite cleric?, 14 May 2018, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁶ France 24, How Iraq's 'blue hat' militiamen went from protecting to killing protesters, 10 February 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Iraq protesters rally in Najaf after deadly clashes with Sadrists, 6 February 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Iraqi cleric scolds security forces after protesters die in new tensions, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁷ Abdo, G., The Long Game in Iraq: Shia Clerics, Activists Find Common Cause To Confront the State, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 17 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9

²⁴¹⁸ Al Jazeera, Confusion, violence in Iraq as al-Sadr pulls support for protests, 8 February 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Iraqi cleric Sadr tells followers to clear sit-ins after PM appointed, 2 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁹ MEI, Iraq: Sadr withdraws support for protests in a political power play, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁰ Al-Hamid, R., ISIS in Iraq: Weakened but Agile, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁴²¹ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces And Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders Of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19

²⁴²² Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), p. 41

²⁴²³ Diyaruna, Iraq secures desert area straddling 3 provinces, 4 February 2020, [url](#). Diyaruna is a website sponsored by the US Central Command.

²⁴²⁴ MEMO, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wasit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)



Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

In September 2021, four militia groups associated with Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani and the religious authority (Marja'ia) of Najaf, namely the Al-Abbas Division (Brigade 26), Ali Al-Akbar Brigade (Brigade 11), Ansar Al-Marja'ia Brigade (Brigade 44) and Imam Ali Division (Brigade 2), announced the formation of an armed unit, the Holy Shrine Unit (Hashd Al-Atabat), separate from the PMU organisation and under the Iraqi army.²⁴²⁵ Already in December 2020, these four groups, commonly known as Shrine militias or Atabat, had announced the creation of a new force comprising about 15 000 fighters (20 000, according to another report)²⁴²⁶ and loyal only to Al-Sistani and the Marja'ia. The move was seen as a step to gain greater autonomy from the more Iran-aligned factions of the PMU,²⁴²⁷ and followed their decision of April 2020, to come administratively and operatively under the direct command of the office of the general commander of the national armed forces. At the heart of the dispute were not only questions regarding the division of power and resources within the PMU, but also the 'dual loyalties' of the Iran-aligned factions and their adherence to a transnational Shia project which the Marja'ia of Najaf rejected.²⁴²⁸

In October 2021, Muqtada Al-Sadr reportedly ordered his militia group Saraya Al-Salam to close the group's offices across the country except for their offices in Najaf and three other governorates.²⁴²⁹ Muqtada Al-Sadr's militia group Saraya Al-Salam constituted PMU Brigades 313, 314 and 315, with Brigade 313 operating predominantly in Samarra, the 'exclusive preserve' of Saraya Al-Salam.²⁴³⁰

2.15.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Anti-government protests in Najaf were reported in 2020 and 2021.²⁴³¹ In March 2021, several people were injured during protests against the local government.²⁴³² Power outages provoked further protests in May²⁴³³ and July²⁴³⁴ 2021, while in June 2021²⁴³⁵ municipality employees protested against local corruption. A party office was set on fire during protests in reaction to the killing of activist Ihab Al-Wazni in neighbouring Karbala governorate.²⁴³⁶

²⁴²⁵ Diyaruna, Newly formed Hashd al-Atabat paramilitary aims to counter Iranian influence in Iraq, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁴²⁶ Arab News, Iraq 'shrine factions' look to peel away from Hashd, 13 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁷ MEE, Iraq's Sistani-backed factions break from Popular Mobilisation in blow to Iran, 9 December 2020, [url](#); Knights, M. and Malik, H., How the United States Should View Iraq's Shrine Militias, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 5 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴²⁸ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Intelligence Briefing: A Thousand Hezbollahs – Iraq's Emerging Militia State, May 2021, [url](#) p. 10-11; Dagher, M., The Holy Shrine Units' Announcement Will Change the Rules of the Game in Iraq, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 5 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁴²⁹ Kurdistan24, Iraqi cleric al-Sadr to close his militia's headquarters in all but 4 provinces, 30 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³⁰ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), p. 42, 209

²⁴³¹ Al Jazeera, In Pictures: Thousands rally in Baghdad on protest anniversary, 25 October 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Najaf activists say intimidated, threatened by pro-Sadr militias, 7 February 2021, [url](#); Iran Press, People of Najaf protest, asking governor to resign, 13 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³² GCHR, Iraq: GCHR's 13th periodic report on human rights violations during popular protests, 6 April 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Iraqi protesters demanding change to local governance met with violence, 18 March 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Clashes between demonstrators and security forces renew in Najaf, 14 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³³ Shafaq News, Demonstrators protest poor services in Najaf and Babel, 23 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³⁴ EPIC, ISHM: July 1 to July 8, 2021, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³⁵ Shafaq News, Demonstrators picket government departments in Najaf and Dhi Qar, 20 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³⁶ EPIC, ISHM: May 6 – May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#)



UNAMI/OHCHR noted in May 2021 the need for greater accountability on human rights violations committed in the context of these protests by perpetrators among armed groups, in particular the need to implement arrest warrants and launch prosecutions.²⁴³⁷ Moreover, relatives of killed protesters were reportedly threatened into dropping the case or fled the country after receiving threats over their calls for an open investigation,²⁴³⁸ while activists reported that they and some of their colleagues were forced by militia attacks and threats to seek refuge in the KRI or abroad.²⁴³⁹

According to a letter by the High Judicial Council of Iraq of 17 April 2021, 346 cases had been opened related to killings and violence in the context of demonstrations in Najaf from October 2019 to March 2021. While 234 of them were closed, 30 kept being investigated and 72 cases were referred to specialised courts.²⁴⁴⁰ In June 2021, two protesters were sentenced to life in prison by a court in Najaf in relation to deadly clashes between protesters and supporters of Muqtada Al-Sadr in February 2020. Reportedly, none of the supporters was prosecuted.²⁴⁴¹

On 7 February 2021, members of the Saraya Al-Salam militia raided the houses of four activists who had publicly spoken against Al-Sadr a day earlier at an event to commemorate the victims of the fatal clashes in February 2020.²⁴⁴² The following day, the militia forces set up check-points in the streets of several cities, including Najaf, claiming this was to protect holy sites against possible attacks by 'Baathists, ISIS [Islamic State], and infiltrators'.²⁴⁴³ For further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

Between August 2020 and July 2021, at least three IED attacks²⁴⁴⁴ and three attacks with grenades²⁴⁴⁵ by unidentified perpetrators on civilians were reported. Other attacks in the reference period included a bomb attack on a language school and assaults with Molotov cocktails on a party office and on the house of a former affiliate of Muqtada Al-Sadr.²⁴⁴⁶

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 4 battles, 10 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 7 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of

²⁴³⁷ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

²⁴³⁸ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 14, 16

²⁴³⁹ EPIC, Iraqi protesters' perilous journey to the ballot box, 29 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁰ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 22

²⁴⁴¹ EPIC, The Long Game: Iraq's "Tishreen" Movement and the Struggle for Reform, October 2021, [url](#), p. 64

²⁴⁴² New Arab (The), Iraq militia raids activists' houses in Najaf, 8 February 2021, [url](#); Rudaw, Najaf activists say intimidated, threatened by pro-Sadr militias, 7 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴³ Rudaw, PMF-affiliated militias deployed across central Iraqi cities after 'threats' to holy sites, 9 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 – February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁴ EPIC, ISHM: July 15 – July 22, 2021, 22 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 17 – June 24, 24 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 13 – August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁵ EPIC, ISHM: May 27 – June 3, 2021, 3 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 19 – August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); New Arab (The), Iraq rocket attack targets think tank in Najaf, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁶ EPIC, ISHM: September 17 – September 24, 2020, 24 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 – February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 1 – October 8, 2020, 8 October 2020, [url](#)



21 security incidents in Najaf governorate, the majority taking place in Al-Najaf district.²⁴⁴⁷ The evolution of all types of security events in the period August 2020 to October 2021 is shown in figure 29 below.



Figure 24: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Najaf governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²⁴⁴⁸

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 4 December 2020, activist Ali Al-Mousawi reportedly survived an assassination attempt in an area close to Al-Mishkhab popular market in Najaf governorate.²⁴⁴⁹
- On 12 February 2021, Ali Naseer Alawy, a well-known member of the protest movement in Najaf was reportedly abducted off the street by a group of armed, masked men in black uniforms in view of police officers who did not intervene. He was

²⁴⁴⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁹ GCHR, Iraq: GCHR's tenth periodic report on violations during popular demonstrations, 23 December 2020, [url](#)

reportedly tortured, questioned about other activists and later left unconscious on a highway near his house.²⁴⁵⁰

- On 30 March 2021, a man was shot in Al-Hurriya, a sub-district of Al-Kufa district in Najaf governorate, reportedly possibly in connection with tribal conflicts.²⁴⁵¹
- One civilian was injured when an IED exploded near a house in Al-Kufa district on 23 June 2021.²⁴⁵²
- On election day, 10 October 2021, the Saraya Al-Salam and Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq militia groups reportedly clashed near a polling centre in Al-Kufa district while promoting their candidates.²⁴⁵³

2.15.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²⁴⁵⁴ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 20 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Najaf	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	4

Table 20: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Missan governorate²⁴⁵⁵

2.15.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

By the end of 2020, reportedly 5 157 539 square metres of Najaf governorate were cluster munition-contaminated.²⁴⁵⁶ Based on data last updated in August 2020, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) listed the area contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 663 032 square metres.²⁴⁵⁷ In 2017, three governorates – Basra, Muthanna, and Najaf – accounted for 98% of detected cluster munitions.²⁴⁵⁸

In September 2021, the PMU media directorate reported on a 'preemptive operation' of the PMU second brigade and the Najaf governorate police, dismantling and detonating war remnants 'within the responsibility sector of the Najaf desert axis'.²⁴⁵⁹

At least three people died in accidents involving war remnants in 2021. In January, one child was killed by the explosion of a cluster bomb submunition while working on a landfill in

²⁴⁵⁰ HRW, Iraq: Detentions of Alleged "Death Squad", 24 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵¹ Shafaq News, Two killed in Najaf in two separate incidents, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵² EPIC, ISHM: June 17 – June 24, 2021, 24 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵³ Shafaq News, Clashes between Saraya al-Salam and Asaib Ahl al-Haq in Najaf, 10 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁴ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²⁴⁵⁵ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

²⁴⁵⁶ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59

²⁴⁵⁷ iMMAP, Recorded Explosive Ordnance Contamination in Iraq - Overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁸ ACAPS, Iraq: Mine Action, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁹ INA, The dismantling of war remnants in the Najaf desert, 10 September 2021, [url](#)



Najaf.²⁴⁶⁰ In April, two people died when a war remnant they had tampered with exploded in the Najaf desert.²⁴⁶¹

In July 2021, two explosions damaged the ammunition depots of the PMU Imam Ali Division in Najaf. While the PMU claimed that drone strikes were responsible for the explosions, the military assumed that they were caused by inadequate storing conditions.²⁴⁶²

2.15.7 Displacement and return

As of 30 September 2021, Najaf governorate hosted a total number of registered 9 078 IDPs, according to IOM data. The largest part of these IDPs originated from Ninewa governorate (99 %), while the remaining 1 % originated from Diyala, Salah Al-Din and Anbar governorates. The majority of IDPs had come to the governorate in the period from June to August 2014; no IDPs had been registered coming to Najaf governorate since May 2015. More than three quarters of all registered IDPs lived in Najaf district (78 %), while 21 % lived in Kufa district and 1 % lived in Al-Manathira district. 6 % of all IDPs registered in Najaf governorate, that is, 558 individuals, lived in shelters classified as ‘critical’ by IOM, with 18 IDPs living in houses that were uninhabitable or not owned by them, and 540 IDPs living in a public building or collective shelter.²⁴⁶³

According to IOM data of 2019, 97 % of IDPs in Najaf governorate were Shia and Sunni Turks, 2 % were minorities like Christians, Kaka’is and Shabak Shia and 1 % were Arab Shia Muslims.²⁴⁶⁴

IOM did not document any IDPs from Najaf governorate in other parts of the country.²⁴⁶⁵ According to IOM, no returnees to Najaf governorate were registered as of September 2021.

²⁴⁶⁰ EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); UNICEF, Iraq, At least one child killed and another six confirmed injured in Iraq since the year began, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁶¹ EPIC, ISHM: April 15 – April 22, 2021, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁶² EPIC, ISHM: July 22 – August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#), Rudaw, PMF claims storage depot in Najaf attacked by drone, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁶³ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel file], 30 September 2021, [url](#); IOM’s definition of ‘critical shelter’ includes also school or religious buildings, makeshift shelters, tents, caravans, mud or block houses or unfinished or abandoned buildings.

²⁴⁶⁴ IOM, Iraq, Integrated location assessment IV, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 62

²⁴⁶⁵ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.16 Qadissiya



Map 27: Qadissiya governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²⁴⁶⁶

2.16.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Al-Diwaniya governorate was renamed 'Qadissiya' in 1976.²⁴⁶⁷ However, the former name of the governorate is still widely used.²⁴⁶⁸ The governorate is located in southern central Iraq and has borders with Babil, Wassit, Thi-Qar, Muthanna and Najaf governorates.²⁴⁶⁹ It is divided into the following districts: Diwaniya, Afak, Al-Shamiya and Al-Hamza.²⁴⁷⁰ The capital city is Diwaniya.²⁴⁷¹

²⁴⁶⁶ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁷ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁸ See AFP, Iraq's heritage battered by desert sun, rain and state apathy, 9 May 2021; Mehr News Agency, US military logistics convoy targeted in Iraq's Al Diwaniyah, 25 August 2021, [url](#); UNFPA, UNFPA, Diwaniyah Governorate Sign Agreement to Support Women in the Governorate, 14 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁹ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁰ NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁷¹ NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 1



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²⁴⁷² the governorate's population at 1 394 885, with around 596 000 people living in rural and around 799 000 in urban areas.²⁴⁷³

Ethno-religious composition

The majority of Qadissiya's inhabitants are Shia Arabs.²⁴⁷⁴ According to a November 2017 profile by Minority Rights Group International (MRG), Roma, who are also referred to as Kawliyah, are living in isolated villages in Qadissiya governorate.²⁴⁷⁵ According to the USDOS, data from 2006 (the latest year from which data are available) indicated that an estimated 54 500 Bidoon (stateless people) lived in or near the governorates of Basrah, Thi-Qar, and Qadissiya.²⁴⁷⁶

Economy

The spokesperson of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, cited by Al-Sumaria TV on 16 February 2020, stated that poverty rates in Qadissiya reached 48 % based on the poverty survey conducted in 2018.²⁴⁷⁷ Qadissiya is home to the Al-Shanafiyah oil refinery.²⁴⁷⁸ According to a July 2021 article, a new 70 000 barrels per day site is planned in Diwaniya.²⁴⁷⁹ However, the governorate's economy is largely agricultural.²⁴⁸⁰ It is known for the cultivation of amber rice²⁴⁸¹ and has been referred to as 'Iraq's agricultural heartland'.²⁴⁸² In December 2020, the Iraqi Ministry of Planning announced agreements between Iraq and Saudi Arabia regarding a 25 million USD investment for the construction of grain silos in Qadissiya.²⁴⁸³ In August 2021, the Trade Ministry announced that 297 727 tons of wheat had been delivered to the ministry's silos by the governorate at the conclusion of the wheat harvest.²⁴⁸⁴ According to IOM, as of February 2019, Qadissiya governorate had 'the largest number of locations affected by water shortage, with 23 affected locations'.²⁴⁸⁵

²⁴⁷² It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁷³ Iraq, CSO, 2021 [تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021](#) [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁴ NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁷⁵ MRG, Roma: Profile, November 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁶ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Iraq, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 35

²⁴⁷⁷ Al-Sumaria TV, [تعرف على نسبة الفقر في المحافظات العراقية](#) [Get Familiar with the Poverty Rates in Iraqi Governorates], 16 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁸ MEMO, Iraq protesters close Diwaniyah oil refinery, 6 November 2019, [url](#);

Asharq Al-Awsat, Iraq Crude Stuck at Field for Third Day as Protests Cut Roads, 7 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁹ S&P Global, Refinery News Roundup: Oil products stocks fall on high Middle East demand, 8 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁰ IAU, Qadissiya Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1; NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁸¹ AFP, Iraq's treasured amber rice crop devastated by drought, 3 July 2018

²⁴⁸² AFP, Pandemic has silver lining for Iraq: food self-sufficiency, 14 July 2020

²⁴⁸³ EPIC, ISHM: December 3 - December 10, 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁴ EPIC, ISHM: August 5 - August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁵ IOM Iraq, Assessing Water Shortage-induced Displacement in Qadissiya, Najaf, Babylon, Wassit and Kerbala, 10 April 2019, [url](#), p. 4





Road security

Qadissiya governorate is affected by attacks targeting convoys supporting the International Coalition against ISIL.²⁴⁸⁶ In the reference period convoys were targeted with IED attacks on highways in the governorate²⁴⁸⁷ or at unspecified locations along highways linking Qadissiya to neighbouring governorates.²⁴⁸⁸ At times bomb squads tried to defuse IEDs²⁴⁸⁹ or scan the highways for IEDs²⁴⁹⁰, however attacks on convoys continued²⁴⁹¹. Also, in March 2021, roads in Diwaniya city were blocked by protesters using burning tires.²⁴⁹² Please see section [2.16.4 Recent security trends](#) for further information on IED attacks in Qadissiya.

2.16.2 Conflict background

As noted in section 4.6.2 of [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), assessments of the security situation from 2015 rated Qadissiya governorate as 'relatively peaceful'²⁴⁹³ and southern Iraq overall as 'more secure',²⁴⁹⁴ when comparing the area to other parts of the country. However, violence between Shia armed factions and tribal conflicts had been reported in the past.

Between October 2019 and March 2021, demonstrations demanding reforms and economic and social rights were held in the governorate. According to UNAMI, 452 cases were filed at investigative court of appeal level, including for killings, assaults, road blocks, burning of tyres, assaults on security forces and the burning of governmental buildings.²⁴⁹⁵

²⁴⁸⁶ UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2020/1099], 10 November 2020, [url](#), para. 27; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/120], 8 February 2021, [url](#), para. 20; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2522 (2020) [S/2021/426], 4 May 2021, [url](#), para. 20; UNSG, Implementation of resolution 2576 (2021) [S/2021/700], 3 August 2021, [url](#), para. 19

²⁴⁸⁷ EPIC, ISHM: September 2 - September 9, 2021, 9 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 19 - August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 5 - August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 20 - May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 13 - May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 22 - August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 6 - May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 22 - April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: APRIL 1 - APRIL 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 18 - March 25, 2021, 25 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 11 - March 18, 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 - February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 24 - October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 10 - September 17, 2020, 17 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 13 - August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁸ EPIC, ISHM: August 27 - September 3, 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 8 - October 15, 2020, 15 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 6 - May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁹ EPIC, ISHM: March 4 - March 11, 2021, 11 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 12 - August 19, 2021, 19 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁹¹ EPIC, ISHM: September 2 - September 9, 2021, 9 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 19 - August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 22 - April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 1 - April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁹² Shafaq News, Protests resumed in al-Diwaniyah for the fourth day in a row, 6 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁹³ NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴⁹⁴ Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

²⁴⁹⁵ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 22-24



For further details on security developments in Qadissiya governorate in 2019-2020, please refer also to section 4.6.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.16.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

As of December 2019, units of the ISF - the Middle Euphrates Operation Command (MEOC), a commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local police and a brigade of the federal police – were active in Qadissiya governorate.²⁴⁹⁶ On 8 January 2021, Major General Tahsin Al-Khafaji, the spokesman of the Joint Operations Command, announced the withdrawal of Iraqi Army forces from five governorates, including from Qadissiya. Internal security control has already been handed over from the ministry of defence to the interior ministry in Qadissiya governorate.²⁴⁹⁷

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

As noted in section 4.6.2 of [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), Diwaniya city had become a recruiting ground for Shia militias in 2014. The PMU maintained an office in Qadissiya and their administrative heads were provided by the Badr organisation. Different PMU brigades were present in south-western Iraq, including Kata'ib Al-Imam Ali (Brigade 40)²⁴⁹⁸ in Diwaniya city.

Other Groups

The group Ashab al-Kahf claimed responsibility for attacks on US convoys in Qadissiya province between March and September 2021.²⁴⁹⁹ The group Qasim Al-Jabarin claimed responsibility for attacks on convoys in January and February 2021.²⁵⁰⁰ According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Ashab Al-Kahf (Companions of the Cave) is the 'first and best-known of the facade groups that Iran-backed militias use to conceal their involvement in operations'. The group first appeared in 2019 and has connections to Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq.²⁵⁰¹ However, according to Voice of America (VOA), Iraqi intelligence sources claim that Ashab Al-Kahf is a subgroup of Kata'ib Hezbollah.²⁵⁰² According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Qasim Al-Jabbarin is a 'Kataib Hezbollah-directed facade group' operating between Baghdad and Diwaniyah.²⁵⁰³

²⁴⁹⁶ Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁷ EPIC, ISHM: January 7 - January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#); see also MEMO, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁸ Smyth, P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project [Interactive Map], The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, updated April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁹ EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, Three other US military convoys targeted in S Iraq, 17 August 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, US logistic convoy targeted in Iraq's Al-Diwaniyah, 5 April 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, US-led military convoy targeted in Iraq's Al-Diwaniyah, 13 March 2021, [url](#); ISWNews, Iraq: Three IED attacks on US convoys, 12 July 2021, [url](#); ISWNews, Breaking: Two IED attacks on US convoys in Iraq, 4 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁰ Rambar, Rebecca, [Twitter], posted on: 30 January 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, US convoy targeted in southern Iraq, 27 February 2021

²⁵⁰¹ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The), Profile: Ashab al-Kahf, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁰² VOA, Iran-backed Militias Resume Rocket Attacks Toward US Embassy in Iraq, 19 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰³ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The), Profile: Qasem al-Jabbarin, 1 April 2021, [url](#)



2.16.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 – October 2021

Attacks on supply convoys

As mentioned in the sub-section on Road security in section 2.16.1, Qadissiya governorate was affected by IED attacks on convoys supporting the International Coalition against ISIL. Security forces or contractors were sometimes injured or killed in these attacks²⁵⁰⁴ and in some instances damage of vehicles was reported²⁵⁰⁵. Between 14 August 2020 and 9 September 2021, EPIC mentions 28 such attacks in the governorate²⁵⁰⁶ and three attacks at unspecified locations on highways between Qadissiya and neighbouring governorates.²⁵⁰⁷ Regarding some of the attacks targeting convoys between March and September 2021, Ashab Al-Kahf claimed responsibility.²⁵⁰⁸

Protests

In 2019 and 2020 mass protests took place in Iraq's southern governorates. According to International Crisis Group, 'state security forces and paramilitary groups harshly suppressed peaceful dissent on numerous occasions'. When prime minister Mustafa Kadhimi took office in May 2020, his tenure was still 'marked by continuous repression, often carried out by groups tied to the state, acting autonomously'.²⁵⁰⁹

In December 2020 and February 2021, solidarity protests were held in Diwaniya in response to violence against protesters in Nasiriyah.²⁵¹⁰ In March 2021, four days of protest in a row were reported in Diwaniya city demanding the dismissal of the local government.²⁵¹¹ In May

²⁵⁰⁴ EPIC, ISHM: March 4 - March 11, 2021, 11 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 24, 2020 - January 7, 2021, 7 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁵ EPIC, ISHM: September 2 - September 9, 2021, 9 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 19 - August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 8 - October 15, 2020, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁶ EPIC, ISHM: September 2 - September 9, 2021, 9 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 19 - August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 5 - August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 22 - August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 20 - May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 13 - May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 6 - May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 22 - April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 1 - April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 18 - March 25, 2021, 25 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 11 - March 18, 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 - February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 24 - October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 10 - September 17, 2020, 17 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 13 - August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁷ EPIC, ISHM: May 6 - May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: October 8 - October 15, 2020, 15 October 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 27 - September 3, 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁸ EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, Three other US military convoys targeted in S Iraq, 17 August 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, US logistic convoy targeted in Iraq's Al-Diwaniyah, 5 April 2021, [url](#); Mehr News Agency, US-led military convoy targeted in Iraq's Al-Diwaniyah, 13 March 2021, [url](#); ISWNews, Breaking: Two IED attacks on US convoys in Iraq, 4 September 2021, [url](#); ISWNews, Iraq: Three IED attacks on US convoys, 12 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box, 26 July 2021, [url](#), p. i

²⁵¹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 3 - December 10, 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#); see also RFI, Iraqis renew protests in solidarity after violence, 4 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵¹¹ Shafaq News, Protests resumed in al-Diwaniyah for the fourth day in a row, 6 March 2021, [url](#)





2021, postgraduate degree holders protested at the local government building in Diwaniya against unemployment and called for job opportunities.²⁵¹²

Targeted attacks

Activists who had participated in protests were targeted by unknown persons in Qadissiya governorate, however there were no casualties.²⁵¹³ There was also an assassination attempt against a TV reporter.²⁵¹⁴

For further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq, please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

In addition, clashes between tribal militias were also reported,²⁵¹⁵ and clashes between tribes sometimes occurred on grounds of minor disputes.²⁵¹⁶

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 6 battles, 21 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 9 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 36 security incidents in Qadissiya governorate, the majority taking place in Diwaniya district.²⁵¹⁷

²⁵¹² EPIC, ISHM: May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹³ EPIC, ISHM: November 19 - December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); see also Al-Sharqiya, Hossam Al-Abedi survived the assassination attempt west of Al-Diwaniyah, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁴ CPJ, Iraqi journalist Ahmed Hassan shot, critically wounded, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁵ ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Iraq, IRQ34065 [source: Ayn Al Iraq News], event date 28 September 2021; ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Iraq, IRQ30273 [source: Al-Sumaria TV], event date 9 April 2021; ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Iraq, IRQ26158 [source: Al Mirbad], event date 26 August 2020

²⁵¹⁶ AFP, Tribal Iraq: where petty squabbles turn lethal, 27 June 2021

²⁵¹⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 30 below.

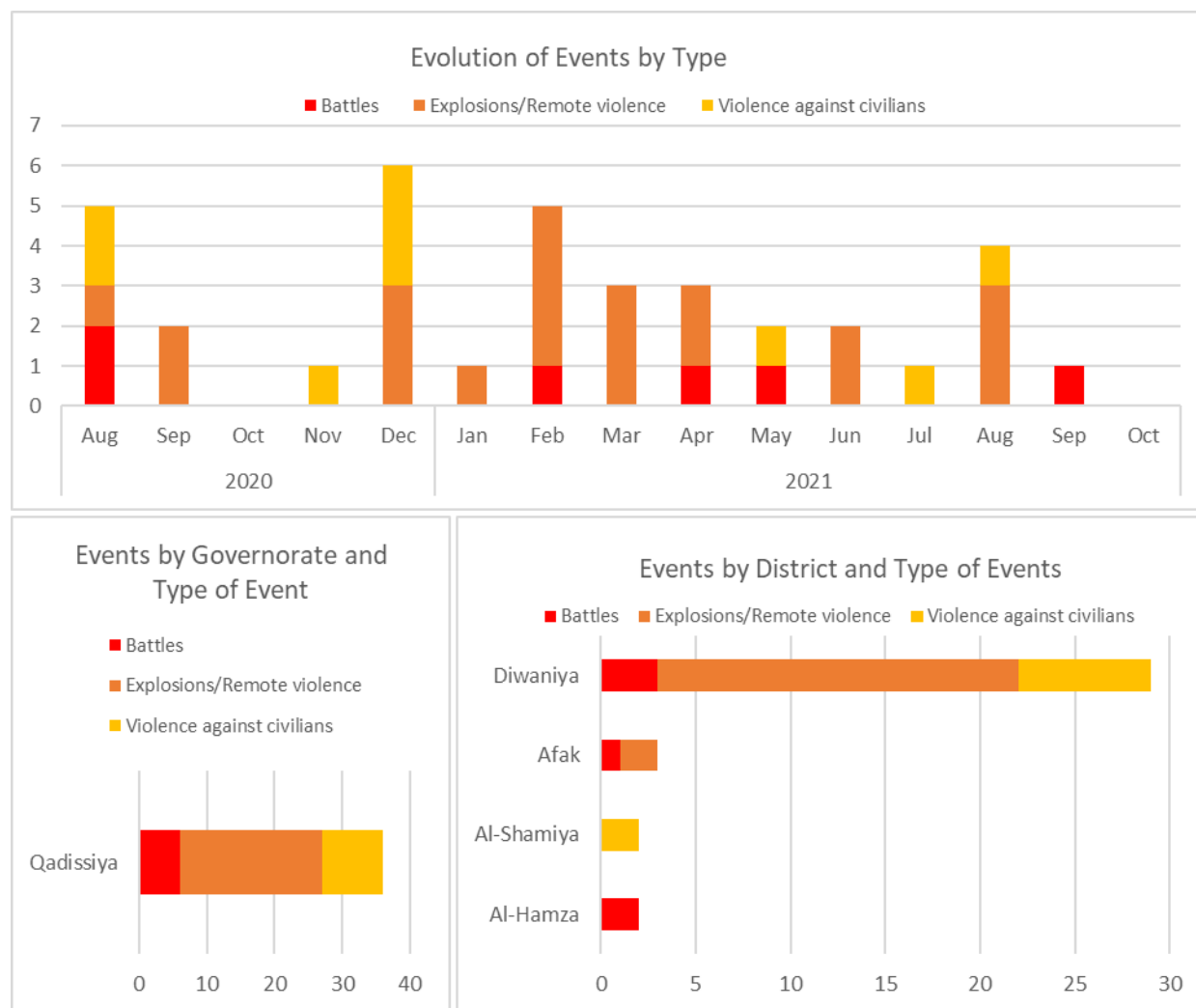


Figure 25: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Qadissiya governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²⁵¹⁸

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 8 September 2020, a member of the police who escorted a coalition convoy was killed and two others were wounded when an IED exploded at an unspecified location on the highway between Babil and Qadissiya governorates.²⁵¹⁹
- On 18 and 27 February 2021, two security contractors were injured and vehicles damaged when IEDs hit truck convoys.²⁵²⁰
- On 10 May 2021 a Satellite TV reporter was shot in the head by a gunman in Diwaniya city and critically wounded.²⁵²¹

²⁵¹⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁹ EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²⁰ EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵²¹ CPJ, Iraqi journalist Ahmed Hassan shot, critically wounded, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

2.16.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²⁵²² and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 21 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Qadissiya	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 21: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Qadissiya governorate²⁵²³

2.16.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to Mine Action Review report of September 2021, the area contaminated by cluster munition remnants in Qadissiya was 3 137 824 square metres at the end of the year 2020.²⁵²⁴ As of August 2020, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) listed the area contaminated with explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 57 665 073 square metres.²⁵²⁵

2.16.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 3 516 IDPs were registered in Qadissiya governorate, originating mostly from Ninewa (63 %) and Kirkuk (34 %). Within Qadissiya governorate, the IDP population is largely concentrated in the districts of Diwaniya (62 %) and Afaq (22%). In Qadissiya, 498 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (e.g. public buildings or collective shelters, religious buildings, unfinished or abandoned buildings), 450 of them in Diwaniya district.²⁵²⁶ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 80.1 and 90 % of IDP households in Al Diwaniya district lived in severe or extreme need. Other districts of the governorate were not assessed.²⁵²⁷

As of 30 September 2021, IOM did not document any IDPs from Qadissiya governorate in other parts of the country,²⁵²⁸ and no returns to Qadissiya governorate were documented.²⁵²⁹

²⁵²² The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²⁵²³ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

²⁵²⁴ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59

²⁵²⁵ iMMAP, Recorded Explosive Ordnance Contamination in Iraq - Overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

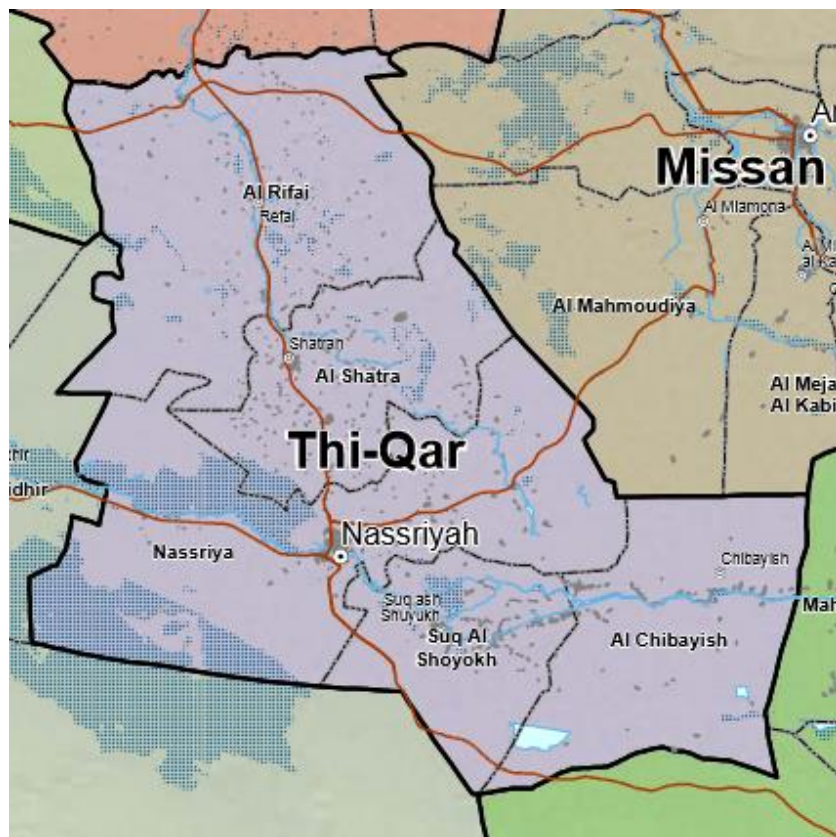
²⁵²⁶ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵²⁷ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁵²⁸ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵²⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

2.17 Thi-Qar



Map 28: Thi-Qar governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²⁵³⁰

2.17.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Thi-Qar (Dhi-Qar) governorate borders Wassit to the north, Missan to the east, Basrah to the east and south, and Muthanna and Qadissiya to the west. The capital is Nasiriya.²⁵³¹ The governorate is divided into five districts: Al-Jubayish (Al-Chibayish), Al-Nasiriya (Nassriyah), Al-Shatra, Suq Al-Shuyukh (Suq Al-Shoyokh), and Al-Rifa'i.²⁵³²

Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²⁵³³ the governorate's population at 2 263 695, with around 811 000 people living in rural and around 1 453 000 in urban areas.²⁵³⁴

²⁵³⁰ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁵³¹ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁵³² NCCI, Thi-Qar governorate profile, updated December 2015, [url](#)

²⁵³³ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁵³⁴ Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)



Ethno-religious composition

In the past, Jewish families, Sabeen Mandeans and a small Christian community were present in Thi-Qar province, in addition to Muslims. However, conflict ‘led many of these families to migrate abroad, and the families who remained in Iraq represent a small portion only of that diversity’.²⁵³⁵ The majority of Thi-Qar’s population is Shia Arab. There is also a Sunni Arab minority and smaller communities of Assyrian and Chaldean Christians²⁵³⁶ and Sabeen Mandeans²⁵³⁷. According to a 2021 media report, Nasiriya is home to only two Christian households and there are no Christian churches in the city.²⁵³⁸ However, there are plans to erect a church in the city of Ur,²⁵³⁹ which is considered the birthplace of the Prophet Ibrahim (known as Abraham by Christians and Jews).²⁵⁴⁰ The southern marshlands of the governorate are inhabited by Marsh Arabs. While many were forced to leave during the Saddam era, some have returned since and ‘live again on isolated islands in the marshlands, while others live in villages and small cities along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers’.²⁵⁴¹

Economy

Thi-Qar governorate is ‘one of the most underdeveloped areas of Iraq’, with infrastructure that has suffered from many years of underinvestment. The governorate ‘has experienced less urbanisation than the rest of the country, resulting in a higher reliance on the agricultural sector as a means of jobs, which provides a lower wage than the industry or services sector’.²⁵⁴² Meanwhile, agriculture in the governorate is declining due to environmental degradation and climate change. Thi-Qar is located in the Tigris-Euphrates basin, where ‘decreasing rainfall, higher temperatures and upstream dams in Turkey and Iran have decreased the water flows’. Another major problem is high salinity and contamination of water. This has led many rural residents to abandon their homes, as ‘polluted and salty water is unsuitable for agriculture’.²⁵⁴³

Thi-Qar is home to the Garraf oil field, located approximately 85 kilometres north of Nasiriya city. Production started in August 2013. After a suspension of operations due to the Covid-19 pandemic, operations resumed in July 2020 with a rate of 50 000 barrels of oil per day.²⁵⁴⁴ As of January 2021, the production rate stands at 70 000 barrels of oil per day.²⁵⁴⁵ Another oilfield situated in the governorate is the Nasiriya oilfield which plans to double its production

²⁵³⁵ Aloda, M., Heritage Buildings In Dhi Qar And Maysan, Observatory Patrimoine d'Orient, 17 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵³⁶ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³⁷ USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Iraq, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 23

²⁵³⁸ AFP, Near Abraham's Iraq birthplace, lone Christians put hope in Pope, 6 March 2021

²⁵³⁹ Fides, ASIA/IRAQ - The project to erect a church in Ur of the Chaldeans takes off, 12 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁰ Al Jazeera, Pope to visit ancient city of Ur, ‘the cradle of civilization’, 5 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴¹ Walker, K., In Iraq’s marshlands, researchers are racing to document a disappearing dialect, Equal Times, 6 September 2021, [url](#); see also SWEDO and WFP, Restoring the Marshlands of Iraq: drivers of crisis [Map], 1 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴² GPG, Economic Drivers Of Youth Political Discontent In Iraq: The Voice of Young People in Kurdistan, Baghdad, Basra and Thi-Qar, October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁴³ Altai Consulting, Economic relief, recovery, and resilience - Assessment for Southern Iraq, International Labour Organization, 14 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 12-13; see also IDMC, When Canals Run Dry: Displacement triggered by water stress in the south of Iraq, February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

²⁵⁴⁴ Hydrocarbons Technology, Garraf Oil Field, Thi Qar Province, n.d., [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁵ Japex, Iraq: Garraf Project, n.d., [url](#)





to 200 000 barrels per day.²⁵⁴⁶ This being said, the oil industry in Nasiriya and its surroundings has been described as ‘distinctly smaller than that of Basra.’²⁵⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Oil Ministry in September 2021 ‘inaugurated a project to capture natural gas and reduce flaring at the Gharraf and Nasiriyah oil fields.’²⁵⁴⁸

In October 2021, the Iraqi prime minister announced the start of a reconstruction fund to ‘support the implementation of various key service projects in the southern province, with a focus on electricity.’²⁵⁴⁹

Road security

Several IED attacks on convoys supporting the International Coalition against ISIL were reported during the reference period,²⁵⁵⁰ sometimes injuring persons.²⁵⁵¹ Ashab Al-Kahf and Qasim Al-Jabarin were responsible for some IED attacks on convoys.²⁵⁵² According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Ashab Al-Kahf (Companions of the Cave) is the ‘first and best-known of the facade groups that Iran-backed militias use to conceal their involvement in operations’. The group first appeared in 2019 and has connections to Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq.²⁵⁵³ However, according to Voice of America (VOA), Iraqi intelligence sources claim that Ashab Al-Kahf is a subgroup of Kata’ib Hezbollah.²⁵⁵⁴ There were also several instances of protesters blocking highways and bridges during the reference period.²⁵⁵⁵

2.17.2 Conflict background

As noted in section 4.7.2 of [EASO’s report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), following the 2003 invasion the governorate became contested between various Shia factions and their militias. Muqtada Al-Sadr’s movement and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq were the most significant in this regard. Their militias attacked Iraqi security forces and clashed with each other. From 2008, the governorate has been largely peaceful, following a settlement between Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Iraqi government. Thi-Qar did not become

²⁵⁴⁶ Reuters, UPDATE 1-Russia's Litasco to finance Iraq's Nassiriya oilfield to double output, 27 January 2021, [url](#); see also Weatherford, Weatherford Signs 18-Month Contract With Iraqi Drilling Company, 13 July 2020, [url](#); Oil Price, New Contract Signals Serious Development Of Iraq’s Huge Nasiriyah Oil Field, 25 July 2020, [url](#); Iraq Business News, Oil and Gas Fields: Nasiriyah, n.d., [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, Iraq Announces New Investment in Nasiriyah, Gharraf Gas Fields, 19 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁷ GPG, Economic Drivers Of Youth Political Discontent In Iraq: The Voice of Young People in Kurdistan, Baghdad, Basra and Thi-Qar, October 2020, [url](#), p. 27

²⁵⁴⁸ EPIC, ISHM: September 16 – September 23, 2021, 23 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁹ EPIC, ISHM: September 30 – October 7, 2021, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁰ EPIC, ISHM: September 23 – September 30, 2021, 30 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 16 – September 23, 2021, 23 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 8 - July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 22 – April 29, 2021, 29 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 28 - February 4, 2021, 4 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 24 - October 1, 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵¹ EPIC, ISHM: July 22 - August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 10 – June 17, 2021, 17 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 17 - December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵² ISWNews, Infographic: Iraqi Resistance Groups Operations against the US in the first six months of 2021, 8 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁵³ Washington Institute for Near East Policy (The), Profile: Ashab al-Kahf, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁴ VOA, Iran-backed Militias Resume Rocket Attacks Toward US Embassy in Iraq, 19 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁵ EPIC, ISHM: June 24 - July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 13 – May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 18 - March 25, 2021, 25 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Nasiriyah Demonstrators block a highway east of Dhi Qar, 9 May 2021, [url](#)



occupied by ISIL.²⁵⁵⁶ The security void that opened in the southern governorates when the security forces were redeployed in 2014 to fight ISIL insurgency in central and northern Iraq, left the southern region open to tribal clashes.²⁵⁵⁷

When the October 2019 mass anti-government protests that began at Baghdad's Tahrir Square quickly spread to the southern governorates, Thi-Qar became the 'second capital' of the protest movement,²⁵⁵⁸ although the 'protests decreased in frequency and size following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.'²⁵⁵⁹

For further details on security developments in Thi-Qar governorate in 2019-2020, please refer also to section 4.7.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.17.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

The Joint Operations Command (JOC) of the Ministry of Defence oversees all operations commands.²⁵⁶⁰ Since May 2020, under the new Khadimi government, 'every headquarters responsible for exercising operational control of the Iraqi security forces at the provincial level has been restaffed'. Thus, the Sumer Operations Command (SuOC) replaced the Rafidain Operations Command (ROC), which was moved to the Syrian border. The SuOC covers Thi-Qar, Missan, and Muthanna.²⁵⁶¹ Knights et al. assessed in March 2020 that 'until Iraqi army and Federal Police forces redeploy to southern Iraq', all eight southern governorates should be considered areas of shared control between the Iraqi army or police, and the PMU.²⁵⁶²

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

According to an interactive map last updated in April 2020, Shia militias active in and around Nasiriya were the Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada, Liwa' Al-Shabaab Al-Risali-Quwat Wa'ad Allah (Brigade 33), Saraya Al-Jihad (Brigade 17), and Firqat Al-Abbas Al-Qitaliyah (Brigade 26).²⁵⁶³ As of September 2019, PMU Brigades 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 21, 22, 26 were present in the governorates Thi-Qar, Missan, and Basrah.²⁵⁶⁴ The PMU commander in Thi-Qar is aligned to the Badr militia.²⁵⁶⁵

²⁵⁵⁶ NCCI, Thi-Qar Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 4

²⁵⁵⁷ Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq's south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁸ EPIC, The Long Game: Iraq's "Tishreen" Movement and the Struggle for Reform, October 2021, [url](#), p. 35

²⁵⁵⁹ New Arab (The), Protests break out in Iraq's Nasiriyah following deadly hospital fire, 14 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁰ ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 12

²⁵⁶¹ Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Kadhimi's Rolling Reshuffle (Part 1): Military Command Changes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 14 September 2020, [url](#); see also EPIC, ISHM: September 3 - September 10, 2020, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶² Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 128-129

²⁵⁶³ Smyth, P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project [Interactive Map], The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, updated April 2020, [url](#); see also Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 205-206

²⁵⁶⁴ Mansour, R. and Salisbury, P., Between Order and Chaos: A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen, Chatham House, September 2019, [url](#), p. 8

²⁵⁶⁵ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), p. 37

2.17.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

Protests

Between August 2020 and February 2021, protests were held in Nasiriya city,²⁵⁶⁶ which included the storming of the provincial government building²⁵⁶⁷ and the burning of offices of several political parties²⁵⁶⁸ by protesters. Killing and wounding of protesters were reported,²⁵⁶⁹ especially in February 2021, when security forces opened fire on protesters.²⁵⁷⁰ In February 2021, the governor of Thi-Qar, Nadhum Al-Waeli, was dismissed by the Prime Minister amid increasing violence against protesters in Nasiriya. Initially, National Security Agency chief Abdul Ghani Al-Asadi was appointed as interim governor²⁵⁷¹, and later Ahmed Al-Khafaji as governor.²⁵⁷² In March 2021, the police chief of the governorate resigned, after pressure from activists.²⁵⁷³ Nonetheless, protests in the governorate continued between March and July 2021.²⁵⁷⁴ After a fire broke out in Al-Hussein Hospital, killing more than 90 people, further protests were held in July 2021 in Nasiriya, resulting in clashes with police²⁵⁷⁵ and in arrests and injuries²⁵⁷⁶. After the arrest of a prominent local activist in August 2021, more protests were held in Nasiriya.²⁵⁷⁷

Targeting of activists

During the reference period, sources reported on the targeting of civil society activists in the governorate by unknown perpetrators,²⁵⁷⁸ including assassination attempts²⁵⁷⁹ and killings of activists.²⁵⁸⁰ In several incidents activists were targeted using IEDs.²⁵⁸¹ Security forces arrested

²⁵⁶⁶ EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 - February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 21 - January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 3 - December 10, 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 19 - December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁷ EPIC, ISHM: October 29 - November 5, 2020, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁸ EPIC, ISHM: August 20 - August 27, 2020, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁹ EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 - February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: November 19 - December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Five protesters die, dozens injured in clashes in Iraqi city, 26 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁰ EPIC, ISHM: April 1 - April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷¹ EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷² Shafaq News, Dhi Qar's new governor: we a three-level plan, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷³ EPIC, ISHM: March 11 - March 18, 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁴ EPIC, ISHM: July 1 - July 8, 2021, 8 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 24 - July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 24 - July 1, 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 17 - June 24, 2021, 24 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 20 - May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 13 - May 20, 2021, 20 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 8 - April 15, 2021, 15 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: March 18 - March 25, 2021, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁵ EPIC, ISHM: July 8 - July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁶ EPIC, ISHM: July 22 - August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 8 - July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁷ EPIC, ISHM: August 5 - August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁸ EPIC, ISHM: August 26 - September 2, 2021, 2 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 22 - August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 15 - 22, 2021, 22 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 8 - July 15, 2021, 15 July 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁹ Al-Sharqiya, Targeting 3 activists in Dhi Qar with bombs and armed attacks, 21 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 4 - February 11, 2021, 11 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 20 - May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁰ FIDH, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan: Systematic targeting of human rights defenders, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸¹ EPIC, ISHM: July 22 - August 5, 2021, 5 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: May 20 - May 27, 2021, 27 May 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 1 - April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 21 - January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 14 - January 21, 2021, 21 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 10 - December 17, 2020, 17 December 2020, [url](#)



activists and raided their homes.²⁵⁸² Militias reportedly targeted the homes of prominent activists.²⁵⁸³

For further details on the targeting of protesters and activists in Iraq, please refer to chapter 3: Political opposition activists and protesters of the [EUAA COI report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals \(January 2022\)](#).

IED attacks

As mentioned in the sub-section on [Road security](#), several IED attacks on convoys were reported in the reference period. Further IED attacks also targeted shops,²⁵⁸⁴ local politicians or officials,²⁵⁸⁵ and property of civilians.²⁵⁸⁶

Tribal clashes

There have been several reports of tribal clashes in the governorate occurring during the reference period, occasionally leading to civilian injuries and fatalities.²⁵⁸⁷

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 50 battles, 82 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 44 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of 176 security incidents in Thi-Qar governorate, the majority taking place in Al-Nasiriya district.²⁵⁸⁸

²⁵⁸² EPIC, ISHM: August 19 - August 26, 2021, 26 August 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 5 - August 12, 2021, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸³ EPIC, ISHM: January 21 - January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 3 - December 10, 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁴ EPIC, ISHM: October 7 – October 14, 2021, 14 October 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 30 – October 7, 2021, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁵ EPIC, ISHM: September 23 – September 30, 2021, 30 September 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 17 - June 24, 2021, 24 June 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 15 – April 22, 2021, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁶ EPIC, ISHM: April 1 - April 8, 2021, 8 April 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 13 - August 20, 2020, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁷ Shafaq News, Unknown assailants kill two citizens in Dhi Qar, 17 July 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Tribal clash resurge in Dhi Qar, 18 June 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Children brawl in Dhi Qar unfolds to an armed tribal clash, 14 June 2021, [url](#); Al-Sharqiya, Violent armed clan conflict erupts in Al-Akaika district, Dhi Qar governorate, 19 October 2021, [url](#); Al-Menasa, Arms Race: Iraqi tribes using heavy weapons in local conflicts, 7 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)



The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 31 below.

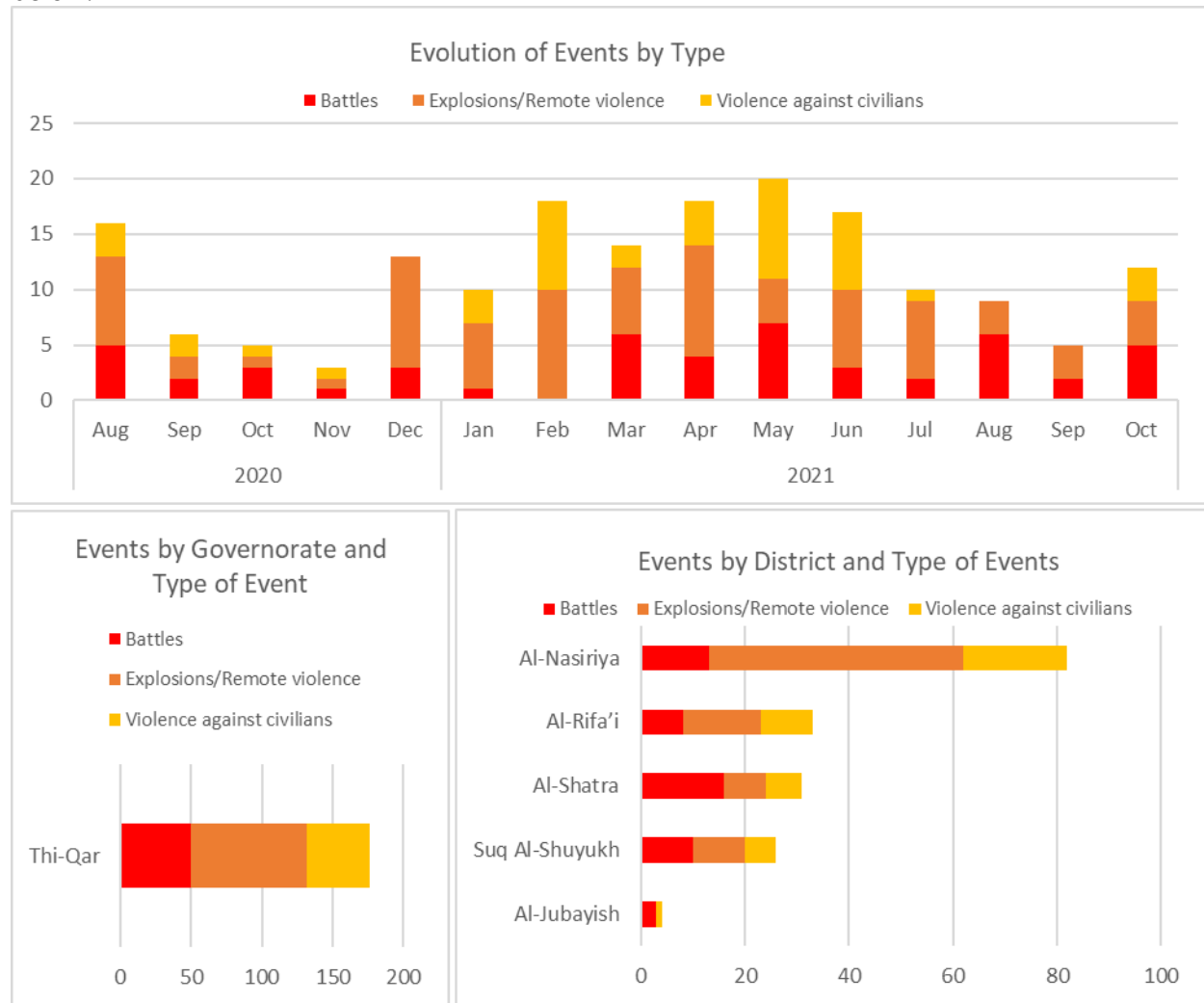


Figure 26: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Thi-Qar governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²⁵⁸⁹

Illustrative examples of incidents

- On 20 December 2020, a convoy transporting supplies for International Coalition forces hit an IED on a main Highway near Nasiriya. A security guard was wounded and two trucks were damaged.²⁵⁹⁰
- On 9 January 2021, lawyer and activist Ali Al-Hamami was killed by unknown perpetrators in Nasiriya.²⁵⁹¹
- In February 2021, three activists of the protest movement were targeted in coordinated attacks by unidentified persons. In Nasiriya city, gunmen opened fire on

²⁵⁸⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁰ EPIC, ISHM: December 17 - December 24, 2020, 24 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹¹ MEE, Iraqi lawyer and activist killed after home invasion in Nasiriyah, 9 January 2021, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 14 - January 21, 2021, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

the home of Sajjad Talib. In Al-Rifa'i district, the house of activist Imad Jasim was targeted, and in Al-Tar sub-district, attackers threw a bomb at the home of activist Raed Karim.²⁵⁹²

- In February 2021, at least five protesters were killed and many wounded in five days of protests in Nasiriya, after security forces fired live ammunition at demonstrators.²⁵⁹³
- On 15 April 2021, civil society activist Hassan Ashour was killed in front of his house in Al-Rifa'i district on 15 April 2021 after armed groups had threatened him.²⁵⁹⁴
- On 16 April 2021, the home of Ammar Al-Rikabi, the former deputy commissioner of Al-Rifa'i district, was targeted by unknown gunmen.²⁵⁹⁵ The attack did not cause injuries.²⁵⁹⁶
- In June 2021, a dispute over a soccer match resulted in the killing and wounding of people. The dispute led to further clashes between the tribes of Al-Zargan and Shmeis in Al-Okaika sub-district.²⁵⁹⁷
- In October 2021, a conflict between two clans in Al-Akaika sub-district resulted in the killing of four people. Seven others were seriously wounded and eight houses burnt. The Sumer Operations Command was deployed to prevent further violence.²⁵⁹⁸

2.17.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²⁵⁹⁹ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 22 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Thi-Qar	0	0	0	0	4	4	3	7

Table 22: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Thi-Qar governorate²⁶⁰⁰

2.17.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to Mine Action Review's September 2021 report, the area contaminated by cluster munition remnants in Thi-Qar was 45 188 393 square metres at the end of the year 2020. 90 % of Iraq's cluster munition remnants are found in the governorates of Thi-Qar, Basrah,

²⁵⁹² Al-Sharqiya, Targeting 3 activists in Dhi Qar with bombs and armed attacks, 21 February 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Three attacks against activists in Dhi Qar, 20 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹³ EPIC, ISHM: February 25 - March 4, 2021, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁴ FIDH, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan: Systematic targeting of human rights defenders, 26 May 2021, [url](#); GCHR, Iraq: GCHR's 14th periodic report on human rights violations during popular protests, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁵ Shafaq News, Unidentified armed men attack the former deputy commissioner of Al-Rifa'i's house, 16 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁶ EPIC, ISHM: April 15 – April 22, 2021, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁷ Shafaq News, Tribal clash resurge in Dhi Qar, 18 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁸ Al-Sharqiya, Violent armed clan conflict erupts in Al-Akaika district, Dhi Qar governorate, 19 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁹ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²⁶⁰⁰ UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021



and Muthanna.²⁶⁰¹ As of August 2020, the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) defined the contaminated area with explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 57 717 714 square metres.²⁶⁰² In January 2021, one civilian was killed when a remnant of war exploded near a lake in Al-Batha sub-district.²⁶⁰³

2.17.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 31 July 2021, 3 222 IDPs were registered in Thi-Qar governorate, originating mostly from Ninewa (55 %), Anbar (18 %) and Kirkuk (17 %). Within Thi-Qar, the IDP population is largely concentrated in the districts of Al-Nasiriya (56 %) Al-Rifa'i (23 %), and Suq Al-Shuyukh (15 %). 270 IDPs in Thi-Qar governorate were living in shelters classified as critical by IOM (mainly in tent, caravans, makeshift shelter etc. but also in public buildings/collective shelters and religious buildings). Of these, 126 were living in Al-Nasiriya district.²⁶⁰⁴ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 60 and 80 % of IDP households in Al-Nasiriya district were living in severe or extreme need. Other districts of the governorate were not assessed.²⁶⁰⁵

As of 30 September 2021, IOM did not document any IDPs from Thi-Qar governorate in other parts of the country,²⁶⁰⁶ and no returns to Thi-Qar governorate were documented.²⁶⁰⁷

²⁶⁰¹ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59

²⁶⁰² iMMAP, Recorded explosive ordnance contamination in Iraq - overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁰³ EPIC, ISHM: January 7 - January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁴ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

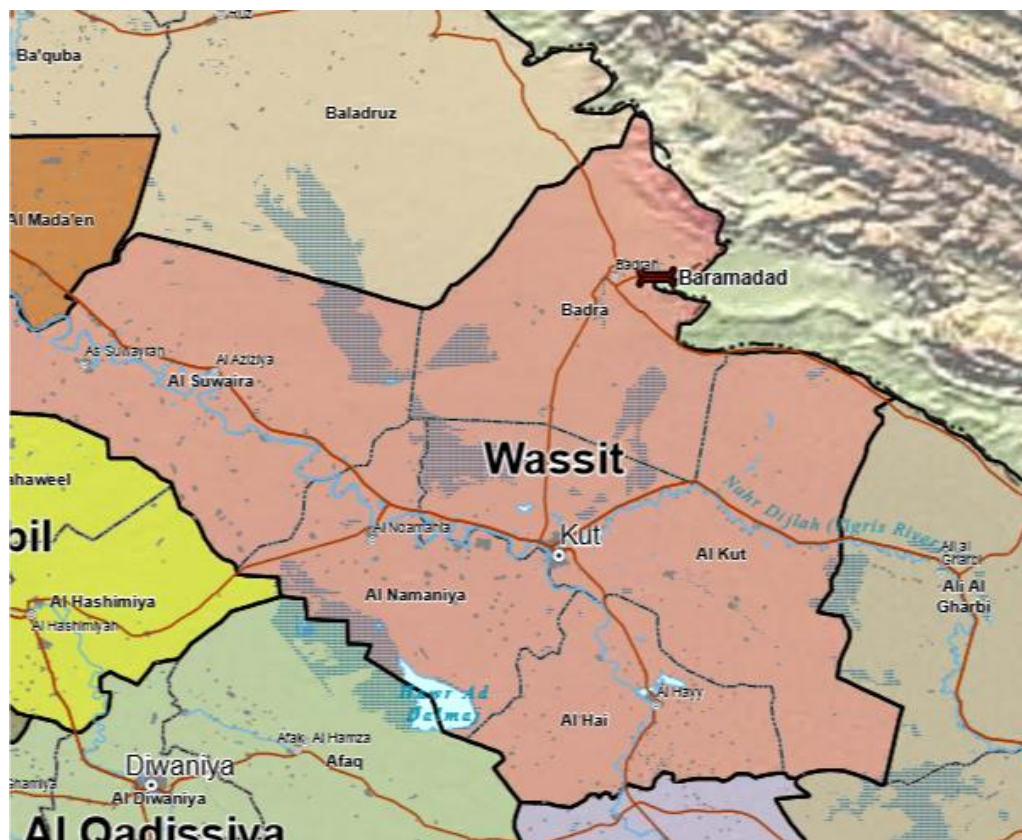
²⁶⁰⁵ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁶⁰⁶ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁷ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)



2.18 Wassit



Map 29: Wassit governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations²⁶⁰⁸

2.18.1 General description of governorate

Basic geography

Wassit (Wasit) shares an international border with Iran in the east. It borders Diyala and Baghdad governorates to the north; Babil and Qadissiya to the west, and the governorates of Thi-Qar and Missan to the south.²⁶⁰⁹ According to sources, the governorate is divided into five²⁶¹⁰ or six²⁶¹¹ districts: Al-Aziziya (Al-Azezia), Badra, Kut, Al-Suwaira, Al-Namaniya (Al-Numaniyah), and Al-Hay (Al-Hay) – with Al-Suwaira district covering the territory of Al-Azezia (sub-)district when five districts are listed. The capital of the governorate is Kut.²⁶¹²

²⁶⁰⁸ UNJAU, Iraq District Map, 29 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁹ UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Wassit Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁰ UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Wassit Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Iraq: National Reference Map [Map], 28 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹¹ IAU, Wassit Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶¹² UNOCHA and iMMAP, Iraq: Wassit Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#); IAU, Wassit Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1



Population estimates

For 2021, the Iraqi CSO estimated²⁶¹³ the governorate's population at 1 489 631, with around 593 000 people living in rural and around 897 000 in urban areas.²⁶¹⁴

Ethno-religious composition

The majority of the population in Wassit governorate are Shia Arabs. However, communities of Feyli Kurds also reside in the governorate.²⁶¹⁵

Economy

Wassit is one of the strongholds of Iraq's wheat and barley production. The governorate however faces land degradation, driven by climate change and urbanisation, and unemployment rates are above 25 %.²⁶¹⁶ Most of the governorate's residents depend on agriculture.²⁶¹⁷

The governorate is home to the Badra oil field. After the construction of a pipeline, oil shipments started in September 2014. In 2017 the Badra oil field produced 3.8 million tons of oil.²⁶¹⁸

The Wassit Thermal Power Plant, securing approximately 20 % of Iraq's national power grid, is also located in the governorate. It was constructed by the Shanghai Electric Group and is also operated by the Chinese company.²⁶¹⁹

Road security

In January²⁶²⁰ and February²⁶²¹ 2021, protesters blocked roads in the governorate.

2.18.2 Conflict background

As noted in section 4.8.2 of [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#), Wassit faced heavy fighting during the US-led invasion in 2003. In 2004, Sadrist leader Muqtada Al-Sadr started a revolt against the coalition forces and the Iraqi government and his Mahdi army managed to take control in several southern cities, including Kut. Unlike many

²⁶¹³ It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987. The last official census covering current Baghdad-administered Iraq dates from 1997; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Rudaw, Iraq's population now over 40 million: planning ministry, 12 January 2021, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM: Demographic change must be considered in upcoming Iraqi census, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁴ Iraq, CSO, 2021 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظات والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2021 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2021] [Table], n.d., [url](#)

²⁶¹⁵ EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#); see also KirkukNow, The Feyli Kurds pay the price for their ethnicity and sect, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁶ WFP, Iraq Socio-Economic Atlas 2019, 2019, [url](#), p. 19, p. 40

²⁶¹⁷ Shafaq News, Wasit demands the federal government to provide sufficient water for farmers, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁸ Gazprom, Iraq, n.d., [url](#); see also Hydrocarbons Technology, Badra Oil Field, Wasit Province, n.d., [url](#)

²⁶¹⁹ Xinhua, Spotlight: Chinese-built power plant stabilizes Iraq's electricity supply amid COVID-19 crisis, 25 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²⁰ EPIC, ISHM: January 21 – January 28, 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁶²¹ Shafaq News, Protests in Dhi Qar and Wasit, 7 February 2021, [url](#)





other parts of Iraq, the governorate did not become occupied by ISIL in 2014, however it experienced bomb attacks by Sunni insurgents targeting Shia civilians in recent years.²⁶²²

Between October 2019 and March 2021, demonstrations demanding reforms and economic and social rights were held in the governorate. According to UNAMI, 376 cases were filed at investigative court of appeal level, including for allegations of killings and attempted killings of protesters, road blocks, burning of tyres, assaults on security forces and the burning of governmental buildings.²⁶²³

For further details on security developments in Wassit governorate in 2019-2020, please refer also to section 4.8.3 in [EASO's report on the security situation in Iraq from October 2020](#).

2.18.3 Presence and areas of control of armed actors

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

In February 2020, responsibility for security in Wassit was handed over to the local police.²⁶²⁴ Previously the Rafidain Operations Command of the Iraqi army was overseeing security in the governorate.²⁶²⁵

Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU)

The southern governorates are considered areas of shared control between the Iraqi army or police, and the PMU. The Iran-backed Kata'ib Al-Imam Ali (Brigade 40) militia has its military base in northern Wassit. The PMU commander in the governorate belongs to the Badr militia.²⁶²⁶

The Shia Militia Mapping Project, published by the Washington Institute in May 2019 and last updated in April 2020, provides an interactive map with mainly Iranian-backed Shia militias active in the Middle East, including Iraq. In Kut and Al-Suwaira the project mentioned Kata'ib Al-Imam Ali (Brigade 40) and Saraya Ansar Al-Aqeeda (Brigade 28) and Firqat Al-Abbas Al-Qitaliyah (Brigade 26) in the Badra area.²⁶²⁷

²⁶²² See also NCCI, Wassit governorate Profile, updated December 2015, archived page from 26 January 2021, [url](#); see also EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²³ UNAMI, Update on Demonstrations in Iraq: Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses by Unidentified Armed Elements, May 2021, [url](#), p. 22

²⁶²⁴ MEMO, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#); see also EPIC, ISHM: January 7 - January 14, 2021, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁶²⁵ ISW, Iraqi security forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Order of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

²⁶²⁶ Knights, M. et al., Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 37, 128-129, 131

²⁶²⁷ Smyth, P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project [Interactive Map], The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, updated April 2020, [url](#)





2.18.4 Recent security trends

Developments August 2020 - October 2021

In the reference period, protesters,²⁶²⁸ activists,²⁶²⁹ and civilians²⁶³⁰ were attacked, including by riot police²⁶³¹, resulting in casualties.

Clashes between tribes were also reported,²⁶³² sometimes on grounds of minor disputes.²⁶³³ For the reference period ACLED data only list 11 relevant security incidents in total, mainly occurring in Kut.²⁶³⁴

Security incidents

Between August 2020 and October 2021, ACLED reported 1 battle, 3 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 7 cases of violence against civilians, accounting for a total of

²⁶²⁸ EPIC, ISHM: June 3 – June 10, 2021, 10 June 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Unidentified assailants assault demonstrators in Wasit, injuring seven, 10 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁶²⁹ EPIC, ISHM: February 11 - February 25, 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); Shafaq News, Civil society activist survives an assassination attempt in Wasit, 8 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁶³⁰ EPIC, ISHM: May 6 – May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁶³¹ EPIC, ISHM: November 19 - December 3, 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); Shafaq News, Escalation of violence in Wasit Governorate, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³² ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Iraq, IRQ29121 [source: Al Mirbad], event date 12 January 2021; ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, Iraq, IRQ31100 [source: Al Mirbad], event date 10 May 2021

²⁶³³ AFP, Tribal Iraq: where petty squabbles turn lethal, 27 June 2021

²⁶³⁴ ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 - 31 October 2021, [url](#)



11 security incidents in Wassit governorate, the majority taking place in Kut district.²⁶³⁵ The evolution of all types of security events in the reference period is shown in figure 32 below.



Figure 27: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Wassit governorate 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, based on ACLED data²⁶³⁶

Illustrative examples of incidents

- In May 2021, a bomb attached to a vehicle exploded in a market in the city of Kut. No casualties were reported.²⁶³⁷
- In June 2021, six civilians were killed in Al Muwaffaqiyah sub-district before the gunman committed suicide. According to police, the attack was not terrorism-related.²⁶³⁸

²⁶³⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁶³⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Data Export Tool, 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

²⁶³⁷ EPIC, ISHM: May 6 – May 13, 2021, 13 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁶³⁸ Al-Mirbad, [url](#) [In Wasit a person killed 6 citizens and then committed suicide], 16 June 2021, [url](#)



- Around June 2021, clashes between the tribes of Al-Hassaniya and Al-Zubeid over the ownership of a duck resulted in the killing of one man in the city of Kut.²⁶³⁹
- In August 2021, unknown attackers shot at activist Qassem Issa, who sustained severe injuries.²⁶⁴⁰

2.18.5 Civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents²⁶⁴¹ and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, is shown in table 23 below.

Governorate	2020 (Aug - Dec)				2021 (Jan - Oct)			
	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties	number of incidents	individuals killed	individuals injured	total casualties
Wassit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 23: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021, Wassit governorate²⁶⁴²

2.18.6 Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to Mine Action Review's September 2021 report, the area contaminated by cluster munition remnants in Wassit was 299 143 square metres at the end of the year 2020.²⁶⁴³ As of August 2020 the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) listed the contaminated area with explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the governorate as 75 257 641 square metres and the area contaminated with landmines at 39 583 178 square metres.²⁶⁴⁴ In September 2021, an Iranian pilgrim was injured when a landmine exploded near the border town of Zurbatya.²⁶⁴⁵

2.18.7 Displacement and return

According to IOM data, as of 30 September 2021, 4 512 IDPs were registered in Wassit governorate, originating mostly from Ninewa (80 %), Kirkuk (9 %), and Diyala (5 %). Within Wassit governorate, the IDP population is largely concentrated in the districts of Kut (66 %) Al-Aziziya (10 %), and Al-Suwaira (7 %). In Wassit governorate, 336 IDPs lived in shelters classified as critical by IOM (unfinished or abandoned buildings), 330 of them in Kut district.²⁶⁴⁶ In September 2020, REACH assessed that between 60 and 80 % of IDP households in Kut

²⁶³⁹ AFP, Tribal Iraq: where petty squabbles turn lethal, 27 June 2021

²⁶⁴⁰ Shafaq News, Civil society activist survives an assassination attempt in Wasit, 8 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁴¹ The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO indicates only those related to armed conflict which had directly impacted civilians (causing civilian casualties) and properties and protected areas of civilian nature (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosques). Please refer to the section [Sources](#) of this report's [Introduction](#) for more information on UNAMI's methodology.

²⁶⁴² UNAMI, Email to EUAA, 11 November 2021

²⁶⁴³ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021 [Table], 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 59

²⁶⁴⁴ iMMAP, Recorded explosive ordnance contamination in Iraq - overall (DMA) – 27 August 2020, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁵ EPIC, ISHM: September 23 – September 30, 2021, 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁶ EUAA analysis based on IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)





district lived in severe or extreme need. Other districts of the governorate were not assessed.²⁶⁴⁷

As of 30 September 2021, IOM did not document any IDPs from Wassit governorate in other parts of the country,²⁶⁴⁸ and no returns to Wassit governorate were documented.²⁶⁴⁹

²⁶⁴⁷ REACH, Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: Key Findings for Iraq, September 2020, 2 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁶⁴⁸ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, IDP 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁹ IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Master List Datasets, Returnee 123 [Excel File], 30 September 2021, [url](#)





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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

In order to assess Article 15(c) QD: “serious and individual threat to a civilian’s life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict”, the security situation report should provide information concerning the following elements. The reference period is **1 August 2020 – 31 October 2021**.

- **General description of the security situation**
 - Overview of the conflict
 - General background of the conflict and recent developments in Iraq within the reference period
 - Political landscape – Upcoming elections
 - International involvement (US, Turkey, and Iran)
 - Recent security trends and armed confrontations
 - Geographical overview of the security situation
 - Actors (The information here should be condensed and the focus at a national level)
 - ISF
 - PMUs
 - Peshmerga
 - PKK
 - ISIL
 - Trends and nature of security incidents
 - Impact of violence on the civilian population
 - Civilian casualties
 - Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
 - Efforts of Iraqi government, international organizations or other donors to repair damage inflicted by the ISIL offensive
 - How are the priorities set in terms of location and resources?
 - IDPs and returnees (displacement due to conflict) [address the issue of IDP camps closure and forced returns, especially to Mosul – differences between voluntary and forced returns are to be highlighted]
- **Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by governorates**
 - Anbar (the structure below should be applied to all other governorates)
 - General description (map, districts, population, ethno-religious composition, focus on city)
 - Conflict background - reference to previous report
 - Presence and control of different actors



- Recent security trends (include information on particularly affected / not affected districts, where available): figures and illustrative examples of incidents
- Civilian casualties figures
- Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war: the overall impact of conflict on infrastructure – Brief description of reconstruction efforts – **Road security**
- Displacement and return
 - Babil
 - Baghdad
 - Diyala
 - Kirkuk
 - Ninewa
 - Salah Al-Din
 - Dohuk
 - Erbil
 - Sulaymaniyah
 - Basrah
 - Kerbala
 - Missan
 - Muthana
 - Najaf
 - Qadissiya
 - Thi-Qar
 - Wassit



doi: 10.2847/65727



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