



# EASO

## Iraq

# Security situation

*Country of Origin Information Report*

October 2020



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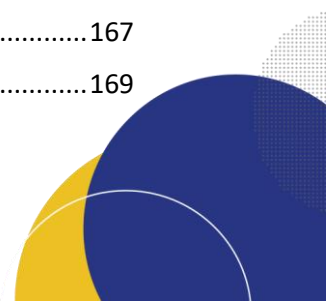
All parts of this report have been reviewed by at least one reviewer. ARC, who acted as co-drafter and as reviewer, reviewed parts drafted by other co-drafters.

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 EASO.

# Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Contents.....	4
Disclaimer.....	8
Glossary and Abbreviations .....	8
Introduction .....	11
Methodology .....	11
Sources .....	11
Structure and use of the report.....	12
Map .....	13
1. General description of the security situation in Iraq .....	14
1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Iraq.....	14
1.1.1 Conflict with ISIL.....	14
1.1.2 Internal tensions .....	16
1.1.3 Turkish and Iranian incursions .....	18
1.1.4 Conflict in Iraq between Iran and the US.....	19
1.2 Armed actors .....	20
1.2.1 The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) .....	20
1.2.2 Kurdistan Regional Government forces (Peshmerga) .....	20
1.2.3 Forces supporting the Iraqi government (Popular Mobilization Units – PMU – Hashd al-Shai’bi).....	20
1.2.4 US-led Coalition forces .....	24
1.2.5 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).....	24
1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations.....	30
1.3.1 Geographical overview of the security situation .....	30
1.3.2 Nature of the security incidents.....	32
1.4 State ability to secure law and order.....	37
1.4.1 Road security.....	38
1.5 Impact of the violence on the civilian population .....	39
1.5.1 Civilian casualties .....	39
1.5.2 Infrastructural damage and explosive remnants of war .....	42
1.5.3 Displacement and return .....	42
2. Northwestern and central governorates: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din .....	44

2.1 Anbar .....	45
2.1.1 General description of the governorate.....	45
2.1.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	47
2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	52
2.2 Babil .....	61
2.2.1 General description of the governorate.....	61
2.2.2 Conflict background and armed actors .....	62
2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	63
2.3 Baghdad.....	68
2.3.1 General description of the governorate.....	68
2.3.2 Conflict background and armed actors .....	70
2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	75
2.4 Diyala .....	84
2.4.1 General description of the governorate.....	84
2.4.2 Conflict background and armed actors .....	86
2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	91
2.5 Kirkuk .....	103
2.5.1 General description of the governorate.....	103
2.5.2 Conflict background and armed actors .....	104
2.5.3 Recent security trends and the impact on the civilian population .....	108
2.6 Ninewa.....	118
2.6.1 General description of the governorate.....	118
2.6.2 Background conflict dynamics and armed actors .....	120
2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	127
2.7 Salah al-Din .....	138
2.7.1 General description of the governorate.....	138
2.7.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	141
2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	146
3. Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah) .....	154
3.1 Dohuk.....	156
3.1.1 General description of the governorate.....	156
3.1.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	157
3.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	160
3.2 Erbil.....	167
3.2.1 General description of the governorate.....	167
3.2.2 Conflict background and armed actors .....	169



3.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	171
3.3 Sulaymaniyah.....	180
3.3.1 General description of the governorate.....	180
3.3.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	182
3.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	185
4. The southern governorates (Basrah, Kerbala, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar, Wassit) .....	193
4.1 Basrah .....	194
4.1.1 General description of the governorate.....	194
4.1.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	195
4.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	197
4.2. Kerbala.....	202
4.2.1 General description of the governorate.....	202
4.2.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	203
4.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	204
4.3 Missan.....	209
4.3.1 General description of the governorate.....	209
4.3.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	210
4.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	211
4.4 Muthanna .....	215
4.4.1 General description of the governorate.....	215
4.4.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	216
4.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	217
4.5 Najaf.....	220
4.5.1 General description of the governorate.....	220
4.5.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	221
4.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	222
4.6 Qadissiya.....	226
4.6.1 General description of the governorate.....	226
4.6.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	227
4.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	229
4.7 Thi-Qar .....	233
4.7.1 General description of the governorate.....	233
4.7.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	234
4.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	235
4.8 Wassit .....	240

4.8.1 General description of the governorate.....	240
4.8.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate .....	241
4.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .....	242
Annex 1: Bibliography .....	246
Annex 2: Terms of Reference.....	323



## Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019).<sup>1</sup> 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 EASO 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 31 July 2020. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 14 September 2020. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).

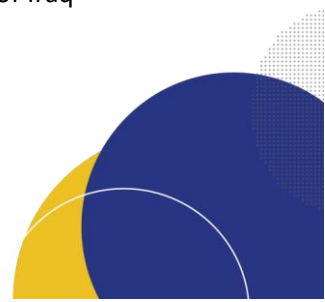
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<sup>1</sup> The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: [url](#).



## Glossary and Abbreviations

AAI	<i>Ansar Al-Islam</i> , meaning ‘supporters of Islam’; Al Qaeda/ISIL affiliate group
AAH	Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (The League of the Righteous);
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. A provider of datasets on conflict incidents
AK	Assault rifle, type “Avtomat Kalashnikova”
<i>al-Hashd al-Asha’iri</i>	Sunni tribal militia units composed mainly of Sunni tribes; some affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Units
<i>al-Hashd al Shaabi</i>	Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)
<i>Asayish</i>	Intelligence services of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Babil/Babylon	Babil is sometimes spelled Babel, Babylon, Babil
Badr Organization	Iranian-backed Shia militia that is part of the Popular Mobilization Units, one of the biggest of the PMUs
CJTF-OIR	Coalition Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve; the international military coalition fighting ISIL
CTS	Counter-Terrorism Service; also called ISOF (Iraqi Special Operations Forces); elite-trained special forces.
Daesh	Arabic abbreviation for ISIL, <i>ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi ‘l-‘Iraq wa-sh-Sham</i>
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency
Dohuk	Dohuk is sometimes spelled Dahuk
EPIC/ISHM	Education for Peace in Iraq Center / Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor
FP	Federal Police
Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani	The highest Shia cleric in Iraq
IA	Iraqi Army
IBC	Iraq Body Count
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IRGC	Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
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
KDP	Kurdish 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	Kataib Hezbollah (Battalions of the Party of God); Iranian-backed Shia militia that is part of the Popular Mobilization Units.
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
<i>Mukhtar</i>	Local community leader
PAK	Kurdistan Freedom Party – in Kurdish <i>Partiya Azadiya Kurdistanê</i> , an Iranian Kurdish opposition group operating from Iraq
Peshmerga	Military forces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
PJAK	Kurdistan Free Life Party – in Kurdish <i>Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê</i> , 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 <sup>2</sup> , as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey <sup>3</sup> , the United States <sup>4</sup> , and Australia. <sup>5</sup>
PMC	Popular Mobilisation Committee
PMF or PMU	Popular Mobilization Forces or Popular Mobilization Units, also called <i>al-Hashd al-Shaabi</i> in Arabic.
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RULAC	Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Project
SVEST	Suicide vest
SVIED	Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
Thi-Qar	Thi-Qar is sometimes spelled Dhi Qar
US	United States
USDOD	US Department of Defense
USDOS	US Department of State
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
YBS	Sinjar Resistance Unit; Yezidi militia considered part of the PKK

<sup>2</sup> 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](#)

<sup>3</sup> Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> US, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Listed terrorist organisations, n.d., [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

# Introduction

This report was drafted by Country of Origin Information (COI) specialists from COI units listed under the Acknowledgements section, together with the EASO COI sector.

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 EASO's country guidance development on Iraq.

## Methodology

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)<sup>6</sup> and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).<sup>7</sup>

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 EASO based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EASO COI specialist network on Iraq and from policy experts in EU+ countries<sup>8</sup> within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Iraq. The ToR can be found in [Annex 2](#) of this report.

This report is an update of the EASO COI report on Iraq, security situation, published in March 2019. The information is a result of desk research of public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 31 July 2020. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 14 September 2020.

## Sources

The two main sources on civilian casualties and civilians killed in Iraq used in this report are the UN Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the organisation Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).

For data on violent incidents, publicly available curated datasets from ACLED have been used. ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on crisis and conflict in Africa, south and south-east Asia and Middle East and provides datasets on conflict incidents. ACLED collects data on violent incidents in Iraq, coding each incident with the time and place, type of violent incident, the parties involved and the number of fatalities. The information is collected in a database that is openly accessible, searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as media reports.

Security incident numbers and associated graphs/maps at country and governorate level are based on a publicly available ACLED curated dataset for Middle East (updated until 31 July 2020). Additional sources have been researched to the extent possible to corroborate the ACLED findings.

UNAMI figures/data on casualties (killed and injured) were received from UNAMI- HRO (Human rights Office) upon request. UNAMI no longer provides publicly available casualty figures for Iraq. The number of incidents provided by UNAMI-HRO were only those armed conflict-related incidents, which had directly impacted on civilians (causing civilian casualties) and on the civilian nature of property

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<sup>6</sup> EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland



and protected areas (such as, civilian houses, cropland, schools, health facilities and mosque).<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

## Structure and use of the report

The report is divided in two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the general security situation in Iraq by providing first 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. A general overview of the current security situation in the reference period, as it relates to the nature of the violence and civilian impacts then follows.

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, 2019-2020 security trends, including information on civilian deaths, security incidents and trends, armed confrontations (etc.), and information on displacement and return, and civilian infrastructure impacted such as road security. It was decided to make a single chapter for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and for eight southern governorates.

For organisational purposes only, this report groups together several governorates under three chapters:

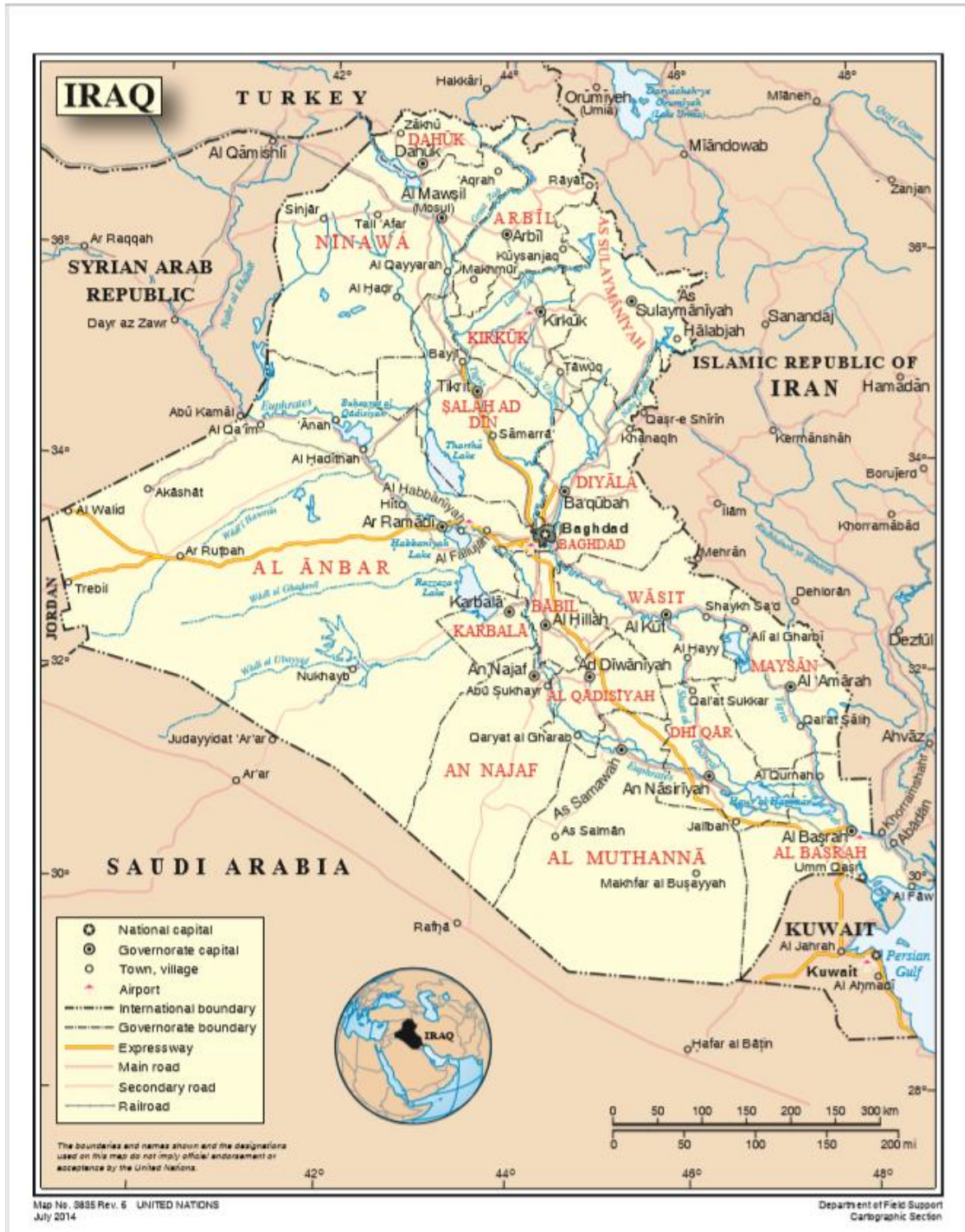
- The northwestern and central governorates: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din),
- Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah),
- The southern governorates (Basrah, Kerbala, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar and Wassit).

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<sup>9</sup> UNAMI, email to EASO, 31 August 2020

<sup>10</sup> UNAMI, email to EASO, 24 August 2020

# Map



Map 1: Iraq, © United Nations.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, Iraq, Map No. 3835 Rev.6, July 2014, [url](#)

# 1. General description of the security situation in Iraq

## 1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Iraq

### 1.1.1 Conflict with ISIL

The Iraqi government, supported by Kurdish Peshmerga forces and various militia groups is involved in a non-international armed conflict against the Islamic State group (ISIL) and associated groups, according to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Project (RULAC). The government is also supported by an international coalition led by the United States (US), which has been carrying out air strikes against ISIL.<sup>12</sup> The air strikes continued through the second quarter of 2020.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of 2017, ISIL had become militarily defeated.<sup>14</sup> During the ensuing period, signs that ISIL has begun to recover have been reported.<sup>15</sup> When the last remnants of ISIL's caliphate in Syria collapsed in 2019<sup>16</sup>, ISIL relocated key people and equipment to Iraq on a large scale, Iraq security experts Michael Knights and Alex Almeida noted. Following a steep decline in ISIL attacks in Iraq in 2018, attacks continued to drop in the beginning of 2019. Then, from the second half of 2019 into 2020, the activity started to grow again, showing a 'strong and steady' resurgence. Attacks nearly doubled from the beginning of 2019 to the beginning of 2020. Knights and Almeida assessed that the group was under way of re-establishing itself in its traditional strongholds in the rural central parts of Iraq.<sup>17</sup> Husham al-Hashimi stated that terrorist incidents and violence had spread in areas near cities retaken from ISIL in the northern and eastern parts of the country during the first half of 2020.<sup>18</sup>

In the winter of 2020, the US Department of Defense (USDOD) reported that ISIL continued to be regrouping, expecting it to be seeking to re-establish territorial governance in northern and western Iraq. USDOD still considered ISIL to be unable to gain control over the local population there.<sup>19</sup>

ISIL has in no large measure returned to its former practices of carrying out urban mass attacks. Nor has it taken back any territorial control, but in all the areas which it previously held, ISIL has shifted back to former insurgency tactics, Knights and Almeida observed. At the same time, as the United States is drawing down its force commitment in Iraq it has become engaged in exchanges of strikes and counter strikes with Iran-backed Iraqi militias. These developments have disrupted Coalition support to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), and the ISF has been left with less capacity to contain ISIL. Benefitting from this, ISIL is accelerating its recovery.<sup>20</sup> Further straining ISF capacity, these forces have

<sup>12</sup> RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 16 January 2020], 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](#)

<sup>13</sup> US, USDOD, Press release 20 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her mission to Iraq, 14 to 23 November 2017 (A/HRC/38/44/Add.1), 5 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; US, USCIRF, Annual Report 2018 – Iraq, April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>15</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>16</sup> Al-Jazeera, ISIL defeated in final Syria victory: SDF, 23 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 14, 25

<sup>18</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: "Smoking the Fox out of its Den" Strategy, July 14, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve Report to the United States Congress, January, 1 – March 31, 1 May 2020, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>20</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

to some measure been redeployed to larger cities to enforce measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus, and to focus on controlling the public protests.<sup>21</sup>

In late 2019, the Iraqi government placed restrictions on Coalition air movement. These measures were introduced after air strikes suspected to have been conducted by Israeli warplanes, had been carried out against Iran-backed militia groups in Iraq.<sup>22</sup> The restrictions were eased shortly after.<sup>23</sup>

In July 2020, USDOD announced that the coalition forces would be transformed from combat forces into an advisory group, whose role will be to advise Iraqi security staff and leaders.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 1 shows the proportion of the Coalition's engagement with ISIL, Iran and Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU) militias, and with other armed actors between January 2019 and June 2020.

## US/Coalition Activity in Iraq

Battles & Explosions/Remote Violence, Jan 2019 – Jun 2020

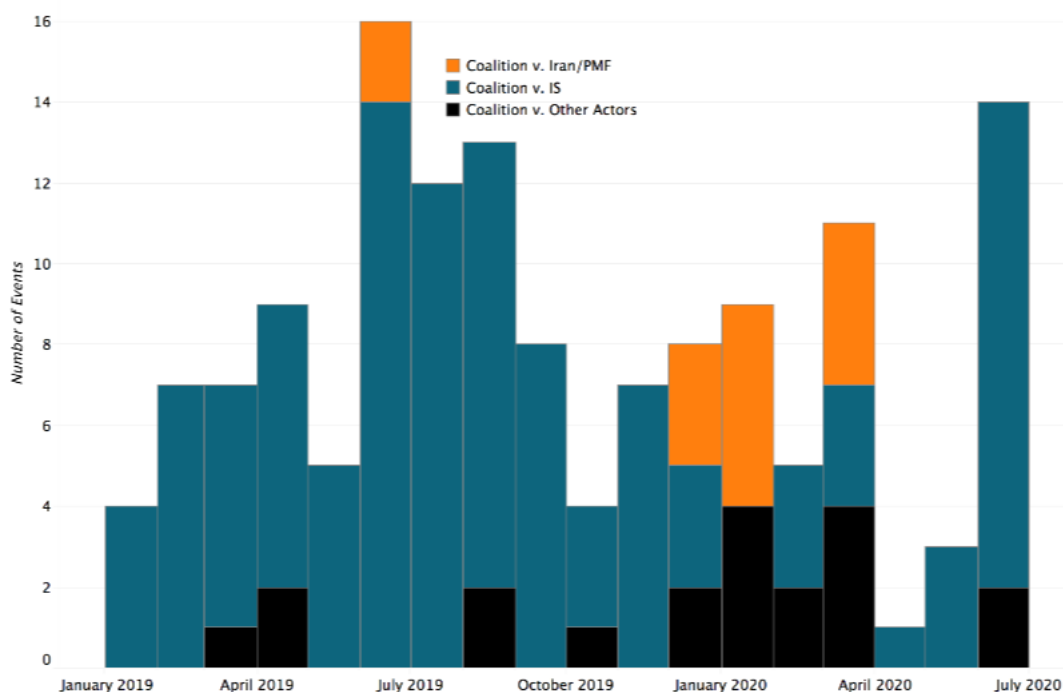


Figure 1: US/Coalition activity in Iraq, January 2019 – June 2020 © 2018 ACLED<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 19; Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>22</sup> Military Times, How Israel airstrikes targeting Iranian militias in Iraq hurt the US-led anti-ISIS mission, 20 November 2019, [url](#). Military Times is an independent source for news and information aiming to reach US military personnel.

<sup>23</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>24</sup> US, USDOD, Coalition Task Force-Iraq transitions to Military Advisor Group, 4 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> Pavlik, M. et al., A sudden surfacing of strength: evaluating the possibilities for a resurgence of IS in Syria and Iraq, 24 July 2020, Figure 7, [url](#) © 2020 ACLED

## 1.1.2 Internal tensions

There may be signs that the sectarian conflict lines dating back to 2003 have increasingly become challenged by the emergence of new conflict lines.<sup>26</sup> Experts point out that the public protest movement that has been growing in recent years, is non-sectarian in its nature and aims to have the established political elite as well as the current political order replaced.<sup>27</sup> The public protests have played out mainly in the south and in Baghdad. They have been driven by frustration over corruption, poor public services, and lack of jobs. The government has been facing a widespread lack of public trust.<sup>28</sup>

In October 2019, the public protests escalated sharply and were violently cracked down on by security forces. Between then and January 2020, over 600 civilian protesters and activists were killed. Intimidation, arrests and torture of protesters followed.<sup>29</sup>

The protests forced Prime Minister Adel Abdul al-Mahdi to step down in November 2019.<sup>30</sup> At that point Iraq was unable to form a new government. Until April 2020, three successive candidates to the premiership failed to get approval.<sup>31</sup> After five months without a functioning government, Mustafa al Kadhimi was approved by the parliament as Prime Minister in May 2020.<sup>32</sup>

In December 2019, a new electoral law was passed. It replaced proportional representation between sects and ethnic groups with an individual candidacy system. The intention was to accommodate the protest movement's demands for an overhaul of Iraq's political system.<sup>33</sup>

As the coronavirus pandemic hit in the winter/spring of 2020, protests largely closed down for some months, but resumed in May 2020 in various cities.<sup>34</sup> Further protests were reported in southern cities and Baghdad in June and July 2020.<sup>35</sup> Figure 2 below shows how the protests spiked at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Hasan, H., Iraq protests: A new social movement is challenging sectarian power, Middle East Eye, 4 November 2019, [url](#). Harith Hasan is a Senior Scholar at Carnegie Middle East Center and a SFM Fellow at the Central European University.

<sup>27</sup> Hasan, H., Iraq protests: A new social movement is challenging sectarian power, Middle East Eye, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Dodge, T. et al, Sectarianism in the Longue Duree, 24 November 2019, [url](#); SEPAD – Sectarianism, Proxies and De-sectarianisation; Halawa, H., Iraq's protests: durability and sustainability, Middle East Institute, 31 January 2020, [url](#). Toby Dodge is professor at the London School of Economics.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Jazeera, Oil price crash compounds problems facing Iraq's new government, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Al, Iraq: Protest death toll surges as security forces resume brutal repression, 23 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> BBC News, Iraq Profile: timeline, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January, 1 – March, 31, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>32</sup> New York Times (The), Iraq Chooses New Prime Minister, an Ex-Intelligence Chief Backed by US, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> Al-Jazeera, Iraq parliament approves new electoral law as deadlock persists, 24 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Middle East Eye, "Today is a message": Anti-government protests resume in Iraq, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Middle East Eye, Coronavirus fears leave Iraq's anti-government protesters divided, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Garda World, Iraq: Anti-government protests reported nationwide June 7 /update 128, 7 June 2020, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Iraq: At least two killed in renewed anti-government protests, 27 July 2020, [url](#)



# Demonstration Activity in Iraq

Protests & Violent Demonstrations, Jan 2016 – Jun 2020

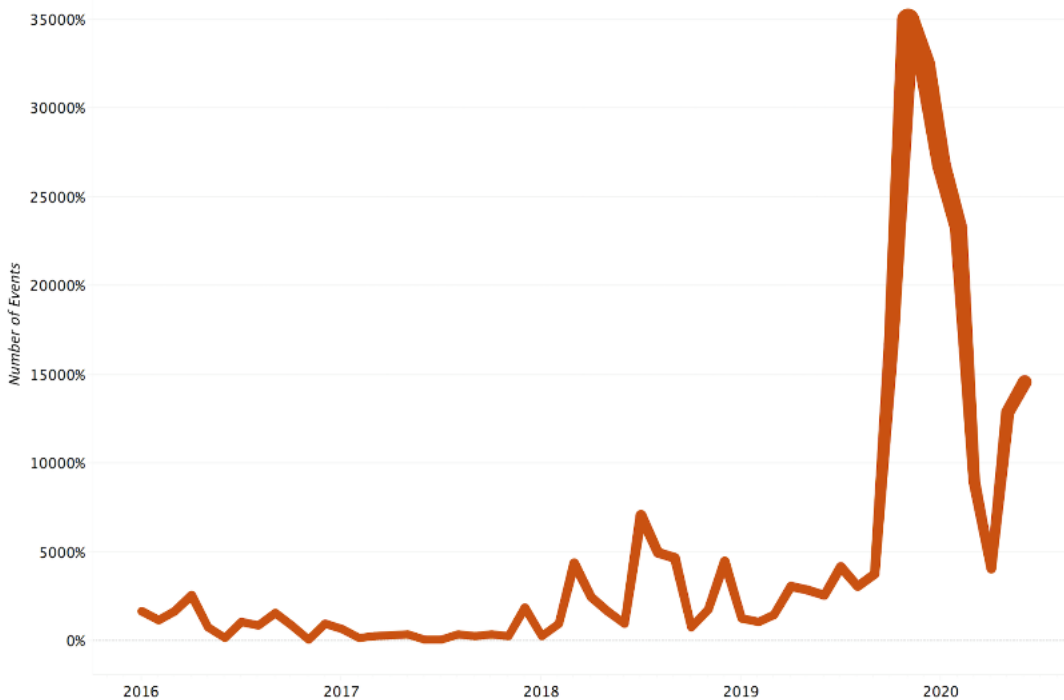


Figure 2: Protests and violent demonstrations, January 2016 – June 2020 © 2018 ACLED.<sup>36</sup>

Falling global oil prices caused Iraq's oil revenue to decline by close to 42 % from 2019 to 2020, a setback with 'dire' implications for Iraq's economy. The reduced oil income impacted GDP by 35 %.<sup>37</sup> Oil accounts for 67 % of Iraq's economy, and the government's budgets are 90 % funded by income from Iraq's oil. The World Bank was cited that Iraq's economy could contract by 9.7 % in 2020.<sup>38</sup> Also the KRI's economy remained fragile in 2020.<sup>39</sup> As it had recovered from a sharp downturn in 2014 and was growing, it again became hit hard by the drop in oil prices. As the revenue dropped by half in 2020, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) became unable to fulfil its obligations under the revenue sharing agreement with the central government in Baghdad closed the preceding year. The budget transfers from Baghdad became frozen<sup>40</sup>, but an agreement was reached later.<sup>41</sup>

Relations between Baghdad and the KRI remained complicated. Even though the Kurdish Region is a constitutionally recognised part of Iraq, the KRG must constantly negotiate with the central

<sup>36</sup> Pavlik, M. et al., A sudden surfacing of strength: evaluating the possibilities for a resurgence of IS in Syria and Iraq, 24 July 2020, Figure 7, [url](#) © 2020 ACLED

<sup>37</sup> Hirmis, A. K., Will crashing oil prices mean the collapse of Iraq's economy? No. Will the Iraqi economy (and people) suffer? Yes, a great deal..., Iraq Business News, 4 May 2020, [url](#), p. 1. Hirmis is Principal at the UK based consultancy Capital Business Strategies Ltd.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Jazeera, Oil price crash compounds problems facing Iraq's new government, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> Saeed, Y., Without Diversifying its Rentier Economy, Pessimism Among Kurdish Youth Will Increase, 25 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Aziz, B., Emerging Risks and Reforms: The KRG's Challenges in Building a Post-Coronavirus Economy, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> Berdikееva, S., Relations between Erbil and Baghdad to be tested by regional tensions, 20 January 2020, [url](#)

government in various aspects of governance, such as budget and a share in government.<sup>42</sup> The two governments have so far not created a joint security system.<sup>43</sup>

In the KRI itself, the traditional balance of power between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the two dominating political parties has shifted from 'dominant' to 'hegemonic' in favour of the KDP, Sardar Aziz noted. The PUK has remained internally divided, and become contested by the KDP in zones of former PUK dominance.<sup>44</sup> In February 2019, Gorran, an opposition party, signed an agreement with the KDP that admitted it into the regional government then being formed.<sup>45</sup> Later in the spring the KDP signed a similar agreement with the PUK.<sup>46</sup>

In Sunni areas in central and northern Iraq where the fighting against ISIL took place, public anger is widespread. Little recovery from the destruction has been seen in these areas.<sup>47</sup>

### 1.1.3 Turkish and Iranian incursions

There is an ongoing international armed conflict between Iraq and Turkey, according to RULAC.<sup>48</sup> Turkish air strikes are taking place in northern Iraq without the consent of the Iraqi government.<sup>49</sup> The air strikes are an extension of an internal conflict in Turkey between Turkish armed and security forces and the opposition group PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), targeting PKK fighters in Iraq.<sup>50</sup> The PKK is on the European Union's list of designated groups which have been involved in terrorism<sup>51</sup>, as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey<sup>52</sup>, the United States<sup>53</sup>, and Australia.<sup>54</sup>

On 14 June 2020, Turkey targeted suspected PKK in the Qandil mountains near the Iranian-Turkish border, and also further into Iraq at locations such as Sinjar and Makhmour districts. Civilian casualties were reported in some locations.<sup>55</sup> Turkish ground forces were deployed to Haftanin in Dohuk governorate.<sup>56</sup> Between 14 and 16 June 2020, Turkey launched joint air and ground operations against Kurdish militants across the border in northern Iraq, targeting suspected PKK positions at an 'unprecedented scale and scope'.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Aziz, S., Sooner Rather Than Later: The Demand for Decentralization in Iraqi Kurdistan, 2 June 2020, [url](#). Sardar Aziz is a senior adviser in the Kurdish parliament as well as a researcher and writer.

<sup>43</sup> Berdikeeva, S., Relations between Erbil and Baghdad to be tested by regional tensions, 20 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> Aziz, S., Sooner Rather Than Later: The Demand for Decentralization in Iraqi Kurdistan, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> Kurdistan 24, KDP, Gorran ink deal on gov. formation as PUK boycotts return to Parliament, 18 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Rudaw, KDP strikes new government deals with Gorran and PUK, 5 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> Cordesman, A., Strategic Dialogue: Shaping a US Strategy for the "Ghosts" of Iraq, Working Draft: 3<sup>rd</sup> Major Revision, CSIS, 26 May 2020, [url](#), p. 21. Anthony Cordesman is an analyst and Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic International Studies, Washington DC.

<sup>48</sup> RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [Last updated: 8 June 2020], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>49</sup> Al-Monitor, Turkey continues bombing Iraqi Kurdistan amid Iraq's strong objection, 2 July 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Turkey says it hit more than 500 PKK targets in northern Iraq, 18 June 2020, [url](#); RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [last updated: 8 June 2020], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq [last updated: 8 June 2020], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> 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](#)

<sup>52</sup> Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> US, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Listed terrorist organisations, n.d., [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> Middle East Eye, Fear and anger greets Turkish air strikes in northern Iraq, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> Al-Jazeera, Turkey sends special forces into northern Iraq, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> 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. 33; Guardian (The), Turkey launches major attack on Kurdish militants in Iraq, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

Also, in June 2020, Iranian artillery was reported to have fired at PKK positions in the Hajji Omaran border district, damaging property in villages.<sup>58</sup>

### 1.1.4 Conflict in Iraq between Iran and the US

A conflict between Iran and the US has developed on Iraqi territory, with exchanges of missile strikes taking place.<sup>59</sup> The USDOD stated in 2020 that Iran was funding, training, and directing Shia militia groups in Iraq to wage what it termed ‘a proxy war’ against the US.<sup>60</sup> Tensions between the US and Iran over Iraq rose through the reference period.<sup>61</sup> Sources considered the tensions to be harming the US-Iraqi security relationship.<sup>62</sup>

On the last day of 2019, members and supporters of Iran-aligned militias demonstrated outside the US Embassy compound in Baghdad, attacked it and set fire to the reception area.<sup>63</sup> At the start of 2020, a US drone attacked and killed Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and leader of the Iraqi Kataib Hezbollah militia Abu Maida al-Muhandis in a strike near Baghdad International Airport.<sup>64</sup> Some days later, Iran retaliated by launching missiles at two Iraqi military bases housing US forces.<sup>65</sup> In a non-binding vote in response to the US attack on Soleimani and al-Muhandis, the Iraqi parliament voted shortly after to evict US and Coalition forces from the country. The vote was non-binding.<sup>66</sup> The decision was not ratified.<sup>67</sup>

US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper stated that the US would not withdraw from Iraq.<sup>68</sup> The USDOD Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) stated that the US forces ‘paused’ their anti-ISIL operations, shifting focus to protecting its own forces against escalating attacks by Iraqi militias backed by Iran. In the same report, the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) and Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) were cited as identifying Iran’s main objective as to disrupt and harass US forces to pressure the US to leave Iraq.<sup>69</sup>

Further into the first quarter of 2020, the US froze the movement of all its troops overseas, including Iraq, for 60 days due the coronavirus pandemic. Several Coalition members temporarily withdrew some of their forces to their home countries.<sup>70</sup> In the second quarter of 2020, US forces began to restart their support to the ISF.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Rudaw, Turkish airstrikes, Iranian artillery simultaneously pound Kurdistan Region border area, 16 June 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Iranian artillery bombs border areas within Kurdistan Region: source, 16 June 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Iran shells Kurdistan Region for second day in row, forcing locals to flee, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> Felbab-Brown, V., Stuck in the middle: Iraq and the enduring conflict between United States and Iran, 29 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>61</sup> Katulis, B., & Juell, P., Putting Diplomacy First, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January, 1 – March, 31, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 14; Katulis, B., & Juell, P., Putting Diplomacy First, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> AP, Protesters attack US Embassy in Baghdad after airstrikes, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>64</sup> BBC, Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>65</sup> NBC News, Iran retaliates for Gen. Soleimani's killing by firing missiles at US forces in Iraq, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>66</sup> DW, Iraqi parliament votes to expel US troops — awaits government approval, 5 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>67</sup> The National, Rocket hits Baghdad airport in latest attack on US forces, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>68</sup> Voice of America, Esper: US Forces not Withdrawing from Iraq, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 23-24

<sup>70</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>71</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, p. 14; New York Times (The), US Military Resumes Joint Operations With Iraq, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

Protection of US personnel in Iraq became reinforced during 2020, as the threat from Iran-backed militias in Iraq was seen to continue.<sup>72</sup> On various occasions during 2020, the US has responded with air strikes on Iran-backed militias.<sup>73</sup> USDOD reported a higher frequency and lethality of the violent confrontations between Iran-backed and US forces during the second quarter of 2020 than in the preceding quarter.<sup>74</sup> According to Iranian analyst Abas Aslani, long-term Iranian regional policies continue uninterrupted by the assassination of Soleimani. Iran will not be inclined to avoid frictions with, or to become forced into negotiations with the US under unfavourable terms.<sup>75</sup> The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) noted that under Soleimani's leadership, escalation and de-escalation of attacks carried out by the Iran-backed militias was closely calibrated to fit with Iran's regional strategy. Tangible objectives such as obtaining relief of the sanctions and pressing the US out of Iraq and the Middle East were being pursued also by these means.<sup>76</sup>

At the regional level, tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia escalated during 2019, Baynafsheh Keynoush, writing for the Atlantic Council observed, pointing to the two countries as competing for spheres of influence in Iraq. Iraq and other countries have sought to mediate between the US and Iran, and between US ally Saudi Arabia and Iran.<sup>77</sup>

Information about the security actors and on dimension of these conflicts is described in further sections of this report, as well in the governorate-level chapters.

## 1.2 Armed actors

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 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 \(2018\)](#).

### 1.2.1 The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

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

### 1.2.2 Kurdistan Regional Government forces (Peshmerga)

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

### 1.2.3 Forces supporting the Iraqi government (Popular Mobilization Units – PMU – Hashd al-Shai'bi)

Renad Mansour et al. term the PMU a 'hybrid actor' that are neither state actors, non-state actors nor purely foreign proxies. They sometimes operate in concert with the state, sometimes they compete with it. While depending on sponsorship both by host state and foreign backers, they are at the same time in a position flexible enough to enable them to keep their own military capability and generate

<sup>72</sup> Times of Israel, US moves missile defense systems to Iraq after attacks by Iran-backed insurgents, 11 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> BBC, Iraq base attack: US in retaliatory strikes on Iran-backed fighters, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January, 1 – March, 31, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>75</sup> Tehran Times, Iran after Soleimani, 16 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> ISW, Iran's proxies accelerate Soleimani's campaign to compel U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> Keynoush, B., Why mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran keeps failing, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

their own revenue.<sup>78</sup> According to Knights et al, the PMU have no defined core competencies, functions, roles, or missions. Lacking such, the PMU were claiming various roles and missions, such as protecting ISIL-threatened communities, or playing a role in the public sphere by engaging in civic activities. The authors further stated that many Iraqi Shia political leaders were viewing the PMU as committed to protecting the political order that developed in Iraq from 2003.<sup>79</sup>

In 2020, the authors estimated the actual number of PMU (Hashd) fighters, spread over a variety of militias that includes Shia militias, Sunni and other minority-based armed forces in Iraq, at 159 000. Of these 24 000 were unregistered, serving without regular pay or contracts. The PMU are composed of 66 predominantly Shia sub-units, 43 Sunni tribal forces, and ‘a dozen ethnically based minority units’. 121 sub-units were identified as PMU formations, with registered PMU personnel. Many of the tribal forces and Baghdad-based auxiliary units were not recognised by the PMU Commission, the central leadership body of the PMU.<sup>80</sup>

### Integrity of PMU

In an order issued by the prime minister on 1 July 2019 intended to strengthen state control over the PMUs, all registered PMU units including the Sunni tribal units were set to become integrated into the same organisational structure. All registered units were then to respond to the same military code of conduct.<sup>81</sup>

In its 2019 annual report on Iraq, AI reported that anyone criticising the conduct of security forces including units of PMU, could become targeted by them, as they were running an ‘intimidation campaign’ against protesters, activists, lawyers representing protesters, medics giving treatment to protesters, and journalists covering the protests. AI pointed at PMU forces using excessive force against protester, having killed up to 500 during the protests. Also, ‘thousands’ of men and boys were reported as having disappeared at the hands of PMU and other security forces when fleeing ISIL-held areas.<sup>82</sup>

Analyst Seth Frantzman, writing for Foreign Policy, remarked in June 2020 that local militia groups’ power remained to be curtailed by the government, which was still lacking a formal hierarchy to organize them under state authority.<sup>83</sup> In response to the killing of a protester during an anti-government demonstration, ISF raided an office in Basra in May 2020 belonging to Thaar Allah, an Iran-backed militia, and arrested five militia members in a move mentioned as ‘rare’.<sup>84</sup>

Sources reported about PMU engaging in illicit economic activities such as extortion, levying fees, fraud and theft.<sup>85</sup> By levying fees at their checkpoints, PMU militias generate significant illicit income, the risk analysis group Global Risk Insights noted. Strong militias, supported by state forces and police as well as Sunni tribal militias, generate a ‘vital’ source of income by taxing oil and other commodities transports on road. The complicity of state actors in such activities has created a system of mutual

<sup>78</sup> Mansour, R. et al., These Iraqi militias are attacking protesters and getting away with it. Here’s why, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>79</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 137-139

<sup>80</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 61, 125

<sup>81</sup> Iraq, Prime Minister’s media office, Diwani Order No. 237 1 July 2019, [Twitter @IraqiPMO], 1 July 2019, [url](#); Rudolf, I., The Sunnis of Iraq’s “Shia” Paramilitary Powerhouse, 13 February 2020, [url](#); Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>82</sup> AI, Iraq 2019, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> Frantzman, S., Iraq’s New Prime Minister Needs to Take Control of His Security Forces, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> RFE/RL, Iraq Targets Iran-Aligned Militia Over Shooting Death Of Protester, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14; Smyth, P., Making sense of Iraq’s PMF arrests, 26 April 2019, [url](#); Al-Arabiya, Secret documents may be reason behind Iraqi activist al-Hashimi’s assassination, 20 August 2020, [url](#); Al-Arabiya, Unpublished work by slain Iraqi activist al-Hashimi shows PMU’s corruption in Nineveh, 21 July 2020, [url](#); Global Risks Insight, Iraq: The political economy of corruption, 8 December 2019, [url](#)

economic and political benefits for state and the state-affiliated actors, the latter gaining from the patronage links to the state that thus have become established.<sup>86</sup>

PMU militias were also reported as having engaged in providing social and medical services to local populations. The PMU Medical Department coordinated with the Iraqi Health Ministry in a government-run campaign to contain the spread of the coronavirus, contributing with advocacy, sanitation and medical assistance.<sup>87</sup>

### Shia PMU forces

These forces have a separate chain of command than the state armed forces. This enables the Shia PMU to decide themselves whether they will implement orders issued by the Prime Minister, or by the ISF, or whether to take a different approach. They do not respond to the Prime Minister, but coordinate many activities with the ISF.<sup>88</sup> Parts of some of these are incorporated into PMUs that are on the government's payroll.<sup>89</sup> In April 2020, the ISW reported about an apparently new Shia militia group, Usbat al-Thairen, likely to be under direct control of the large Iran-backed militia Kataib Hezbollah. Referring to its pattern of activity and its capacities, the ISW assumed that the launch of this new group might have indicated the start of a new phase of Iran-supported, increasingly lethal militia attacks against US forces.<sup>90</sup>

In June and July 2019, the Iraqi government began to issue pronouncements about reforms intended to strengthen state control over the PMU that Knights and Almeida considered 'significant'. The backdrop was escalating US-Iranian tensions, and drones having been launched into Saudi Arabia from PMU sites in Iraq.<sup>91</sup>

In September 2019, the PMU was formally placed under the Joint Operational Command, adding it as a 'security agency' in the command. All these agencies were under the operational command of the Prime Minister or his alternate, a general. Knights et al. stated early in 2020 that the provisions had not been implemented.<sup>92</sup> In April 2020, the government announced that four PMU militias tasked with protecting the holy shrines, would be placed directly under the Prime Minister's Office. Reporting about this move, analyst Shelly Kittleson commented it as an attempt to weaken Iranian and Iran-linked Kataib Hezbollah's influence over them.<sup>93</sup> In June 2020, the head of the PMU ordered the force to adopt unmet reforms.<sup>94</sup> Further information about the implementation of the reforms has not been found.

Experts explain that the PMU enjoy direct support both by a Shia public and a Shia political class, and they are supported by external actors. By providing security and services, PMUs build and maintain their own constituencies. The PMU have thus become 'a formidable security actor', according to Knights et al. state, even if they lack the training, equipment and international partnership available to the state forces, and have a weaker funding.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Global Risks Insight, Iraq: The political economy of corruption, 8 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> Wall Street Journal (The), Iran-backed Groups in Lebanon and Iraq Seek Public Support in Coronavirus Fight, 27 April 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iraq's PMU throw weight behind countering COVID-19, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>89</sup> Foreign Policy, A Powerful Iran-backed Militia is losing Influence in Iraq, 11 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>90</sup> ISW, Iran's proxies accelerate Soleimani's campaign to compel US withdrawal from Iraq, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 14-15

<sup>92</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. ix

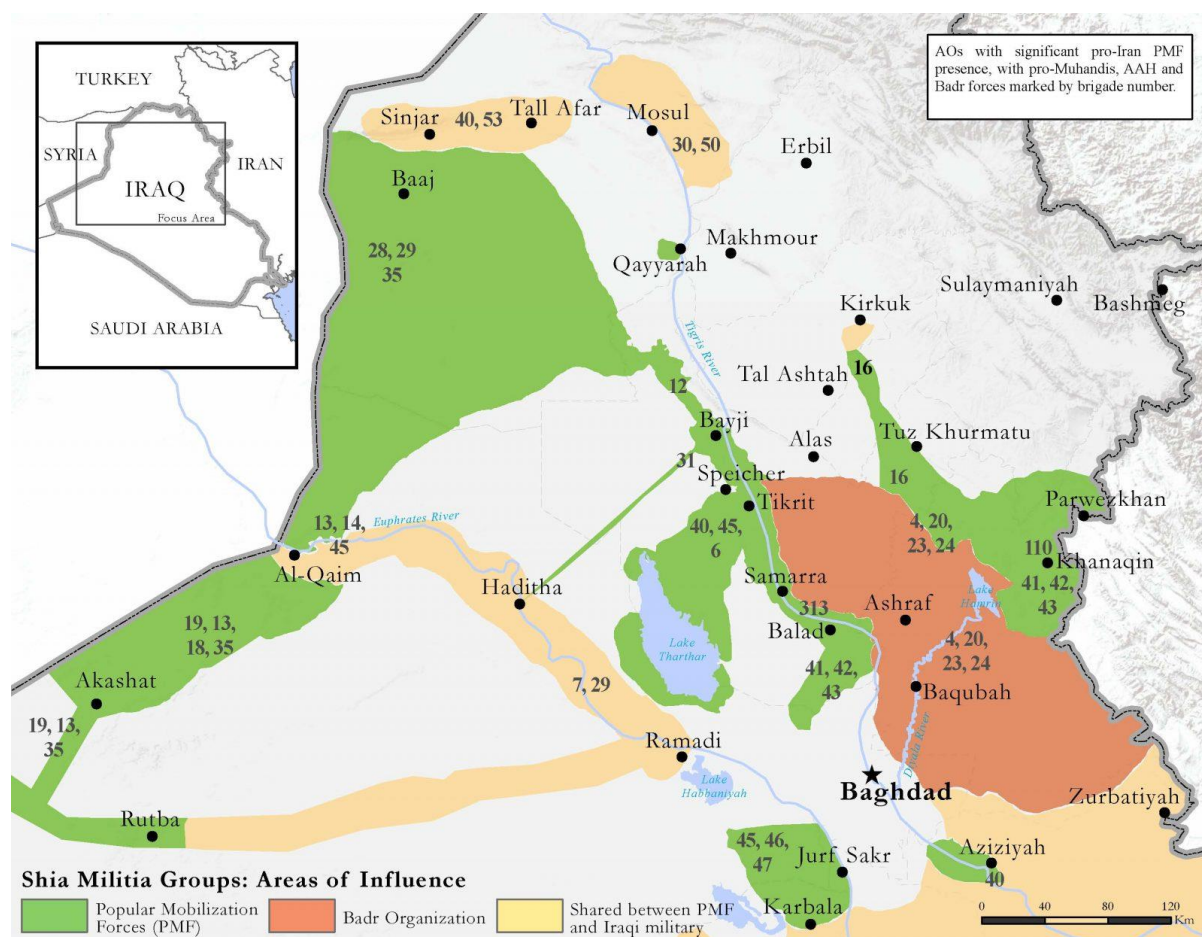
<sup>93</sup> Foreign Policy, A Powerful Iran-backed Militia is losing Influence in Iraq, 11 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>94</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report June 3-9, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>95</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 144; Mansour, R. et al (Mansour, R., Cambanis, T, Hanna, M. W.), These Iraqi militias are attacking protesters and getting away with it. Here's why, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

An [interactive map](#) provided by analyst Philip Smyth at the Washington Institute charts militias' locations, movements, ties to Iran, and involvements in conflicts in Iraq up to April 2020.<sup>96</sup>

Presented in an article by Knights et al., a map provided by the CTC Sentinel (Brandon Mohr) shows the deployment of the dominant PMU types in north/central Iraq as per August 2019. The areas where the PMU were dominant, are marked in green. Beige areas are those where responsibility was shared between the PMU and units of the Iraqi army or police. Brown areas are dominated by Badr militia-controlled units of the Iraqi army. All eight southern provinces (covered by the beige area) should be considered areas of shared control between the Iraqi army or police, and the PMU, until the army and the police are redeployed to these governorates.<sup>97</sup>



Map 2: Main areas of operation for Iran-backed militias in Iraq, annotated with PMF brigade numbers @ Brandon Mohr<sup>98</sup>

### 'Fake Hashd' groups

'Fake Hashd' is a phenomenon in which various kinds of actors seek to exploit the popularity of the PMU to set up an irregular group by attracting people believing it is a regular PMU. Such 'fake Hashd' groups have been found to engage in criminal activities, such as setting up false checkpoints for the purpose of extorting money from travellers.<sup>99</sup> In 2019, the government as well as the PMU Commission began to increase their efforts to abolish the 'fake Hashds'. In May 2019, the security

<sup>96</sup> Smyth, P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Presentation), 19 April 2029, [url](#); Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>97</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained – the future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 128-129

<sup>98</sup> Map @ Brandon Mohr, in Michael Knights, Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>99</sup> Rise Foundation, Mosul and Tel Afar Context Analysis, December 2017, [url](#), p. 21

directorates of the PMU Commission claimed that it had closed more than 320 facilities belonging to illegal groups.<sup>100</sup>

### **Sunni tribal militias or Tribal Mobilisation Forces (TMF) - al-Hashd al-Asha'iri**

Security analyst Husham al-Hashimi, cited by Knights and Almeida estimated that out of 121 sub-units identified as PMU formations with registered PMU personnel, 43 are Sunni tribal forces.<sup>101</sup> A source in 2017, estimated a unit size at 50 - 200 personnel, while others may have counted fewer than 700.<sup>102</sup> Newer estimates have not been found. Knights et al cited Iraqi security analyst Husham al-Hashimi that even though tribal forces under the PMU have been provided entire brigade equipment by the US, their offensive capabilities remained 'negligible'.<sup>103</sup>

In the summer of 2019, the Iraqi government ordered the tribal forces and other PMU forces that had taken part in fighting ISIL, to move their camps and depots out of the towns where they were located, considering extended presence illegal.<sup>104</sup> No information has been found about how the order was followed up.

### **Minority group militias**

The various minority group militias are explored further down in this report in the relevant governorate chapters. More information is also available in the [EASO COI Report – Iraq: Actors of Protection \(2018\)](#). For more information about the sub-categories of the PMU, please also see the March 2019 [EASO-COI Report Iraq: Security Situation, Section 1.3](#).

## **1.2.4 US-led Coalition forces**

In March 2020, Coalition forces withdrew from the al-Qaim base on the border to Syria as part of a planned drawdown. Withdrawal from other bases across Iraq followed shortly thereafter.<sup>105</sup> Also in March 2020, the Coalition announced the 'repositioning' of its forces in Iraq from fewer and smaller bases, with fewer people, as a response both to success in the fight against ISIL and in order to protect its personnel against the spread of the coronavirus.<sup>106</sup>

In July 2020, USDOD announced that the Coalition forces would be transformed from combat forces into a Military Advisor Group put together by the Coalition member states. The role of this group will be to provide specialised expert advice to Iraqi security staff and leaders.<sup>107</sup>

## **1.2.5 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**

### **Targets, activity, and tactics**

As a general trend of ISIL attack types in the reference period, Al-Hashimi mentioned targeting of belt areas surrounding cities and large villages.<sup>108</sup>

Knights & Almeida mentioned attacks on ISF and PMU posts and checkpoints with IEDs and grenade launchers, and booby-trapping houses. Civilian targets would typically be preachers, Mukhtars and

<sup>100</sup> Fanack, Iraqi Prime Minister Issues New Decrees to Reign In, Depoliticize Militias, 22 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>101</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 125

<sup>102</sup> Gaston, Erica, "Sunni Tribal Forces," GPPI (Global Public Policy Institute), August 30, 2017, [url](#), p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 70, 133

<sup>104</sup> Iraqi National Security Council Directive, 15 August 2019, cited in: Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 198.

<sup>105</sup> Military times, US-led coalition troops pull out of base in western Iraq, March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>106</sup> US, USDOD, CJTF-OIR Statement on repositioning of forces, March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> US, USDOD, Coalition Task Force-Iraq transitions to Military Advisor Group, 4 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>108</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)



other community leaders, tribal leaders, villages inhabited by minority groups, mosques, markets, rural tribes, and shepherds. Civilians would be targeted by means of IEDs, mass casualty attacks, and sometimes by snipers. Attacks could occasionally occur in cities as well, sometimes as mass casualty attacks. Targeted attacks on civilians declined sharply from 2018 to 2019, from 167 to 79. Attacks intended to create mass casualties declined likewise in this period, from 141 to 59. Attempted mass attacks went down from eight to five in this period, and then further down to three in the first quarter of 2020. The lethality of those attacks also declined into the beginning of 2020. In the same period, the use of roadside bombs, and attacks on military targets, increased. The frequency of attacks per governorate changed between the two most attacked governorates, Kirkuk and Diyala. In 2018, Kirkuk and Diyala experienced 370 and 340 attacks respectively. In 2019, Diyala had 550 attacks and Kirkuk 228. Attacks in Kirkuk recorded by Knights and Almeida then dropped to 46 in the first quarter of 2020.<sup>109</sup>

During the second quarter of 2020, sources began to report about an increase in ISIL activity.<sup>110</sup> ISIL was attacking villages and Sunni tribes in a mode described as ‘low-cost, low-tech, rural, but lethal’.<sup>111</sup> Knights and Almeida and Husham Al-Hashimi mentioned ISIL shelling villages, burning farms, carrying out assassinations and kidnappings.<sup>112</sup> The attacks in 2020 were targeting the Iraqi state, local government, the ISF, tribes and tribal resistance, Knights and Almeida reported. As a tactic to keep people out of areas with sanctuaries, ISIL would kill livestock, burn crops and kill shepherds. In Diyala, ISIL would pursue ethnic/sectarian cleansing of Shia, Kurdish and Kakai villages, and it would extort and intimidate civilians.<sup>113</sup>

Over the years ISIL has sought to incite sectarian violence and to disrupt the relationship between the civilian population and state forces, according to ACLED. The group has also engaged state forces directly, seeking to weaken them. In 2020, ISIL appeared to be pursuing similar strategies, aiming at shaping its operational environment to its advantage, and gain space for it to grow. To avoid Sunni communities turning against them, ISIL sought to stay present and spread fear in such communities, committing several attacks on hostile Sunni communal leaders. ACLED noted a notable increase in the share of incidents that involved state forces, from 59 % in 2017 to 75 % in 2019 and 73 % in the first half of 2020. The corresponding rate of attacks on civilians were 17 % (2017), 15 % (2019) and 13 % (January – June 2020).

ACLED noted that corresponding in time with the Corona pandemic, an increased attack rate during the first four months of 2020 suggested that the group had been made able to exploit gaps in the presence of security forces that the pandemic has opened for.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-10, 2-3

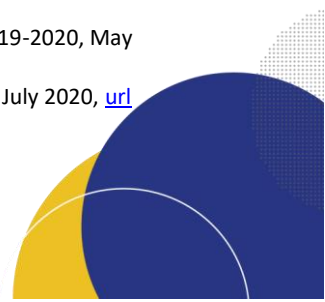
<sup>110</sup> New York Times (The), ISIS Attacks Surge in Iraq Amid Debate on US Troop Levels, 10 June 2020, [url](#); Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 12; Lister, C., ISIS’ dramatic escalation in Syria and Iraq, 4 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> New York Times (The), ISIS Attacks Surge in Iraq Amid Debate on US Troop Levels, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 19 ; Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p.2

<sup>114</sup> ACLED, A sudden resurfacing of strength: evaluating the possibility of an IS resurfacing in Iraq and Syria, 24 July 2020, [url](#)



## IS Activity Over Time in Iraq

Jan 2019 – Jun 2020

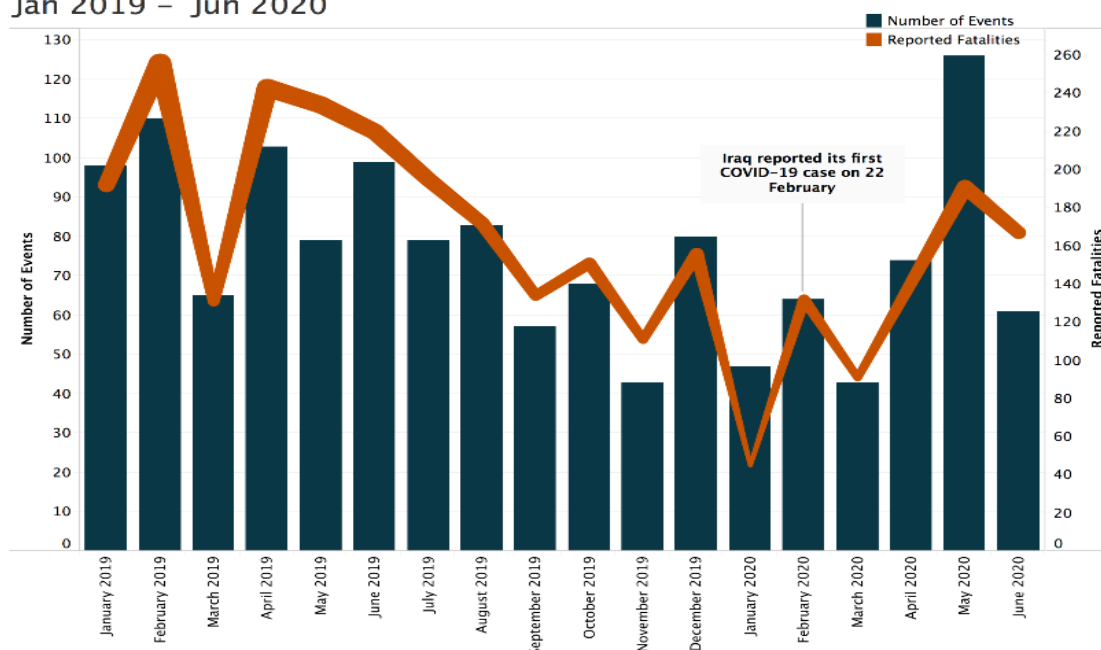


Figure 3: ISIL activity over time in Iraq, January 2019 – June 2020 @2020 ACLED.<sup>115</sup>

Analyst Sam Heller at the International Crisis Group (ICG) observed that during the spring of 2020, ISIL for the first time since it was officially defeated in 2017 began to stage complex attacks against ISF. In April 2020 a shift in timing and the selection of targets could be noted, such as an attempted suicide attack on an intelligence headquarters in Kirkuk and a number of coordinated attacks in Salah al-Din that took place month.<sup>116</sup>

According to ACLED, the shift indicates growing capability and strength, since the new attack types require advanced equipment and competence, and access to intelligence. The modus operandi that ISIL has displayed in 2020 indicates a shift from staging low-cost, simple remote explosions and violence, to engaging mainly state forces in complex armed confrontations.<sup>117</sup>

### Presence and capacities

Knights and Almeida estimated that in less than one and a half years from the end of 2018, the number of areas with active ISIL attack cells had nearly doubled from 27 to 47. As outlined by the authors by March 2020, these 47 areas were located in:

**“Anbar:** Akashat; the al-Qaim/Abu Kamal border area; Wadi Horan/Rutbah; Nukhayb; the Rawah-Anah-Haditha corridor; Hit; Ramadi and Lake Razazah; Karmah and southern Thar; and Fallujah/Amiriyat al-Fallujah

**Salah al-Din:** Eastern Thar Thar/Balad; southern Jallam Desert/Mutaibijah; Udham, northeastern Thar Thar/Tikrit; Baiji/Siniyah/Makhul; northern Jallam Desert/Hamrin; Tuz/Pulkhana; and Zarga

<sup>115</sup> Pavlik, M. et al., A sudden surfacing of strength: evaluating the possibilities for a resurgence of IS in Syria and Iraq, 24 July 2020, Figure 7, [url](#) © 2020 ACLED. All rights reserved. Used with permission from ACLED.

<sup>116</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>117</sup> ACLED, A sudden surfacing of strength: evaluating the possibility of an IS resurfacing in Iraq and Syria, 24 July 2020, [url](#)

**Baghdad:** Tarmiyah; Taji/Saab al-Bour; Abu Ghraib/Zaidon; the Latifiyah/ Yusufiyah/ Mahmudiyah triangle; Jurf al-Sakhr; and Jisr Diyala/Madain

**Diyala:** Buhriz/Kani Ban Saad; western Baquba; Mukhisa/Abu Sayda; Sherween/ Muqdadiah; Jalula/Sa'adiyah; Qara Tapa/Hamrin; Khanaqin and Nida/Mandali;

**Kirkuk:** Zab/Abbasi; the Mamah-Gharra / Batawi ridge; Riyadh; Rashad/Jawwalah Daquq/Ghayda; Dibis and the Qani Domlan; and Kirkuk city

**Ninewa:** East Mosul; Ash Shura/Hammam al-Alil; Qayyarah; Sharqat; Jurn triangle; the Hatra/Iraq-Turkey Pipeline corridor southwest of Mosul; Badush/Atashana/west Mosul; Tal Afar/Muhallabiyah; Tal Afar/Ayadhiyah; Sinjar/Baaj; and Lake Sunnislah/Jazeera.”<sup>118</sup>

ISIL has gained more freedom to operate during 2020, as state forces were diverted to enforce measures to control the spread of the Corona virus.<sup>119</sup> According to Husham al-Hashimi, ISIL has been seeking to establish itself in places where conventional military operations were challenging, such as valleys, mountains and deserts across northern and central Iraq. There they can settle in abandoned villages, hide in caves and tunnels they dig, and set up camps. Al-Hashimi noted that by 2020, ISIL had become able to patrol rural areas located in Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, and northern Baghdad.<sup>120</sup>

Media sources reported that ISIL had resurfaced in Sunni majority governorates and in Kirkuk, stronger and increasing its attacks.<sup>121</sup> The New York Times pointed specifically to Salah al-Din, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa governorates.<sup>122</sup> Analyst Husham al-Hashimi noted that raids on PMU and tribal mobilisation forces' barracks, as well as surprise attacks, increased between April and July 2020.<sup>123</sup> An article by al-Hashimi published in August 2020 contains a map showing locations of ISIL attacks during the spring and summer of 2020. It shows the densest concentration of attacks around Baquba, the capital of Diyala governorate. The other locations are spread out over Diyala, southern Erbil, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates, Baghdad city, as well as locations in Anbar governorate adjacent to Baghdad. The strategic aim of these attacks were to cut off road traffic, disrupt reconciliation between local population groups, and to blockade cities economically as well as to gain control of open terrain.<sup>124</sup>

Knights and Almeida noted in May 2020 that ISIL had 'spread out across many more areas' in Iraq during the preceding 18 months.<sup>125</sup> In these areas ISIL was operating almost only in rural environments, where it was seeking to wear out the ISF, according to experts.<sup>126</sup> According to Husham Al-Hashimi, these are rural areas located in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Baghdad governorates. More precisely, ISIL had been active at the following locations:

**Anbar:** southwest Anbar desert, Horan valley to al-Abiach valley to al-Kadef valley, and the northern part of Rawa

**Ninewa:** the southern part of the Ninewa desert, Baaj

<sup>118</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>119</sup> New York Times (The), ISIL Attacks Surge in Iraq Amid Debate on US Troop Levels, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>120</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> NPR, Laid Off By US Contractor, Iraqi Interpreters Fear ISIL Retaliation, 19 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), ISIL Attacks Surge in Iraq Amid Debate on US Troop Levels, 10 June 2020, [url](#); BBC, Isis in Iraq: Militants "getting stronger again", 23 December 2019 [url](#); New York Times (The), ISIL Is Regaining Strength in Iraq and Syria, 19 August 2019, [url](#); Atlantic (The), The Inconvenient Truth About ISIS, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

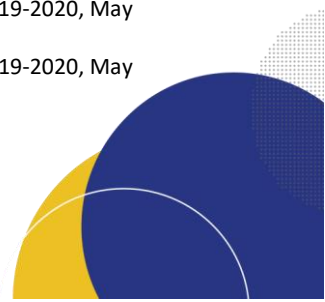
<sup>122</sup> New York Times (The), ISIL Attacks Surge in Iraq Amid Debate on US Troop Levels, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIL in Iraq: "Smoking the Fox out of its Den" Strategy, July 14, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIL thrives in Iraq's "money and death triangle", 11 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>126</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 12; Al-Hashimi, H., ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)



**Erbil:** Makhmour

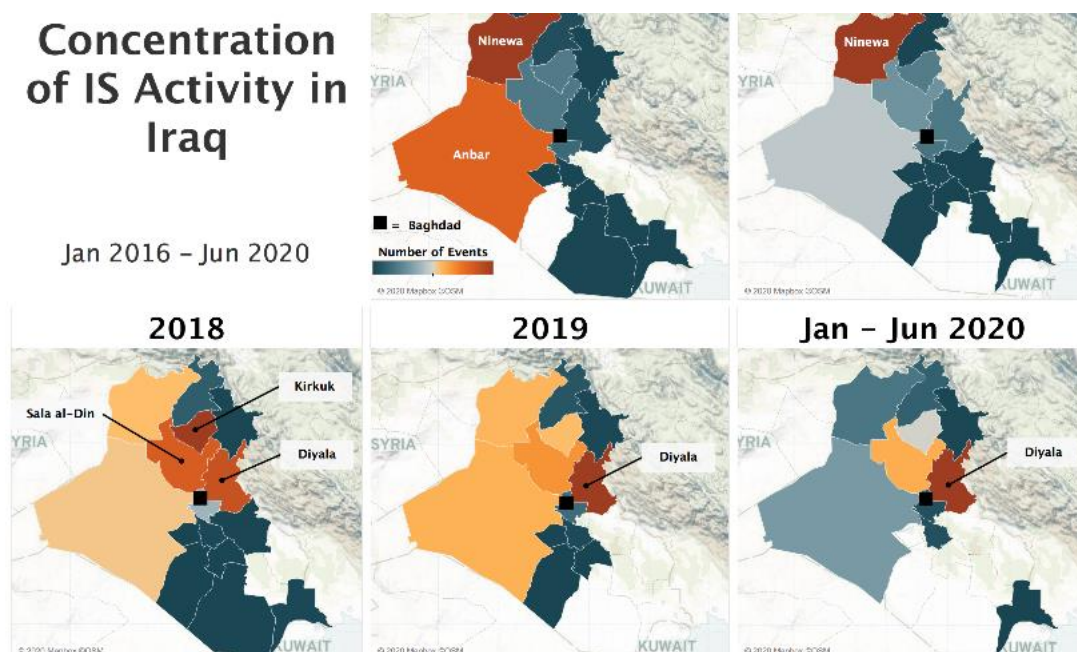
**Baghdad:** the Belts

**Diyala:** the north-eastern areas

**Kirkuk:** south of Kirkuk, Hawija, Zab, and Abbasi

**Salah al-Din:** Shirqat, Khanuqa, Hamrin mountains, east of Lake Tharthar.<sup>127</sup>

In recent years, ISIL has been seen to some degree to have shifted its activity southwards from Kirkuk towards Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates, where it has been increasing its activity. It has thus been moving in the direction of Baghdad. Resembling its earlier strategy of seeking control of larger cities' rural surroundings, ISIL has carried out 'at least half a dozen complex, coordinated attacks' in the outskirts of the capital during the first half of 2020, according to ACLED.<sup>128</sup> Figure 3 shows this gradual shift in concentration of activity from the start of 2016 onwards.



Map 3: Concentration of ISIL activity in Iraq, January 2016 – June 2020 © 2020 ACLED.<sup>129</sup>

Knights and Almeida reported about a steady increase in attacks carried out by ISIL from 132 per month in the second quarter of 2019 to about 188 per month in the first quarter of 2020. Between the first quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020 the number of attacks nearly doubled, from 292 to 566. Citing a UN source, the authors pointed to the increase as showing a 'strong and steady recovery'.<sup>130</sup>

ISIL continued to carry out occasional mass casualty attacks. On one day in May 2020, a string of five IED incidents in the Baghdad area killed and wounded civilians.<sup>131</sup> Also in the spring of 2020, Knights

<sup>127</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>128</sup> Pavlik, M. et al, A sudden surfacing of strength: evaluating the possibilities for a resurgence of IS in Syria and Iraq, 24 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>129</sup> Pavlik, M., et al., A sudden surfacing of strength: evaluating the possibilities for a resurgence of IS in Syria and Iraq, 24 July 2020, [url](#), Figure 4, © 2020 ACLED. . All rights reserved. Used with permission from ACLED.

<sup>130</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 10-11, 2-3

<sup>131</sup> EPIC, ISHM: May 7- May 14, 2020, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

and Almeida noticed the start of a trend of suicide attacks to intimidate rural tribes, but also extending into urban areas. The authors recorded a strong growth in ISIL attempts to overrun checkpoints and bases during 2019.<sup>132</sup> Kurdistan 24, an Iraqi Kurdish media outlet, continued to report about such attacks in the second quarter of 2020.<sup>133</sup>

In May 2020, Knights & Almeida indicated that ISIL's forces in Iraq amounted to 1 300 attack cell combatants, and 2 700 logistical, financial and other support operatives. These together made up a core combat force of about 4 000 members. In addition, around 10 000 supporters came providing services such as food and other supplies, safe houses, and information. Taken together this indicated a total force of around 14 000.<sup>134</sup> In the winter and spring of 2020, USDOD as well as Husham al-Hashimi assessed ISIL to count 14-18 000 people in Syria and Iraq.<sup>135</sup>

At this point, analyst Aaron Zelin held the opinion that with a number of fighters at 11 000, one would have seen a much higher level of violence than what has been reported. In his opinion, the fairly low level of violence would mean that this number also includes non-fighting members. Speaking about a 'resurgence' would then be an overestimation of ISIL's capacity, Zelin contended.<sup>136</sup>

An analysis by ACLED indicated that even though ISIL's current position has improved relative to that immediately after its defeat in 2017, it has not regained the strength it had in the run-up to its territorial gains in 2014. If not resurging it is patiently exploiting current favourable operational conditions, preparing for its further evolution.<sup>137</sup>

### State response to ISIL

Anti-ISIL operations in Kirkuk during most of 2019 worked to reduce ISIL activity in this governorate.<sup>138</sup> In October and November 2019, the ISF temporarily postponed some operations against ISIL because public protests in Baghdad and elsewhere led the Iraqi military to change its priorities.<sup>139</sup> In 2020, Coalition support to ISF became reduced as a consequence of Iraqi restrictions imposed on Coalition activity, and the ISF was needed to enforce measures to contain the Corona pandemic. The operational tempo of the ISF in fighting ISIL diminished accordingly, as well as its ability to hold terrain it had once cleared of ISIL. Also anti-ISIL operations by the Emergency Police and the Federal Police dropped in the first quarter of 2020.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 10, 2, 4

<sup>133</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS targets security forces in central Iraq for the second day in a row, 3 May 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Militiamen killed in massive, multi-pronged ISIS attack in central Iraq, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>135</sup> US, USDOS, 23 January 2020, Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS James Jeffrey, Special Briefing, [url](#); Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

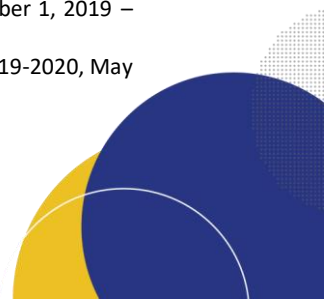
<sup>136</sup> Zelin, A., A Year Since Baghuz, the Islamic State Is Neither Defeated nor Resurging (Yet), 25 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>137</sup> ACLED, A sudden surfacing of strength: evaluating the possibilities for a resurgence of IS in Syria and Iraq, 24 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 7-8

<sup>139</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>140</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 14-20



## 1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations

### 1.3.1 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.

#### Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah)

Through the reference period, the most extensive armed activity in the KRI took place in the areas bordering Turkey. Turkish air strikes and battles between Turkish militants and Turkish forces took place in the districts of Zahko and Amedi (Dohuk), Soran (Erbil), and Turkish air strikes in Pishdar and Sulaymaniyah districts (Sulaymaniyah).<sup>141</sup> Turkish military operations in northern Iraq against the PKK intensified between January and May 2020. Turkish officials that were cited mentioned that around 150 suspected PKK positions had been targeted in the operations.<sup>142</sup>

Also Iranian Kurdish militant groups have used the region to launch attacks against Iran across the border.<sup>143</sup> Iran, for its part, targeted such groups inside the KRI.<sup>144</sup> In July 2019, Iran officially stated that the IRGC had attacked training camps and other sites in the KRI used by Iranian opposition groups with drones, missiles and artillery.<sup>145</sup> Iran continued to keep up its pressure on these groups in 2020.<sup>146</sup>

For more information about Turkish incursions in the KRI, please see the 2019 EASO-COI report Iraq: Security Situation, [Sections 1.4. and 2.7.](#), and in this report under [Chapter 3.](#)

#### The disputed territories

The disputed territories of northern Iraq are areas defined in accordance with Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. The territories are predominately inhabited by non-Arab groups, notably Kurds, Christian (Assyrians), Turkmens, Yazidis and Shabak. The areas include parts of the governorates of Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk, which the Kurds claim are theirs. Kurdish forces took over much of the disputed territories after ISIL seizure of the city of Mosul in 2014. The Iraqi Government regained control of the disputed areas in October 2017, following the Kurdish referendum for independence, subsequently forcing the Kurdish forces to back within the boundaries of what is defined as the Iraqi Kurdistan (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah [and Halabja], Dohuk).<sup>147</sup>

USDOD stated in December 2019 that ISIL was exploiting territory being claimed both by Iraqi Arabs and Kurds to its own advantage.<sup>148</sup> Since the Kurdish forces withdrew in late 2017, the disputed areas had remained largely ungoverned. The ISF and Peshmerga, sharing responsibility for the security, lacked operational coordination. These state forces, on their part, wanted to ‘avoid clashes with each other within disputed territory’, USDOD quoted a source.<sup>149</sup> The ICG identified deployment gaps

<sup>141</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, ACLED Power BI Report, [url](#)

<sup>142</sup> Guardian (The), Turkey launches major attack on Kurdish militants in Iraq, 17 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>143</sup> Al Monitor, IRGC masses troops on Iraq border amid rising tensions with Kurdish groups, 16 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> Garda World, Iraq: Iranian forces carry out attacks against Kurdish targets in Kurdistan region, 18 June 2020, [url](#);

Defence Post, Iran strikes Kurdish militants in Iraqi Kurdistan, 12 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> Defence Post, Iran strikes Kurdish militants in Iraqi Kurdistan, 12 July 2019, [url](#). The Defense Post is a US based independent media outlet dedicated to defence-related news.

<sup>146</sup> Voice of America, Activists: Iraq’s Kurdish Region Becomes Less Safe for Iranian Dissidents, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>147</sup> ISW, 19 October 2017, [url](#); US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, 4 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2, 10-11

<sup>148</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>149</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January, 1 – March 31, 1 May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

between ISF and Peshmerga forces up to 5 km apart in Hawija, Dibis and Daquq (Kirkuk governorate), Makhmour (Erbil governorate), and in Salah ad Din and Diyala governorates.<sup>150</sup> In sanctuaries that ISIL has developed in areas such as these, it has built an infrastructure of viable underground shelters stocked with food, water, generators, parts and explosives, and relocated some of its ‘most active attack cells’ there.<sup>151</sup>

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

Two analysts stated in 2020 that ISIL was active in the Kirkuk, Baghdad, Ninewa, and Anbar regions.<sup>152</sup> Aron Zelin, stated in March 2020 that ISIL cells had conducted 11 to 15 attacks per month in these areas, and that the group’s command and control system thus appeared intact. Zelin named Diyala ISIL’s ‘epicentre’ of attacks in Iraq.<sup>153</sup> Husham al-Hashimi stated that ISIL through 2020 also had operations in Salah al-Din and northern Baghdad. In the mentioned parts of the country ISIL sought to gain foothold in areas surrounding larger cities, possibly for turning them into staging grounds for operations at the cities themselves. ISIL’s attacks were targeting Sunni tribes who cooperated with the government against ISIL as well as Sunnis perceived to be collaborators, Mukhtars, Sheikhs, and tribal leaders, for instance by means of kidnappings and assassinations.<sup>154</sup> The ICG reported that ISIL attacks in these areas had escalated in April 2020. They had also become more assertive, targeting ISF directly and increasingly during daytime.<sup>155</sup>

Hafsa Halawa, an independent consultant writing for the Middle East Institute, stated that ISIL had active sleeper cells in Diyala and Kirkuk governorates, where it carried out daily attacks against mainly ISF and community leaders. Areas around the wider district around Hawija city, such as Abbasi and Zab, remained insecure. Security forces would disappear from such places at night time out of fear of being attacked by ISIL. The presence of active ISIS sleeper cells in Kirkuk and Diyala was hindering reconstruction efforts. Attacks took place daily, forcing Mullahs and other community leaders in Hawija city to periodically flee to Kirkuk City. Areas like Jalawla remained impossible to reach. Larger cities were becoming increasingly insecure, Halawa stated, pointing to Khanaqin or Baqubah as examples.<sup>156</sup>

The ISW raised concerns that the US troop consolidations undertaken in March 2020 would decrease the US pressure on ISIL, thus benefitting the group.<sup>157</sup>

### **Confrontations between Iran-backed militias and US forces**

The ISW assumed that the Iran-backed militias in Iraq would continue to escalate their pressure on the US presence in Iraq. Iranian missile attacks against US targets in the first quarter of 2020 took place mainly in Baghdad and at locations in its vicinity (Balad, Taji, Basmayah) but also in Erbil, western Anbar, and Kirkuk.<sup>158</sup> The USDOD was cited that Iran-backed militia targets had been attacked ‘across the country’ mentioning specifically Babil and Kerbala governorates.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>150</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>151</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>152</sup> Zelin, A., A Year Since Baghuz, the Islamic State Is Neither Defeated nor Resurging (Yet), 25 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>153</sup> Zelin, A., A Year Since Baghuz, the Islamic State Is Neither Defeated nor Resurging (Yet), 25 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>154</sup> Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>156</sup> Halawa, H., The forgotten Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>157</sup> ISW, Iran’s proxies accelerate Soleimani’s campaign to compel US withdrawal from Iraq, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>158</sup> ISW, Iran’s proxies accelerate Soleimani’s campaign to compel US withdrawal from Iraq, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> BBC, Iraq base attack: US in retaliatory strikes on Iran-backed fighters, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

## Southern Iraq

The security void resulting from the deployment of security forces in 2014 to fight ISIL insurgency in central and northern Iraq left the southern region open to tribal clashes, criminal activity and political violence.<sup>160</sup>

Analyst Benedict Robin reported in July 2019 that the public protests being held across the southern part of the country, at that point had been more subdued than a year before and that they had taken more place in peripheral towns than in major urban centres like Basra.<sup>161</sup>

Demonstrations, occasionally violent, again broke out in October 2019, and were met with harsher reactions than before.<sup>162</sup> Protesters set fire to the headquarters of political parties, damaged government buildings and engaged in revenge killings. Several demonstrators have been killed and injured by government forces and supporting militias opening fire and attacking them. During the remaining months of 2019 the violence connected to protests and riots escalated.<sup>163</sup> In November 2019, protesters attacked and set fire to the Iranian consulate in Najaf, in what was reported as an outburst of anti-Iranian sentiment among the population.<sup>164</sup>

Also tribal leaders in the south have reacted against the crackdown on protesters and what they reportedly have seen as Iran playing a role in, occasionally turning against the security forces and joining the protests.<sup>165</sup> In Nasiriyah tribal fighters cut off roads in order to prevent state forces from reaching the city.<sup>166</sup> Some 'tribal elements' in Basrah, Thi Qar, and Missan had reportedly even taken a lead in protest activities.<sup>167</sup>

Tensions escalated again in January 2020 when some protesters forcibly prevented students and teachers from accessing state educational institutions. The protests continued through February 2020.<sup>168</sup> Partly due to the lockdown imposed by the government to counter the spread of the coronavirus, the protests wound down during the winter and spring months of 2020. In May 2020, protests resumed again in cities in the south. The number of protesters who turned out were lower than in December 2019, though.<sup>169</sup>

Rising tribal violence in the south was reported in the summer of 2020.<sup>170</sup>

### 1.3.2 Nature of the security incidents

The ACLED collects data on violent incidents in Iraq, coding each incident with the time and place, type of violent incident, the parties involved and the number of fatalities. The information is collected in a database that is openly accessible, searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily comes from secondary sources such as media reports.<sup>171</sup>

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

<sup>160</sup> Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq's south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>161</sup> Robin, B., South Iraq security and protest dynamics report: July 2019, Monthly interactive maps, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>162</sup> O' Driscoll, D., Tensions on Iraqi soil likely to overshadow anti-government protest demands, [Blog], 9 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>163</sup> New York Times (The), Iraq Protesters Burn Down Iran Consulate in Night of Anger, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> Guardian (The), Iraq risks breakup as tribes take on Iran's militias in 'blood feud', 30 November 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), Iraq Protesters Burn Down Iran Consulate in Night of Anger, 27 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> Guardian (The), 30 November 2019, Iraq risks breakup as tribes take on Iran's militias in 'blood feud', 30 November 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), Iraq Protesters Burn Down Iran Consulate in Night of Anger, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> Gulf News, As Iraqis protest, tribes make comeback, 10 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>167</sup> Smyth, P., Iran is Losing Iraq's Tribes, 4 Dec 2019, [url](#)

<sup>168</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Resolution 2470 (2019) – Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>169</sup> Middle East Eye, 'Today is a message': Anti-government protests resume in Iraq, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>170</sup> Iraq Oil Report, Tribal violence escalates in Iraq's oil heartland, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> ACLED, Methodology overview, 10 April 2019, [url](#)



**Battles:** violent clashes between at least two armed groups. Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. Sub-events of battles are armed clashes, government regains territory and non-state actor overtakes territory.

**Violence against civilians:** violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. It includes violent attacks on unarmed civilians such as sexual violence, attacks, abduction/forced disappearance.

**Explosions/remote violence:** events where an explosion, bomb or other explosive device was used to engage in conflict. They include one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to engage or defend themselves and their location. They include air/drone strikes, suicide bombs, shelling/artillery/missile attack, remote explosive/landmine/IED, grenade, chemical weapon.

**Riots:** are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include violent demonstration, 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, protest with intervention, excessive force against protesters.

**Strategic developments:** 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, change to group/activity, non-violent transfer of territory, arrests.<sup>172</sup>

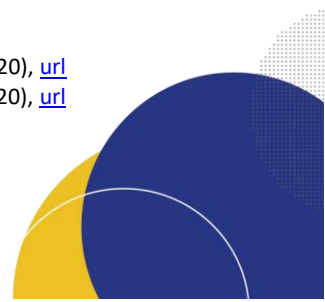
For the purpose of this report only the following type of events were included in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. A country overview of the data on riots and protests is also provided separately (see the [EASO-COI Report – Iraq: The protest movement and treatment of protesters and activists](#)).

EASO used the publicly available ACLED Power BI Report dataset for Iraq (31 July 2020) for security incidents figures, graphs and maps.<sup>173</sup> According to this dataset, in all of 2019 and 1 January – 31 July 2020, there were 3 768 security incidents recorded in Iraq: 1 189 were coded as battles, 2 164 as explosions/remote violence, and 415 as violence against civilians. Most security incidents were recorded in Dohuk (751), Diyala (630), Erbil (613) and Salah al-Din (327) governorates. The lowest number of security incidents was recorded in Najaf and Qadissiyah (12 each), and Muthanna (3) governorates.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>172</sup> ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 7-14

<sup>173</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>174</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)



## Evolution of events by type

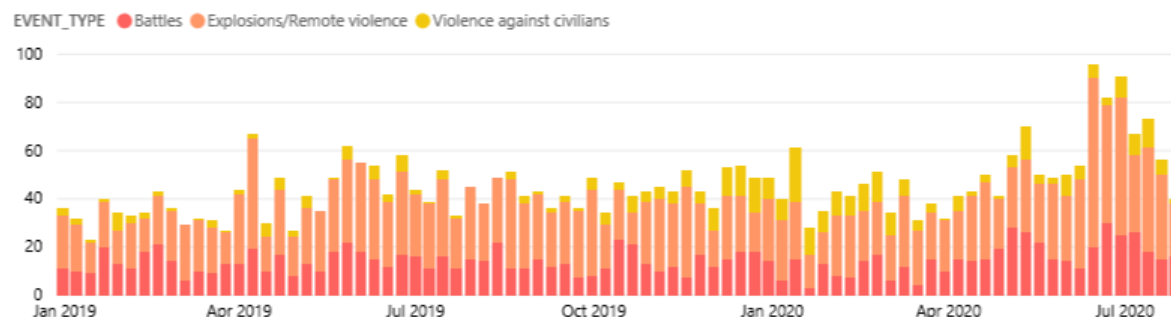
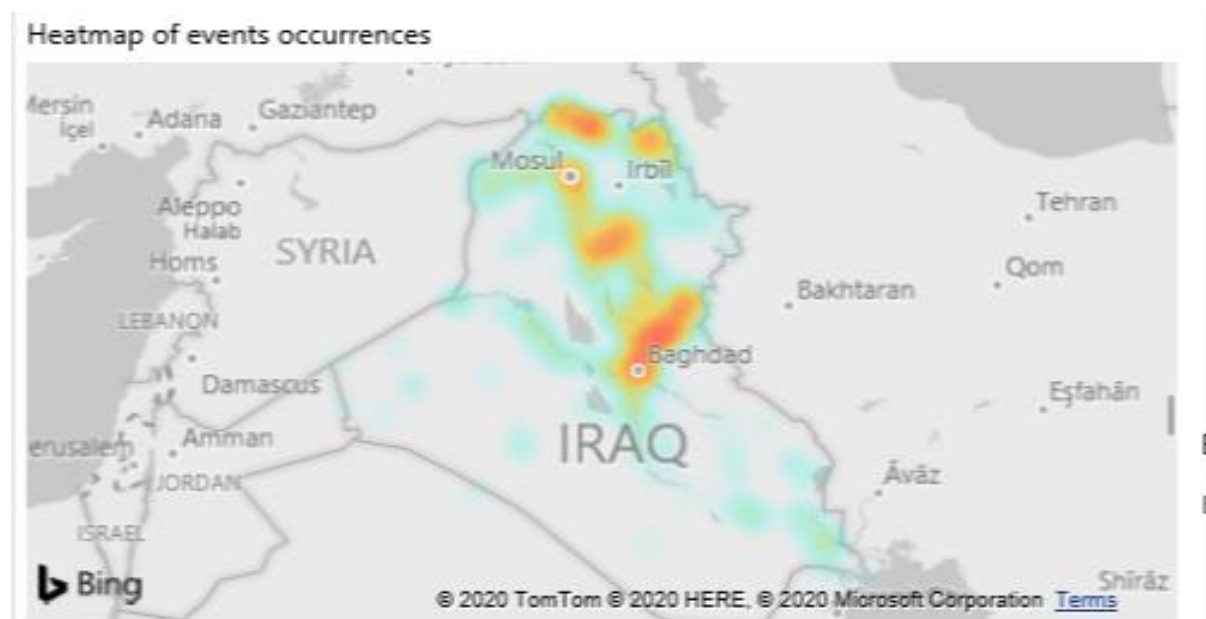


Figure 4: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in 2019, based on ACLED data<sup>175</sup>



Map 4: Heatmap of security events (coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians) occurrences in 2019, based on ACLED data<sup>176</sup>

### 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 2 164 incidents recorded by ACLED in the reference period. The largest number of explosions/remote violence was registered in Dohuk (620), Erbil (438), Diyala (260) and Baghdad (163) governorates. The lowest numbers were recorded in Najaf and Qadissiyah (5 each) and Muthanna (2).

The figures varied from month to month, and peaked in April 2019 (125) most of which occurred in Dohuk's Amedi District (30) and in July 2020 (176), also most of which took place in Dohuk's Zahko District (37).<sup>177</sup> Both districts are located along the border to Turkey.<sup>178</sup> Lower levels were recorded in March 2019 (82) and March 2020 (100).<sup>179</sup>

<sup>175</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>176</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>177</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>178</sup> NCCI, Dohuk District Map, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>179</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

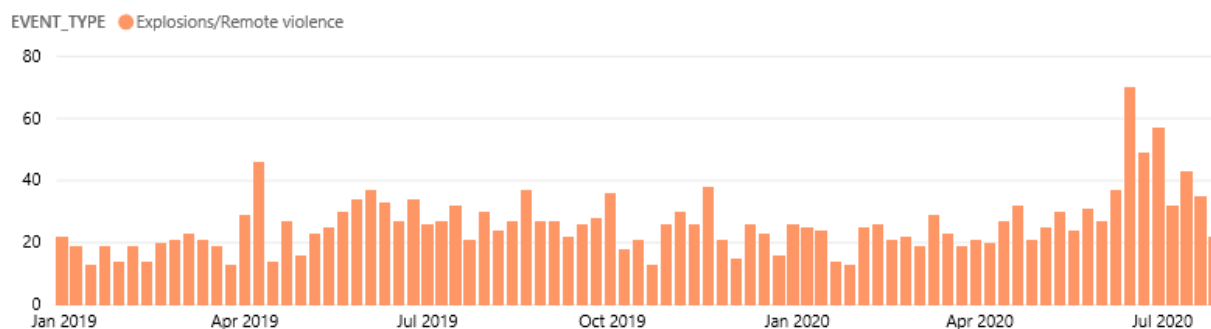


Figure 5: Evolution of 'explosions/remote violence' events 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020 based on ACLED data<sup>180</sup>

### Armed clashes, assaults and ground engagements

Battles (armed clashes) is the category with the second most registered incidents; 1189 were recorded between 1 January 2019 and 31 July 2020. Most battles were recorded in Diyala (280), Erbil (162) and Salah al-Din (155). The lowest number of battles in the reference period took place in Kerbala (4), Najaf (2) and Muthanna (1). All the battles that were recorded in Erbil (123) took place in Soran District, which is bordering Turkey.

Most battles in 2019 took place in October (71) the majority of which affected Diyala governorate (188). The highest number in 2020 was in July (80), the majority of these (39) taking place in Dohuk governorate. All of these took place in Zahko District.

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).<sup>181</sup>

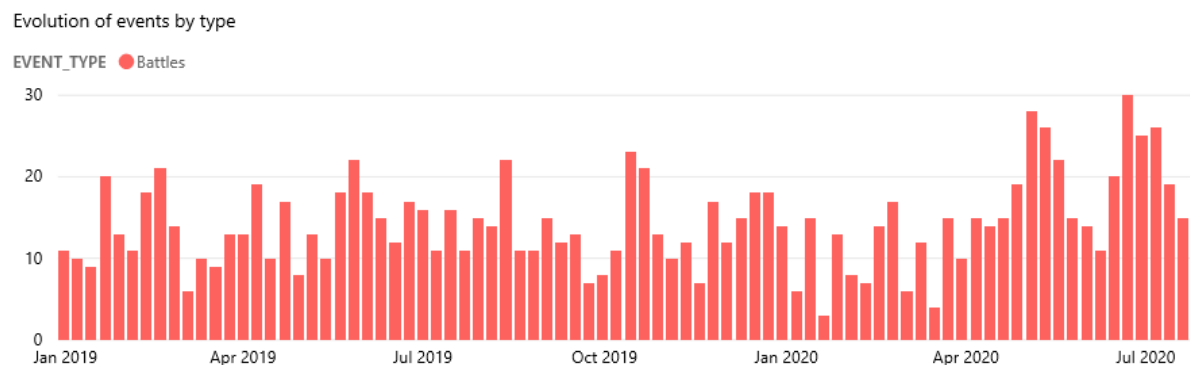


Figure 6: Evolution of 'battles' events 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>182</sup>

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.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>180</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>182</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>183</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

## Targeted attacks, abductions, killings

ACLED recorded a total 415 incidents of targeted attacks, abductions and killings across Iraq during the reference period. Diyala and Baghdad governorates had the highest numbers, 90 and 81 respectively.<sup>184</sup> The highest number of attacks in the reference period took place in January 2020 (56), the majority taking place in Baghdad (16), and the second highest number in the southern Thi-Qar governorate (8).

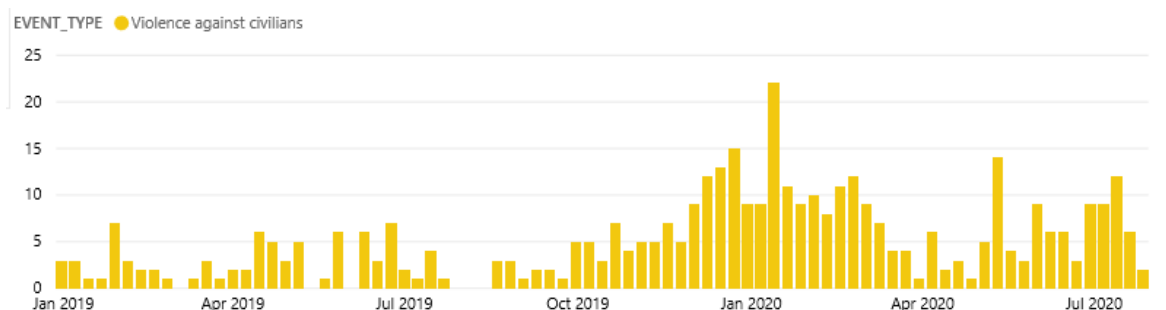


Figure 7: Evolution of 'battles' events 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>185</sup>

ACLED ascribed 113 targeted attacks on civilians to ISIL during the reference period. The highest number (41) took place in Diyala. The highest number at district level (18) in this governorate occurred in Khanaqin.

273 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 men. Among civilians targeted under a variety of circumstances were protesters and activists. The highest number (37) occurred in Baghdad, including Sadr City. Second was Basrah with 25 such incidents.

Two civilians were deliberately killed by ISF, one in Erbil and one in Diyala. Two civilians were kidnapped by PKK fighters in Dohuk and Erbil.

One abduction, one sexual assault, one shooting at a group of civilians, and a hold-up of a deputy governor's convoy, were attributed to PMU or suspected PMU men.

Four instances of Turkish forces directing gunfire at civilians were reported.

Six cases of police violence against civilians, among them, two against journalists and one abduction, were reported.<sup>186</sup>

Knights and Almeida recorded 102 targeted killings in all of 2019 and in the first quarter of 2020. The authors also reported about attempts to overrun ISF checkpoints and outposts, and person-specific targeted attacks. Targeted killings of Mukhtars and tribal chiefs declined in 2020.<sup>187</sup>

Experts indicated that ISIL was directing targeted attacks against members of the ISF, and government allied forces as well as civilians.<sup>188</sup> Kidnappings of local inhabitants carried out by ISIL or suspected ISIL members, were reported in rural areas in Kirkuk and Diyala.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>184</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>187</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC Sentinel Volume 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 2-4, 8, 10

<sup>188</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., 5 May 2020, ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, [url](#); Knights et al, Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC Sentinel Volume 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>189</sup> CIVIC, "We just want someone to protect us". Civilian protection challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 14; EPIC, ISHM: May 7- May 14, 2020, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

## Air strikes and shelling

According to USDOD, between August 2014 and the end of December 2019, the US-led Coalition carried out 34 763 air strikes in Syria and Iraq between August 2014 and December 2019, unintentionally killing 1 370 civilians in both countries.<sup>190</sup> This counts for 231 civilian casualties between the end of November 2018 and the end of December 2019, and for 3 357 air strikes in the same period. Please see the [EASO-COI Report – Iraq: Security Situation 2019, Section 1.4](#)

In late 2019 the Iraqi government placed restrictions on Coalition air movement after they suspected Israel had conducted air strikes against Iraqi militias tied to Iran, according to USDOD. Air strikes continued to be carried out in 2020 by the Iraqi and the Coalition air forces.<sup>191</sup> The Iraqi air force conducted air activity against ISIL mostly in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala governorates.<sup>192</sup> In 2019 and 2020, US warplanes carried out attacks on Iran-backed militias, in retaliation for attacks on US personnel and installations.<sup>193</sup>

Increased Turkish air strike activity was reported in the KRI and in Sinjar.<sup>194</sup>

ISIL was reported as having shelled civilians in their villages in 2019 and 2020.<sup>195</sup>

## Missile attacks

The Coalition stated that in 2019 Iran-backed militias escalated their missile attacks on Iraqi military bases where US forces were stationed, triggering counterattacks by the US forces. Multiple attacks on US forces were carried out from early October to the end of December 2019.<sup>196</sup> In January 2020, Iran's military fired missiles at US bases in retaliation for the killing of Qassem Soleimani.<sup>197</sup> In March 2020, Joel Wing reported that these attacks and US counter attacks continued.<sup>198</sup>

## 1.4 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 \(2018\)](#).

Crime and lawlessness remained a serious threat throughout the country, the US State Department stated in 2020 in an advice to US citizens travelling to Iraq.<sup>199</sup> Analyst Philip Smyth indicated that the militia groups central to running the PMU were involved in 'widespread criminality'. In order to stay reputable, the PMU itself had arrested militia members, which the state then in some cases convicted to prison sentences. Such crackdowns still did not include the large Iran-backed militias. Leaders of

<sup>190</sup> US, USDOD, CJTF-OIR, Monthly Civilian Casualty Report, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> BNO News, US-led airstrike destroys ISIS cave complex in Iraq, 30 April 2020, [url](#); Garda World, Iraq: Coalition airstrikes kill 19 IS militants south of Makhmour (Erbil governorate) June 3, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>192</sup> US, USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 23, 19

<sup>193</sup> CNN, US strikes 5 facilities in Iraq and Syria linked to Iranian-backed militia, 30 December 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), US launched airstrikes in Iraq in retaliation for rocket attack, Pentagon confirms, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>194</sup> Guardian (The), Turkey launches major attack on Kurdish militants in Iraq, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>195</sup> CIVIC, "We just want someone to protect us". Civilian protection challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 13, 48; Al-Hashimi, H., 5 May 2020, ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, [url](#)

<sup>196</sup> US, USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 23, 2

<sup>197</sup> CNN, Trump says "Iran appears to be standing down" following its retaliatory attacks against Iraqi bases housing US troops, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>198</sup> Wing, J., Tit For Tat Between US and Pro-Iran Hashd Continues, 15 March 20120, [url](#)

<sup>199</sup> US, USDOS, OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Baghdad, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

'core' Iran-backed militias remained out of reach for the state, even if these militias were heavily involved in organised crime, according to Smyth.<sup>200</sup>

In the wake of the wave of public protests that began in October 2019, reports emerged about participants in public protests who had disappeared and who were unaccounted for, and about limited efforts taken by the government to assist in finding them and in bringing state authorities accountable.<sup>201</sup> Sources also reported about protesters having been killed during demonstrations.<sup>202</sup>

For more information about the protests and the treatment of protesters, please see the EASO-COI report [EASO-COI Report – Iraq: The protest movement and treatment of protesters and activists](#).

Both in 2019 and 2020, it was reported about Iraqi state forces not being fully able or willing to protect civilians in areas where ISIL was active. State forces could be reluctant to respond, or they could withdraw from contested places at nightfall.<sup>203</sup> Kurdistan 24 cited KRG President Nechirvan Barzani that more coordination was needed between ISF and the Peshmerga to protect the local population in areas between Erbil and Baghdad.<sup>204</sup> It has also been reported about state forces rescuing civilians kidnapped by armed groups.<sup>205</sup>

For further information, please also see the [EASO-COI Report Iraq – Security Situation 2019, Section 1.4](#)

### 1.4.1 Road security

According to analysts, ISIL kept targeting highways serving civilian traffic, transportation of oil, gas and commodities in the western, eastern and northern governorates.<sup>206</sup> By such means ISIL was seeking to avoid those areas becoming penetrated and visible to others, such as the ISF.<sup>207</sup> Civilians from Daquq in eastern Kirkuk, told in 2019 the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), an NGO, that ISIL fighters were infiltrating their villages at night for the purpose of extorting them. Armed men would block the roads to villages and threaten the inhabitants if they did comply with their demands.<sup>208</sup>

ICG reported in 2020 about PMU units running false checkpoints, illicitly levying fees from truck drivers crossing them.<sup>209</sup>

Hafsa Halawa stated that when a checkpoint closed for the night, local inhabitants could become stuck inside or outside the adjacent city.<sup>210</sup>

Media reported about protesters having blocked roads and highways in Baghdad and various locations in southern Iraq, such as Najaf, Thi Qar, Diwaniyah, Nasiriyah, Wassit, and Basrah, in late 2019 and

<sup>200</sup> Smyth, P., Making sense of Iraq's PMF arrests, 26 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>201</sup> UNAMI, 23 May 2020, Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, [url](#), pp. 2, 4-5; HRW, Iraq: State Appears Complicit in Massacre of Protesters, 16 December 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Abductions Linked to Baghdad Protests, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>202</sup> Arab News, Iraq activist shot dead as anti-government protesters block roads, 22 January 2020, [url](#); AP, 13 dead in 1 of the "worst" days of protests in southern Iraq, 24 November 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, [url](#)

<sup>203</sup> CIVIC, "We just want someone to protect us". Civilian protection challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 18; Halawa, H., The Forgotten Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>204</sup> Kurdistan 24, Kurdistan Region President warns of escalating 'terrorist attacks' in Iraq, because of 'security vacuum', 16 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> Kurdistan 24, Kurdistan security frees 3 abductees chained underground for 11 days, 17 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#); Knights, M., & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>207</sup> Knights, M., & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>208</sup> CIVIC, "We just want someone to protect us". Civilian protection challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 14-15

<sup>209</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>210</sup> Halawa, H., The Forgotten Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

early 2020.<sup>211</sup> For the first time in several years, a truck convoy carrying military supplies was attacked by armed men in the south of Iraq, on the highway between Diwaniyah and Qadissiyah.<sup>212</sup>

More information on road security is provided in the governorate level chapters.

## 1.5 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

### 1.5.1 Civilian casualties

At EASO's request, the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) compiled data on civilian casualties in the reference period.

Year	Number of incidents	Killed	Injured	Total
2019 (Jan – Dec)	400	341	566	907
2020 (Jan – Jul)	213	121	184	305
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>1212</b>

Table 1: Overall casualty figures, 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020<sup>213</sup>

Broken down by gender, age and police, 323 men and 20 women, 45 children and 74 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 directly taking part in hostilities – DPIH).

Year	Women casualties		Children casualties		Police casualties		Men casualties		Total
	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	
2019 (Jan – Dec)	14	21	39	65	50	69	238	411	907
2020 (Jan – Jul)	6	12	6	21	24	41	85	110	305
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>1 212</b>

Table 2: Casualty figures by gender, age and police, 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020<sup>214</sup>

UNAMI's breakdown by incident type uses a different categorisation of incidents than ACLED. As shown by UNAMI's categorisation in the table below, the incidents causing the highest numbers of fatalities are IEDs (including roadside IEDs (465 casualties), small arms fires by pistols and or AKs<sup>215</sup> (350), vehicle-borne IED (VBIED - 131 casualties). Air strikes caused 58 civilian casualties.

<sup>211</sup> Al-Jazeera, Iraqi protesters block roads, shutting offices and schools, 3 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, 20 January 2020, Iraq protesters block roads as they step up calls for reform, 20 January 2020, [url](#); BBC, Iraq protesters: Demonstrators block roads in Najaf, 1 February 2020, [url](#); Arab News, Iraq activist shot dead as anti-government protesters block roads, 22 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>212</sup> EPIC, ISHM: July 9-16, 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 August 2020

<sup>214</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 August 2020

<sup>215</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, AK-47 Soviet firearm, n.d., [url](#)

Incidents' type	2019			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
IED (including roadside IEDs)	112	103	280	<b>383</b>	45	24	58	<b>82</b>
Vehicle-borne IED (VBIED)	12	18	106	<b>124</b>	3	0	7	<b>7</b>
Suicide VBIED (SVIED)	2	1	7	<b>8</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Body-borne IED (BBIED)	1	4	1	<b>5</b>	1	0	6	<b>6</b>
SAF (small arms fires by pistols and or AKs)	136	153	74	<b>227</b>	60	63	60	<b>123</b>
Indirect Fire (mortars and rockets) – IDF	12	15	28	<b>43</b>	15	2	30	<b>32</b>
Air attack/artisries	25	7	28	<b>35</b>	66	15	8	<b>23</b>
Explosive Remnant of War (ERW)	22	8	19	<b>27</b>	7	7	2	<b>9</b>
Unexploded Ordinances (UXOs)	4	2	3	<b>5</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Execution-Style	14	25	2	<b>27</b>	5	7	0	<b>7</b>
Hand grenade (HG)	13	1	12	<b>13</b>	4	2	13	<b>15</b>
Farmland related fires	18	3	4	<b>7</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Stabbing/Assault	5	0	2	<b>2</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Armed attack/ground engagement	1	0	0	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Abduction	17	0	0	<b>0</b>	7	1	0	<b>1</b>
Empty building destructions (by IEDs)	5	0	0	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
...Other...	1	1	0	<b>1</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>Grand total (killed and injured) for 2019 &amp; 2020</b>								<b>1 212 (907 +305)</b>



Table 3: Civilian casualties by incident type<sup>216</sup>

Ninewa had the highest numbers of casualties (264 casualties, of which 82 were fatalities) followed by Kirkuk (258 casualties, of which 81 were fatalities), Diyala (224 casualties, 93 fatalities), Anbar (120 casualties, 50 fatalities), and Baghdad (58 casualties, 40 fatalities). The lowest numbers appeared in Wassit (2 casualties, 1 fatality), Thi-Qar (3 casualties, 1 fatality), Qadissyia (4 casualties, 0 fatalities). Basra had 12 casualties of which 9 were fatalities. No casualties were recorded in Missan.

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

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Anbar	30	43	62	105	4	7	8	15
Babil	13	1	31	32	1	0	0	0
Baghdad	42	37	13	50	4	3	5	8
Basra	17	6	3	9	2	3	0	3
Diyala	55	47	64	111	48	46	67	113
Dohuk	19	6	30	36	59	10	2	12
Erbil	16	5	12	17	12	4	1	5
Karbala	8	13	4	17	8	1	0	1
Kirkuk	73	68	156	224	17	13	21	34
Muthanna	4	1	1	2	2	2	0	2
Najaf	10	4	15	19	1	0	0	0
Ninewa	62	68	106	174	27	14	33	47
Qadisiyyah	10	0	0	0	4	0	4	4
Salahadin	31	39	58	97	12	16	33	49
Sulaymaniyah	3	3	11	14	2	0	7	7
Thi-Qar	3	0	0	0	3	1	2	3
Wasit	4	0	0	0	6	1	1	2
Maysan	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	400	341	566	907	213	121	184	305
Grand total (killed and injured) for 2019 & 2020								<b>1 212 (907+305)</b>

Table 4: Civilian casualties by governorate<sup>217</sup><sup>216</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 August 2020<sup>217</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 August 2020

## 1.5.2 Infrastructural damage and explosive remnants of war

The military effort to retake Iraqi cities from ISIL resulted in ‘significant explosive hazard contamination’, according to the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS). Additional hazard is created by IEDs that ISIL intentionally left behind. Working to address the problem, UNMAS focused through all of 2019 on Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates. National and international stakeholders have acknowledged that clearance must come before reconstruction of key infrastructure and residential buildings can start, UNMAS stated, and deemed the clearance of explosive hazard as ‘critical’ to enabling people who have fled to return safely to the affected areas.<sup>218</sup>

In January 2019, iMMAP recorded highly contaminated areas mainly in the governorates of Ninewa, Kirkuk (around Kirkuk city and Daquq), in Salah al-Din (along the Tigris basin), in Anbar (between Fallujah and Ramadi), in Dohuk and Erbil (along the Turkish border), and in Sulaymaniyah (along the border with Iran).<sup>219</sup>

Most incidents mapped in all of 2019 were in the areas liberated from ISIL in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates, as well as in Baghdad governorate.<sup>220</sup> In all of 2019, iMMAP recorded 310 explosive hazard incidents in these governorates plus Baghdad governorate. Between 1 January and 8 July 2020, iMMAP recorded 212 incidents in these governorates.<sup>221</sup>

## 1.5.3 Displacement and return

By 30 June 2020, IOM recorded 1 382 332 IDPs across Iraq. The top five governorates hosting IDPs were Ninewa (324 078), Dohuk (319 062), Erbil (236 496), Sulaymaniyah (139 860), and Kirkuk (100 026).<sup>222</sup>

The volume of returns has diminished over the years, with 8 % occurring since January 2018, according to UNOCHA – HNO 2020. During the first half of 2019, the number of IDPs who had returned home was 140 000, 3 % of all historic returns. Those who continued to stay in protracted displacement, did so for reasons such as fear and trauma, or new sources of instability.<sup>223</sup> Human rights organisations reported in 2019 about Iraqi authorities forcing IDPs to return to severely damaged places of origin in areas retaken from ISIL.<sup>224</sup> According to Husham al-Hashimi, the Iraqi government saw increasing instability in the northern and eastern parts of Iraq developing during 2020 as hindering the return of IDPs.<sup>225</sup>

In June 2020, IOM recorded 330 000 IDPs living in camps, 114 000 in critical shelters, 936 000 in private settings, and 1 000 in unknown accommodation.<sup>226</sup>

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Iraq, reported that extensive closures and consolidation of camps in the second half of 2019 had caused secondary displacement for more than 16 000 displaced households.<sup>227</sup>

<sup>218</sup> UNMAS, 31 December 2019, Where We Work, Iraq, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response Monthly Security Incidents Situation Report, January 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>220</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response, Explosive Hazard Incidents in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din Governorates from January to December 2019, 12 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>221</sup> iMMAP Explosive Incident Hazards Dashboard, Explosive Hazard 1 January 2020 – 8 July 2020, updated 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>222</sup> IOM, DTM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>223</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq HNO 2020, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>224</sup> AI, Iraq: stop forced returns of hundreds of internally displaced people, 29 August 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Camps expel over 2,000 people seen as ISIS-linked, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: “Smoking the Fox out of its Den” Strategy, July 14, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>226</sup> IOM, Iraq DTM Dashboard, Master List, Displacement Timeline, chart 4, [url](#)

<sup>227</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Programme Cycle 2020, 19 November 2019, [url](#), p. 13

By the end of June 2020, over 4.7 million persons had returned to their areas of origin.<sup>228</sup> This is an increase in the numbers of returnees from 2018, when over 4.1 million persons had returned to areas of origin as of 31 December 2018.<sup>229</sup> IOM ranked the five top governorates of return in 2020 as follows: Ninewa (1 807 170 returnees), followed by Anbar (1 503 468 returnees), Salah al-Din (692 142 returnees), Kirkuk (341 106 returnees) and Diyala (230 244 returnees).<sup>230</sup>

Returns decreased overall through the second quarter of 2020, partly due to movement restrictions imposed to counter the spread of the coronavirus. In districts that had an increase in returns, this was largely due to improved security, services, jobs, and reconstruction. Around 95 % returned to a habitual residence in a good condition and two percent are living in private settings, like host families or rented accommodation. The remaining three percent were living in critical shelters.<sup>231</sup> The same percentages were reported for 2018, in the [EASO – COI Report: Iraq – Security Situation 2019, Section 1.5](#).

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported in 2019 that the KRG had blocked the return of ‘thousands’ of Sunni Arabs, only allowing Kurds and Arabs with ties to the KRI to return to their places of origin.<sup>232</sup>

For more information on the impact of the conflict on the civilian population, see the governorate level chapters of this report. Additionally, information on aspects of this topic is also addressed in the 2020 EASO COI Report [Iraq: Key socio-economic indicators for \(Baghdad, Basrah, Erbil\)](#) and the 2019 [EASO COI Report Iraq: Internal mobility](#).

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<sup>228</sup> IOM, DTM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>229</sup> IOM, Iraq: DTM Round 107, December 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan – Advance Executive Summary, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

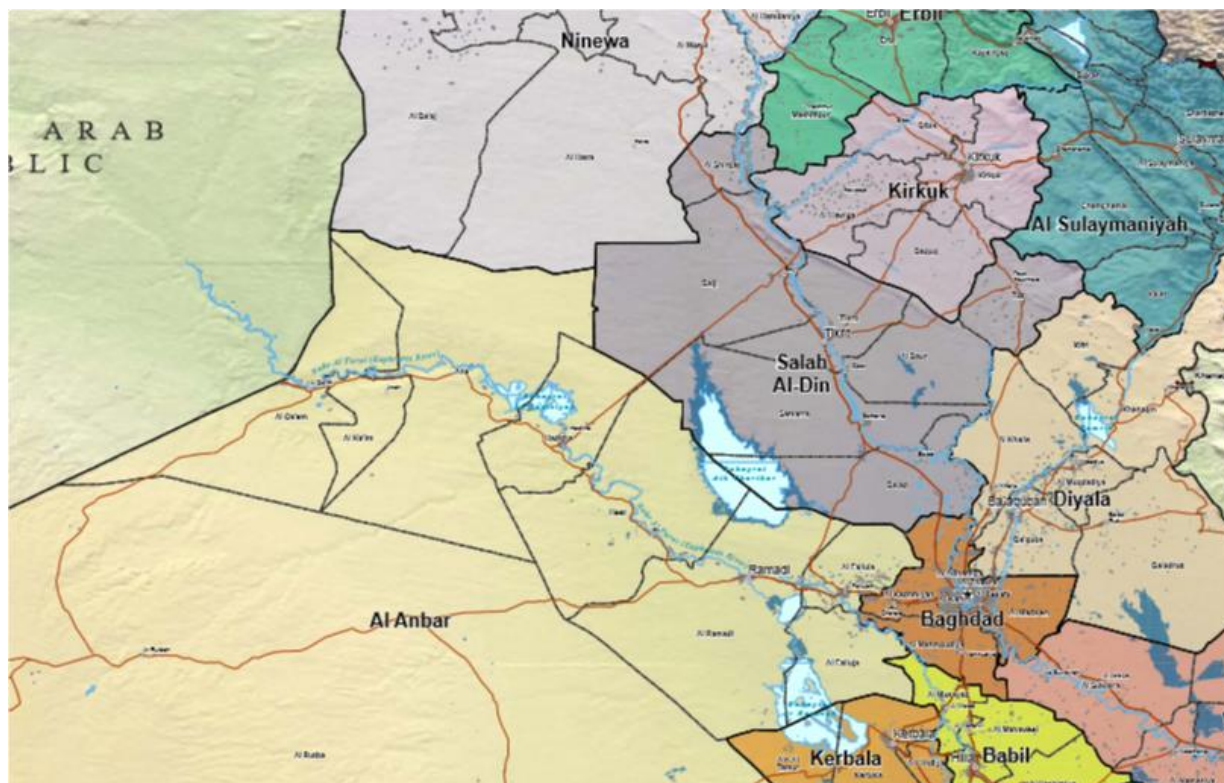
<sup>230</sup> IOM, DTM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>231</sup> IOM, DTM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>232</sup> HRW, KRI – Arabs not allowed to return, 6 September 2019, [url](#)



## 2. Northwestern and central governorates: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din

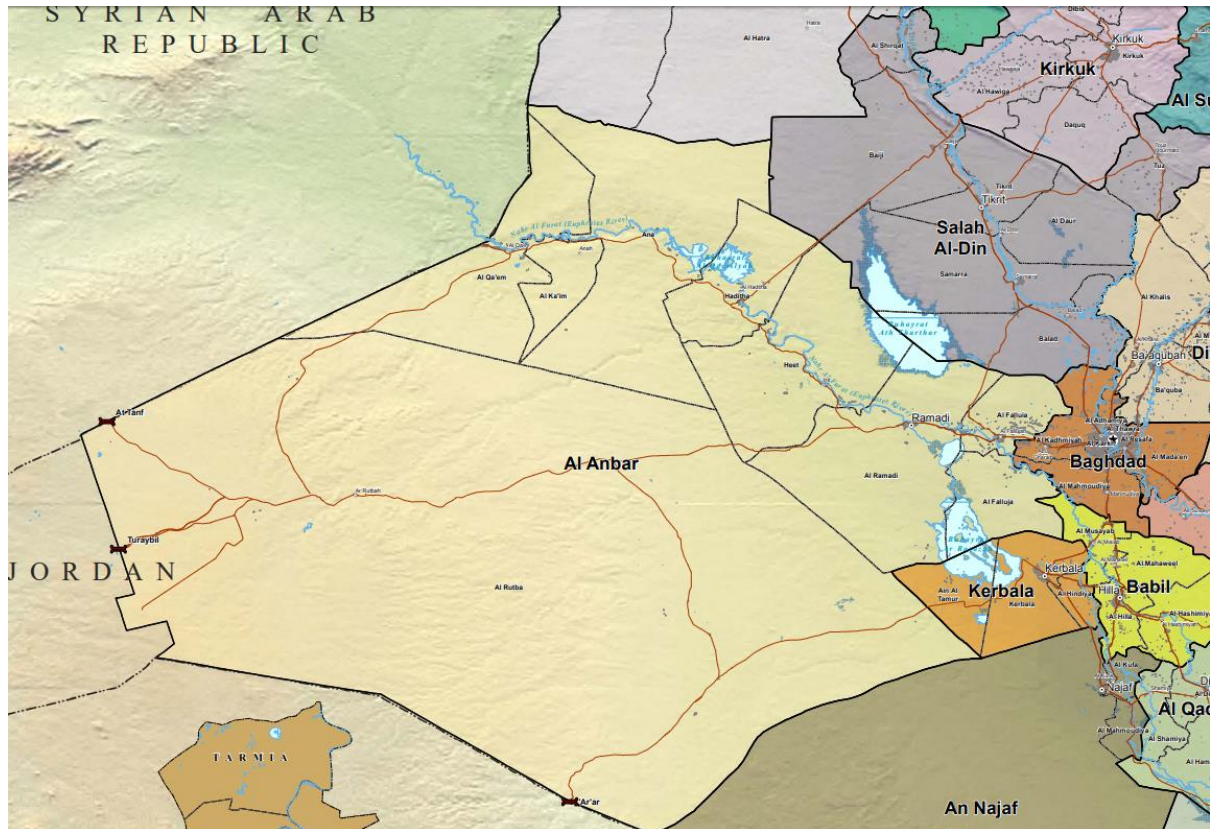


Map 5: The northwestern and central governorates with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>233</sup>

This subsection covers the ‘northwestern and central’ governorates which include for the purpose of this report: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Sahal al-Din.

<sup>233</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

## 2.1 Anbar



Map 6: Anbar governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>234</sup>

### 2.1.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Anbar is the largest governorate in Iraq and makes up about one third of Iraq's total area. Despite its size, and given its vast desert terrain, Anbar is also one of the most sparsely populated regions in Iraq.<sup>235</sup> The governorate has seven districts: Ana, Fallujah, Haditha, Heet, al-Qaim, Ramadi and al-Rutba.<sup>236</sup> The capital of Anbar is Ramadi.<sup>237</sup> Anbar governorate borders with three countries, including Syria to the west and north-west, Jordan to the west and Saudi Arabia to the south-west.<sup>238</sup>

<sup>234</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>235</sup> UN Interagency Information and Analysis Unit, Anbar Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1; NCCI, NCCI Governorate Profile: Anbar, 31 March 2004, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>236</sup> UNOCHA, IRAQ Anbar Governorate profile and monthly humanitarian response January - August 2019, 30 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>237</sup> UN Interagency Information and Analysis Unit, Anbar Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>238</sup> UNOCHA, Al-Anbar Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

## Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>239</sup> the governorate's population at 1 818 318.<sup>240</sup> The governorate's capital Ramadi had an estimated population of 148 598 inhabitants in 2007.<sup>241</sup>

## Ethnicity

The governorate is predominately inhabited by Sunni Arabs, but also hosts a small Christian minority.<sup>242</sup> The socio-political fabric of Anbar traditionally revolves around local hierarchies and has a strong tribal structure, where tribal leaders and Sunni clerics maintain a high level of authority in local affairs.<sup>243</sup> Many of the elder leaders of the tribes -Sheikhs- fled the country after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. This opened up opportunities for new Sheikhs to gain power and prestige by 'aligning with coalition forces and garnering reconstruction projects and employment for their tribes'.<sup>244</sup>

## Road security

Various military groups and security actors maintained security within Anbar governorate, including the ISF, police, local and non-local PMUs, including Shia militias and Sunni tribal militias.<sup>245</sup> According to Al-Monitor, 'a plethora of checkpoints manned by several different security forces are scattered throughout Anbar province, slowing movement and creating confusion regarding authorizations due to ineffective communication between the officers in charge.'<sup>246</sup> Occasional attacks staged by insurgent groups, including ISIL, continued to be reported on roads and checkpoints in Anbar governorate in 2019 and 2020.<sup>247</sup> According to iMMAP in June 2020, risks of explosive hazards on roads in Anbar governorate were reported in and around Rutbah, Fallujah, Ramadi, Heet and on the road linking Qaim with the border crossing.<sup>248</sup>

Two of three official border crossings between Iraq and Syria are located in Anbar governorate, the Qaim-Bukamal crossing and the Tanf-Walid crossing further south, which remained closed, according to a report from March 2020.<sup>249</sup> The Iraq-Syria border crossing in Qaim was opened by the Iraqi government on 30 September 2019, which came under Border Police control, however various PMUs

<sup>239</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>240</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 إحصاء السكان والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>241</sup> UN Interagency Information and Analysis Unit, Anbar Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>242</sup> Ali, A., Security, Religion and Gender in Al-Anbar Province, Iraq: A focus group-based conflict analysis, May 2014, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>243</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment II, October 2017, [url](#), p. 2; NCCI, NCCI Governorate Profile: Anbar, 31 March 2004, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>244</sup> Asfura-Heim, P., CNA-Anaysis & Solutions. No Security Without US: Tribes and Tribalism in al-Anbar Province Iraq, June 2014, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>245</sup> Niqash, Red Lines In The Sand: In The Deserts of Anbar, US And Pro-Iran Forces Jostle, 13 September 2019, [url](#); Niqash, Extremists At The Intersections: As Security Forces Multiply In Anbar, So Does Danger, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>246</sup> Al-Monitor, Anbar governor wants police boosted and military back on bases, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>247</sup> For examples of roadside bombs, IEDs and other attacks on roads and checkpoints in Anbar governorate, see illustrative security incidents below.

<sup>248</sup> iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar Governorate 01-30 June 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#). For an overview of explosive hazards risk level on roads in Anbar governorate since 2019, see iMMAP's monthly updated maps.

<sup>249</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 20

maintained presence around the main checkpoint.<sup>250</sup> The Turaybil-Karamah border crossing with Jordan as well as the Arar border crossing with Saudi Arabia are also located in Anbar governorate. According to media reports, Turaybil-Karamah border crossing was operational in 2019,<sup>251</sup> while Arar crossing remained closed<sup>252</sup> with plans to reopen in October 2020.<sup>253</sup> Arar border crossing and the nearby town of Al-Nukhaib were controlled by PMUs, including the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades, Al-Najaba, Khorasani and Imam Ali.<sup>254</sup>

According to the USDOS' 2020 report, '[b]order security remained a critical capability gap, as the ISF has limited capability to fully secure Iraq's borders with Syria and Iran.'<sup>255</sup> The border with Syria south of the KRI remained porous and prone to ISIL and other terrorist networks' activities, and smuggling and other criminal enterprises.<sup>256</sup> Iran-backed PMUs maintained a presence at Iraq's major border crossings.<sup>257</sup> According to 2019 reports, Kataib Hezbollah units operated along the border, maintaining checkpoints on the border road (Highway 20).<sup>258</sup> According to the same source, Kataib Hezbollah also controlled the Husseibah Point of Entry and the Akashat border crossings were coordinated via a Kataib Hezbollah base at the H-3 airfield, near Rutbah.<sup>259</sup>

## Economy

Agriculture provided employment to around a quarter of Anbar governorate's population prior to ISIL.<sup>260</sup> According to the Carnegie Endowment's report from March 2020, Kataib Hezbollah has turned a large swath of agricultural land containing about 1 600 farms in the Masharii area, on the southern side of Qaim, into a military zone, refusing to allow local farmers to use it. Members of Qaim's local council have complained about economic losses for the community, particularly as about 40 % of the local population depends on agriculture for its livelihood.<sup>261</sup>

## 2.1.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

From shortly after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 until 2006, Anbar governorate was described as the centre of an entrenched Sunni insurgency against US forces. Towards the end of 2006, Sunni tribes in Ramadi formed a movement, the Anbar Awakening, to partner with US forces against Al-Qaeda and defeated the insurgent group in Ramadi by mid-2007. The Awakening spread to the rest of the

<sup>250</sup> US, USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Iraq, 24 June 2020, [url](#); Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Al-Monitor, Dangers persist as Iraqi border crossing opens and IDPs return, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>251</sup> Arab News, Jordan receives first Iraqi oil for 5 years, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>252</sup> The New Arab, Car bomb explosion ends two-year calm on Iraq-Saudi border, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>253</sup> Gulf News, Saudi-Iraq border crossing to officially reopen in October, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>254</sup> The New Arab, Car bomb explosion ends two-year calm on Iraq-Saudi border, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>255</sup> US, USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Iraq, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>256</sup> US, USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Iraq, 24 June 2020, [url](#). See also: Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 13-14

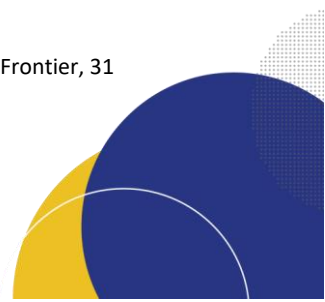
<sup>257</sup> US, USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Iraq, 24 June 2020, [url](#); Foreign Policy, A Powerful Iran-Backed Militia Is Losing Influence in Iraq, 22 May 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Dangers persist as Iraqi border crossing opens and IDPs return, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>258</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>259</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>260</sup> UN Interagency Information and Analysis Unit, Anbar Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>261</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14



governorate and to other parts of Iraq, which led to a drop in violence and a period of comparative calm and stability in Anbar.<sup>262</sup>

With the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in late 2011, ISIL started to emerge in Ramadi, Fallujah and various towns in Anbar governorate. By December 2013, clashes between Sunni tribal militias and the Iraqi army escalated after the arrest of Ahmed al-Alwani, a politician from Anbar. On 1 January 2014, ISIL seized control of the governorate's cities and the ISF largely fled and abandoned their positions.<sup>263</sup> Without a united opposition, ISIL overran police checkpoints and stations throughout Anbar governorate and took control of large parts of it, including Rutba, Qaim, Heet, and the capital, Ramadi. US military operations resumed following ISIL's sweep into Mosul in June 2014, with US forces returning to Anbar's al-Asad air base in late 2014.<sup>264</sup>

Following a series of protracted battles with US military support, between December 2015 and June 2016, the Iraqi government recaptured Fallujah and Ramadi with ISIL having been weakened significantly.<sup>265</sup> The military offensive to retake ISIL territory was formally concluded in November 2017, with the retaking of Rawa, the last town remaining under ISIL control.<sup>266</sup>

ISIL's rule and military operations to regain control of Anbar, left civilian areas devastated with 'widespread destruction of public and private property'<sup>267</sup> and led to successive waves of mass displacement.<sup>268</sup> Nearly half a million people fled ISIL's advance between January and May 2014, while a second major wave of displacement took place in 2015/2016 during the military campaign to recapture territory from ISIL. As of June 2020, over 1.5 million people have returned to Anbar governorate,<sup>269</sup> where tensions exist between those who fled during the initial advance of ISIL and those who initially remained and fled later on, according to IOM.<sup>270</sup>

As of November 2018, 24 other mass graves have been discovered in Anbar governorate with many containing the remains of civilians and ISF personnel.<sup>271</sup> In December 2019, a mass grave was found near the city of Fallujah containing the bodies of 643 Sunni Arab civilians and are believed to be of the Al Muhamdah tribe who disappeared in 2016 after their areas were taken over by Shia militants fighting under the banner of the PMU.<sup>272</sup> An investigation was reportedly undertaken by the Iraqi authorities.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>262</sup> Foreign Affairs, Anbar's Illusions - The Failure of Iraq's Success Story, 24 June 2017, [url](#)

<sup>263</sup> Foreign Affairs, Anbar's Illusions - The Failure of Iraq's Success Story, 24 June 2017, [url](#)

<sup>264</sup> NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 7; Foreign Affairs, Anbar's Illusions - The Failure of Iraq's Success Story, 24 June 2017, [url](#)

<sup>265</sup> Foreign Affairs, Anbar's Illusions - The Failure of Iraq's Success Story, 24 June 2017, [url](#)

<sup>266</sup> NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>267</sup> NRC et al., The Long Road Home: Achieving Durable Solutions to Displacement in Iraq: Lessons from Returns in Iraq, February 2018, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>268</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>269</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>270</sup> IOM, Managing Return in Anbar; Community Responses to the Return of IDPs with Perceived Affiliation, March 2020, [url](#), p. 4.

<sup>271</sup> UNAMI/OHCHR, "Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL", 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>272</sup> The New Arab, The Iraq Report: Mass graves of Sunnis found as mass protests rage on, 20 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>273</sup> Diyaruna, Iraq investigates mass grave near Fallujah, 18 December 2019, [url](#)



## Armed actors

### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and aligned forces*

The ISF have the overall responsibility of the security within the governorate through the regional operation commands.<sup>274</sup> According to a 2017 ISW report on the Iraqi Order of Battle, regional operation commands in Iraq were reported to act as operational-level headquarters commanding and supervising different ISF units within a geographical area of responsibility.<sup>275</sup> Anbar governorate was split between the Anbar Operations Command (AOC), covering Ramadi and Fallujah and the surrounding desert areas,<sup>276</sup> and the Jazeera and Badia Operations Command (JBOC) covering most of Anbar governorate, west of Ramadi, including the western Euphrates River Valley, the far western district of Rutba, the Amman-Baghdad highway, and much of the Jazeera and Badia Deserts. The JBOC was reportedly understaffed and therefore relied heavily on the support of local Jughaihi tribal fighters, who laid claim on the Haditha district.<sup>277</sup> In addition to the AOC and JBOC, the ISF deployed other Operations Command detachments across the country to Anbar.<sup>278</sup>

However, some parts of Anbar governorate, particularly along the Syrian and Iraqi border with vast desert areas, are 'considered hard to control'.<sup>279</sup> The ISF predominately consists of units from the army, federal police<sup>280</sup> and the mobile Emergency Response Division.<sup>281</sup> According to media reports from 2018/2019, plans were underway to gradually hand over security control from the ISF to local and federal police forces, including in Anbar governorate.<sup>282</sup> Border Guard Units were reported to be deployed in Anbar governorate along the border crossings with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>283</sup>

### *United States (US) and International Forces*

As of March 2020, US forces reportedly continue to hold two military bases in Anbar governorate near the Iraqi-Syrian border, one at Tanf-Walid in Ar-Rutbah district and the other at Ain al-Asad, near Baghdadi district.<sup>284</sup> Additionally, US forces were earlier based near the old railway station in Qaim during the campaign against ISIL, but redeployed to a different base in Kirkuk since mid-March 2020.<sup>285</sup> Qaim base has been taken over by the ISF since the end of March 2020.<sup>286</sup>

<sup>274</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>275</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>276</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>277</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 18-19

<sup>278</sup> Detailed information on the detachments redeployed to Anbar is described in ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 14-24. The report further includes a chart over Iraqi Army Divisions and their areas of operation (Appendix D: Iraqi Security forced Commanders). See pp. 61-62

<sup>279</sup> Al-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> For more details on the units and detachments deployed to Anbar as at May 2016, see: ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 25-26

<sup>281</sup> For more details on the units and detachments deployed to Anbar as at May 2016, see: ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 26-27

<sup>282</sup> Al-Monitor, As Iraqi army retreats to borders, local police controls cities' security, 1 February 2019, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Anbar governor wants police boosted and military back on bases, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>283</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p.12; ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 27-28

<sup>284</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 16; Niqash, Red Lines In The Sand: In The Deserts of Anbar, US And Pro-Iran Forces Jostle, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>285</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 17; Al-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>286</sup> Xinhua, Iraqi forces assume full control of military base in Anbar province, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

### Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)

Many government-incorporated PMUs as well as militias with closer links to Iran, operate near Qaim close to the Syrian-Iraqi border.<sup>287</sup> According to Michael Knights' 2019 report, the Akashat sub-sector is garrisoned by brigades Allah al-Tawfiya (PMU Brigade 19), Liwa al-Tafuf (PMU Brigade 13), and Saraya Talia al-Khurasani (PMU Brigade 18).<sup>288</sup> The Husseibah/Qaim sub-sector was garrisoned mainly by Liwa al-Tafuf (PMU Brigade 13).<sup>289</sup> The commander of Liwa al-Tafuf, Qasim Muslih, also headed the PMU Western Anbar Axis, which was the sector headquarters for all PMU operations along the border and in Rutbah. Liwa al-Tafuf and Kataib Hezbollah jointly controlled all smuggling and commercial activities across the border.<sup>290</sup>

Michael Knights further reported that the Euphrates River Valley leading down to eastern Anbar governorate was predominantly controlled by ISF and Liwa al-Muntadher (PMU Brigade 7) and Kataib Ansar al-Hujja (PMU Brigade 29).<sup>291</sup> The same 2019 source reported that at the eastern end of this area was the Husseibah border crossing on the Euphrates, facing the Albu Kamal areas in Syria, where PMUs such as Kataib Hezbollah (PMU Brigade 45), Kataib Al-Imam Ali (PMU Brigade 40), and Harakat al-Abdal (PMU Brigade 39) maintained combat forces.<sup>292</sup> Kataib Hezbollah (PMU Brigade 45) controlled the road between Qaim and Akashat to its southwest.<sup>293</sup> Qassim Musleh is the head of the PMUs for western Anbar and thus for the Kataib Hezbollah brigades.<sup>294</sup> Some Kataib Hezbollah units have been formally incorporated into the government-salaried PMUs, however, most units are not under state control.<sup>295</sup>

Reports describe that the many security actors, and particularly PMUs operating in western Anbar governorate, often lack coordination among one another,<sup>296</sup> 'lead to confusion',<sup>297</sup> do not pursue a unified security strategy,<sup>298</sup> and thus raise concerns and distrust among the civilian population.<sup>299</sup> According to media reports, '[t]he presence, quantity and relative influence of the various security forces — both those answering to the central government and those answering to others — have long been difficult to clearly establish'<sup>300</sup>, and further, '[c]ivilians have repeatedly complained to Al-Monitor during several visits to the area since its liberation from Islamic State control in November 2017 about

<sup>287</sup> Al-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#); Niqash, Red Lines In The Sand: In The Deserts of Anbar, US And Pro-Iran Forces Jostle, 13 September 2019, [url](#); Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>288</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>289</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12; Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>290</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>291</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4. See also, Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>292</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 3. See also, Al-Monitor, Dangers persist as Iraqi border crossing opens and IDPs return, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iraq's Qaim border open to nonlocal PMU fighting in Syria, 25 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>293</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>294</sup> Al-Monitor, Qaim residents fearful following conflict between US, Iran-backed militias, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>295</sup> Al-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>296</sup> Niqash, Extremists At The Intersections: As Security Forces Multiply In Anbar, So Does Danger, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>297</sup> Al-Monitor, Anbar governor wants police boosted and military back on bases, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>298</sup> Niqash, Extremists At The Intersections: As Security Forces Multiply In Anbar, So Does Danger, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>299</sup> Al-Monitor, PMU decree unlikely to shift power balance in Iraq's Qaim, 20 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>300</sup> Al-Monitor, Qaim residents fearful following conflict between US, Iran-backed militias, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

the dizzying array of security forces, some of whom do not wear insignia of any sort but carry weapons.<sup>301</sup>

### *Sunni Tribal Militias*

Sunni tribal forces have been mobilised since 2014 in the wake of the fight against ISIS in Iraq and have been incorporated into the PMU. The initiative was partially US-sponsored and the forces are known as the Tribal Mobilization Force (TMF), or tribal *hashd* in Anbar and Ninewa governorates, which aimed at tribal forces to play a role as local 'hold' forces in their areas once retaken from ISIL.<sup>302</sup>

As of June 2019, an estimated 10 000 salaried members of the TMF were based in Anbar governorate, according to Anbar tribal forces leader Sheikh Qatari Samarmad al-Obeidi.<sup>303</sup> And further, some 7 500 fighters were enlisted in eastern Anbar governorate, including Ramadi and Fallujah, while 2 500 fighters were based in the western districts of the governorate such as Heet, Haditha and Qaim.<sup>304</sup> Of these, one major group is reported to be the Hamza Brigade, led by Rabah al-Mahallawi and made up of members of the Bou Mahal tribe, who have been deployed near Husseibah.<sup>305</sup> The other one is the Upper Euphrates Brigade, linked to the Karbuli tribe and led by Musa al-Karbuli and Assif Ibrahim al-Karbuli. This brigade is reported to have been deployed in Karabla and near the Akkas gas field.<sup>306</sup>

According to Anbar tribal forces leader Sheikh Qatari Samarmad al-Obeidi, as of June 2019, an additional 4 000 forces in Anbar governorate were previously receiving military training and held administrative orders designating them as official fighters, however, they were not part of the official TMF and did not receive any salaries. These fighters were planned to be incorporated into the TMF and receive salaries from the Iraqi government.<sup>307</sup>

### *ISIL*

According to the UN Security Council in February 2020, '[w]hile the overall level of violence related to ISIL has decreased, the group remains a significant threat and has shifted to insurgent tactics, with attacks continuing in different parts of the country.'<sup>308</sup> Security vacuums caused by re-deployments 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 Anbar governorate.<sup>309</sup> In remote areas of Iraq, ISIL is reported to continue to mount attacks on official checkpoints, infrastructure and officials.<sup>310</sup> ISIL operations in the first half of 2020

<sup>301</sup> Al-Monitor, PMU decree unlikely to shift power balance in Iraq's Qaim, 20 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>302</sup> Derzsi-Horvath, A. et al., Iraq after ISIL: Who's Who: Quick Facts About Local and Sub-State Forces, GPPI, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>303</sup> Diyaruna, Iraq to beef up ranks of tribal forces in Anbar, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>304</sup> Diyaruna, Iraq to beef up ranks of tribal forces in Anbar, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>305</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>306</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>307</sup> Diyaruna, Iraq to beef up ranks of tribal forces in Anbar, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>308</sup> UN Security Council, 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

<sup>309</sup> 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-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>310</sup> UN Security Council, 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

have been described as an ‘assassination campaign’ by the late Husham al-Hashimi, a leading Iraqi security analyst.<sup>311</sup> The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reports in June 2020 that ISIL’s geographical reach and activities have almost doubled since late December 2018 across the governorates of Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din.<sup>312</sup> The ICG further assesses that the militant group’s attacks have become ‘more assertive’ in spring 2020 and have been primarily focused on a rural belt reaching across Iraq’s centre north, in Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates as well as the western edge of Anbar governorate, along the Jordanian and Saudi Arabian borders.<sup>313</sup>

According to analysis by Husham al-Hashimi, as of December 2019, ISIL had around 350 to 400 active fighters supported by 400 inactive fighters or ‘sleeper cells’ who mainly deal with logistics in each of their ‘sectors’, including the Anbar ‘sector’.<sup>314</sup> Small patrols of nine to 11 men operated in various places and carried out attacks.<sup>315</sup> According to the ICG, many of these active ISIL fighters are Iraqis and local to their respective areas of operation, however, most of the 200 to 300 remaining foreign fighters in Iraq were based in Anbar, according to estimates by Husham al-Hashimi.<sup>316</sup> ISIL fighters were able to exploit Anbar’s remote desert terrain, which is difficult to patrol.<sup>317</sup> ISIL fighters used buried containers as subterranean bases, with some militants reportedly traversing open expanses disguised as shepherds.<sup>318</sup>

Knights and Almeida observed in May 2020 that ISIL maintain active attack cells in the following areas in Anbar governorate: Akashat; the al-Qaim/Abu Kamal border area; Wadi Horan/Rutbah; Nukhayb; the Rawah-Anah-Haditha corridor; Hit; Ramadi and Lake Razazah; Karmah and southern Thar; and Fallujah/Amiriyat al-Fallujah.<sup>319</sup>

### 2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

In an escalation of hostilities between the US and Iran, a series of attacks took place between December 2019 and January 2020 in Iraq, including in Anbar governorate. On 29 December 2019, the US military launched airstrikes against five Kataib Hezbollah positions near the Iraqi-Syrian border (three in Anbar governorate and two in Syria), killing over 25 PMU fighters and injuring dozens.<sup>320</sup> This strike further escalated tensions between the US and Iranian-backed groups and the Iraqi government and led to an attack by demonstrators affiliated with the PMU on the US Embassy in Baghdad on 31 December 2019. In response, the US administration ordered a drone attack on 3 January 2020, which killed Kataib Hezbollah commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, the leader of the IRGC’s Quds Force, at Baghdad International Airport. On 7 January 2020,

<sup>311</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>312</sup> SIPRI, *The resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq: Political and military responses*, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>313</sup> ICG, *When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard*, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>314</sup> 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., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>315</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>316</sup> ICG, *Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria*, Middle East Report N°207, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>317</sup> Al-Monitor, *Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria*, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>318</sup> ICG, *Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria*, Middle East Report N°207, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>319</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., *Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020*, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 23.

<sup>320</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, *The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier*, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 18; Al-Monitor, *Fighters in Iraq’s Anbar wary of US-Iran conflict as Denmark pulls forces*, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

in a revenge attack, 22 Iranian ballistic missiles targeted US troops based at the Ain al-Asad base in western Anbar and a base near Erbil where US troops are also stationed, leading to 34 injuries among US troops and considerable damage at Ain al-Assad base. Subsequently, both sides sought to deescalate the crisis.<sup>321</sup>

Successive UN Security Council reports from 2019 and the first half of 2020 reported that ISIL remnants frequently carried out asymmetric attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, especially in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates.<sup>322</sup> According to analysis by Knights and Almeida from May 2020, Anbar governorate displayed the fewest attacks among the surveyed governorates<sup>323</sup> throughout 2018 and 2019, with an average of 7.0 ISIL attacks per month in 2018, and 8.7 per month in 2019. However, after April 2019, Anbar saw the return of attempted mass-casualty attacks, including on cities like Ramadi and Hit, as well as increased intimidation of rural tribes with terror tactics such as attempted suicide bombings targeting markets, mosques, and shepherds. Larger and newer-looking weapons caches were found in the Hit to Ramadi corridor, staged within striking distance of Hit, Ramadi, Fallujah, and Baghdad.<sup>324</sup>

According to analysis by Joel Wing of Musings of Iraq, throughout 2019, ISIL has been focusing on moving in fighters and material from Syria into Iraq via Anbar and Ninewa governorates.<sup>325</sup>

During the first quarter in 2020, monthly average attacks jumped to 27.6 in Anbar, triple the average of 2019. Roadside bombings became used more frequently mostly targeting soft-skinned civilian vehicles of the PMUs on the desert highway system between Qaim and Rutbah, which are attacked from the high plateau of Wadi Horan. Larger-scale tactical operations at platoon strength of 30 or more men armed with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and mortars were reported for the same period, as well as more sniper attacks targeting village *mukhtars*.<sup>326</sup>

Analysis by Joel of Wing of Musings on Iraq shows that ISIL launched a ‘spring campaign’ across Iraq as the months of April and May 2020 saw a significant surge in violence, which largely subsided by June 2020.<sup>327</sup> Anbar governorate has reported ten incidents in April, 17 incidents in May and four incidents in June 2020, representing a rare spike in security incidents in the governorate,<sup>328</sup> and pointing to ‘Anbar no longer being a center for the insurgency like it used to be.’<sup>329</sup>

<sup>321</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, *The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier*, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 18; Al-Monitor, *Pentagon: 34 US troops injured in Iranian strike*, 24 January 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, *Fighters in Iraq's Anbar wary of US-Iran conflict as Denmark pulls forces*, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>322</sup> UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 24; UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 24; UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019)*, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/903], 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 29; UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019)*, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/660], 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 19. See also: UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018)*, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/365], 2 May 2019, [url](#), para. 18

<sup>323</sup> Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din governorates were assessed; Knights, M. and Almeida, A., *Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020*, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13.

<sup>324</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., *Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020*, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 15.

<sup>325</sup> Wing, J., *Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June*, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>326</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., *Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020*, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 15.

<sup>327</sup> Wing, J., *Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June*, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>328</sup> Wing, J., *Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June*, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>329</sup> Wing, J., *Islamic State Offensive In Iraq Takes Off In May*, 3 June 2020, [url](#)



Anti-ISIL security sweeps and military operations of varying scales reportedly continue in Anbar governorate, particularly in western Anbar, throughout 2019 and 2020.<sup>330</sup> In February 2020, ISF have launched a major operation, Heroes of Iraq, targeting ISIL's sleeper cells in areas of Anbar governorate bordering Syria and Jordan due to the recent uptick in insurgent activity, such as bombings, ambushes, kidnapping, extortion, and arson. The operation involved several branches of the ISF, including Border Patrol Units, Anbar Operation Command, Baghdad Operation Command, and Al-Jazeera Operation Command, with support from the Iraqi Air Force.<sup>331</sup> In May 2020, another major military campaign, Desert Lions Operation, was launched to clear areas of ISIL remnants, focusing on the north of Anbar governorate, the south of Ninewa governorate and the west of Salah al-Din governorate.<sup>332</sup> June 2020 saw a total of ten security sweeps in Anbar governorate, 'focusing upon interdicting IS's movement across the Syrian border and the province into other parts of Iraq.'<sup>333</sup> Anti-ISIL operations are reported to have limited effects against clearing ISIL from Anbar governorate.<sup>334</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 11 January 2019, a car bomb exploded in a market in Qaim killing two civilians and injuring 25 others.<sup>335</sup>
- Between January and March 2019, ISIL fighters have been 'kidnapping and, in some cases, executing Iraqi truffle hunters, mostly in the deserts of western Anbar Province. The ISF confirmed the kidnapping of 44 truffle hunters this year, and more have probably gone unreported.'<sup>336</sup> ISF confirmed the kidnapping of 44 truffle hunters in the first quarter of 2019, and more are likely to have gone unreported.<sup>337</sup> On 13 March 2019, an ISIL member killed a resident who had been kidnapped while picking desert truffles in the desert. On 15 February 2019, eight civilians were abducted while picking truffles in two separate incidents. Five persons were abducted in Rawa district and three in Haditha district in western Anbar.<sup>338</sup> On 28 January 2019, ISIL militants killed two Iraqi farmers and kidnapped another in Haditha district who were gathering desert truffles.<sup>339</sup>
- On 6 May 2019, unidentified people bombed a house owned by the family of an ISIL member in the center of Heet city in Anbar governorate in a seeming revenge attack.<sup>340</sup>

<sup>330</sup> The Arab Weekly, Baghdad launches military campaign to counter ISIS resurgence, 18 May 2020, [url](#); Jerusalem Post, Iranian-backed militias playing key role in Anbar against ISIS, 26 April 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Iraqi army launches new anti-ISIS op – without coalition or PMF backing, 12 February 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Has the Islamic State returned to western Anbar?, 20 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>331</sup> Rudaw, Iraqi army launches new anti-ISIS op – without coalition or PMF backing, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>332</sup> The Arab Weekly, Baghdad launches military campaign to counter ISIS resurgence, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>333</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>334</sup> Wing, J., Iraq Launches Security Op In Response To New Islamic State Offensive, 20 May 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Has the Islamic State returned to western Anbar?, 20 March 2019, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Local intelligence key to Anbar anti-IS operations, 12 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>335</sup> US, USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Iraq, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>336</sup> The New York Times, They Go to the Desert to Hunt for Truffles. But ISIS Is Hunting Them., 19 March 2019, [url](#). See also: GQ Middle East, The Truffle Hunters Of Iraq, 5 January 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Has the Islamic State returned to western Anbar?, 20 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>337</sup> The New York Times, They Go to the Desert to Hunt for Truffles. But ISIS Is Hunting Them., 19 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>338</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS kidnaps 8 more Iraqis picking truffles in Anbar, 16 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>339</sup> Iraqi News, Islamic State kills two Iraqis, kidnaps another in Iraq's Anbar, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>340</sup> Al-Monitor, Iraqi tribes seek to heal enduring wounds of IS legacy, 22 May 2019, [url](#)

- On 29 August 2019, unidentified gunmen shot dead four Iraqi soldiers and wounded seven more at a military checkpoint in Anbar governorate.<sup>341</sup>
- In January 2020, one Iraqi officer was killed and five others wounded in a car bomb explosion carried out by ISIL in the border town of Al-Nukhaib, located around 20 kms from the border with Saudi Arabia.<sup>342</sup>
- In early February 2020, PMUs repelled two attacks the same week by ISIL militants on PMU manned checkpoints in western Anbar.<sup>343</sup>
- On 21 March 2020, two Iraqi soldiers were killed in a double bomb attack in the town of Rutba in western Anbar. While no group had claimed responsibility for the attack, such attacks are reportedly commonly carried out by ISIL militants in the area.<sup>344</sup>
- On 5 April 2020, four Iraqi soldiers were killed in an ISIL attack on a checkpoint west of Rutba town in western Anbar.<sup>345</sup>
- On 25 July 2020, a motorcycle bomb exploded near Kubaisa in Anbar governorate, killing one soldier and wounding another.<sup>346</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Anbar	30	43	62	<b>105</b>	4	7	8	<b>15</b>

Table 5: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Anbar governorate.<sup>347</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period ACLED reported 124 battles, 100 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 16 cases of violence against civilians, 0 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 240 security incidents of these types in Anbar governorate, the majority taking place in Ar-Rutba district. 16 protests were also reported in Anbar governorate during the reference period.<sup>348</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>341</sup> Al Arabiya, Gunmen kill 4 Iraqi soldiers at checkpoint in Anbar province, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>342</sup> The New Arab, Car bomb explosion ends two-year calm on Iraq-Saudi border, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>343</sup> Shafaq News, Within a week, ISIS step up and launch two attacks in western Iraq, 4 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>344</sup> Anadolu Agency, Bomb attack kills 2 soldiers in Iraq's Anbar, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>345</sup> Anadolu Agency, Daesh/ISIS terrorists kill 4 Iraqi soldiers in Anbar, 5 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>346</sup> NINA, Killing and wounding two soldiers with a motorcycle bomb explosion in Anbar, 25 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>347</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 July 2020

<sup>348</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

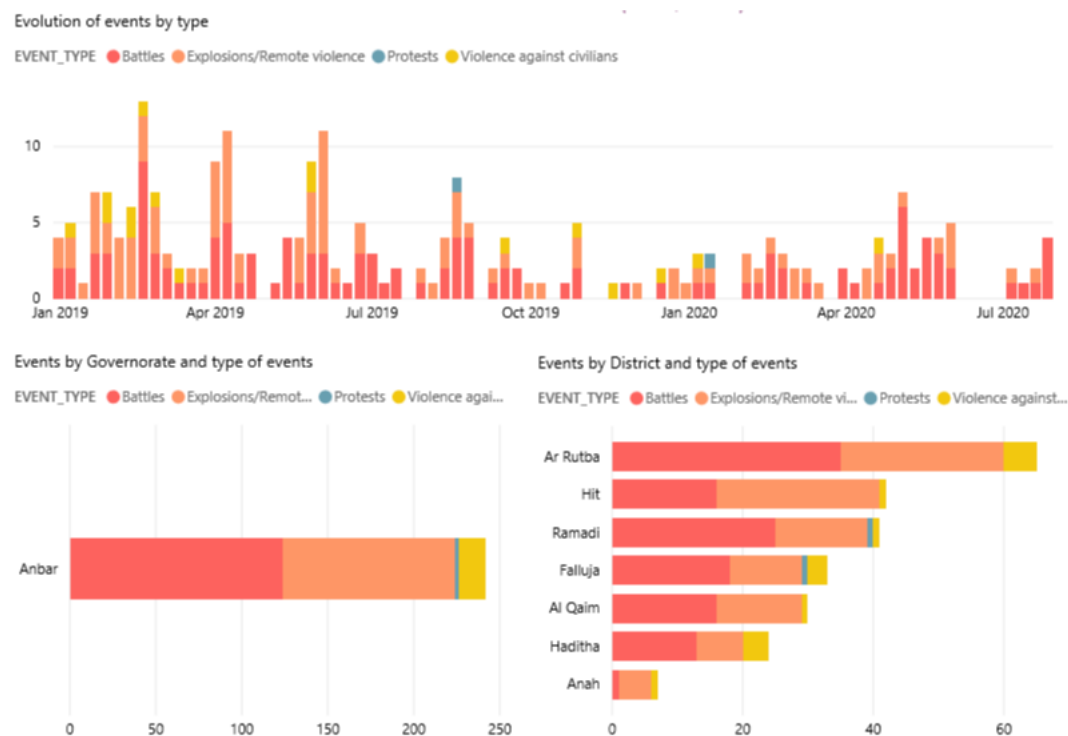


Figure 8: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Anbar governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data.<sup>349</sup>

## 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 \(2018\)](#).

According to a 2018 media article, state authority was reported to be weak in Anbar governorate, '[w]ith so many different forces in Iraq, the [Anbar] governor lamented that he does not have the power to investigate some issues in his own province.'<sup>350</sup> In Qaim in particular, given the continued reported presence of a plethora of local and non-local PMU, not all militia groups answered and were accountable to the central Iraqi government,<sup>351</sup> and some even operated with complete independence from the Iraqi government.<sup>352</sup> And further, the reported lack of coordination between different security actors undermined functioning security.<sup>353</sup> According to a report by the Carnegie Middle East Centre with regards to the multiplicity of military forces based in Qaim, 'the tensions caused by the presence of militias and the weakness of official security forces have made it difficult to fully secure border towns and direct resources toward reconstruction and long-term stabilization.'<sup>354</sup>

<sup>349</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>350</sup> Al-Monitor, Anbar governor wants police boosted and military back on bases, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>351</sup> Al-Monitor, Qaim residents fearful following conflict between US, Iran-backed militias, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>352</sup> Foreign Policy, A Powerful Iran-Backed Militia Is Losing Influence in Iraq, 22 May 2020, [url](#); Niqash, Red Lines In The Sand: In The Deserts of Anbar, US And Pro-Iran Forces Jostle, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>353</sup> Niqash, Red Lines In The Sand: In The Deserts of Anbar, US And Pro-Iran Forces Jostle, 13 September 2019, [url](#); Niqash, Extremists At The Intersections: As Security Forces Multiply In Anbar, So Does Danger, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>354</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 13



The mostly Sunni Arab residents reportedly resented the continued dominance of the predominantly Shia PMUs who continued controlling and patrolling large areas in Anbar.<sup>355</sup> PMUs have committed gross and widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings in Anbar governorate during the military operations against ISIL between 2016 and 2017.<sup>356</sup> According to Michael Knights, the lack of trust and the fear of the local population of the security forces deter many locals from cooperating with these security actors.<sup>357</sup> According to the head *sheikh* of one of the largest tribes in the area, Sheikh Rabah al-Karbouly, 'the local population is still unhappy about alleged seizure of land in the area by the PMU, the balance of power in their sharing of checkpoints with other Iraqi security forces and ongoing smuggling.'<sup>358</sup> Civilians complained to the media 'about the dizzying array of security forces, some of whom do not wear insignia of any sort but carry weapons.'<sup>359</sup> And further, the diverse range of PMU is also reported to prioritise their own interests rather than facilitating the return of refugees or reconstruction, thereby ignoring the needs of the local population.<sup>360</sup>

According to observers, some PMU factions with security functions were implicated in criminal activities, including smuggling, extortion and illegal taxation, further undermining livelihoods and economic development.<sup>361</sup> In Qaim in particular, militias have harmed the local economy by monopolising black market activities, mainly in relation to the smuggling of fuel and other goods from Syria across the border, reportedly both before and since the official reopening of the border crossing on 1 October 2019.<sup>362</sup> A member of an official Iraqi security body was quoted in the Carnegie Middle East Centre report as saying 'that state institutions could not effectively monitor areas controlled by IRGC-backed militias near the Qa'im border zone.'<sup>363</sup> And further, most militia forces and even some security forces were reported to have directly engaged in extortion, according to the Carnegie Middle East Center in March 2020. For example, '[l]ocal residents have reported that some tribal fighters, now deprived of the patronage they previously enjoyed from the U.S. military or the Iraqi government, have sought to make up for this shortfall by regularly blackmailing business owners or shopkeepers'.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Foreign Policy, A Powerful Iran-Backed Militia Is Losing Influence in Iraq, 22 May 2020, [url](#); Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 13; Al-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, PMU decree unlikely to shift power balance in Iraq's Qaim, 20 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>356</sup> Al, Iraq: Turning a Blind Eye, The Arming of the Popular Mobilization Units, 5 January 2017, [url](#), pp. 18-19

<sup>357</sup> Atlantic (The), ISIS never went away in Iraq, 31 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>358</sup> Al-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>359</sup> Al-Monitor, PMU decree unlikely to shift power balance in Iraq's Qaim, 20 July 2019, [url](#)

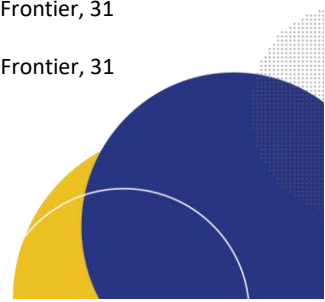
<sup>360</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14; Niqash, Red Lines In The Sand: In The Deserts of Anbar, US And Pro-Iran Forces Jostle, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>361</sup> Foreign Policy, A Powerful Iran-Backed Militia Is Losing Influence in Iraq, 22 May 2020, [url](#); Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14; Al-Monitor, Impacts of US withdrawal from Qaim base in Iraqi border with Syria, 24 March 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iraq's Qaim border open to nonlocal PMU fighting in Syria, 25 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>362</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14; Wing, J., Kataib Hezbollah's Role Along The Iraq-Syrian Border: Security Profits Supporting Iran, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>363</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>364</sup> Carnegie Middle East Centre, The Transformation of the Iraqi-Syrian Border: From a National to a Regional Frontier, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14



## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to a 2018 study, conducted by the Iraqi government in collaboration with the World Bank,<sup>365</sup> Anbar is one of the governorates with high scores of critical infrastructure damage as a result of conflict.<sup>366</sup> This relates in particular to damage to housing,<sup>367</sup> to the agricultural sector,<sup>368</sup> to essential municipal services,<sup>369</sup> as well as the industry and commerce productive sectors.<sup>370</sup> And further, the total housing damage surveyed in the seven most conflict affected governorates in Iraq, 19 % was found in Anbar governorate.<sup>371</sup> A total of 29 000 houses were completely destroyed in Anbar governorate during the conflict with ISIL.<sup>372</sup> Access to public electricity networks has been ‘significantly diminished’ as a result of the conflict.<sup>373</sup> For example, in Fallujah city in Anbar governorate, ‘an assessment of damages to the public power grid concluded that 85 percent of the city’s public electricity infrastructure sustained damages during the period of ISIS occupation.’<sup>374</sup> According to the World Bank, agricultural output experienced a significant decline due to conflict and the resultant displaced populations, looting and theft, and fatalities.<sup>375</sup> However, the DNA noted some improvements in relation to a limited number of agricultural subsectors as of September 2017, especially through repairs to water infrastructure along the Euphrates River.<sup>376</sup> Anbar governorate was further assessed as having been the hardest hit by far in relation to damages to the industry and commerce productive sectors, including major damage to phosphate and concrete facilities, with a total estimated cost to reconstruct of IQD 3.3 trillion.<sup>377</sup>

Reconstruction and rehabilitation projects continued in Anbar governorate throughout 2019 and 2020 with almost 19 991 houses having been completed and 5 726 being either in planning or ongoing, while funding was still being sought for 2 200 houses, according to the Shelter Cluster Iraq as at 5

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<sup>365</sup> ‘The Iraq Damage and Needs Assessment (DNA) is an assessment unprecedented in both its sectoral and geographic scope, covering damages, losses, and needs across 19 sectors in all conflict affected governorates in Iraq’, including Anbar, Babel, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, Salah Al-Deen, and Baghdad. Damage data were assessed up to early December 2017; World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. I-III

<sup>366</sup> ‘The Iraq Damage and Needs Assessment (DNA) is an assessment unprecedented in both its sectoral and geographic scope, covering damages, losses, and needs across 19 sectors in all conflict affected governorates in Iraq’, including Anbar, Babel, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, Salah al-Din, and Baghdad. Damage data were assessed up to early December 2017; World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. I-III

<sup>367</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>368</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>369</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. XXIV

<sup>370</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 57, 59

<sup>371</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>372</sup> UN Habitat, To Improve Urban Recovery and Resilience in Post Conflict Areas in Anbar/Iraq UN-Habitat Handed Over Three New Urban Settlements of Durable Core Houses To Vulnerable Returnees, 28 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>373</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 70

<sup>374</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 72

<sup>375</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>376</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>377</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 57, 59

August 2020.<sup>378</sup> However, Amnesty International reported that reconstruction in governorates badly affected by the conflict, including Anbar, was still slow throughout 2019.<sup>379</sup>

Explosive ordnance contamination is reported to pose an obstacle to safe returns of IDPs as well as to the provision of humanitarian activities in more than one third of districts assessed in Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates by the Humanitarian Country Team in Iraq.<sup>380</sup>

## Displacement and return

As of 30 June 2020, 10 % of the total IDP population in Iraq originates from Anbar governorate, with the main districts of origin being Ramadi (67 266), Falluja (48 594) and Qaim (11 956).<sup>381</sup> At the same time, Anbar governorate hosts a total number of 36 162 IDPs, the eighth highest number of IDPs of all 18 governorates of displacement.<sup>382</sup> Furthermore, 74 % of IDPs in Anbar have been displaced within the governorate, while 24 % originate from Babil governorate.<sup>383</sup> The same source reports that 44 % of IDPs in Anbar governorate are assessed to be living in 'critical shelters', making Anbar the governorate with the highest proportion of IDPs living in 'critical shelters' in Iraq.<sup>384</sup> During 2019, many IDPs were reportedly forced into secondary displacement due to 'forced and premature returns and forced or coerced departures from camps and informal settlements in Ninewa, Salah Al-Din, Al-Anbar, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates.'<sup>385</sup>

Returns to Anbar governorate outpace displacement and Anbar governorate continues to have the second highest number of returnees, with a total of 1 503 468 returnees recorded as at 30 June 2020.<sup>386</sup> The three main districts of return are Ramadi with 593 250 returnees; Falluja with 552 138 returnees and Heet with 176 034 returnees.<sup>387</sup> IOM assesses Anbar governorate to host the third highest number of returnees (122 256 individuals) living in 'severe conditions' (indicating a lack of livelihoods, services, social cohesion and security).<sup>388</sup> In areas of return, including in Anbar, employment opportunities remain limited<sup>389</sup> and food insecurity high.<sup>390</sup> 35 637 returnees to Anbar governorate are assessed as being food insecure, representing the third highest figure per

<sup>378</sup> Shelter Cluster Iraq, Iraq War Damaged Shelter Rehabilitation Dashboard, 5 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>379</sup> Al, Human rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Review of 2019, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>380</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>381</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>382</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>383</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>384</sup> 'Critical shelters include informal settlements, religious buildings, schools and unfinished or abandoned buildings. For returnees, it also includes habitual residences that are severely damaged or destroyed and for IDPs, long-term rental accommodations that are unfit for habitation (having characteristics of unfinished or severely damaged buildings).' IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 8

<sup>385</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 5. See also pp. 14, 17 of the same report.

See also: UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Iraq: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of Internally Displaced Persons\* (A/HRC/44/41/Add.1), 13 May 2020, [url](#), para. 27; UNHCR, UNHCR Iraq Protection Update - August 2019, 14 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 3; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Iraq October 2019, 30 October 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Niqash, Case Closed? Trading One Problem For Two, As Anbar Displaced Camps Close, 27 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>386</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>387</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>388</sup> IOM, Return Index Findings Round Nine – Iraq July 2020, 9 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2. See also, See also, UNOCHA, Response Plan Humanitarian Monitoring Report January-May 2019, 27 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 10

<sup>389</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 December, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>390</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 December, [url](#), pp. 45, 47

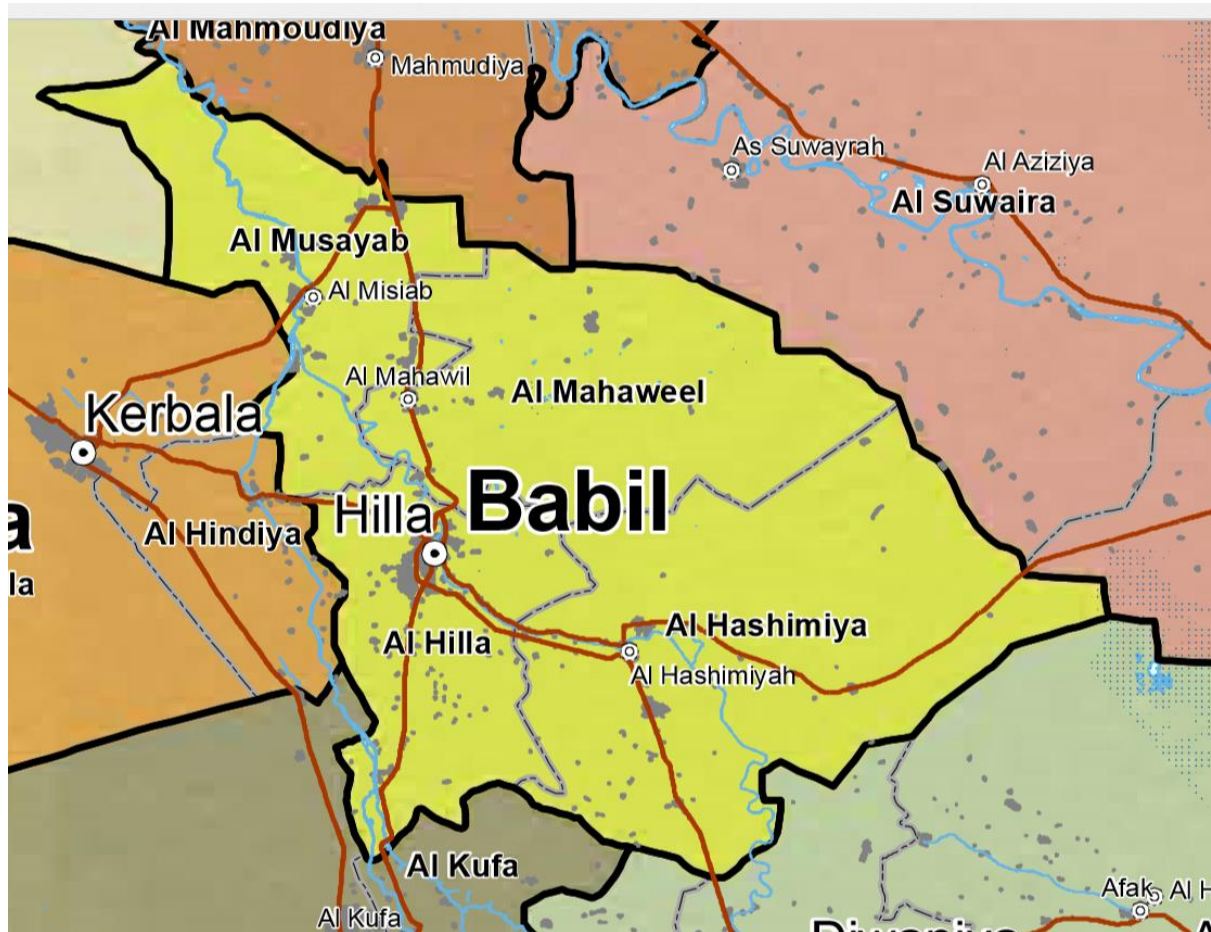
governorate in Iraq.<sup>391</sup> IOM assessed two areas in Anbar governorate to which no returns took place as of April 2020, mostly due to lack of security and blocked returns.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> 'Governorates with the highest number of food insecure returnees are Ninewa (224,434), Salah Al-Din (93,450), Al-Anbar (35,637) and Diyala (29,112).' Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 December, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>392</sup> IOM, Areas of origin having witnessed no return – April 2020, June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

## 2.2 Babil



Map 7: Babil governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.<sup>393</sup>

### 2.2.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Babil governorate is located in the central part of Iraq, south of Baghdad governorate and has borders with Baghdad, Anbar, Kerbala, Qadissiya, and Wassit governorates. Babil governorate is divided into the following districts: Al Musayab, Al Mahaweel, Al Hilla, and Al Hashimiya. The governorate's capital is Hilla.<sup>394</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>395</sup> the governorate's population at 2 119 403.<sup>396</sup>

<sup>393</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>394</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>395</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>396</sup> Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

## Ethnicity

The majority of the governorate's population is Shia Arab, with a Sunni minority.<sup>397</sup>

## Road security

Babil governorate forms part of the Baghdad Belts that stretch from southern Fallujah through Amariyat al Fallujah and Jurf al-Sakhr town, in the north of Babil.<sup>398</sup> Babil is of strategic importance as it is situated along a main highway used by Shiite pilgrims from northern and central Iraq into Karbala and Najaf.<sup>399</sup>

## Economy

Agriculture is the most important sector for Babil governorate's economy.<sup>400</sup>

## 2.2.2 Conflict background and armed actors

### Conflict background

In 2014, ISIL seized control of Jurf al Sakhr town in Babil and declared an official base of operations in Northern Babil.<sup>401</sup> The area of Jurf al Sakhr was heavily used by ISIL during the period when it took over large parts of Iraq.<sup>402</sup> From there, ISIL was able to gain a foothold and launch attacks against the Shiite holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. ISIL was driven out of Jurf al-Sakhr town in 2014 and Shiite militias were accused of targeting Sunnis, displacing and driving out families, destroying homes, and preventing returns.<sup>403</sup>

### Armed actors

#### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

The ISW reported in 2017 that the Iraqi military's Babil Operations Command (BabOC) was responsible for Babil governorate and the Southern Baghdad Belts. The BabOC, which includes the 8<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division, had the majority of its detachments in Anbar. It also included areas of responsibility in Jurf al-Sakhr, as well as Kerbala and Najaf.<sup>404</sup> In February 2019, Al-Monitor reported on plans by the government to transfer security duties from the army to the police in several governorates, including Babil, however further details were not provided in the source.<sup>405</sup> Further information on security forces developments in the governorate could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

#### *Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)*

Michael Knights reported in August 2019,

'Kata'ib Hezbollah has carved out an exclusive principality in Jurf as-Sakr, 40 kilometers southwest of Baghdad. This area was liberated in late 2014, when it was celebrated as the first major liberation undertaken by the PMF. Since then, KH has strongly consolidated a "no-

<sup>397</sup> NCCI, Babil Governorate Profile, July 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>398</sup> ISW, ISIS Re-Establishes Historical Sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>399</sup> Wing, J., Details on Collective Punishment Meted Out by Hashd Upon Jurf al-Sakhr, 21 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>400</sup> NCCI, Babil Governorate Profile, July 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>401</sup> ISW, ISIS Re-Establishes Historical Sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>402</sup> New York Times (The), Bus Bomb Kills 12 Iraqis Near Major Pilgrimage Site, 21 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>403</sup> Intercept (The)/New York Times (The), A Spy Complex Revealed, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>404</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 14, 19

<sup>405</sup> Al-Monitor, As Iraqi army retreats to borders, local police controls cities' security, 1 February 2019, [url](#)

go” zone in which displaced Sunni residents cannot return and where only KH forces operate, complete with private prisons (holding well over 1,000 illegal detainees).<sup>406</sup>

The Washington Institute’s Shia Mapping Project reported that there were Shia militias present in Jurf al-Sakhr and in Hillah towns as of its May 2019 map.<sup>407</sup> Al-Monitor reported in December 2019<sup>408</sup> and FP reported in May 2020 that Kataib Hezbollah still controls Jurf al-Sakhr.<sup>409</sup>

### ISIL

In 2019, ISW reported that ISIL had started to use a support zone in Amariyat al Fallujah to ‘project force south’ towards Jurf al Sakr and Babil governorate in December 2018.<sup>410</sup> The UN also wrote in May 2019 that ISIL reorganised cells and increased their operations and attacks in Babil, as well as Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din governorates.<sup>411</sup>

## 2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### Developments 2019-2020

According to an FP article written in May 2020, the town of Jurf al-Sakhr was renamed Jurf al Nasr (victory) after the defeat of ISIL, though residents continue to call it the former name. It further indicated that as of May 2020 Kataib Hezbollah, a major Iran-linked PMU, is continuing to occupy the whole town of Jurf al-Sakr, in Babil, where it claims to be protecting nearby Shia holy sites in Karbala.<sup>412</sup> In 2019, sources wrote that Sunni residents who were expelled following the ISIL defeat have not been allowed back.<sup>413</sup> The FP article similarly stated in May 2020 that Kataib Hezbollah ‘continues to prevent its Sunni residents from returning – and allegedly anyone else, including government officials, from entering Jurf al Sakr.’<sup>414</sup>

Jurf al-Sakhr area is the target of ISIL threats and attacks from time to time, according to the Deputy Governor of Babil governorate, speaking to the local media in June 2020.<sup>415</sup> Furthermore, Kataib Hezbollah in Babil governorate is described by Iraq blogger Joel Wing as a ‘common target’ of ISIL.<sup>416</sup> Writing in October 2019, Iraq analyst Joel Wing stated about that Babil had one IED attack upon the Hashd in the Jurf al-Sakhr district in the northeast, and then no other activity during that month. He wrote that ‘again, Babil has not been a priority for the insurgency in years. When it does strike, there it is almost always in Jurf al-Sakhr which is empty of civilians and has been converted into a major base for Kataib Hezbollah.’ In August 2019, he recorded eight attacks, the highest number he had recorded since June 2018.<sup>417</sup> According to the same source, there were seven attacks in Babil during May 2020, the most in the governorate since August 2019, and all attacks took place in Jurf al-Sakhr district, which has been ‘emptied of civilians by the security forces and then turned into a large base for Kataib

<sup>406</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq, CTC Sentinel, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>407</sup> See the map: Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>408</sup> Al-Monitor, Iranian consulates torched in Najaf and Karbala, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>409</sup> FP, A powerful Iran-backed militia is losing influence in Iraq, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>410</sup> ISW, ISIS Re-Establishes Historical Sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>411</sup> UNSC, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) (S/2019/365), 2 May 2019, [url](#), para. 18

<sup>412</sup> FP, A powerful Iran-backed militia is losing influence in Iraq, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>413</sup> New York Times (The), Bus Bomb Kills 12 Iraqis Near Major Pilgrimage Site, 21 September 2019, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iranian consulates torched in Najaf and Karbala, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>414</sup> FP, A powerful Iran-backed militia is losing influence in Iraq, 11 May 2020, [url](#) See also: Al Monitor,

<sup>415</sup> Al Maalimah, داعش يحاول بين فترة وأخرى مهاجمة جرف النصر [Deputy for Babel: ISIS is trying from time to time to attack], 2 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>416</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State’s Spring Offensive in Iraq Ends in June, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>417</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State not Following Their Uual Pattern in Attacks In Iraq, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

Hezbollah’, making it a frequent ISIL target.<sup>418</sup> Joel Wing stated that the incidents were part of a campaign by ISIL against the area, targeting PMUs noting that ‘almost every attack is in Jurf al-Sakhr because it is a Hashd base providing plenty of targets’.<sup>419</sup> He stated in May 2020 that ISIL ‘usually carried out at least one operation in Babil every week’ to harass the PMUs.<sup>420</sup> He also estimated that about three incidents per month have been carried out in Jurf al-Sakhr district by ISIL since the beginning of 2019. He noted that ‘outside of the annual spring-summer offensive however the militants have tended to leave the governorate alone.’<sup>421</sup>

Babil has been the site of protests against the government occurring, for example, in March 2019<sup>422</sup> and in October 2019.<sup>423</sup> Protesters also converged on the university in Babil in December 2019, forcing it to close and preventing students and staff from entering.<sup>424</sup> The Iraqi Human Rights Commission reported that 123 people were wounded and 1 killed during the demonstrations in the first week of October 2019 in Babil; a further 105 were detained and later released.<sup>425</sup> Protests also occurred on 25 October 2019, centred on several locations across the south of Iraq, including Babil, where the UN reported that it received information about the use of live ammunition against protesters by private militias to stop them entering political and government buildings.<sup>426</sup> The same report noted that on 26 October, in Babil governorate, ‘a militia group opened fire with live ammunition on a group of demonstrators trying to enter their building, killing seven and injuring 12.’<sup>427</sup> Dozens of arrests across the south were also reported in the late October protests, though less than those that took place during 1-9 October 2019.<sup>428</sup> There were some reports that anti-terrorism legislation was used against demonstrators including in Babil, though most were processed under criminal law. Further detail was not given.<sup>429</sup> Protests were also reported in July 2020 in Babil.<sup>430</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- In January 2019, the PMF’s 46th Brigade, a branch of Kataib Hezbollah, ‘thwarted an ISIL SVBIED in Jurf al-Sakhar in Northern Babil. The target of this attack remains unclear but it marked the first such incident since the PMF cleared ISIL from Jurf al-Sakhar in October 2014. ISIL likely staged the SVBIED from its support zone south of Fallujah in Anbar Province’.<sup>431</sup>
- On 19 February 2019, ‘Babil Police arrested an ISIS fighter at a checkpoint in Iskandariya between Baghdad and Karbala on February 19. The 47<sup>th</sup> Branch, also of KH, ‘later clashed with

<sup>418</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State Offensive In Iraq Takes Off in May, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>419</sup> Wing, J., Security In Iraq, May 22-28 2020, 1 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>420</sup> Wing, J., Security in Iraq, May 15-21 2020, 25 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>421</sup> Wing, J., Spike in Violence In April 2020 But Can It Be Sustained? 1 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>422</sup> Baghdad Post (The), Citizens protest in Babil, demand services provision, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>423</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin – Iraq, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; UNSC, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) (S/2019/903), 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 11; UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report: Demonstrations in Iraq (1-9 October 2019), October 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>424</sup> Baghdad Post (The), Protesters close a university and an activist survives an assassination attack, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>425</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice, December 2019, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>426</sup> UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report: Demonstrations in Iraq: update (25 October-4 November 2019), November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>427</sup> UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report: Demonstrations in Iraq: update (25 October-4 November 2019), November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>428</sup> UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report: Demonstrations in Iraq: update (25 October-4 November 2019), November 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>429</sup> UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report: Demonstrations in Iraq: update (25 October-4 November 2019), November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>430</sup> Wing, J., National Protests Start in Iraq During the Weekend – UPDATED, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>431</sup> ISW, ISIS Resurgence Update – April 2019, [url](#)



ISIS during an attempted clearing operation in Jurf al-Sakhar on April 9. ISIS temporarily withdrew from the area but Kata'ib Hezbollah did not properly clear the terrain.'<sup>432</sup>

- On 3 February 2019, an IED targeting a PMU patrol between Jurf al-Sakhr and Razzaza in North Babil exploded and wounded a PMU fighter.<sup>433</sup>
- On 15 June 2019, 'two members of the Popular Mobilization Forces PMF were injured in a car bomb explosion northwest of Hilla city in Babil province.'<sup>434</sup>
- On 22 August 2019, '[a] motorcycle bomb attack on a market place in the city of al-Musayib in Babil province (about 60km south of Baghdad) wounded almost 40 people. Another report said that there were four deaths and 30 injured people.'<sup>435</sup>
- On 26 October 2019, seven demonstrators were killed and 12 injured when a militia group opened fire on protesters.<sup>436</sup>
- In June 2020, 5 people were injured in a tribal dispute over land in Hilla.<sup>437</sup>
- On 29 June 2020, five people were killed and 13 people were injured over a land dispute in Hillah in an exchange of fire with light weapons; the police settled the conflict and made a number of arrests.<sup>438</sup>
- In July 2020, unknown gunmen opened fire on the house belonging to Babil's Director of Water Resources which was damaged, but no one was injured.<sup>439</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Babil	1	1	31	<b>32</b>	1	0	0	<b>0</b>

Table 6: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Babil governorate.<sup>440</sup>

<sup>432</sup> ISW, ISIS Resurgence Update – April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>433</sup> EPIC, ISHM: January 30-February 6 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>434</sup> Germany, BAMF, Information Centre Asylum and Migration, Briefing Notes, 17 June 2019, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>435</sup> Germany, BAMF, Information Centre Asylum and Migration, Briefing Notes, 26 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2; See also: Kurdistan24, Nearly 40 injured in motorcycle bombing in Iraq's Babil, [url](#)

<sup>436</sup> UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report: Demonstrations in Iraq: update (25 October-4 November 2019), November 2019, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>437</sup> NINA, Five People Injured In A Tribal Dispute In Southern Hilla, Babylon Governorate, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>438</sup> NINA, People Killed and Injured in a Dispute Over Agricultural Land North of Hilla, Babylon, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>439</sup> NINA, Armed Men Attack The House Of The Director Of Water Resources in Babylon, 22 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>440</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

## Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 11 battles, 25 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 7 cases of violence against civilians, 8 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 51 security incidents of these types in Babil governorate, the majority taking place in Al-Mahawil district. 49 protests were also reported in Babil governorate during the reference period.<sup>441</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

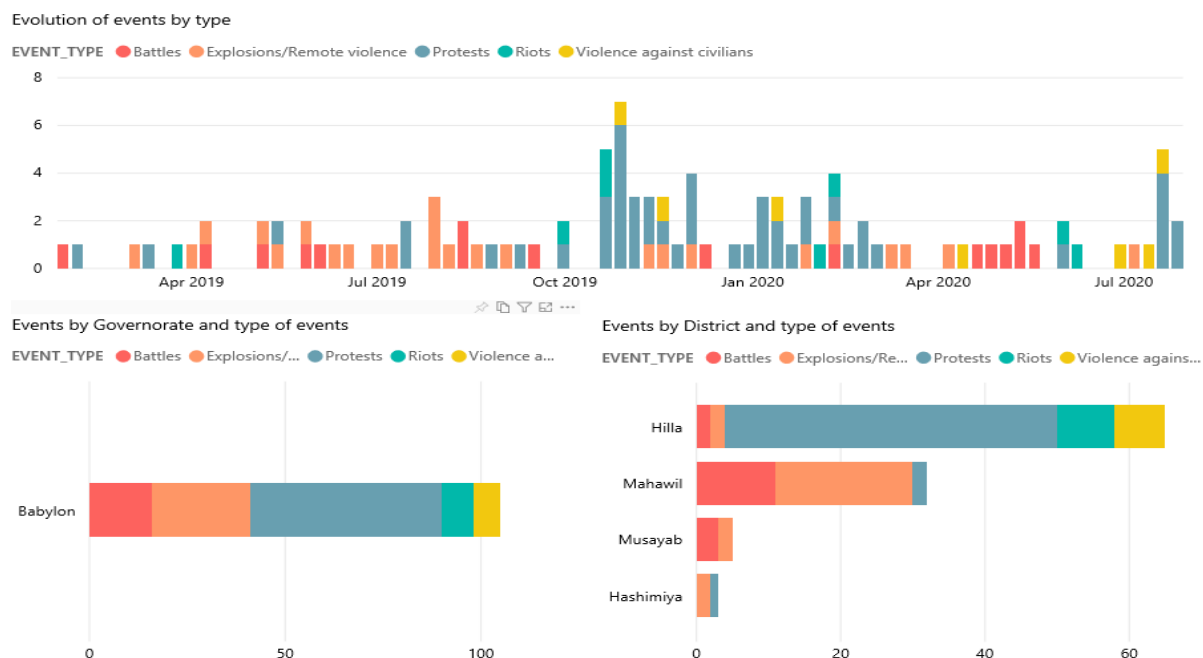


Figure 9: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Babil governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data.<sup>442</sup>

## State ability to secure law and order

Specific information on the state's ability to secure law and order in Babil could not be found in the time constraints of this report. Please refer to the actors and incidents sections above.

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 \(2018\)](#).

## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Information on infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war in Babil governorate were not found in the time constraints of this report.

A 2018 Damage Needs Assessment by the World Bank covering 7 governorates directly affected by the conflict indicated that Babil represented 1 % of reported damage to housing assets across the surveyed governorates.<sup>443</sup>

<sup>441</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>443</sup> WB, Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates – Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

## Displacement and return

As of 30 June 2020, there were 17 004 IDPs in Babil governorate, according to IOM's DTM matrix. Musayib district has the most IDPs (14 826), followed by Hilla district (1 512) and Al Mahawil district (372).<sup>444</sup> According to UNOCHA's 2020 humanitarian needs overview, there are about 10 000 people in need of humanitarian assistance living in Babil. Babil does not have IDPs living in camps; however, it has a population living outside camps.<sup>445</sup>

According to IOM's Return Index for July 2020, a map showing 'hotspots' in returnee population density and severity of return conditions indicated that Babil had no returns, or very low returns to some parts of the north.<sup>446</sup>

USDOS reported that in 2018, PMU militias prevented Arab Sunni IDPs from returning to their places of origin in Babil and Diyala governorates.<sup>447</sup> Specifically, Joel Wing reported in December 2018 that both Jurf al-Sakhr and Musayib had been cleared out of their residents and that the provincial government had banned anyone from returning to these two districts,<sup>448</sup> and in December 2019 he remarked that the government showed no signs of changing this policy.<sup>449</sup> UNHCR's July 2019 protection update also remarked that '[i]n Babil Governorate, approximately 530 IDP families in Al-Askandaria (north of Babil), originally from Jurf Al-Sakhar, Al-Buhairat, and AlKhudhir areas are being prevented from returning to their areas of origin due to tribal and political reasons. IDP families, many headed by women, expressed their willingness to return but claimed they are unable to do so due to tribal disputes and missing civil documentation.'<sup>450</sup>

IOM reported in April 2020 that blocked returns were the reason some areas of Babil did not have returnees.<sup>451</sup> The areas listed by IOM as having no returns in Babil were in the sub-districts of Al Iskandaria (in Al Musayib district): Abo Shamsy, Al-Haweja, Al-Qadiriya, Al-Sheeha, Om Hayaia; and Jurf al Sakhr, in the locations: Al-Bahbahani, Al-Baj Al-Jnoobi, Al-Baj Al-Shimali, Al-Farsia, Al-Hujair, Al-Jazrieavillage, Ruwaiaa, Snedeej.<sup>452</sup>

Further information on developments in 2020 could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

<sup>444</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>445</sup> See map on page 6 and table Scope of Analysis Matrix on page 16 in: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020 – Iraq, November 2019, [url](#), pp. 6, 16

<sup>446</sup> IOM, Return Index – Findings Round Nine- Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>447</sup> US, USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2018 – Iraq, [url](#)

<sup>448</sup> Wing, J., Permanently Displaced in Iraq's Babil Province, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>449</sup> Wing, J., Number of Displaced Returning In Iraq Takes Another Large Drop, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

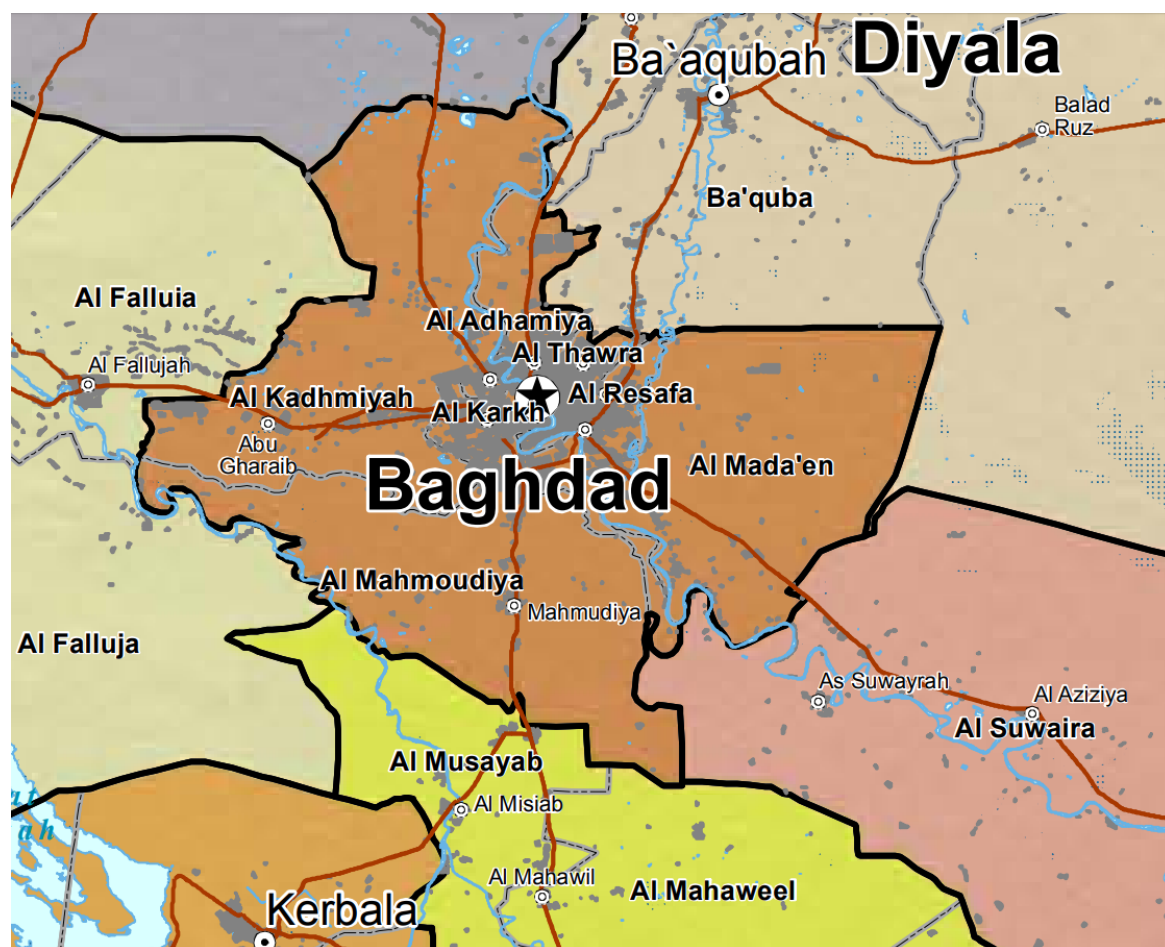
<sup>450</sup> UNHCR, Iraq Protection Update – July 2019, July 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>451</sup> IOM, Areas of Origin Having Witnessed No Returns, April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>452</sup> IOM, Areas of Origin Having Witnessed No Returns, April 2020, [url](#), p. 2



## 2.3 Baghdad



Map 8: Baghdad governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.<sup>453</sup>

### 2.3.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

The capital of Iraq, Baghdad city, is located in Baghdad governorate.<sup>454</sup> Baghdad is situated in the Tigris valley in the centre of Iraq and is the smallest governorate in terms of overall surface area (4 555 km<sup>2</sup>).<sup>455</sup> It is the main economic hub of the country and hosts the heavily protected Green Zone<sup>456</sup> which 'houses the US embassy and Iraqi government offices'<sup>457</sup>.

Baghdad city is made up of the districts: Adhamiyah, Karkh, Karada, Khadimiyah, Mansour, Sadr City, Al Rashid, Rusafa and 9 Nissan ('new Baghdad'). The rest of Baghdad governorate is comprised of the districts of Al Madain, Taji, Tarmiyah, Mahmudiyah, and Abu Ghraib.<sup>458</sup> Outlying areas of Baghdad that

<sup>453</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>454</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>455</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>456</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>457</sup> Guardian (The), Baghdad's Green Zone reopens to public after 16 years, 4 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>458</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

share a border with Diyala, Anbar, Salah al-Din, and Babil governorates are referred to as the ‘Baghdad belts’.<sup>459</sup>

## Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>460</sup> the governorate’s population at 8 340 711, of which 1 043 279 were residing in rural areas and 7 297 432 in urban areas.<sup>461</sup> The CIA estimated the population of Baghdad at 7 144 000 in 2020.<sup>462</sup> Despite being the smallest governorate in Iraq, it has the highest population of all governorates, with 87 % being urban.<sup>463</sup> Baghdad has the highest population density in Iraq.<sup>464</sup>

## Ethnicity

According to sources, Baghdad governorate and city has a mixed population of Shia and Sunni Muslims, with a ‘number of smaller Christian communities’.<sup>465</sup> Baghdad was one of the main ‘battlegrounds’ between groups involved in the 2006-2007 sectarian violence<sup>466</sup> that followed the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, when bombings and killings impacted many areas of Baghdad and caused inhabitants to resettle along more sectarian lines, with the involvement of Shia militias forcing Sunnis out of some areas at that time.<sup>467</sup> Landinfo also observed in 2015 that ‘[w]hile most Baghdad neighbourhoods used to be inhabited by a mix of Sunni and Shia in the past, the violent sectarian cleansing in the 2000’s resulted in the city now appearing as much more segregated and Shia dominated’.<sup>468</sup>

## Economy

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘[m]ost of Iraq’s manufacturing, finance, and commerce is concentrated in and around Baghdad. This includes at least half of the large-scale industry of Iraq.’<sup>469</sup> The oil field to the east of Baghdad is 65 kilometres long and 11 kilometres wide and has a reserve of 8 million barrels of oil.<sup>470</sup> Moreover, Baghdad is well connected to the rest of the country and has one of the most important airports in Iraq, Baghdad International Airport.<sup>471</sup>

## Road security

The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) observed the existence of ‘improvised checkpoints’ in addition to ‘the numerous government security checkpoints’ across the city of Baghdad. OSAC also observed that measures restricting access to the International Zone were eased in December 2018.

<sup>459</sup> IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#)

<sup>460</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>461</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 العراق سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by province, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>462</sup> CIA, World Factbook, People and Society, 12 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>463</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>464</sup> UN, Iraq Population Density [Map], 23 July 2014, [url](#)

<sup>465</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>466</sup> According to IBC data, the years 2006-2007 were among the years with the highest levels of violent deaths of civilians in Baghdad. See: IBC, Documented civilian deaths from violence, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>467</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), pp. 1-2; New York Times (The), District by District, Shiites Make Baghdad Their Own, 23 December 2006, [url](#)

<sup>468</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat, Irak: Bagdad - sikkerhetssituasjon per februar 2015 [Baghdad – Security situation], 13 February 2015, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>469</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Baghdad, Economy, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>470</sup> Iraq Business News, Oil and Gas Fields: East Baghdad, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>471</sup> NCCI, Baghdad Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#)



However, in October 2019, access to the International Zone became more restricted in the wake of the protests that swept the city. Reportedly, '[a]ccess procedures to the IZ can change quickly as the security situation ebbs and flows ... [which has] directly affected diplomatic missions, the private sector, and residences.'<sup>472</sup> Iraq Humanitarian Fund and iMMAP published a map indicating the explosive hazards risk level on roads in Baghdad governorate between 1 and 30 April 2020. That map showed primary risk roads in Tarmiyah, Abu Ghraib, and Mahmoudiya. Secondary risk roads were indicated in the above-mentioned areas as well as in Mada'in, and in scattered neighbourhoods in Baghdad City.<sup>473</sup>

### 2.3.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

#### Conflict background

In 2013, ISIL increased the number of terrorist attacks in Baghdad drastically. Particularly Shia targets in the city were hit by VBIEDs. With this strategy, ISIL tried to demonstrate the incapacity of the Iraqi authorities and the ISF, and to provoke the resurgence of Shia militias.<sup>474</sup> These waves of VBIEDs continued in 2014.<sup>475</sup> The fear that ISIL could overrun Baghdad during summer 2014 did not materialise, however, there was fighting between ISIL militants and the Iraqi Army in Zaidan and Abu Ghraib in the west of the governorate (in about 20 km distance to the city centre).<sup>476</sup> Also in the towns of al-Mahmudiya and Latifiya south of the city gunfights with ISIL were reported.<sup>477</sup> In addition, the Shia districts of Baghdad continued to be targeted by regular terrorist attacks on public places in 2014.<sup>478</sup> The ISIL raids in June 2014 led to the mobilisation of Shia militias in Baghdad.<sup>479</sup> While the Iraqi army was primarily maintaining the security in the centre of Baghdad, these militias were mainly present in the suburbs.<sup>480</sup> The visible reappearance of these militias recalled memories within the Sunni minority of the civil war of 2006-2007 in the city, when Shia militias carried out sectarian cleansing against the Sunni population of Baghdad.<sup>481</sup> During 2014, there were reports of sectarian killings by Shia militias and murders of Sunni civilians have been attributed to members of different militias.<sup>482</sup> However, the large-scale sectarian killings of 2006-2007 did not reoccur in Baghdad in 2014 or later.<sup>483</sup>

<sup>472</sup> OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Baghdad, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>473</sup> Iraq Humanitarian Fund and iMMAP, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Baghdad Governorate 01-30 April 2020, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>474</sup> ISW, Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, The Breaking the Walls Campaign, Part I, Middle East Security Report 14, September 2013, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>475</sup> ISW, Warning Intelligence Update: Baghdad, 23 July 2014, [url](#)

<sup>476</sup> ISW, The Battle for Baghdad: Scenarios, 13 June 2014, [url](#)

<sup>477</sup> US, CRS, Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights, 02 July 2014, [url](#), p. 19; ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 24, 2014, 24 July 2014, [url](#); ISW, "ISIS in Iraq: Battle Plan for Baghdad" - Coming Soon! 27 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 15, 2014, 15 June 2014, [url](#)

<sup>478</sup> Reuters, Dozens killed in car bombs across Baghdad, 08 June 2014, [url](#); Reuters, Suicide bomber kills 16 people in Baghdad's Shi'ite Sadr City, 11 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 17, 2014, 17 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 26, 2014, 26 June 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 14, 2014, 14 July 2014, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 19, 2014, 19 July 2014, [url](#)

<sup>479</sup> Washington Institute, Iranian Proxies Step Up Their Role in Iraq, 13 June 2014, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>480</sup> Netherlands, Ambtsbericht Veiligheidssituatie in Irak, 19 September 2014, [url](#), pp. 45, 18

<sup>481</sup> Daily Beast (The), Torched Baghdad Neighborhood Could Be Just the Beginning, 15 May 2015, [url](#)

<sup>482</sup> New York Times (The), As Sunnis Die in Iraq, a Cycle Is Restarting, 17 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](#); BBC News, Iraq: Shia militias 'killing Sunnis in reprisal attacks', 14 October 2014, [url](#)

<sup>483</sup> Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of the 2019 EASO report, 18 January 2019, in: EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#)

According to ISW, ISIL stopped using VBIED/SVEST attacks on Baghdad for a few months in 2016, but returned to using these tactics to attack Baghdad in April and May 2016. According to ISW, ISF had successfully been blocking VBIEDs but due to political upheaval and overstretched security, the resurgence of ISIL's successful use of VBIED/SVESTs in Baghdad facilitated 23 attacks by ISIL in the month of 4 April to 11 May 2016, the attacks mainly targeting security forces and checkpoints, but also markets, funerals, and pilgrims for example.<sup>484</sup> Civilians and Shia pilgrims were targeted by ISIL, leading to numbers of civilians being killed and wounded in Baghdad bombings in April 2016.<sup>485</sup> In May 2016, ISIL detonated a large bomb in the Shia area, Sadr City, killing 52 people and injuring dozens of people; Baquba, which is in Diyala, but also on the outskirts of the Baghdad belts was targeted by a bomb that killed 10.<sup>486</sup> ISIL carried out three simultaneous attacks in Baghdad on 11 May 2016, killing 93 civilians and injuring many others.<sup>487</sup> In July 2016, 324 people were killed in the Karrada suicide bombing in Baghdad when ISIL blew up a truck bomb outside a shopping mall.<sup>488</sup> According to Iraq expert Joel Wing, using his own data in August 2017, ISIL continued to launch attacks from the rural areas surrounding Baghdad, but incidents dropped from 12 daily incidents down to three.<sup>489</sup> In 2017, there were large numbers of attempted mass casualty incidents against markets and shops by ISIL in Baghdad.<sup>490</sup> For example, 35 people were killed in a car bomb attack on the Shia area of Sadr City in January 2017; a car bomb outside the Al-Kindi hospital in Baghdad killed three people; and two suicide bombings in a market in Baghdad targeted Shia and left 28 people dead the same month.<sup>491</sup> Mass casualty attacks by ISIL dropped off significantly after the first quarter of 2018.<sup>492</sup>

## Armed actors

### *Iraqi army, police*

According to a report published by ISW in 2017, the units of the Iraqi Army in Baghdad were under the lead of the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC), which is divided in two areas, the Karkh Area Command and the Rusafa Area Command. The Prime Minister's Special Forces Division (SFD) is responsible for security in the International Zone and for protecting the Prime Minister. The SFD answers to the Ministry of Defence through the BOC and the Joint Operations Command (JOC), and to the PM. They also have some responsibilities for securing areas of Baghdad, especially during Shia pilgrimages.<sup>493</sup>

The Iraqi army presence in Baghdad is organised by the Rusafa (Eastern Baghdad) and Karkh (Western Baghdad) areas of the BOC:

<sup>484</sup> ISW, ISIS's Explosive Attacks in the Greater Baghdad Area: April 4-May 11, 2016, 11 May 2016, [url](#)

<sup>485</sup> UNAMI, SRSG Kubiš Condemns Baghdad Suburb Terrorist Bombing: "A premeditated and Wanton Aggression" against Civilians, 30 April 2016, [url](#); UNAMI, SRSG Kubiš on Saydiyah Bombing: Iraqis should in one loud voice condemn targeting of civilians, particularly pilgrims, 03 May 2016, [url](#)

<sup>486</sup> New Arab (The), Dozens killed in IS attack on Iraq's Sadr City, 11 May 2016, [url](#)

<sup>487</sup> UN Security Council, Security Council Press Statement on Terrorist Attacks in Baghdad, 12 May 2016, [url](#)

<sup>488</sup> IBC, Another year of relentless violence in Iraq, 2016, [url](#); New York Times (The), Major Islamic State Attacks in Baghdad, 15 October 2016, [url](#)

<sup>489</sup> Wing, J., 1,459 Killed, 636 Wounded In Iraq July 2017, 03 August 2017, [url](#); Wing, J., October 2018: Islamic State Expanding Operations In Iraq, 2 November 2018, [url](#)

<sup>490</sup> Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019 in: EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>491</sup> BBC News, IS Conflict: Baghdad suicide car bomb blast kills 35, 2 January 2017, [url](#)

<sup>492</sup> Chatelard, G. Email to EASO, 27 January 2019 in: EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>493</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017 [url](#), pp. 11-12, 14-16. The information provided by this source is not fully updated, the localization of some of the units dates back to 2015, 2016 and 2017.

- Karkh Area Command: 6th Iraqi Army Division, one of the units securing the western Baghdad Belts. The 22nd, 24th and 54th Brigade are stationed north and north-west of the capital, the 54th also in Mansour, central Baghdad. The 59th Brigade is situated north of Baghdad, in Garma, near Falluja, and also south of the capital. Unattributed units are active in the south-west of Baghdad, in Anbar governorate and in Kadhimiyah, north-west of the capital.<sup>494</sup>
- Rusafa Area Command: 9th Iraqi Army Armoured Division. This is the only armoured division of the Iraqi Army, therefore, it has a functional rather than a geographical area of responsibility. The 9th IA Division is not stationed in Baghdad.<sup>495</sup>

On 7 April 2020, Rudaw reported that ‘Iraqi forces today took back control of the [Abu Ghraib] camp inside the headquarters of the 6th Division of Iraqi forces in the capital Baghdad, which were used by International Coalition Forces (French) advisors’. The source added that ‘Abu Ghraib’s handover is the latest in a quick succession of transfers of base control to the Iraqi armed forces in recent weeks’.<sup>496</sup>

The Federal Police (FP) under the Ministry of Interior are present in Baghdad through the 1<sup>st</sup> FP Division, securing the south-west, west, south-east, Canal Zone (east of the capital) of Baghdad;<sup>497</sup> the 2<sup>nd</sup> FP Division, the only mechanised FP division for Baghdad security, occupied mostly by counter-terrorism operations in Baghdad and the belts, securing pilgrimage routes, and law enforcement.<sup>498</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> FP Division covers southern Baghdad and areas south of the capital such as Karkh prison.<sup>499</sup> The 3rd brigade of the Emergency Response Division (ERD) is stationed west of Baghdad.<sup>500</sup>

Baghdad city and the suburbs are generally under the control of the authorities; however, in practice, authorities share defence and law enforcement roles with the Shia-dominated PMUs, leading to ‘incomplete’ or overlapping control with these militias.<sup>501</sup> ISW wrote in its December 2017 report on Iraq’s battle orders:

‘The BOC is responsible for security in both Baghdad and much of the Baghdad Belts that surround the capital. The BOC’s area of responsibility is a merger of the former Karkh and Rusafa Operations Commands’ areas of responsibility. Iraqi Shi’a militias, including lethal proxy militias and Sadrist loyalists, operate outside the BOC’s command and control. They have conducted crimes and kidnappings with impunity, established bases and unilateral control zones in northeastern and southern Baghdad, and even clashed with the ISF on rare occasions. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister’s SFD, attached to the JOC [Joint Operations Command], maintains security in the Green Zone and for critical infrastructure around Baghdad. The BOC is nevertheless ordinarily one of the best-resourced of the ISF’s operations commands. It is assessed to have the most frontline on-duty strength of all the operations commands given its role in securing the capital.’<sup>502</sup>

The information about the Iraqi army and police above is as of 2017, and no more recent information could be found.

<sup>494</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 14-16

<sup>495</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>496</sup> Rudaw, US-led coalition withdraws from sixth Iraqi military base, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>497</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>498</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>499</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>500</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>501</sup> Norway, Landinfo, Respons Irak: Militser i Bagdad [Militias in Baghdad], 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>502</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 14



### Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)

Michael Knights observed that formally, the PMUs have no operational headquarters in Baghdad governorate, however, in practice there are ‘substantial bases’ in Baghdad’s belts. Reportedly, Kataib Hezbollah ‘has carved out an exclusive principality in Jurf as-Sakr, 40 kilometers southwest of Baghdad’; Kataib Al-Imam Ali attempts to establish a base in southeastern Baghdad belts; and Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq is dominant in northern Baghdad belts. With regard to the city itself, the source stated that PMUs ‘maintain local offices in numerous parts of Iraq for fundraising and recruitment’ with the highest concentration of those offices being in Baghdad city. Additionally, the PMU militias in Baghdad city ‘carved out zones of dominance: Palestine Street for Kata’ib Hezbollah, Sadr City for Saraya Salam and Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, Badr and Kata’ib Al-Imam Ali for Karradah and Jadiriyah’ where those militias tax business enterprises and real estate transactions.<sup>503</sup> In a report published by Knights et al. in March 2020, the late Husham al-Hashimi stated that the PMU ‘comprises sixty-six predominantly Shia subunits, forty-three Sunni tribal forces, and a dozen ethnically based minority units. Of those 121 subunits identified as Hashd formations, with registered Hashd personnel, fewer than sixty have been allocated a unique numerical designator (i.e., a “brigade” number).’<sup>504</sup>

The independent news outlet, Iran Wire, published a map updated on 8 May 2020, which indicated that the following PMU groups maintained a presence in Baghdad city, and provided the total number of fighters in Iraq and Syria for each group:

- Al-Khorasani Brigades – 3 000 fighters – Gherai’at, Al-Bayda’a, and Bo’aitha – Headquarter is in Karada.
- Al-Salam Brigades – 7 000 fighters registered under the PMU and 20 000 fighters under Jaysh Al-Mahdi (Mahdi Army) – headquarter is in Sadr City.
- Al-Tayyar Al-Risali – 2 000 fighters – A502 and 9 Nissan in Baghdad.
- Liwa Abu Fadl Al-Abbas – 2 500 fighters (mixed elements from Lebanese Hezbollah and Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq) – Safaraat and Al-Saadoon Park.
- Kata’eb Al-Imam Ali – Al-Mutanabi.
- Faylaq Badr (Badr Organisation) – 10 000 fighters – Mansour, Suwaib and Al-Rasheed.
- Saraya Ashoura’a – 6 000 fighters – Abu Nuwas.
- Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq – 15 000 fighters – Diyala River and Bab Al-Sham.
- Kata’ib Jund Al-Imam – composed of several Brigades including 4 and 6 – Base Falcon.<sup>505</sup>

According to a Chatham House research paper published in September 2019, in Baghdad governorate, the following PMU groups were present, alongside the ISF Tigris and Baghdad Operations Commands: Brigades 1, 2, 4, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 47, and 110.<sup>506</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) observed that ‘Iran-backed militias maintain at least some forces in predominantly Shia areas,

<sup>503</sup> Michael Knights, *Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups*, August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>504</sup> Knights, M. et al., *Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces*, March 2020, [url](#), p. 125

<sup>505</sup> Iran Wire, *خريطة انتشار الميليشيات الإيرانية في سوريا والعراق* [Map of Iran-backed Militias in Syria and Iraq], 8 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>506</sup> Chatham House, *Between Order and Chaos: A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen*, September 2019, [url](#), p. 8

especially in Baghdad, that could deploy quickly in the event of a crisis'. Reportedly, PMUs stockpiled weapons in several areas, including in Baghdad.<sup>507</sup>

A report by Knights et al. from March 2020 noted that 'another type of Hashd emerged in the 2014 period separate from al-Hashd al-Shabi: the Defense Hashd, which consisted of multiple minor groups deploying primarily in the Baghdad belt areas and nominally affiliated with the Ministry of Defense'.<sup>508</sup> According to the authors, the Defense Hashd provided 'fifty-six platoonsize checkpoint units under the operational control of the Defense Ministry-run Baghdad Operations Command, while receiving training support from the ministry's Baghdad Fighting School at Taji'. Moreover, supporters of the PMU denigrated the Defense Hashd and the PMU Commission did not recognize it.<sup>509</sup>

On 17 July 2020, Congressional Research Service stated that a new group called Usbat Al-Tha'irien (League of the Revolutionaries) emerged in March 2020. According to the source, the new group 'has claimed responsibility for actual and attempted attacks against U.S. targets, posting aerial surveillance footage of key U.S. installations in Iraq'. According to Husham Al-Hashimi, the group seeks 'to provoke these [U.S.] troops into an uncalculated retaliation that causes killing of Iraqi security or military forces or civilians. This way they can create public resentment against the foreign presence.'<sup>510</sup>

### ISIL

Several sources reported on an increased ISIL activity in Baghdad in 2019-2020. A BBC article dated 23 December 2019 indicated that ISIL 'is re-organising in Iraq, two years after losing the last of its territory in the country'. The BBC quoted a top Kurdish counter-terrorism official who warned that ISIL 'would be nourished by the current unrest in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, and would exploit the sense of alienation among their fellow Sunni Muslims - a minority community.'<sup>511</sup> Business Insider noted that since mid-2019, ISIL has been operating in rural areas including east and north of Baghdad.<sup>512</sup> Musings on Iraq observed that in 2019, ISIL intended to return to the city and was even able to orchestrate several bomb attacks, but then shifted its focus on the countryside.<sup>513</sup>

In May 2020, Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) stated that ISIL active attack cells existed in the following areas of Baghdad governorate: Tarmiyah; Taji/Saab al-Bour; Abu Ghraib/Zaidon; the Latifiyah/ Yusufiyah/ Mahmudiyah triangle; Jurf al-Sakhr; and Jisr Diyala/Madain. The source added that the increase in ISIL activities around Baghdad 'has manifested primarily in the northern and western', with the northern belts falling under the group's Shamal Al-Baghdad Wilayat. Reportedly, this area 'is a vital thoroughfare connecting a range of other geographic sub-sectors of the insurgency' and 'seems to serve as hub for fighters and materiel flowing down the Euphrates River Valley (ERV) from Syria and pooling in the triangle between Hit, Fallujah/Karma, and the southern shores of Lake Thar Thar.'<sup>514</sup>

<sup>507</sup> IISS, *Iran's Networks of Influence - Chapter Four: Iraq*, November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>508</sup> Knights, M. et al., *Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces*, March 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>509</sup> Knights, M. et al., *Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces*, March 2020, [url](#), p. 125

<sup>510</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Iraq: Issues in the 116th Congress*, 17 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>511</sup> BBC, *Isis in Iraq: Militants 'getting stronger again'*, 23 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>512</sup> Business Insider, *ISIS is making a comeback, and Iraq's government may not be able to handle it*, 7 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>513</sup> Wing, J., *Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June*, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>514</sup> Combating Terrorism Center, *Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020*, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

### US-led Coalition forces

According to an Aljazeera article published on 8 January 2020, the US had 5 200 soldiers deployed in various bases across Iraq. Two of those bases were in Baghdad, namely Taji to the north and Victory, which is situated inside Baghdad International Airport. The latter, according to Aljazeera is used as a command centre and for intelligence and control purposes.<sup>515</sup> According to an article published on 6 July 2020 by Military Times, the US-led Coalition in Iraq is ‘adjusting their operating model as Iraqi security forces step up their fight against ISIS’. Reportedly, Task Force Iraq, ‘a one-star subordinate command of Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve’ is being transformed to the Military Advisor Group which will have a central location in Baghdad.<sup>516</sup> Al-Arab newspaper stated on 17 July 2020 that the US does not intend to leave Iraq; however, the reduction of the number of US troops in Iraq is possible and is subject to consultations with Baghdad.<sup>517</sup>

## 2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### Developments 2019-2020

#### Iran-US tensions

One of the major security developments in Iraq in 2019 and 2020 was the rising tension between Iran and the US. On 29 December 2019, the New York Times reported on US airstrikes that targeted several positions held by Kataib Hezbollah across Iraq in retaliation for an attack that killed one American national.<sup>518</sup> On 2 January 2020, Qassim Suleimani, the Commander of Al-Quds Forces of the Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC), and a number of Iran-backed militia officials, notably the Popular Mobilisation Committee (PMC) Chief of Staff Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, were killed in a US drone attack in Baghdad Airport.<sup>519</sup> Reportedly, shortly after the attack, the Iraqi Council of Representatives voted ‘to expel American forces from the country’.<sup>520</sup> On 8 January 2020, the New York Times reported that Iran retaliated by launching ‘more than 20 ballistic missiles at military bases in Iraq where American troops are based’. None of those military bases were reported to be in Baghdad province.<sup>521</sup> Radio Free Europe reported that on 24 January, thousands of Iraqis took to the streets of Baghdad and chanted slogans against the US in response to a call by the Shiite leader Muqtada Al-Sadr. Reportedly, the demonstration was protected by Saraya As-Salam and other PMUs.<sup>522</sup> According to ISW, on 29 February 2020, Kataib Hezbollah issued a ‘final warning’ to all Iraqis collaborating with the US, including companies and governmental bodies.<sup>523</sup> Moreover, on 13 March 2020, the New Arab reported on the deployment of ISF in the Green Zone and the evacuation of militia bases in the neighbourhoods of Jadiriya, Karrada, Arsat, and Palestine Street in the wake of US airstrikes that targeted PMU bases in Jurf Al-Sakhr in Babil governorate.<sup>524</sup> The same source reported on 14 March

<sup>515</sup> 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](#)

<sup>516</sup> Military Times, Anti-ISIS coalition — saying Iraqi security forces now effective — reducing personnel, shifting mission focus, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>517</sup> Al-Arab, الولايات المتحدة تؤكد عدم نيتها سحب قواتها من العراق [The US Reiterates Its Unwillingness to Withdraw Its Troops from Iraq], 17 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>518</sup> New York Times (The), U.S. Launches Airstrikes on Iranian-Backed Forces in Iraq and Syria, 29 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>519</sup> New York Times (The), U.S. Strike in Iraq Kills Qassim Suleimani, Commander of Iranian Forces, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>520</sup> New York Times (The), As U.S.-Iran Tensions Flare, Iraq Is Caught in the Middle, 10 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>521</sup> New York Times (The), Maps: How the Confrontation Between the U.S. and Iran Escalated, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>522</sup> Radio Free Europe, Thousands Rally In Baghdad Against U.S. Military Presence, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>523</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: February 26 - March 3, 2020, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>524</sup> New Arab (The), انتشار أمني كثيف في بغداد ومليشيات تخلي مقراتها بعد ضربات أميركية [Heavy Deployment of Security Forces in Baghdad and Militias Evacuate Their Bases after US Airstrikes], 13 March 2020, [url](#)

that 14 ‘Katyusha rockets’ hit Al-Taji military base to the north of Baghdad<sup>525</sup>, which resulted in three casualties among US troops, two of which were in critical condition<sup>526</sup>. On 17 March 2020, a new group designated Usbat Al-Tha’irien (League of the Revolutionaries) claimed responsibility for the 14 March attack, and two other attacks, on Al-Taji camp.<sup>527</sup> This escalation saw about a one-month pause during April 2020, before Iran-backed militias resumed their attacks and targeted US Army positions near Baghdad Airport on 6 May 2020.<sup>528</sup> The attacks continued in July 2020, and according to EPIC, three rockets hit Al-Taji military base on 27 July<sup>529</sup> and two rockets struck Baghdad International Airport on 30 July 2020.<sup>530</sup>

In addition to the attacks mentioned above, ISW documented seven attacks that targeted the Green Zone and some other neighbourhoods in Baghdad City between 8 January and 17 March 2020. According to ISW, some of the rockets were launched from neighbourhoods in Baghdad such as Al-Amanah, Zafaranyah, and Arab Jabour. In the seven attacks, only one American national was wounded when three mortars hit the US embassy on 26 January 2020.<sup>531</sup> Moreover, EPIC reported that three rocket attacks targeted Baghdad’s Green Zone in June and July 2020, in one of which, a child was injured.<sup>532</sup>

The Washington Institute stated that on 3 June 2020, the Chairman of the Hashd Commission in the Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi’s office issued a memo signaling the ‘recommencement of “Hashd reform”’. The changes proposed in the memo included the closure of some of the PMU offices in the cities and removing unit nomenclatures. However, according to the Washington Institute, the PMU Commission is headquartered in Baghdad, and the new memo will help larger militias, including Kataib Hezbollah to intimidate the government by ‘posting tactical units in sensitive locations (e.g., adjacent to the prime minister’s office, or even within the Republican Palace complex, a key site for government meetings)’.<sup>533</sup> Finally, on 25 June 2020, the Iraqi Prime Minister authorised a CTS operation into Kataib Hezbollah’s building in Dora area, southern Baghdad, which led to the arrest of 14 of the group’s members and the seizing of rockets. The 14 members were released later after Kataib Hezbollah reportedly exercised pressure on the Prime Minister.<sup>534</sup>

## Protest movement

Another development that took place in Iraq in 2019-2020 was large-scale demonstrations in several cities, particularly Baghdad. A UN Security Council report dated 22 November 2019 stated that on 1 October 2019, protestors gathered in Tahrir Square in Baghdad calling for reforms. The demonstration turned violent when the protestors attempted to cross to the International Zone. Reportedly, the protests continued in Baghdad for the subsequent days before they spread to other governorates.<sup>535</sup>

<sup>525</sup> New Arab (The), العراق: استهداف معسكر التاجي الذي يضم جنوداً أميركيين بـ14 صاروخ كاتيوشا [Iraq: Al-Taji Military Camp in Which US Troops Were Present Was Targeted with 14 Katyusha Rockets], 14 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>526</sup> New Arab (The), البنتاغون يعلن إصابة 3 جنود أميركيين بالهجوم على التاجي... اثنان حالتهم حرجة [The Pentagon Announced that Three US Soldiers Were wounded in the Attack on Al-Taji Base, of Whom Two were in Critical Condition], 14 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>527</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2020/363, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>528</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: May 6-12, 2020, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>529</sup> EPIC, ISHM: July 23 - July 30, 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>530</sup> EPIC, ISHM: July 30 - August 6, 2020, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>531</sup> ISW, Iran’s Proxy Militias Continue to Escalate Against U.S. Personnel: January 3 – March 17, 2020, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> EPIC, ISHM: June 11 – June 18, 2020, 18 June 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 2 - July 9, 2020, 9 July 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 16 - July 23, 2020, 23 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>533</sup> Washington Institute, Hashd Reforms in Iraq Conceal More Than They Reveal, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>534</sup> Aljazeera, عناصر حزب الله العراقي المفرج عنهم يستعرضون قوتهم في بغداد [Released Iraqi Hezbollah Members Display Power in Baghdad], 30 June 2020, [url](#); Warsaw Institute, Iraq: Security Sector Reform regarding paramilitary units, 9 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>535</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2019/903, 22 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1

An open-ended curfew was imposed by the Iraqi government on 3 October 2019.<sup>536</sup> On 7 October 2019, Reuters reported on clashes between protestors and the ISF in Al-Sadr city that resulted in the death of 15 people. According to Reuters, '[t]he spread of the violence into Sadr City on Sunday night poses a new security challenge for authorities dealing with the worst violence in the country since the Islamic State group was defeated nearly two years ago.'<sup>537</sup> By the end of October 2019, the demands of the protestors were expanded to include 'political accountability for the loss of life, the resignation of the Government and electoral and constitutional reforms'.<sup>538</sup> The HRW World report of 2019 stated that '[c]lashes with security forces left at least 350 protesters dead in protests in Baghdad and Iraq's southern cities from early October to December'. Reportedly, security forces fired tear gas cartridges and live munition directly at protestors in some cases.<sup>539</sup> Amnesty International published a report on 23 January 2020 according to which, more than 600 protestors were killed since October 2019. The report quoted activists who reported on the intentional use of live munition and 'military-grade' tear gas to kill protestors.<sup>540</sup> ISW stated that between 5 and 8 March 2020, three protestors were killed and 44 wounded by 'unidentified security forces' in central Baghdad.<sup>541</sup> Moreover, the UN Security Council report published on 6 May 2020 indicated a decrease in the numbers of deaths and injuries among protestors, partially due to the COVID-19 situation. The report added that during the reporting period, 21 February – May 2020, ten protestors died and 367 injured in Baghdad.<sup>542</sup> With regard to the official reaction, former Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi sent the CTS in late October 2019 to put an end to the protests.<sup>543</sup> Later, the PMU command issued firm instructions to its units on 7 December 2019 that all military tasks of the PMU should be under the Joint Operations Command and that no units should be present in the vicinity of protest sites.<sup>544</sup> On 26 May 2020, the new Iraqi Prime Minister, Al-Kadhimi, pledged to investigate into reports of violence against protestors.<sup>545</sup>

A UNAMI report dated 23 May 2020 stated that there were cases of 'abduction' among people who participated in demonstrations or provided support to demonstrators.<sup>546</sup> According to the report, the incidents happened in the vicinity of the demonstration sites or on the route from/to home or work. Moreover, the 'abductees' reported being blindfolded and brought to places of detention or interrogation where they faced 'allegations of support from/to foreign states, particularly the United States'. Additionally, the report observed that all male respondents 'described being subjected to various acts amounting to torture and/or ill-treatment' while female respondents 'described being beaten, threatened with rape and touched in 'private areas'. In all but one case, those abducted received no medical treatment during their abduction'.<sup>547</sup>

## ISIL insurgency

Regarding ISIL, a UN Security Council report published in November 2019 observed that '[r]emnants of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continued to launch frequent asymmetrical attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, particularly in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, and Salah

<sup>536</sup> BBC, Iraq protests: Shots fired as demonstrators defy Baghdad curfew, 3 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>537</sup> Reuters, Death toll climbs as Iraq unrest hits Baghdad's volatile Sadr City, 7 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>538</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2019/903, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 11

<sup>539</sup> HRW, World Report 2019 – Iraq, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>540</sup> Al, Iraq: Protest death toll surges as security forces resume brutal repression, 23 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>541</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: March 4 - 10, 2020, 14 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>542</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 58

<sup>543</sup> Radio Free Europe, Iraqi PM Sends Counter-Terror Force To Put Down Street Protests, 27 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>544</sup> Sky News Arabic, تعليمات صارمة لمليشيات الحشد الشعبي بعد "مجزرة بغداد"..[url](#) [Following the "Baghdad Massacre".. Firm Instructions to PMU Militias], 7 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>545</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: May 20 - 26, 2020, 30 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>546</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>547</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4



al-Din Governorates'.<sup>548</sup> Musings on Iraq observed 'a large surge in violence' in April and May 2020. The source added that preserving fighters has been ISIL's priority since its defeat in Syria until April when it 'unleashed a slew of attacks which only grew in the following month eventually reaching 2018 levels'. With regard to Baghdad, the source stated that in 2019, ISIL intended to return to the city and was even able to orchestrate several bomb attacks. However, the group seemed to have shifted its focus to the countryside again as the number of attacks in Baghdad dropped significantly. According to the source, ISIL conducted seven attacks in March 2020, zero in April 2020, 14 during its spring campaign, and the number dropped to two in June 2020.<sup>549</sup> Moreover, ISW observed that ISIL was building and expanding its support zone in the northern and southwestern Baghdad Belts.<sup>550</sup> Combating Terrorism Center observed that '[i]n the first half of 2019, attacks [by ISIL] averaged 11.3 per month, in the second half 24.3 per month, and in Q1 2020, the average reached 35.3 per month'. According to the source, 'there has undoubtedly been a partial recovery of attack metrics in rural Baghdad', and ISIL's primary focus in 2020 is 'on security force targets as opposed to civilians'.<sup>551</sup> The Lead Inspector General of Operation Inherent Resolve reported that between 1 January and 31 March 2020, 'Baghdad province experienced slightly more than 20 attacks ... however many of these attacks were unclaimed and resulted in few casualties'.<sup>552</sup>

On 8 February 2020, ISW stated that ISIL was likely responsible for five IED explosions that targeted public areas in Baghdad.<sup>553</sup> On 12 March 2020, ISW reported that ISIL was likely behind six IED attacks that targeted areas in eastern, southern, and northern Baghdad and injured seven civilians.<sup>554</sup> In a report published on 6 May 2020, the UN Security Council observed that '[r]emnants of ISIL continued to launch frequent asymmetric attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces' in several provinces including Baghdad.<sup>555</sup> According to Musings on Iraq, on 2 July 2020, the Iraqi Army launched an anti-ISIL operation in Al-Tarmiya, to the north of Baghdad, where ISIL cells still exist.<sup>556</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat cited Mohammad Al-Karbouli, Iraqi MP and member of the parliamentary security and defense committee, who denounced 'the arbitrary arrest campaigns north of Baghdad' and revealed that 'more than 50 young men were seized in a humiliating way in front of their families' alluding to possible sectarian dimensions.<sup>557</sup> Finally, the National reported on the same operation, and observed that it came in the aftermath of the increase in ISIL attacks in 2020.<sup>558</sup>

ISW reported that due to COVID-19 pandemic, European members of the US-led anti-ISIL Coalition began to withdraw their troops from Iraq between 25 and 31 March 2020. Reportedly, France, the Czech Republic and Portugal announced complete withdrawals from Iraq, while the UK, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and Germany announced partial withdrawals only. Moreover, on 25 March 2020, the USDOS ordered all US government employees in Iraq and the KRI to depart from Iraq due to 'poor security conditions and restricted travel options as a result of COVID-19'. Additionally, the Iraqi Joint Operations Command deployed 40 military vehicles in Al-Sadr City to enforce the curfew.<sup>559</sup>

<sup>548</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2019/903, 22 November 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>549</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>550</sup> ISW, ISIS Re-Establishes Iraqi Sanctuary, March 7, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>551</sup> Combating Terrorism Center, Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>552</sup> USDOD (Department of Defense), Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress – January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, 3 May 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>553</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: February 7 - 12, 2020, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: March 11 - 17, 2020, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>555</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 24

<sup>556</sup> Wing, J., Security In Iraq Jul 1-7, 2020, 9 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>557</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Iraq Finds Underground ISIS Training Camp, 4 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>558</sup> National (The), Iraqi military moves against ISIS north of Baghdad, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>559</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: March 25 - 31, 2020, 3 April 2020, [url](#)

imposed by the Iraqi government on 17 March 2020 in Baghdad.<sup>560</sup> Furthermore, the UN Security Council report of 6 May 2020 observed that protests were staged in Baghdad and several other locations against the economic impact of the measures imposed by the government to limit the spread of the virus. Reportedly, 27 000 arrests for breaching the curfew were reported by the Baghdad Operations Command.<sup>561</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 10 May 2019, Radio Free Europe cited Iraqi security officials who stated that a suicide bomb attack took place in Sadr City in Baghdad and resulted in at least eight deaths and 15 injuries. The attack was claimed by ISIL.<sup>562</sup>
- According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees of Germany (BAMF), a suicide attack targeted a liquor store in Baghdad on 13 June 2019. Reportedly, two civilians were injured in the attack.<sup>563</sup>
- On 12 August 2019, a large explosion took place in the southern outskirts of Baghdad that targeted ammunition depot of the PMU. Reportedly, the shrapnel caused by the explosion damaged civilian housing nearby.<sup>564</sup>
- Radio Free Europe reported on 7 September 2019 that four bomb attacks targeted commercial districts in the east, south, west, and centre of Baghdad and 14 people were wounded.<sup>565</sup>
- On 26 November 2019, two motorcycle bombings and one IED hit the neighbourhoods of Al-Sha'ab, Bayaa, and Baladiyyat. At least, six people were killed in the unclaimed attacks.<sup>566</sup>
- On 20 January 2020, three French nationals and an Iraqi, who worked in a Christian charity, were kidnapped in Baghdad. They were released on 27 March 2020.<sup>567</sup>
- ISW reported that on 8 February 2020, five IEDs exploded in public areas in Baghdad, including Baghdad Jadida, Bayaa, Jokuk, Hurriya, and Qahira. According to the report, the attacks were likely carried out by ISIL.<sup>568</sup>
- On 14 February 2020, six protestors were killed in Tahrir Square, one person in Yarmouk, and one body was found in Nahrawan.<sup>569</sup>
- According to ISW, on 22 February 2020, seven IED attacks, likely carried out by ISIL, wounded 13 people in Baghdad. The explosions took place in Al-Maalaf, Al-Shaab, Al-Habibi, Al-Mashtal, Al-Zafaraniya and Al-Shula neighbourhoods.<sup>570</sup>

<sup>560</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2020/363, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>561</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2020/363, 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>562</sup> Radio Free Europe, At Least Eight People Killed In Suicide Bomb Attack On Baghdad Market, 10 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>563</sup> Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 17 June 2019, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>564</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2019/903, 22 November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>565</sup> Radio Free Europe, Baghdad Rocked By Explosions, 14 Wounded, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>566</sup> Arab Week, العراق: قتلى وجرحى في ثلاثة انفجارات تهب بغداد, 27 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>567</sup> BBC, French Christian charity workers kidnapped in Iraq are freed, 27 March 2020, [url](#); Radio Free Europe, Four Workers Of French Christian Charity Missing In Iraq, 25 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>568</sup> ISW, IRAQ SITUATION REPORT: FEBRUARY 7 - 12, 2020, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>569</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>570</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: February 20 - 25, 2020, 2 March 2020, [url](#)



- On 11 April 2020, two burned bodies were found in Karrada.<sup>571</sup>
- On 30 April 2020, ISIL militants targeted high voltage towers in the east of Baghdad and south of Baquba. According to EPIC, '[t]he attacks put 1,500 megawatts of power out of service, causing a drop in power supplied to six provinces'.<sup>572</sup>
- On 12 May 2020, three family members were killed in an armed attack that targeted a house in Abu Ghraib.<sup>573</sup>
- On 15 May 2020, the body of a young man who was previously kidnapped by ISIL was found stabbed. On 14 May 2020, the body of a girl was found, bearing signs of torture and one woman was stabbed in New Baghdad.<sup>574</sup>
- According to IBC, on 19 May 2020, one person was killed in an IED explosion in a minibus in Mada'in and one body was found in Tigris, allegedly with marks of torture and shooting.<sup>575</sup>
- On 9 June 2020, two women were killed in a drive-by shooting in Al-Binak.<sup>576</sup>
- Two women were killed by gunmen in Baghdad on 9 June 2020, according to IBC.<sup>577</sup>
- According to IBC, on 17 June 2020, one person was killed in Ur, one person was stabbed in Sadr City, and three bodies were found in unspecified locations in Baghdad.<sup>578</sup>
- IBC stated that a woman was killed by gunmen in Baghdad, on 24 June 2020.<sup>579</sup>
- On 6 July 2020, masked gunmen on motorcycles assassinated Husham al-Hashimi, the Iraqi security analyst and advisor to the Iraqi President and Prime minister, in front of his house in the Ziyouna neighbourhood in Baghdad. According to ISW, Kataib Hezbollah was likely responsible.<sup>580</sup>
- On 24 July 2020, Al-Monitor reported that a German national who was abducted in Baghdad was freed in an ISF operation.<sup>581</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

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<sup>571</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>572</sup> EPIC, ISHM for April 23 - April 30, 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>573</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>574</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>575</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>576</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>577</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>578</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>579</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>580</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 1 - 7, 2020, 10 July 2020, [url](#); Warsaw Institute, Iraq: Security Sector Reform regarding paramilitary units, 9 July 2020, [url](#); Radio Free Europe, Prominent Iraqi Analyst Shot Dead After Pro-Iran Militia Threats, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>581</sup> Al-Monitor, German woman kidnapped in Baghdad freed in Iraqi operation, 24 July 2020, [url](#)



Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Baghdad	42	37	13	50	4	3	5	8

Table 7: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Baghdad governorate.<sup>582</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 42 battles, 163 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 81 cases of violence against civilians, 107 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 393 security incidents of these types in Baghdad governorate, the majority taking place in the capital Baghdad City. 130 protests were also reported in Baghdad governorate during the reference period.<sup>583</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

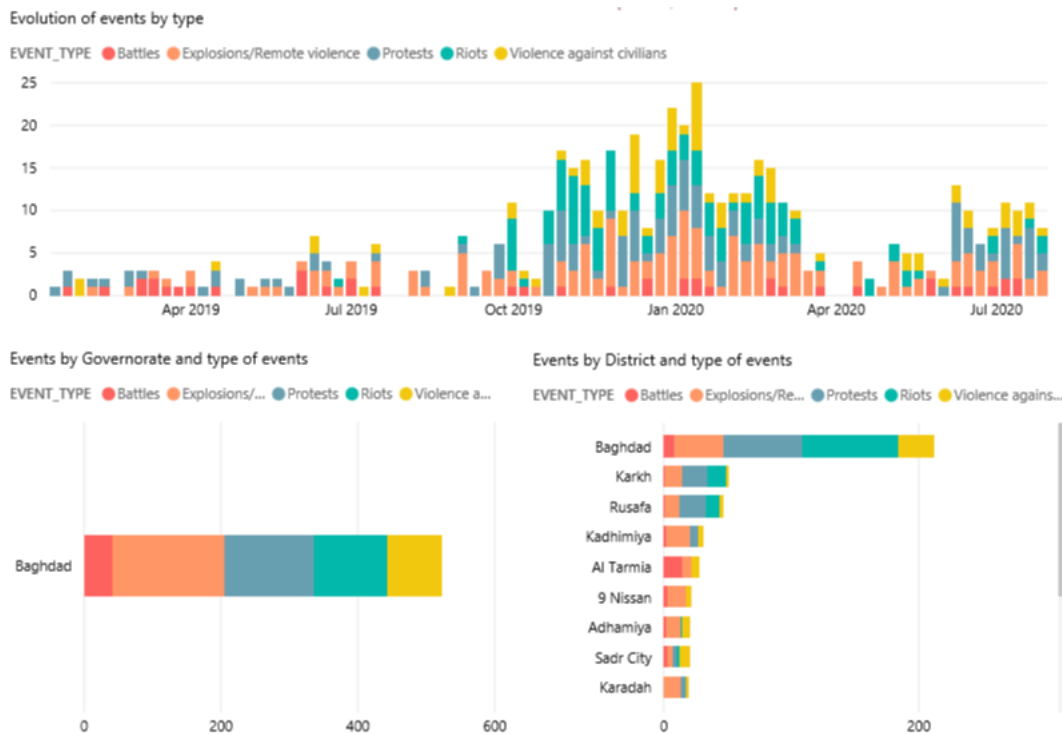


Figure 10: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Baghdad governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data.<sup>584</sup>

### 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 \(2018\)](#).

<sup>582</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 July 2020

<sup>583</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>584</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) observed that in Baghdad, ‘organized crime, uncontrolled militia activity, and corruption remain formidable obstacles to free enterprise and business’. The report made reference to the threat Shia Militia Groups posed to US nationals, but also to Iraqi civilians. It also maintained that those militia groups ‘use low-yield and crude IEDs in Baghdad city to intimidate and extort small business owners in protection rackets’. With regard to ISIL, OSAC stated that USDOS ‘has assessed Baghdad as being a CRITICAL-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests’. Furthermore, militias and criminal groups in Baghdad engaged in kidnapping of individuals for political or monetary gain.<sup>585</sup>

With regard to the ISF’s ability to secure order, OSAC stated that when protestors attempted to cross the Sinak Bridge to the International Zone, the ISF managed to push them back to the eastern side of the Tigris.<sup>586</sup> AP reported on 7 October 2019 that following violent clashes between the Iraqi Army and protestors in Sadr City, the Iraqi Prime Minister ordered the Iraqi Police to replace the army in order to de-escalate the situation.<sup>587</sup> Furthermore, OSAC noted that the ISF had ‘a limited ability to respond to security incidents, terrorist attacks, and criminal activities’. There are numerous permanent checkpoints as well as temporary ones across the city.<sup>588</sup>

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

The US Central Command reported on the discovery and destruction of ISIL ammunition caches in different areas in Iraq, including Baghdad governorate. A weapon cache was discovered in Al-Mikaitimat area, Al-Yusifia sub-district on 28 June 2020.<sup>589</sup> Moreover, Counter IED Report stated that on 26 July 2020, a weapon depot belonging to the Iraqi FP, and located in the southern outskirts of Baghdad, exploded due to heat. Reportedly, one person was killed and 29 injured.<sup>590</sup> Additionally, on 22 July 2020, the ISF ‘located a cache of ammunition containing a number of mortar rounds’ in the west of Baghdad and on 28 July, explosive devices were located in Al-Nabai’i desert to the north of Baghdad.<sup>591</sup>

IOM stated in 2017 that ‘Infrastructure damage is consistent with the country average in all sectors except roads, which appear to have suffered the greatest damage (roads were destroyed in locations hosting 7% of the IDP and resident population and are not efficient for 53% of the population), in particular in the districts of Abu Ghraib and Mahmoudiya.’ Moreover, electricity and tap water networks were destroyed or not properly functioning ‘for over half of the IDPs and returnees.<sup>592</sup> According to Reuters, power outages were however commonplace.<sup>593</sup> The damage to the housing stock in the governorate of Baghdad was estimated to amount to IQD 337.5 billion (EUR 239.3 million).<sup>594</sup> Significant residential damage was mainly reported in Abu Ghraib (3 %) and Mahmoudiya (7 %) areas.<sup>595</sup> IOM also noted that in Baghdad, 13 994 households returned to non-

<sup>585</sup> OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Baghdad, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>586</sup> OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Baghdad, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>587</sup> AP, Iraqi police replacing army in volatile Baghdad neighborhood, 7 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>588</sup> OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Baghdad, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>589</sup> US, CJTF-OIR, Defeating Daesh Highlights of the Week, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>590</sup> Counter IED Report, Explosion hits southern Baghdad weapons depot, blamed on heat, 26 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>591</sup> US, CJTF-OIR, Defeating Daesh Highlights of the Week, July 29, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>592</sup> IOM, Iraq Displacement Tracking Matrix, Integrated Location Assessment II, Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>593</sup> Reuters, As Baghdad life improves, some still seek refuge in its past, [url](#)

<sup>594</sup> World Bank, Iraq reconstruction & investment part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>595</sup> IOM, Iraq Displacement Tracking Matrix, Integrated Location Assessment II, Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 6

critical shelters compared to 1 044 who returned to critical shelters, i.e. uninhabitable buildings, informal settlements, and abandoned, religious or school buildings.<sup>596</sup>

During the preparation of this report, no information on explosive remnants of war or unexploded ordnance, pertinent to Baghdad governorate, was found.

### Displacement and return

According to IOM's DTM, as of 30 June 2020, there were 35 034 IDPs in Baghdad, originating from Anbar (18 102), Babil (4 812), Baghdad (348), Diyala (858), Kirkuk (108), Ninewa (7 992), and Salah al-Din (2 814) governorates.<sup>597</sup> The DTM stated that there were 38 766 IDPs in Iraq who originated from Baghdad governorate, of which 348 were displaced within the governorate.<sup>598</sup> The three main districts of displacement were Karkh (10 284), Abu Ghraib (6 846), and Mahmoudiya (4 944).<sup>599</sup> An IOM report published in February 2020, and covering the period March 2018 – December 2019, identified 292 locations in Iraq in which secondary displacement occurred, of which 18 were in Baghdad.<sup>600</sup> Furthermore, 161 households in Mahmoudiya and 150 in Abu Ghraib were re-displaced.<sup>601</sup>

With regard to returns, DTM recorded the return of 90 228 IDPs to Baghdad, while 38 766 were still displaced.<sup>602</sup> Of those, 49 116 returned from Mahmoudiya, 23 112 from Abu Ghraib, 10 236 from Tarmia, and 7 764 from Kadhimiya.<sup>603</sup>

UNHCR observed that as of November 2019, persons from areas recaptured from ISIL, particularly Sunni Arabs, did not need a sponsor to enter Baghdad. However, to obtain residency in Baghdad, such persons were required to have two sponsors from the neighborhood in which they intended to stay in addition to a letter from the *Mukhtar*.<sup>604</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq: Returnees Master List – Round 115, 12 June 2020, [url](#), Tab 'Shelter Type by Gov of Return'

<sup>597</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Displacement Overview, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>598</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Displacement Timeline, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>599</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, IRAQ MASTER LIST REPORT 116: May – June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

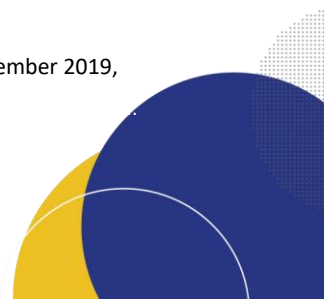
<sup>600</sup> IOM Iraq, RE-DISPLACED: AN EXPLORATION OF DISPLACEMENT AFTER ATTEMPTED RETURN IN IRAQ, February 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>601</sup> IOM Iraq, RE-DISPLACED: AN EXPLORATION OF DISPLACEMENT AFTER ATTEMPTED RETURN IN IRAQ, February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

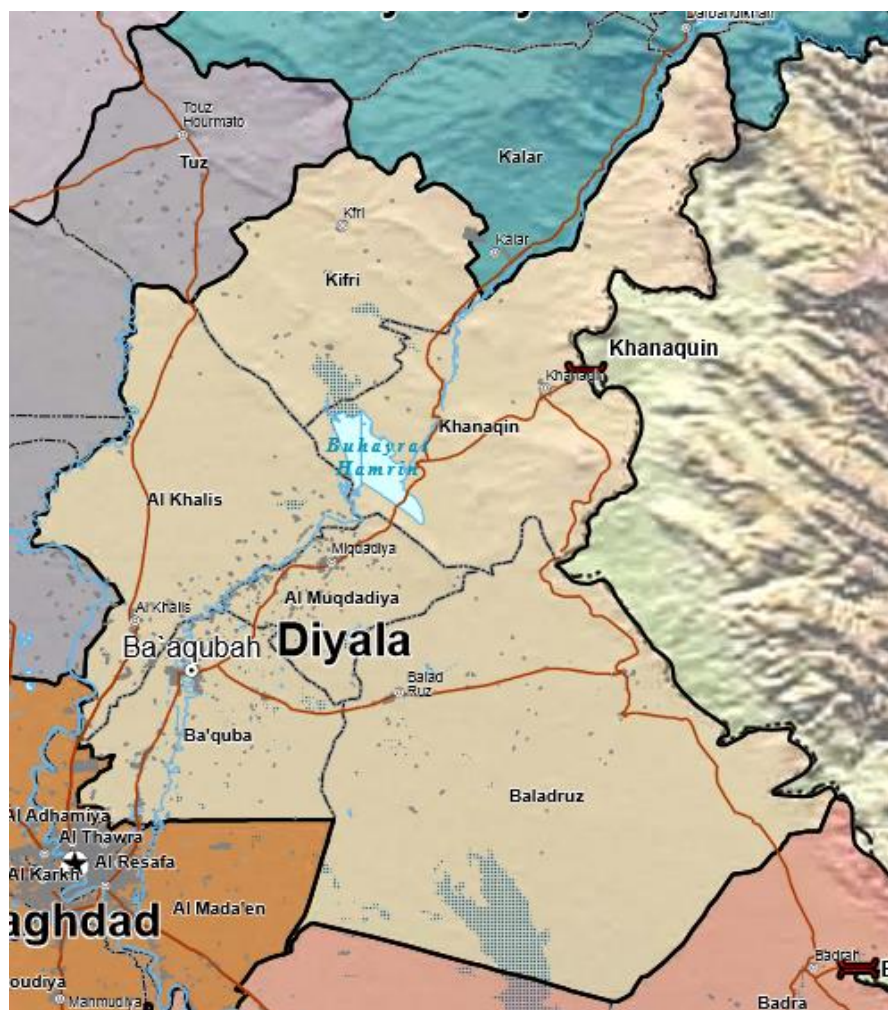
<sup>602</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return Overview, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>603</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Returnees by Governorate and District, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>604</sup> UNHCR, Iraq: Country of Origin Information on Access and Residency Requirements in Iraq (Update I), November 2019, [url](#), p. 2



## 2.4 Diyala



Map 9: Diyala governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.<sup>605</sup>

### 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, Baladruoz, Khalis, Khanaqin, Kifri and Muqadiya. Baqubah city is the capital of the governorate.<sup>606</sup> The district of the disputed Khaniqin (also written as Khaniqin) includes the sub-districts of Jalawla, Saadiya and Qara Tapa.<sup>607</sup>

#### Population

Diyala governorate has an estimated population of 1 680 328 inhabitants as of 2019.<sup>608</sup>

<sup>605</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>606</sup> UNOCHA, Diyala Governorate Profile, March 2009, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>607</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>608</sup> Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

## Ethnicity

Diyala has a diverse ethnic and religious population. Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmens make up the majority of the population, each including the Sunni and Shi'a sects of Islam. Other ethnic and religious groups residing in the governorate include Christians, Yezidis and Ahl al-Haqq (a religious group with roots in Shi'a Islam). Among the Kurdish population is also the community of Faili (also written as Feili, Fayli or Feily) Kurds, who are predominantly Shi'a Muslims.<sup>609</sup>

The Juburi and the Tamimi tribes are the biggest and most influential tribes in the governorate.<sup>610</sup> Other important tribes in Diyala are the al-Assadi, the Atighi and the Salhi.<sup>611</sup> The (Pro-KRG) Shia Kurds constitute the largest portion of the population in the city of Khanaqin.<sup>612</sup>

## Road security

The districts in Diyala which are disputed by the KRG and the central government are Khanaqin, Kifri and the sub-district Mandali, situated in Baladrooz district.<sup>613</sup>

The highways Baghdad–Tehran and Baghdad–Kirkuk–Erbil–Mosul pass through Diyala. Diyala has particularly good connections with Baghdad, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.<sup>614</sup> 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.<sup>615</sup>

During the first half of 2020 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.<sup>616</sup> In 2019, the same roads were designated as primary risk roads.<sup>617</sup> Between January and December 2019, a number of explosive hazard incidents were reported in Diyala, especially on the road from Baquba to Khanaqin.<sup>618</sup> In

<sup>609</sup> NCCI, Diyala Governorate Profile, January 2016, [url](#), p. 2; Minority Rights Group International, Iraq, Faili Kurds, November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>610</sup> 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

<sup>611</sup> LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>612</sup> Saleem, Z.et al., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI, November 2018, [url](#)

<sup>613</sup> 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](#)

<sup>614</sup> LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>615</sup> LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 61

<sup>616</sup> iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-30 June 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (01-31 May 2020), 7 June 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-30 April 2020, 6 May 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-31 March 2020, 6 April 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-29 February 2020, 4 March 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-31 January 2020, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>617</sup> iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate from January to December 2019, 12 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>618</sup> iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazard Incidents in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates from January to December 2019', 12 January 2020, [url](#)

Jalawla, Khanaqin district, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) operates checkpoints on commercially strategic roads and imposes taxes on passing vehicles.<sup>619</sup>

## Economy

Diyala province is a key gateway for Iranian-Iraqi trade.<sup>620</sup> Khanaqin district, rich in oil, deploys an oil field and an oil refinery.<sup>621</sup> It is 'strategically important for commercial, security and political reasons' and produces major oil revenues via two border crossings with Iran, the Mounzariah and Paruezkhan crossings.<sup>622</sup>

## 2.4.2 Conflict background and armed actors

### Conflict background

Diyala has been described as an 'ethno-sectarian microcosm for security dynamics' for the whole of Iraq.<sup>623</sup> Its mixed ethnic-religious population and proximity to Baghdad and Iran made it 'a crucial prize in the sectarian struggle engulfing Iraq' and it 'became a battleground of Shia and Sunni factions who vied for power'.<sup>624</sup> The governorate is known to have hosted extremist insurgents in Iraq since 2004.<sup>625</sup> The governorate's proximity to Baghdad as well as to the Iranian border made it a priority for the Iraqi government and the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) to control the region.<sup>626</sup>

Diyala is one of Iraq's governorates most affected by the 2013-2014 ISIL invasion.<sup>627</sup> 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.<sup>628</sup> The Karawi ( or Kerwi /Kerwei), a large Arab tribe in the area of Jalawla, pledged loyalty to ISIL.<sup>629</sup> ISIL managed to occupy large areas in the north of the governorate including Saadiyah and Jalawla during its offensive.<sup>630</sup>

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 displaced.<sup>631</sup> The Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), cited by USDOD, reported that 'Diyala, which has one of the largest concentrations of Iranian aligned militias, is also the largest focus of attacks by ISIS within Iraq.'<sup>632</sup> USDOD added that 'Since the fall of ISIS's territorial caliphate in March 2019, Diyala

<sup>619</sup> Saleem, A.Z. et al., *Security and governance in the disputed territories under a fractured GOI*, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>620</sup> ICG, *Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State*, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>621</sup> LADP, *Provincial response plan Diyala governorate*, February 2018, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>622</sup> Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., *Iraq's disputed internal boundaries after ISIS*, February 2019, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>623</sup> Flood, D., *From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq*, September 2018, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>624</sup> LADP, *Provincial response plan Diyala governorate*, February 2018, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>625</sup> Niqash, *New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies*, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

<sup>626</sup> Flood, D., *From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq*, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>627</sup> LADP, *Provincial response plan Diyala governorate*, February 2018, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>628</sup> New York Times (The), *Wary tribal alliances, born of necessity, offer hope in Iraq*, 6 October 2014, [url](#)

<sup>629</sup> 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

<sup>630</sup> NCCI, *Diyala Governorate Profile*, January 2016, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>631</sup> 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.

<sup>632</sup> 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](#); USDOD, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress – January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020*, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 26

province northeast of Baghdad has consistently seen the highest concentration of ISIS attacks in the OIR [Operation Inherent Resolve] battlespace'.<sup>633</sup>

An international NGO working in Iraq interviewed in April 2018 by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS)/Landinfo characterized Diyala's security situation as 'a real hodgepodge: 'you have armed groups whose dynamics predate 2014 because ISIL never controlled the area long enough to influence the underlying trends. You also have protracted communal conflicts that are geographical, ethnic, and sectarian. Lastly, you have PMU competition over access to resources and rents.'<sup>634</sup>

## Armed actors

### Iraqi Security Forces

#### *Dijla Operations Command (DOC)*

Diyala governorate falls under the Dijla Operations Command (DOC), which includes all of Diyala governorate<sup>635</sup>, eastern Salah al-Din and its ethnically mixed town of Tuz Khurmatu, as well as the Hamrin Mountains. 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. In 2017, ISW reported that the 5th Army Division in Diyala was more responsive to Badr Organisation than to the Iraqi government and operated as an extension of the organisation.<sup>636</sup>

The ISF struggle to maintain territorial control in regions where ISIL continues to be supported by the local population. In addition, the ISF's operations in Diyala are being restricted due to the proximity of the border with Iran.<sup>637</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division remains present in Diyala<sup>638</sup>, its soldiers continue to be a target of ISIL attacks.<sup>639</sup>

#### *Border Guards Command*

In 2017, the Border Guards Command in Diyala operated under the 3<sup>rd</sup> border region which covers the Diyala –Wassit border with Iran.<sup>640</sup> In August 2019, the Iraqi authorities in Diyala closed the Iran-Iraq border crossing at Mandali, as drugs and weapons were being smuggled into the country via this route.<sup>641</sup> The border was opened in December 2019, after the border staff had been provided with 'the necessary equipment to prevent the violations that had been taking place before'.<sup>642</sup> The border

<sup>633</sup>USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve –Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>634</sup> 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

<sup>635</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>636</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>637</sup>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

<sup>638</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State conducts attacks near Iraq's Syrian and Iranian borders, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>639</sup> Rudaw, ISIS militants kill 5 Iraqi soldiers in Diyala attacks, 16 December 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: April 16–April 23, 2020, 23 April 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: December 12 – December 19, 2019, 19 December 2019, [url](#); BBC News, IS militants step up attacks on Iraqi security forces, 5 May 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, ISIS launches attacks on Iraqi army, PMF basis in Iraq's Diyala: security, 10 March 2020, [url](#); Middle East Monitor, Iraq soldier killed, 5 wounded in Daesh attack in Diyala, 21 April 2020, [url](#); Iraqi News, Two Iraqi soldiers killed in armed attack on army checkpoint Diyala, 27 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>640</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>641</sup> Hasan, H., Boundary disputes, 26 September 2019, [url](#). See also OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>642</sup> Kurdistan24, Iraq reopens a border crossing with Iran after five-months closure, 23 December 2019, [url](#)

with Iran was temporarily closed again on 20 February 2020, due to a COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>643</sup> The border was opened again on 27 July 2020.<sup>644</sup>

### PMU forces

The Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU or PMF) Diyala Operations Command is led by Talib al-Musawi, a commander of the Badr Organisation.<sup>645</sup> 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).<sup>646</sup> Particularly in southern Diyala, the Badr Organisation remains the dominant Shia militia, the ‘first among equals’. 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.<sup>647</sup> Hashd Brigade 110 and Liwa al-Taff (Brigade 20) are mainly based in the Khanaqin area.<sup>648</sup> PMU-brigade 110 belongs to Badr Organisation and consists of Faili Kurds.<sup>649</sup> 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.<sup>650</sup> Northern Diyala has increasingly become an area of operations for Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH).<sup>651</sup> AAH forces operating in northern Diyala do not seem to be under the operational control of the PMU Diyala Operations Command.<sup>652</sup> In northeastern Diyala AAH is present in Jalawla, constructing local Sunni-manned militias from the Kerwi (or Karawi<sup>653</sup>) tribe.<sup>654</sup> In Abu Sayda, AAH militiamen have unsuccessfully contested Badr’s control of the town.<sup>655</sup>

Activists of the Kaka’i minority in Diyala reported harassment and discrimination by the PMU.<sup>656</sup>

PMUs are reportedly particularly strong in Diyala. The Badr Organisation, which has control over the provincial council, is considered to be the main security actor.<sup>657</sup> An Iraq analyst interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI noted that PMUs were still present in areas liberated from ISIL, including Diyala. The same source further stated that Kataib Hezbollah (KH, one of the Iran-backed PMUs) ‘operates in secret ways in Diyala and in Southern Iraq, including Basra’.<sup>658</sup>

In a May 2020 report Husham Al-Hashimi noted the presence of PMUs in the Al-Udhaym area of northeast Al-Saadiya, areas Khanaqin, Mansuriya, Diyala, Muqdadiyah, Khana, Mountain and Naft, Mandali, Hamrin, East Diyala as of December 2019.<sup>659</sup> USDOD, In its Lead Inspector General Report covering the second quarter of 2020, reported that the PMU has ‘outsized influence relative to the

<sup>643</sup> Garda, Iraq: Border crossings with Iran temporarily closed amid COVID-19 outbreak February 20 update 1, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>644</sup> Iran, Iraq resume trade via Mandali border, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>645</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>646</sup> Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>647</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>648</sup> Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>649</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>650</sup> Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 205

<sup>651</sup> Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 131

<sup>652</sup> Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>653</sup> Saleem, Z. et al., Security and Governance in the Disputed Territories Under a Fractured GOI, November 2018, [url](#)

<sup>654</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>655</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>656</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>657</sup> ICG, Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 15, 17

<sup>658</sup> 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](#), pp. 45, 48

<sup>659</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)



ISF'.<sup>660</sup> The source further described that PMUs 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'.<sup>661</sup>

However, in May 2020, it was reported that KH is losing influence in Iraq, five months after the death of its leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. The Iraqi government has undertaken steps to 'more fully integrate some Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) factions into government chains of command and structures that existed prior to 2014.' In April 2020, it was announced that four 'shrine units' loyal to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (amongst others, Liwa Ali al-Akbar) would be placed directly under the PM's control, in a bid to reduce Iranian and KH's influence on Iraq's security situation.<sup>662</sup>

### **Tribal Mobilization Forces (TMF, Hashd al-Asha'iri)**

The Hashd al-Asha'iri (or Ashayari) are an Arab Sunni militia, backed and armed by the Ministry of Defense; it was created in 2014 to defend and secure the northern Diyala area.<sup>663</sup> 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 organised in Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Anbar than in Diyala. In Diyala they number 3 500 armed men, serving without pay.<sup>664</sup> Tribal Mobilization Forces are involved in direct confrontations with ISIL. On 3 May 2020, for instance, five Tribal Mobilization fighters were killed in clashes with ISIL militants in the village of Umm al-Karami, in north-western Diyala.<sup>665</sup>

### **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.<sup>666</sup> In December 2019, Kurdish Peshmerga forces reportedly carried out large-scale combing and reconnaissance operations in villages and lands in Khanaqin, al-Saadiya, Jalawla and Qara Tapa.<sup>667</sup> In a May 2020 report, Husham Al-Hashimi noted the presence of 'PKK and affiliates' in the Jalawla area.<sup>668</sup> In June 2020, Peshmerga Forces participated in the military campaign Operation Heroes of Iraq, targeting ISIL cells in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din. In July 2020, phase four of Operation Heroes of Iraq was launched in Diyala. ISF and Peshmerga forces together reportedly searched at least 53 villages over the first three days.<sup>669</sup> This cooperation is not without tensions, however, as the Peshmerga are 'fearing Baghdad's forces' intentions'. The PUK remains in control in Kifri.<sup>670</sup> The Paruezkhan (Parvis Khan) border crossing has been under KRG control for a long time.<sup>671</sup>

<sup>660</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p.23

<sup>661</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p.25

<sup>662</sup> Foreign Policy, A Powerful Iran-Backed Militia Is Losing Influence in Iraq, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>663</sup> Iraqi Center for Policy Analysis and Research, Sunni Arabs' grievances in post-ISIS Iraq, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>664</sup> Iraqi Center for Policy Analysis and Research, Sunni Arabs' grievances in post-ISIS Iraq, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>665</sup> BBC News, IS militants step up attacks on Iraqi security forces, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>666</sup> BBC News, Iraq takes disputed areas as Kurds 'withdraw to 2014 lines', 18 October 2017, [url](#)

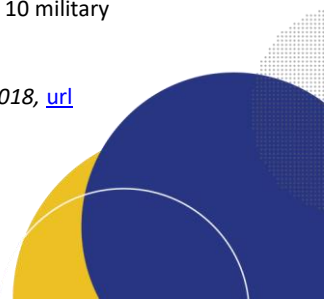
<sup>667</sup> Diyaruna, Peshmerga forces crack down on ISIS in central Iraq, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>668</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>669</sup> 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](#)

<sup>670</sup> Kirkuk Now, Peshmerga in Kifri: Iraqi forces have bad intentions and we will take a stance, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>671</sup> Saleem, A.Z. et al., *Security and governance in the disputed territories under a fractured GOI*, 6 December 2018, [url](#)



## 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.<sup>672</sup> In 2019 and early 2020, Diyala has become ISIL's most active *wilayat* (province).<sup>673</sup> Operating from its rural bastions along the Diyala River Valley, the Iranian border, and the provincial border with Salah al-Din<sup>674</sup> ISIL wages its insurgency through roadside bombings, attacks on security forces checkpoints and sniping attacks.<sup>675</sup> Targeting Kurds, Shia, and uncooperative Sunni tribes, ISIL uses 'ethnic or sectarian cleansing activities' on a scale not seen in other provinces. Mortar shells are regularly fired on Shia, Kurdish, and Kaka'i<sup>676</sup> villages, houses and crops are burned, machinery is destroyed, electricity lines are dropped, and livestock is slaughtered, resulting in the evacuation of villages in the Mukhisa, Abu Saida, Muqdadiyah, Khanaqin, and Mutabijah areas.<sup>677</sup>

In a March 2019 interview Abdul Khaliq Al-Azzawi, a member of the Defense Committee in the Iraqi parliament from Diyala, stated ISIL is operating in rural areas like Nada Plain (south of Khanaqin), Zore (between Al-Muqdadiya and the Hamrin Mountains), the Hamrin Mountains and Auzem.

ISIL attack cells are active in Buhriz/Kani Ban Saad, western Baquba, Mukhisa/Abu Sayda, Sherween/Muqdadiyah, Jalula/Sa'adiyah, Qara Tapa/Hamrin, Khanaqin and Nida/Mandali.<sup>678</sup> Zaghaniyah, Qubbah, Mukhisa and Abou Karmah villages, situated in the Diyala river valley, are reported to be natural bastions for ISIL.<sup>679</sup> In Diyala governorate, ISIL is most active in the northern area; and the Makhmour, Makhul, Palkhana, and Hamrin mountains, spanning several northern governorates.<sup>680</sup>

ISIL is also expanding its field of operations to the south of the city of Baquba, according to ISW.<sup>681</sup> In the Hamrin Mountains, ISIL has built a permanent infrastructure consisting of hideouts, training camps and its own courts. Local officials confirmed in January 2019 to ISW that several villages near Muqdadiyah were *de facto* under ISIL control. Frequent clearing operations by local security forces in the area had little effect.<sup>682</sup> ISIL has also built a tunnel network in the Hamrin Mountains, and has weapons arsenals there.<sup>683</sup> ISIL sleeper cells remained active and as of March 2020 ISIL daily claimed attacks in Diyala, mainly targeting the ISF and community leaders.<sup>684</sup>

<sup>672</sup> Niqash, New frenemies: Extremists return to Diyala, to reunite with old allies, Al Qaeda, 27 April 2017, [url](#)

<sup>673</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 12, p. 15

<sup>674</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>675</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>676</sup> '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](#)

<sup>677</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>678</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 21, 23

<sup>679</sup> 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](#)

<sup>680</sup> 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

<sup>681</sup> ISW, ISIS re-establishes historical sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>682</sup> ISW, ISIS re-establishes historical sanctuary in Iraq, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>683</sup> ISW, ISIS' second come-back: assessing the next ISIS insurgency, 30 June 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>684</sup> 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. 25

ISIL carries out attacks on ISF checkpoints and kills pro-government village and tribal leaders, thus undermining the limited state authority in the region.<sup>685</sup> Its operations are financed through kidnappings, extortion, car-jackings and robberies.<sup>686</sup> According to Joel Wing of Musings on Iraq, ISIL has access to all the rural parts of Diyala.<sup>687</sup> 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.<sup>688</sup>

### **Ansar al Islam (AAI)<sup>689</sup>**

Ansar al-Islam, formerly known as Jund al-Islam, is a terrorist group operating in northeastern Iraq with close links to and support from Al-Qaida. In 2014, part of the group pledged allegiance to ISIL. In October 2019, AAI carried out its first attack in Iraq in five years, by exploding two IEDs in Diyala province.<sup>690</sup>

## **2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population**

### **Developments 2019-2020**

The Middle East Institute analysed the situation in Diyala governorate as follows:

'In Diyala, the situation is even more precarious as ISIS remains far more active, impeding any attempt at a return to normal life. Daily attacks can number anywhere from four to a dozen, according to security experts monitoring the situation. Areas like Jalawla remain impossible to reach, while larger cities such as Khanaqin or Baqubah are becoming increasingly insecure the longer the situation is ignored.'<sup>691</sup>

According to USDOD, the areas around Baqubah and Khanaqin experienced the deadliest attacks.<sup>692</sup>

Airstrikes on suspected ISIL hideouts in and around the Hamrin mountains by international coalition forces and/or Iraqi warplanes were reported throughout 2019 and the first half of 2020.<sup>693</sup> For example, on 8 July 2019, Iraqi forces launched a four-day operation called Will of Victory against ISIL sleeper cells in northern Iraq, including Diyala governorate. 'Iraqi armed forces, paramilitary units of the Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Units), tribal groups and U.S.-led Coalition warplanes' participated in the operation. ISIL sleeper cells continue to perform hit-and-run attacks against government checkpoints, structures and officials. The aim of the operation was to destroy ISIL 'bases,

<sup>685</sup> Rudaw, ISIS threat unabated in Diyala province's 'security vacuum': Kurdish officials, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>686</sup> SIPRI, Governing 'the ungoverned': Suppressing the Islamic State's insurgency in Iraq, 12 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>687</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State Might Be Coming Out Of Its Winter Hibernation In Iraq, 4 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>688</sup> Zelin, A.Y., A year since Baghuz, the Islamic State is neither defeated nor resurging (yet), 25 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>689</sup> Ansar al-Islam, formerly known as Jund al-Islam, is a terrorist group operating in northeastern Iraq with close links to and support from Al-Qaida.

<sup>690</sup> US, USDOS, Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - Iraq, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>691</sup> MEI, The forgotten Iraq, policy paper 2020-7, March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>692</sup> 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. 23

<sup>693</sup> EPIC, ISHM June 25 – July 2, 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Iraqi warplanes shell ISIS hideout in Diyala's Hamrin area, kill all occupants, 21 December 2019, [url](#); Iraqi News, Air raid kills two Islamic State militants in Iraq's Diyala, 9 October 2019, [url](#); Iraqi News, Iraqi airstrikes kill four Islamic State militants in Diyala, 16 February 2019, [url](#)

training camps, depots and tunnels'.<sup>694</sup> On 29 December 2019, the 8th stage of Operation Will of Victory was launched.<sup>695</sup>

On 11 July 2020, ISF, in cooperation with PUK's Counter-Terrorism units and air support from the International Coalition, launched an operation against remnants of ISIL in Khanaqin District.<sup>696</sup>

In the autumn of 2019, protest demonstrations also took place in Diyala, albeit on a smaller scale than in Baghdad and in the south of Iraq.<sup>697</sup>

## ISIL operations

In the period January-March 2019, USDOD noted that ISIL continued to strengthen its network in Diyala province, primarily along the northern Diyala River Valley. Fighters and equipment moved from Kirkuk to the Hamrin Mountains.<sup>698</sup>

ISIL's offensive Revenge of the Levant, launched in April 2019, peaked in May 2019 in Diyala. 35 security incidents were registered in May alone, mainly situated in the Khanaqin-Jalawla area.<sup>699</sup>

In August 2019, the number of ISIL attacks in Diyala rose to 41.<sup>700</sup> Twenty villages near Khanaqin were evacuated because of ISIL bombardments.<sup>701</sup>

In October 2019, only 13 ISIL attacks were reported in Diyala. As demonstrations engulfed Baghdad and the southern provinces, ISIL held off on attacks.<sup>702</sup> According to USDOD, in this period ISIL's low-level attacks, mainly in Diyala and Kirkuk provinces, continued. In a number of villages intimidation by ISIL members became so intense that residents temporarily left their homes.<sup>703</sup>

In December 2019, the number of security incidents in Diyala rose to 42. ISIL changed its focus from the Jalawla-Khanaqin districts in the northeast especially to the Muqdadia district. Partly this was because the government launched a security sweep through Khanaqin.<sup>704</sup>

As ISIL began its annual spring-summer offensive in April 2020, the number of security incidents rose to 42 in April 2020 and 71 in May 2020. Most of these ISIL attacks took place in Khanaqin and Muqdadia.<sup>705</sup>

ISIL was particularly active in Diyala governorate in June 2020. The group 'claimed in its weekly propaganda newsletter, *al-Naba*, that its militants had carried out 52 attacks in Iraq between June 11 and 17 alone – almost half of them in Diyala province'.<sup>706</sup>

<sup>694</sup> Defense Post (The), Iraq launches 'Will of Victory' operation against ISIS sleeper cells near Syrian border, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>695</sup> Kurdistan24, Iraq begins eighth phase of anti-ISIS 'Will of Victory' operation, 29 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>696</sup> Kirkuk Now, Iraqi forces and PUK's Counter-Terrorism units launch operation against ISIS in Diyala Province, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>697</sup> Reuters, Iraq declares curfew as gunfights rage and protests spread nationwide, 2 October 2019, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation report November 1-4, 2019, 6 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>698</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2019-March 31, 2019, 7 May 2019, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>699</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's offensive could be winding down, 5 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>700</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's new game plan in Iraq, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>701</sup> Basnews, IS bombardments kill one, injure another near Khanaqin, 9 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>702</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State waits out the protests in Iraq, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>703</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, October 1, 2019-December 31, 2019, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 19

<sup>704</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State Makes Its Return In December 2019, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>705</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State offensive in Iraq takes off in May, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>706</sup> Rudaw, Erbil and Baghdad kick talks to fill security vacuum in disputed areas into high gear, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

## ISIL tactics and targets

Armed attacks by ISIL usually take place at night, targeting security forces or civilians, Oxfam reported in March 2020. 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’.<sup>707</sup> For instance, in April 2019, ISIL militants published a video depicting the execution of Sunni militiamen and village chiefs in eastern Diyala, accused of being informers to government forces. Amongst the nine executed persons was the *mukhtar* of the village of Bahiza al Kabira.<sup>708</sup> On 14 May 2020, ISIL snipers injured the *mukhtar* of Mubarak near Kahnaqin and set fire to crops in nearby farms.<sup>709</sup>

ISIL continues to target ISF<sup>710</sup> and PMU members in the governorate.<sup>711</sup> For example, on 19 May 2019, seven PMU militia members were killed in a roadside explosion near the city of Balad Ruz. 26 others were injured.<sup>712</sup>

Abductions and kidnappings are tactics by ISIL used to acquire money for ransom, to finance its operations.<sup>713</sup> For instance, in late January 2020, suspected ISIL gunmen set up a mock security checkpoint and abducted seven civilians to the west of Khanaqin. A couple of days later two more people were kidnapped in a similar incident in the same area.<sup>714</sup> On 4 June 2020, ISIL militants kidnapped a local farmer and his three sons near Jalawla. The three sons were executed but there was conflicting information about the fate of their father.<sup>715</sup>

Michael Knights and Alex Almeida documented ‘numerous village evacuations in the Mukhisa-Abu Saida-Muqdadiyah, Khanaqin, and Mutabijah areas’. They considered that the aim of the attacks witnessed in the area appears to be ‘not only to intimidate and extort, but even to depopulate’.<sup>716</sup> In August 2019, twenty villages near Khanaqin were evacuated because of ISIL bombardments.<sup>717</sup> Likewise, early 2019, a number of Kurdish and Sunni Arab villages around Khanaqin and Jalawla were evacuated due to increased ISIL activities.<sup>718</sup> Evacuations of Kurdish villages near Khanaqin were reported as early as July 2018.<sup>719</sup>

<sup>707</sup> OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>708</sup> Rudaw, ISIS militants execute Iraqi mukhtars, militiamen in new video, 14 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>709</sup> EPIC, ISHM, May 14 – May 21, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>710</sup> EPIC, ISHM March 22-28, 2019, 28 March 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: August 1 – August 8, 2019, 8 August 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM November 7- November 14, 2019, 14 November 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM January 23 – January 30, 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#); Iraqi News, Two Iraqi soldiers killed in armed attack on army checkpoint in Diyala, 27 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>711</sup> EPIC, ISHM February 27- March 5, 5 March 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 11 – July 18, 2019, 18 July 2019, [url](#); Iraqi News, Bomb explosion kills seven PMF personnel in Diyala, 19 May 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: July 11 – July 18, 2019, 18 July 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: September 19 – September 26, 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#); Middle East Monitor, Iraq: Daesh kills 5 security personnel, 3 civilians in Diyala, Saladin, 13 May 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Casualties on both sides in ISIS, Iraqi militia clashes in disputed Diyala, 28 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>712</sup> Iraqi News, Bomb explosion kills seven PMF personnel in Diyala, 19 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>713</sup> 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](#)

<sup>714</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS attack on religious minority in disputed Khanaqin leaves 2 dead, 10 injured, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

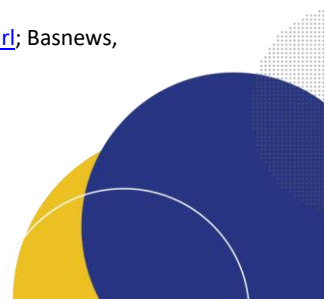
<sup>715</sup> EPIC, ISHM: May 28 - June 4, 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>716</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>717</sup> Basnews, IS bombardments kill one, injure another near Khanaqin, 9 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>718</sup> Kurdistan24, Villagers around Iraq's Khanaqin, Jalawla evacuate as ISIS attacks increase, 18 January 2019, [url](#); Basnews, Khanaqin: Many Kurdish Villages Evacuated Due to IS Threats, 4 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>719</sup> ISW, ISIS re-establishes historical sanctuary in Iraq, 07 March 2019, [url](#)



Widespread crop fires – ignited by ISIL but allegedly also by Shia militias – flared up in spring 2019 in several agricultural areas in Diyala, in particular in the district of Khanaqin.<sup>720</sup> The arsonists were allegedly aiming at starting an economic war or as a tactic to drive the Kurdish population out of the region (ISIL)<sup>721</sup> or (Shi'a militias) to target alleged supporters of ISIL.<sup>722</sup> In May 2020, crop fires were reported at the beginning of harvesting season in wheat farms near Qara Tapa, northeast of Baquba.<sup>723</sup> ISIL claimed responsibility for crop fires taking place in Khanaqin district in April, May and June 2020.<sup>724</sup>

Reporting on the second quarter of 2020, USDOD reported that ‘While most ISIS attacks in Diyala were small and resulted only in injuries, many resulted in deaths, and attacks occurred almost daily throughout the quarter. Many of the targets were farmers and other civilians, who were often killed or kidnapped for ransom’.<sup>725</sup>

## Khanaqin District

In a March 2019 analysis, the International Review noted:

‘Since this past summer [2018], a campaign of bombings, assassinations, and skirmishes against local security forces have escalated as IS cells have established themselves in the countryside between Jalawla and Khanaqin, as well as the mountains around Tuz Khurma and Sulayman Bek. This insurgency has continued into January, and has intensified even further in Diyala, where the security vacuum continues to be a significant issue. The countryside of Khanaqin has become a haven for IS cells, who have dug in and have a firm grip on the mountains due to the lack of security personnel. While the effects of these attacks are limited and cause relatively few casualties, the rate at which incidents are occurring is rising.’<sup>726</sup>

The security situation in the ‘mixed Kurdish and Sunni Arab’ city of Jalawla is dominated by AAH.<sup>727</sup> Whilst local Sunni Arabs made an alliance with AAH, the Kurdish population is marginalised.<sup>728</sup> In the Sunni majority town Sadiyah, Badr Organisation is in control of the security.<sup>729</sup> In Kifri, the PUK was in control.<sup>730</sup>

The lack of coordination between Baghdad-controlled Iraq and the Kurdish region in Diyala’s disputed territories allowed ISIL to exploit these ‘unguarded spaces’.<sup>731</sup> Increased ISIL activity in rural areas and a lack of government protection caused displacement of people from central and northeast Diyala, such as in Ramadan and Islah, in October and November 2019.<sup>732</sup>

<sup>720</sup> 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](#)

<sup>721</sup> Kurdistan 24, In Iraq’s Diyala, 400 acres of Kurdish crops burned, 18 May 2019, [url](#)  
Rudaw, Senior Peshmerga officer warns of PMF excesses in Diyala, 25 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>722</sup> Reuters, After years of war and draught, Iraq’s bumper crop is burning, 20 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>723</sup> EPIC, ISHM: May 21 – May 28, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>724</sup> Kurdistan 24, Fires destroy hundreds of acres in Iraq’s disputed Kirkuk, 16 May 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Iraqi forces launch third phase of ‘Heroes of Iraq’ anti-ISIS operation, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>725</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>726</sup> International Review, Iraq’s Diyala faces a new insurgency, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>727</sup> Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Iraq’s disputed internal boundaries after ISIS, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>728</sup> Saleem, A.Z. et al., *Security and governance in the disputed territories under a fractured GOI*, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>729</sup> Skelton, M. & Saleem, Z., Iraq’s disputed internal boundaries after ISIS, February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>730</sup> 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

<sup>731</sup> ICG, Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria, 11 October 2019, pp. 6-7, [url](#)

<sup>732</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State forcing people out of rural Diyala, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

In April 2019, the ISW described that ‘Khanaqin ISIL retains both a support and attack zone along the Iraqi-Iranian Border stretching into Halabja Province in Iraqi Kurdistan.’ The source further considered that it was likely that ISIL uses mountain routes in Northern Khanaqin district to cross between Iraq and Iran, prompting multiple PMU deployments in the region.<sup>733</sup>

### Illustrative incidents

There were many security incidents in the districts of Khanaqin, Baquba and Muqadiyah in particular. Most of these caused no more than injuries or one or two fatalities. Below are listed several incidents that caused more than 2 fatalities in which civilians were concerned.

- On 14 April 2019, ISIL militants published a video depicting the execution of nine Sunni militiamen and village chiefs, amongst whom was the *Mukhtar* of the village of Bahiza al Kabira. They had been accused of informing security forces of militant activities.<sup>734</sup>
- On 12 May 2019, ISIL militants attacked the village of Habib Abdalla in Khanaqin and killed two members of the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party (KSDP).<sup>735</sup>
- On 30 May 2019, an unidentified IED explosion, followed by an armed attack, in Abu Saida killed 6 civilians and injured 4.<sup>736</sup>
- On 1 June 2019, unidentified gunmen killed 3 civilians in a village near the town of Abu Saida.<sup>737</sup>
- On 28 September 2019, Iraqi forces shot and killed 3 Kurdish civilians near Mukhaysah village in Muqadiyah district.<sup>738</sup>
- On 10 October 2019, ISIL snipers shot and killed 3 civilians and injured 4 of their relatives in a village in Khanaqin district. ISF, called upon this incident, were hit by a roadside bomb exploding near one of their vehicles, killing two police officers, injuring three others.<sup>739</sup>
- On 24 October 2019, suspected ISIL militants shot dead the head of Abu Saida town council, his son and a civilian accompanying them in the town's center.<sup>740</sup>
- On 20 January 2020, a protester was killed and three injured in Baquba during a confrontation between demonstrators and riot police over the closure of a bridge.<sup>741</sup>
- On 6 February 2020, ISIL sniper fire in Ali Saadoun village in Khanaqin district killed 2 civilians and seriously injured one person.<sup>742</sup>

<sup>733</sup> ISW, ISIS Resurgence update, 19 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>734</sup> Rudaw, ISIS militants execute Iraqi mukhtars, militiamen in new video, 14 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>735</sup> NRT TV, Update: ISIS kills 2 Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party members in Khanaqin, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>736</sup> ACLED, Data Export tool, 01-01-2019 to 31-07-2020, [url](#)

<sup>737</sup> ACLED, Data Export tool, 01-01-2019 to 31-07-2020, [url](#)

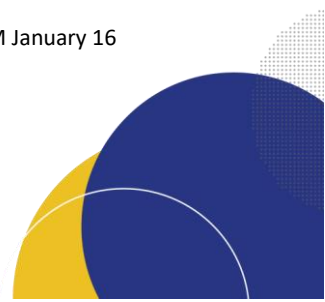
<sup>738</sup> ACLED, Data Export tool, 01-01-2019 to 31-07-2020, [url](#)

<sup>739</sup> Xinhua Net, 5 killed, 7 wounded in IS attack in eastern Iraq, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>740</sup> ACLED, Data Export tool, 01-01-2019 to 31-07-2020, [url](#)

<sup>741</sup> EPIC, ISHM: January 16 – January 23, 2020, ISHM, 23 January 2020, [url](#); EPIC, Enhance Understanding, ISHM January 16 – January 23, 2020, ISHM, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>742</sup> ACLED, Data Export tool, 01-01-2019 to 31-07-2020, [url](#)



- On 22 April 2020, seven ISIL militants were reportedly killed in an airstrike targeting their hideouts near Khanaqin.<sup>743</sup>
- On 15 May 2020, three PMU fighters were killed and two injured in an IED explosion, allegedly by ISIL targeting Brigade 23, in the Hawi al-Udheim region.<sup>744</sup>
- On 12 May 2020, ISIL fighters killed two Kaka'i farmers and burnt their fields.<sup>745</sup>
- On 4 June 2020, ISIL militants attacked an agricultural orchard on the outskirts of Islah village northeast Baquba. Three farmers were killed and one other relative injured from the same family.<sup>746</sup>
- On 6 June 2020, ISIL militants attacked a farmer in the Shaykh Bawa village in Diyala province, and after he was injured his 3 sons tried to defend their father but were killed.<sup>747</sup>
- On 13 June 2020, ISIL gunmen attacked Kaka'i villages, killing six people and wounding six others, including Iraqi security force members.<sup>748</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Diyala	55	47	64	<b>111</b>	48	46	67	<b>113</b>

Table 8: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Diyala governorate.<sup>749</sup>

### Number of security incidents

According to Joel Wing, in early 2019, ISIL committed on average roughly one incident per day in Diyala, in particular Khanaqin district, by employing terror tactics ranging from shootings, to attacks on checkpoints and villages, shelling and IEDs.<sup>750</sup>

A May 2020 analysis on ISIL published by Michael Knights and Alex Almeida noted a surge in its attack activities in the second half of 2019 (on average 59.8 attacks per month) and the first quarter of 2020

<sup>743</sup> EPIC, ISHM April 16 – April 23, 2020, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>744</sup> EPIC, ISHM: May 14 – May 21, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>745</sup> Kirkuk Now, 'Islamic State militants' kill two Kakai farmers and burn their grain fields, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>746</sup> ACLED, Data Export tool, 01-01-2019 to 31-07-2020, [url](#)

<sup>747</sup> ACLED, Data Export tool, 01-01-2019 to 31-07-2020, [url](#)

<sup>748</sup> EPIC, ISHM: June 4 – June 11, Enhance Understanding, 11 June 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: June 11 - June 18, 2020, ISIS Attacks Minorities In Diyala, 18 June 2020 [url](#)

<sup>749</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 July 2020

<sup>750</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State Might Be Coming Out Of Its Winter Hibernation In Iraq, 4 March 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), ISIS, weakened, finds news bombers: cows wearing explosive vests, 4 September 2019, [url](#)



(decreasing to 45.8 attacks per month).<sup>751</sup> Between January 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, Diyala has experienced 690 attacks, which is the highest number at governorate levels.<sup>752</sup>

According to open sources data from ACLED, EPIC and Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency database, ISIL conducted around 80 attacks in Diyala governorate in the first quarter of 2020.<sup>753</sup>

In the reference period, ACLED reported 280 battles, 260 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 90 cases of violence against civilians, 0 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 630 security incidents of these types in Diyala governorate, the majority taking place in the Muqdadiyah district. 58 protests were also reported in Diyala governorate during the reference period.<sup>754</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

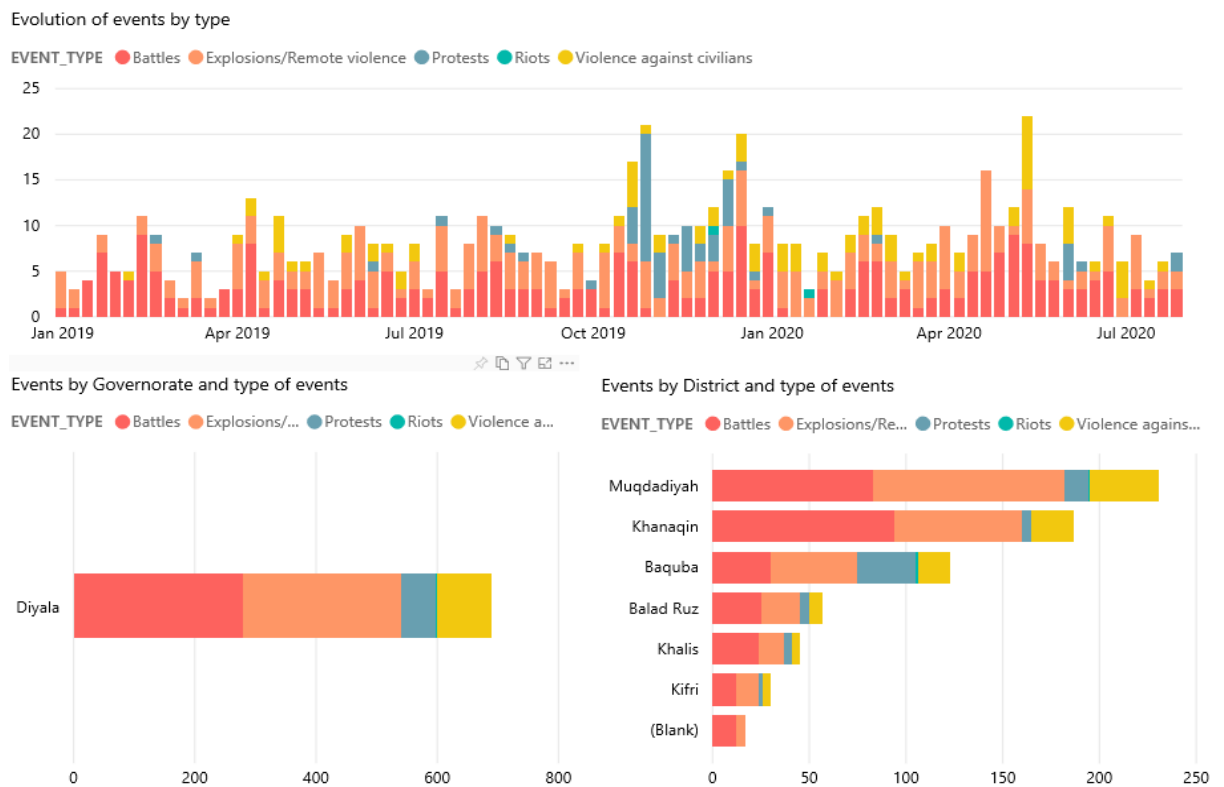


Figure 11 : Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Diyala governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data.<sup>755</sup>

### 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 \(2018\)](#).

<sup>751</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 20

<sup>752</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>753</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>754</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>755</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

ISIL militants withdrawing from the areas between Diyala to Ninewa in the period 2015-2017, left the villages and homes booby-trapped, so that IDPs could not return. ISF is not properly trained in high-risk removal of explosives. While government forces were busy clearing IEDs, ISIL took the opportunity to deploy insurgent tactics in Diyala.<sup>756</sup> Joint forces from the army, federal police and the PMU carried out security sweeps in the governorate.<sup>757</sup>

In July 2019, the second phase of the 'Will to victory' military campaign was launched, focusing on Diyala. Iraqi forces cleared 25 villages. Then-Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi stated the Iraqi army encountered little 'real resistance'.<sup>758</sup> According to analysts, ISIL is used to shutting down its operations during ISF campaigns and moving elsewhere.<sup>759</sup> In June 2020, the Iraqi government launched the military campaign Operation Heroes of Iraq, targeting ISIL cells in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din. In July 2020, phase four of Operation Heroes of Iraq was launched in Diyala. Collaborating with Peshmerga forces the ISF allegedly searched at least 53 villages over the first three days.<sup>760</sup>

The ISF reportedly struggle to maintain territorial control in regions where ISIL continues to be supported by the local population.<sup>761</sup> Especially in rural and desert areas, where the ISF have a limited presence and where ISIL previously exercised territorial control, ISIL retains freedom of movement. The group is primarily active at night, carrying out assassinations and abductions of local leaders and attacks with IEDs on military and civilian targets.<sup>762</sup>

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. The Iraqi army and police are too understaffed and unprepared to definitively defeat ISIL in Diyala. They also lack local knowledge and trust of communities to overcome 'the militants whose recent, brutal rule has so terrified civilians that they don't dare to resist'.<sup>763</sup> The ISF are, according to Knights and Almeida, neither trained nor equipped to conduct counterinsurgency'.<sup>764</sup>

The PMU are also distrusted by the local population. This is why many local, 'impromptu' militias are active in this province, according to the International Review.<sup>765</sup>

<sup>756</sup> Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>757</sup> Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#); National (The), ISIS attacks resurgent on Iraq's 'Highway of Death', 7 July 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Iraqi security in ongoing operation against Islamic State in Diyala: Local politician, 25 June 2018, [url](#); Iraqi News, Paramilitary forces seize IS hideouts & drone underground in Diyala, 21 September 2019, [url](#); Iraqi News, Joint operation destroys 5 Islamic State hotbeds in Iraq's Diyala, 17 September 2019, [url](#); Iraqi News, Iraq security operation launched to clear Diyala region from IS, 12 July 2019, [url](#); Iraqi News, Four senior IS leaders killed during security operations in Iraq's Diyala, 23 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>758</sup> Hassan, H., ISIS in Iraq and Syria: Rightsizing the Current 'Comeback', 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>759</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State Makes Its Return In December 2019, 6 January 2020, [url](#); Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>760</sup> ISW, Iraq situation report: July 8-14, 2020, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>761</sup> 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

<sup>762</sup> 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](#)

<sup>763</sup> Intercept (The), The underground Caliphate, 16 September 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Islamic State's new game plan in Iraq, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>764</sup> Knights, M. & Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>765</sup> International Review, Iraq's Diyala faces a new insurgency, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

On 11 July 2020, ISF, in cooperation with PUK's Counter-Terrorism units and air support from the International Coalition, launched an operation against remnants of ISIL in Khanaqin District.<sup>766</sup>

The USDOD, in a report covering the second quarter of 2020 analysed that:

'Diyala features a complex environment where political, sectarian, and geographic fault lines converge, making it difficult to assess a single or dominant factor that has enabled ISIS to operate at such a high tempo. [...] Moreover, dominant authority in the province is held by Iranian-backed forces, mainly the Badr Organization, who combat ISIS, but also exacerbate sectarian tensions. These PMF groups lack coordination with local tribal forces, the Peshmerga, and Coalition forces, and are mainly concerned with using Diyala's strategic location to smuggle arms and other assistance from Iran. Iraq analysts state that Diyala is likely to remain the most consistent site of ISIS attacks if present conditions continue'.<sup>767</sup>

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Although the share of Diyala's territory invaded and occupied by ISIL was relatively small, the governorate suffers from significant infrastructure and housing damage. Diyala is one of the governorates with particularly high scores of infrastructure damage.<sup>768</sup>

The humanitarian crisis after the defeat of ISIL has contributed to high levels of unemployment and poverty, according to IOM.<sup>769</sup> In November 2019, UNOCHA's 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview showed that Diyala had 210 605 people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>770</sup>

According to a January 2018 World Bank report concentrated on the seven governorates directly affected by ISIL's territorial ambitions (Anbar, Babil, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, Salah Al-Din, and Baghdad) the total damage to the housing sector in Iraq is estimated at IQD 18.7 trillion, around 138 051 residential buildings were affected. 7 % of these damages are situated in Diyala.<sup>771</sup> Damages to the power sector, one of the worst damaged sectors, amount to IQD 8.2 trillion (USD 7 billion), of which IQD 38.5 billion are situated in Diyala.<sup>772</sup> 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 Diyala.<sup>773</sup> Total damage to the industry and commerce facilities was IQD 6.0 trillion, of which IQD 51 billion is situated in Diyala.<sup>774</sup>

The total damages to the agricultural sector in Diyala are estimated to amount to 557 billion Iraqi Dinar, about 478 million dollar.<sup>775</sup> The livestock sector declined by 50 percent since 2003.<sup>776</sup> Damage to municipal assets in Diyala amounts to an estimated cost of IQD 1.5 billion (USD 1.3 million).<sup>777</sup>

<sup>766</sup> Kirkuk Now, Iraqi forces and PUK's Counter-Terrorism units launch operation against ISIS in Diyala Province, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>767</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2020 – June 30, 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>768</sup> LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), pp. 11, 24

<sup>769</sup> IOM, Iraq, Crisis Funding Appeal 2018, 31 January 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>770</sup> UNOCHA, 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>771</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>772</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 70-72

<sup>773</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 51-53

<sup>774</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>775</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. XVIII-XIX

<sup>776</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>777</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. XXIV, 103

Total damages to the health sector is estimated to be approximately IQD 2.7 trillion, of which IQD 190.6 billion are situated in Diyala.<sup>778</sup> Damages to the education sector in Diyala amount to IQD 165.9 billion.<sup>779</sup> Across Diyala, an estimated more than 60 schools have been totally destroyed, and another 181 partially destroyed in the context of the battle against ISIL.<sup>780</sup>

Damages to cultural heritage, contemporary religious buildings and tourism in Diyala amount to IQD 42 billion.<sup>781</sup> 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 situated in Diyala.<sup>782</sup> 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.<sup>783</sup> Total damage to government buildings is equivalent to IQD 868 billion (USD 745 million), IQD 71.6 billion of which is situated in Diyala.<sup>784</sup>

According to Crisis Group, the Iraqi government has made only minimal progress rebuilding post-ISIL areas and reviving their local economies.<sup>785</sup> Oxfam noted some progress in rehabilitating key infrastructure – notably through UNDP’s Funding Facility for Stabilization as well as other stabilisation projects – but ‘major gaps remain, especially in Diyala and in camps’.<sup>786</sup> In Khanaqin district, different areas face different challenges. 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.<sup>787</sup>

According to the Shelter Cluster’s data on Iraq, reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged houses has been largely completed, except for Khanaqin. In Khalis district, 982 houses been targeted and all rehabilitated, in Muqyadiya district 275 house rehabilitations were completed and in Khanaqin 275 houses had been targeted of which 200 had been rehabilitated and the other 75 planned.<sup>788</sup>

Between January and December 2019, several explosive hazard incidents were reported in Diyala, especially on the road from Baquba to Khanaqin.<sup>789</sup> Between January and June 2020, the explosive hazards risk level on roads in Diyala governorate was elevated most frequently in and around Khanaqin district.<sup>790</sup> Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor noted in 2018 four confirmed hazardous areas (CHA) in Diyala province, and six suspected hazardous area (SHA), contaminated by IED’s.<sup>791</sup>

<sup>778</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 21-22

<sup>779</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>780</sup> LADP, Provincial response plan Diyala governorate, February 2018, [url](#), p. 75

<sup>781</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>782</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 88-90

<sup>783</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 94-97

<sup>784</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq, Reconstruction & Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 108

<sup>785</sup> ICG, Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>786</sup> OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>787</sup> IOM, Labour market opportunities and challenges – Khanaqin district, Diyala Governorate, April 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>788</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, UN Habitat Iraq war damaged shelter rehabilitation dashboard, updated 31 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>789</sup> iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazard Incidents in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates from January to December 2019’, 12/01/2020, [url](#)

<sup>790</sup> iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate (01-31 May 2020), 7 June 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-30 April 2020, 6 May 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-31 March 2020, 6 April 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-29 February 2020, 4 March 2020, [url](#); iMMAP, iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Diyala Governorate 01-31 January 2020, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>791</sup> Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Iraq Mine action, last updated 16 November 2018, [url](#)

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.<sup>792</sup>

## Displacement and return

As of June 2020, 53 688 IDPs were registered in Diyala, the majority of which were displaced within the governorate.<sup>793</sup> By the same date, 230 244 returnees have been registered in Diyala, of which almost half returned to Khanaqin district.<sup>794</sup> The majority of the returnees (79 %) were formerly displaced within the governorate.<sup>795</sup>

The pace of return to Diyala has slowed compared to the May 2017–May 2018 period. Between May 2018 and June 2019 the number of returnees increased by 3876.<sup>796</sup> The rate of return<sup>797</sup> to Diyala, as of June 2019, was 73 %, representing 5% of all returns.<sup>798</sup> According to IOM’s Return Index, from March 2020, a total of 43 728 returnees to Diyala face high severity return conditions.<sup>799</sup>

As of March-April 2020, 10 % of Diyala’s returnee population were living in critical shelters.<sup>800</sup> According to IOM’s Return Index, regarding caseloads facing so-called severity conditions, in Diyala 44 454 returnees face so-called low severity conditions, 140 910 face medium severity conditions and 43 728 face high severity conditions.<sup>801</sup>

In April 2020, Diyala counted a number of areas of origin where no returns have been witnessed. In Al-Khalis district three such locations are cited, in Muqdadia district two, whilst Khanaqin district counts 38 locations where no returns have been registered. Lack of security, tribal tensions, lack of job opportunities and destroyed houses are the reasons for no return in these areas.<sup>802</sup>

In its 2019 report on International Religious Freedom, USDOS cited a warning by MP Raad al-Dahlaki on intimidation and forced displacement of Sunnis in Diyala by ‘government-affiliated Shia militia groups’. According to the MP, this resulted in ‘a systematic demographic change along the border with Iran’.<sup>803</sup> USDOS also noted that alleged ISIL sympathisers and/or their relatives were being evicted from their homes in Diyala, faced movement restrictions and discrimination.<sup>804</sup>

In December 2019, UNOCHA noted ‘forced and premature returns and forced or coerced departures from camps and informal settlements’ took place in Nineveh, Salah Al Din, Anbar, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates, causing secondary displacement.<sup>805</sup> Research by Oxfam in the April-May 2019 period showed that individuals and groups with perceived affiliation to extremist groups in Kirkuk and Diyala

<sup>792</sup> Kurdistan 24, Land mine remnants, explosive leftovers remain threat in disputed Khanaqin district, 21 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>793</sup> IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 115, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>794</sup> IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 115, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>795</sup> IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 115, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>796</sup> IOM, Iraq, Integrated location assessment IV, 03/02/2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>797</sup> 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

<sup>798</sup> IOM Iraq, Integrated location assessment IV, 30 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>799</sup> IOM’s Return Index correlates all data available on returnee population numbers with indicators on (a) livelihoods and basic services and (b) social cohesion and safety perceptions to create a score at location level (i.e., individual village, town or neighbourhood) that measures the severity of conditions or quality of return. See IOM Iraq, Return Index Findings round 8- Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>800</sup> IOM Iraq, DTM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 115, 25 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>801</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Index Findings round 8- Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>802</sup> RWG Iraq/IOM, Areas of origin having witnessed no return, last update April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>803</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>804</sup> US, USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>805</sup> UNOCHA, 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5



were prevented from returning, and faced harassment and abuse at checkpoints.<sup>806</sup> In November 2018, UNOCHA noted that ‘many returnees— in Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninewa—who are alleged to be affiliated with extremists have been forcibly evicted from their homes upon return, resulting in their secondary displacement, with their properties destroyed or confiscated.’<sup>807</sup>

Respondents in Oxfam’s spring 2019 survey indicated that ‘the return procedures established by the government are unclear, flawed and take a long time’. Sunni IDPs from Diyala’s southern districts who were unwilling to return have cited abuse, arbitrary arrests and forced transfer of ownership of land by armed actors as reasons for remaining in displacement.<sup>808</sup> As for IDPs in Khanaqin district, Oxfam noted, ‘return to their area of origin continues to be prevented. In addition to movement restrictions and denial of security clearance, destruction and seizure of property are used as a means to prevent return.’ This was reported in particular by respondents displaced from Saadiya and Muqdadaya areas.<sup>809</sup>

Families with (real or perceived) ISIL affiliation experience difficulties to return to their original communities in Diyala, due to ‘local “decrees” and threats of violence’.<sup>810</sup> According to al-Hashimi, suspicions that such families could facilitate new ISIL attacks ‘likely contributed to their forced displacement’ and made reintegration more difficult. He added: ‘Moreover, Diyala’s Command of Operations and PMF have submitted a proposal advising to refuse the return of ISIS families until ISIS’s “vengeance” operations stop.’<sup>811</sup>

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<sup>806</sup> OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>807</sup> UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Iraq, 16 December 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>808</sup> OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>809</sup> OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>810</sup> UNAMI/OHCHR, The right to education, Part one: The legacy of ISIL territorial control on access to education, February 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>811</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIL in Iraq: The Challenge of Reintegrating ‘ISIS Families’, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

## 2.5 Kirkuk



Map 10: Kirkuk governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.<sup>812</sup>

### 2.5.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Kirkuk (previously called al-Tamim) is a governorate in northern Iraq. It comprises four districts, namely Kirkuk, where Kirkuk city is located, Dibs, Hawija (Al-Hawiga) and Daquq.<sup>813</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>814</sup> the governorate's population at 1 639 953.<sup>815</sup>

#### Ethnicity

Described as a 'microcosm of Iraq', Kirkuk has a diverse and mixed population with a variety of ethnic and religious groups, including (Sunni) Arabs, (Sunni) Kurds, but also Turkmen (Shia and Sunni), and a

<sup>812</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>813</sup> IOM, Kirkuk Governorate profile, 1 July 2015, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>814</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>815</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 إحصاءات السكان والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by province, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

small community of Chaldo-Assyrian Christians.<sup>816</sup> The predominant religious group in the governorate are Sunni Muslims.<sup>817</sup>

### Road security

In 2019, iMMAP showed that stretches of the main roads in Hawija, Kirkuk, Dibil and Daquq districts were classified as primary and secondary risk roads regarding explosive hazard risk level.<sup>818</sup> As of July 2020, only stretches of the main roads in Hawija and Kirkuk districts were still classified as primary and secondary risk roads regarding the explosive hazard risk level.<sup>819</sup> The Baghdad-Kirkuk highway, which links Baghdad to Kirkuk and other northern parts of Iraq, was reportedly manned by a checkpoint that closes at 5pm in the portion passing through Kirkuk governorate, obstructing travel.<sup>820</sup> ISIL attacks on civilians<sup>821</sup> and security forces<sup>822</sup> along the main roads of the governorate were reported in 2019 and 2020.

### Economy

Abundant oil reserves make Kirkuk a governorate of strategic importance, but also a source for tensions and a longstanding territorial dispute between the Iraqi central government and the KRG.<sup>823</sup>

## 2.5.2 Conflict background and armed actors

### Conflict background

In late 2018, ICG described Kirkuk as one of the areas of the disputed territories that has experienced ‘the worst turbulence’ in recent years.<sup>824</sup> When ISIL launched its 2014 offensive in northern Iraq, the Iraqi army collapsed, and ISIL took over the region around Hawija City, in south-western Kirkuk governorate,<sup>825</sup> with a local population of about 100 000 who lived under ISIL control.<sup>826</sup> ISIL took over and administered areas of Hawija district from June 2014, controlling the countryside and rural areas of Kirkuk until it was pushed out in October 2017.<sup>827</sup> From Hawija district, ISIL carried out attacks against other areas in Kirkuk governorate from 2014.<sup>828</sup>

In the wake of the Iraqi army’s collapse fighting ISIL in Kirkuk in 2014, Kurdish Peshmergas moved in and replaced the federal forces, with Kirkuk city remaining for three years under the rule of PUK, the second largest party in the KRI and the KRG taking control of the oil fields.<sup>829</sup> For three years,

<sup>816</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1; ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>817</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>818</sup> iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates from January to December 2019, 12 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>819</sup> iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Kirkuk Governorate 01-30 June 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>820</sup> Halawa, H., The Forgotten Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>821</sup> Basnews, IS Temporarily Seizes Control of Kirkuk-Baghdad Road, 15 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>822</sup> Kurdistan24, ISIS sleeper cells attack Iraqi army in disputed Kirkuk, kill 2 soldiers, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>823</sup> Jamestown Foundation: Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 18 Issue: 12, 17 June 2020, [url](#);

ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>824</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>825</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>826</sup> Monde (Le), Kirkouk, la guerre d’après [Kirkuk, the war after], 10 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>827</sup> Flood, D., CTC, The Hawija Offensive: A liberation exposes faultlines, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 9, 18 November 2017, [url](#), p. 24; Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>828</sup> Monde (Le), Kirkouk, la guerre d’après [Kirkuk, the war after], 10 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>829</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 8



Peshmergas and ISIL were at a standoff in Kirkuk, with ‘repeated clashes’ along the frontlines south and west of the city, though the city itself was ‘tightly controlled’.<sup>830</sup> AI reported on the deliberate destruction of over 40 villages and Arab properties by Kurdish Peshmergas after ISIL confrontations in Kirkuk.<sup>831</sup>

In October 2017, several control changes occurred in Kirkuk. In early October 2017, the Iraqi government announced that ISIL had been driven out from the city of Hawija, its final significant remaining stronghold in Iraq. According to security analyst Derek Flood, this also marked a point in time eliminating the main unifying cause [fighting ISIL] between the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Iraqi military. In the Hawija campaign which began on 21 September 2017, the Iraqi army, the Emergency Response Division, CTS, Federal Police and the pro-Iranian PMUs led an offensive to push ISIL out of Hawija district.<sup>832</sup> On 5 October 2017, the Iraqi Prime minister announced the liberation of Hawija from ISIL’s occupation<sup>833</sup>, though some villages east of the town reportedly were still believed to be under ISIL control at that time.<sup>834</sup> The Hawija military campaign resulted in the displacement of 47 000 people in September 2017, with 11 000 who were still displaced at the end of the next month and unwilling to return; 62 000 returns were recorded across Kirkuk.<sup>835</sup> IOM reported that civilians displaced from Hawija during operations mainly left Hawija for the districts of Daquq (Kirkuk governorate), Tirkrit, Al Daur, Al Shirqat (Salah ad-Din governorate), and Makhmur.<sup>836</sup> In November 2017, outside Hawija town, 400 bodies of people wearing civilian clothes were found in mass graves; they were thought to have been prisoners killed by ISIL.<sup>837</sup>

In retaliation for the KRG’s decision to hold an independence referendum in September 2017, including in Kirkuk, and which was opposed and rejected by the Iraqi government<sup>838</sup>, Baghdad moved into the disputed areas with the Iraqi army, the Counter-terrorism Forces, the Federal Police and the PMUs, made up of the Badr Organization’s Turkmen Brigade (16th PMU brigade) and Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (the 41st, 42nd and 43rd PMU brigades). It launched an offensive from 15 to 21 October 2017 against Kurdish security forces and regained control of most of Kirkuk governorate. The Peshmerga affiliated to the PUK largely withdrew and were subsequently accused by the KDP of collusion with the federal government.<sup>839</sup> The forces of the federal government retook the city of Kirkuk from the Kurds within hours, followed by the majority of other disputed areas.<sup>840</sup>

## Armed actors

As of June 2020, a wide range of security actors are reported to operate in Kirkuk governorate, including the Iraqi army, the CTS, an array of PMUs, federal and local police and various intelligence

<sup>830</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>831</sup> AI, Banished and dispossessed: Forced displacement and deliberate destruction in Northern Iraq”, 15 January 2016, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>832</sup> Flood, D., CTC, The Hawija Offensive: A liberation exposes faultlines, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 9, 18 November 2017, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>833</sup> BBC News, Iraq forces retake town of Hawija from IS, 5 October 2017, [url](#); Flood, D., CTC, The Hawija Offensive: A liberation exposes faultlines, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 9, 18 November 2017, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>834</sup> BBC News, Iraq forces retake town of Hawija from IS, 5 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>835</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Iraq - October 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>836</sup> IOM, Iraq displacement crisis 2014-2017, 8 November 2018, [url](#), based on the map on p. 37

<sup>837</sup> Independent (The), Mass graves discovered in Iraqi town recaptured from Isis, 13 November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>838</sup> 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 November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>839</sup> ISW, The “War after ISIS” begins in Iraq, 15 November 2017, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Iraq forces in full control of Kirkuk province, 21 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>840</sup> Quesnay, Arthur, Email to DIDR (OFPPRA), 10 December 2018, in EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 99-100

services. Each actor had its own mandate, structure and political affiliation. ICG assessed that the high number of security actors was possibly undermining the stability of the governorate instead of contributing to it.<sup>841</sup>

### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

In a May 2020 report, prominent Iraqi security expert Husham al-Hashimi noted the presence of the ISF - the CT (Second Operation command) center of Kirkuk, Federal Police sub-District around center city of Kirkuk and Hawija, two Brigades of the Iraqi Army stationed at the south and west and Southwest Kirkuk as of December 2019.<sup>842</sup>

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.<sup>843</sup> According to the Center for Civilians in Conflict, the Iraqi Federal Police, was as of December 2019, the main security force in the governorate.<sup>844</sup>

The elite CTS, which is linked to the PM of Iraq and supervised by the National Security Council, has been deployed in Kirkuk in 2017 to fight ISIL. After the ousting of Kurdish forces from the area in October 2017, following the failed independence referendum, the CTS assumed overall command of the federal forces in Kirkuk.<sup>845</sup>

Units of the Iraqi Army were also reported to have been present in the governorate. After the Kurdish referendum of September 2017, the 5th and 20th divisions of the Iraqi Army were deployed to take control of Kirkuk City, which was subsequently transferred to the Federal Police. The 61st Brigade of the Special Operations division of the Iraqi Army was deployed in the governorate in February 2019, as was the 14th division which took positions in Zab sub-district of Hawija district and some parts of Dibis district.<sup>846</sup>

### *Kurdish Peshmerga forces*

Kurdish Peshmerga forces withdrew from Kirkuk city and most of the governorate in October 2017<sup>847</sup>, following the fallout of the Kurdish referendum and intervention by ISF and PMU forces in the governorate.<sup>848</sup>

In June 2019, a joint Iraqi Army-Peshmerga coordination security mechanism was agreed upon by Iraqi and Kurdish authorities but no agreement was reached on whether the Kurdish forces would take positions inside Kirkuk governorate or just outside its northern and eastern borders. The Iraqi government has since set up a joint operations command in Kirkuk comprising only of federal forces, without Kurdish involvement.<sup>849</sup> The Altun Kopri checkpoint located on the road between Kirkuk and Erbil was reported to be the only one jointly run by Iraqi federal and Kurdish forces.<sup>850</sup>

<sup>841</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>842</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>843</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>844</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>845</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>846</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 8-9, footnote 26

<sup>847</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 8; US CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 116th Congress, 10 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 5

<sup>848</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>849</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. ii

<sup>850</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

In June 2020, a joint military operation ‘Iraqi Heroes’ against ISIL remnants in south-western Kirkuk involved Iraqi forces including the Iraqi Army, CTS, and PMUs, forces of the anti-ISIL coalition as well as Kurdish Peshmerga forces.<sup>851</sup> However, Iraqi authorities pointed out in July 2020 that the Kurdish Peshmerga have not returned to Kirkuk and that only intelligence and military cooperation in the disputed territories was being discussed between the two parties.<sup>852</sup>

### *US-led Coalition forces*

At the end of March 2020, the US-led coalition against ISIL transferred the responsibility of the K1 Iraqi Airbase in Kirkuk governorate to the ISF.<sup>853</sup>

### *PMU*

Local PMU groups were responsible mainly for the non-urban areas in the governorate’s western and southern parts where ISIL insurgents were still active. These local PMUs included:

- The predominantly Shiite Turkmen 16th and 52nd Hashd brigades affiliated with the Badr Organisation. They were reported to mainly operate in Daquq and areas south of Kirkuk city that border Hawija district.<sup>854</sup> Other sources place the 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Tuz Khormatu and Kirkuk areas which are dubbed the ‘northern axis’.<sup>855</sup>
- The Sunni Arab comprised 56th brigade of the tribal Hashd in Hawija.<sup>856</sup>

While local PMUs were responsible for the security roles described above, their political organisations which included the Badr Organisation, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, Kataeb Jund al-Imam and Kataib Hezbollah, were also reported to maintain offices or a small armed presence in some towns in the governorate.<sup>857</sup>

In Hawija City, ISF and PMU militias were reported to be present and to have divided up the city and wider district among themselves, each exerting control over the territory assigned to them.<sup>858</sup>

### *ISIL*

While ISIL was not controlling territory in the governorate, as of December 2019 it is reported to be active and resorting to a ‘hit and run insurgency’ strategy.<sup>859</sup> According to Iraq analyst Hafsa Halawa writing for the Middle East Institute in March 2020, ISIL ‘ sleeper cells’ remain active in Kirkuk and Diyala provinces in particular.<sup>860</sup>

ISIL activity was reported in the rural areas of Hawija and Daquq districts in a December 2019 report.<sup>861</sup> A local security official interviewed by ICG in March 2019, assessed that ISIL concentrated its activity in the rural parts of Hawija, especially the areas bordering the districts of Dibis and Daquq.<sup>862</sup> For the period covering January to March 2020, the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessed Hawija

<sup>851</sup> Jamestown Foundation, Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 18 Issue: 12, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>852</sup> Basnews, Peshmerga Hasn’t Returned to Kirkuk: Iraqi Army, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>853</sup> US< USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve – Quarterly Report to the United States Congress. 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>854</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>855</sup> Knights, M. et. al, Honored not Contained. The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, [url](#), pp. 205, 207

<sup>856</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>857</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>858</sup> Halawa, H., The Forgotten Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>859</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>860</sup> Halawa, H., The Forgotten Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>861</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>862</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 15-16

district as being the district in Kirkuk province where ISIL remained most active.<sup>863</sup> According to a March 2020 analysis, ISIL activity persisted in the Kirkuk provincial towns of Abassi and Zab (both in Hawija district), where a highway checkpoint manned by the ISF closes at 5 pm. As night falls, security forces, fearing ISIL attacks, leave the post.<sup>864</sup> In May 2020, sources reported that local tribesmen joined or supported the ISF and PMUs fighting ISIL in Hawija district where ISIL was particularly active.<sup>865</sup>

Hawija district was described by the ICG as the ‘most vulnerable area’ to ISIL activity due to its proximity to the mountain ranges used by ISIL as safe havens and bases for staging attacks. The difficult terrain further complicates effective coordination between the security forces operating in neighbouring Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates.<sup>866</sup>

Husham al-Hashimi identified Kirkuk as a governorate with concentrated ISIL operations in 2020. He assessed that ISIL was able to operate in many rural areas in Kirkuk and had some 350-400 active fighters supported by some 400 inactive fighters that were focused on logistics.<sup>867</sup> In a report covering the period 1 April – 30 June 2020, the CJTF-OIR (Combined Joint Task Force-OIR) assessed that ISIL ‘operated mostly as small, cohesive cells of 5 to 15 fighters in Iraq, usually living in austere conditions in outlying desert, mountainous, or rural areas in Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah ad Din, and Anbar provinces—largely Sunni areas that stretch across northern Iraq’.<sup>868</sup>

In a May 2020 analysis, Michael Knights assessed that the number of areas with active ISIL attack cells in Iraq have almost doubled from 27 areas in December 2018 to 47 areas in May 2020. As of May 2020, in Kirkuk governorate these areas were: Zab/Abbasi; the Mamah-Gharra/Batawi ridge; Riyadh; Rashad/Jawwalah Daquq/Ghayda; Dibis and the Qani Domlan; and Kirkuk city.<sup>869</sup>

### 2.5.3 Recent security trends and the impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

The UN Security Council reported frequent asymmetric attacks by ISIL against security forces and civilians in several provinces including Kirkuk during 2019<sup>870</sup> and in 2020.<sup>871</sup>

According to a May 2020 analysis by Michael Knights, in Kirkuk governorate ISIL carried out 30.8 attacks per month in 2018 (the most of any governorate), 11.2 attacks per month in 2019 (the third most of any governorate) and 15.3 attacks per month for the first quarter of 2020 (the fifth highest number among all governorate). The number of high-quality attacks (in the analyst’s classification high-quality attacks include effective roadside bombings, attempts to overrun Iraqi security force

<sup>863</sup> USDOD. Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve- Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>864</sup> Halawa, H., The Forgotten Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>865</sup> Al Monitor, Kirkuk tribesmen rally as IS launch new wave of attacks, 27 May 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Hawija tribes launch campaign against ISIS, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>866</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 15-16

<sup>867</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, CG Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>868</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress. 1 April 2020 – 30 June 2020, 4 August 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>869</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>870</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/660], 5 August 2019, [url](#), p. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/365], 2 May 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>871</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), p. 4

checkpoints or outposts, person-specific targeted attacks, and attempted mass-casualty attacks) carried out by ISIL declined in the province between 2018 and the first quarter of 2020 (from 15.1 high-quality attacks/month in 2018 to 3.2 in the second half of 2019 and 3.6 in the first quarter of 2020).<sup>872</sup>

Despite this decline, the same source pointed out that in 2019, ISIL managed to carry out IED bombings against civilians in Kirkuk city, harassment campaigns against the Kaka'i minority living around the Kirkuk to Baghdad highway, assassinations of community leaders, kidnappings for ransom of farmers, and extortion of civilians.<sup>873</sup> In 2019, ISIL was also reported to carry out sniper attacks, ambushes, kidnapping, and assassinations against security forces and community leaders. ISIL also targeted civilian infrastructure such as water and electricity installations in Kirkuk.<sup>874</sup>

A security official interviewed by ICG in March 2019, indicated that in areas of Hawija district bordering Dibis and Daquq districts, ISIL used roadside bombs to target security forces and occasionally fire mortars at villages and towns.<sup>875</sup> A December 2019 report by the Center for Civilians in Conflict wrote that ISIL remnants were active in the rural areas of Daquq and Hawija, where they intimidated civilians perceived to cooperate with the government, carried out kidnappings and attacks on *mukhtars* and tribal leaders, stole food and supplies and burned crops.<sup>876</sup>

Regular attacks by armed actors, including ISIL, were reported in 2019 in Daquq district, where villages such as Ali Saray, Heftagar, Dara, and Zanqir were targeted.<sup>877</sup>

According to Michael Knights' analysis on ISIL activity in Iraq, in 2019, ISIL demonstrated some of the most sophisticated roadside bombing techniques in Kirkuk such as IEDs set at mortar launch locations, bombs and explosive booby-trapping of bodies.<sup>878</sup>

According to open sources data from ACLED, EPIC and Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency database cited by USDOD, ISIL conducted between 30 and 40 attacks in Kirkuk governorate from January to March 2020.<sup>879</sup> A March 2020 analysis published by the Middle East Institute revealed that ISIL-claimed attacks in Kirkuk mainly targeted ISF and community leaders. ISIL activity persisted in the Kirkuk provincial towns of Abassi and Zab (Hawija district). Mullahs and other community leaders continued to periodically flee from Hawija City to Kirkuk City as they have become popular targets for ISIL.<sup>880</sup>

For the period comprised between 1 April and 30 June 2020, USDOD recorded 70 ISIL-claimed or suspected attacks in Kirkuk, the second highest number out of all provinces during the reporting period.<sup>881</sup> In a May 2020 analysis, ICG cited a tribal sheik from the Kirkuk area who assessed ISIL's presence stating that 'it's not in cities or urban areas. It's out in the [rural] districts and subdistricts; in

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<sup>872</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>873</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>874</sup> US, USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>875</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>876</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

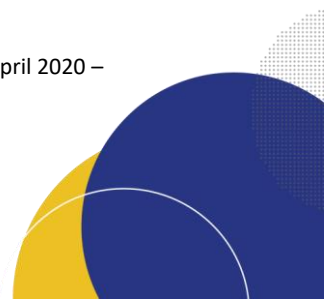
<sup>877</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>878</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>879</sup> US< USDOD, Lead Inspector General Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>880</sup> Halawa, H., The Forgotten Iraq, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>881</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 April 2020 – 30 June 2020, 4 August 2020, [url](#), p. 23



the bush, or in ravines and mountains'.<sup>882</sup> In May 2020, two additional federal police brigades were deployed to Dibis and Hawija districts, where ISIL sleeper cells have been particularly active.<sup>883</sup>

For the reference period 1 January to 30 March 2020, the US Combined Joint Task Force-OIR reported that more than 20 military operations and one major clearance operation against ISIL were conducted in Kirkuk governorate by ISF with international coalition intelligence and fire support.<sup>884</sup> A June 2020 military operation dubbed 'Iraqi Heroes' and aimed at clearing ISIL remnants in south-western Kirkuk using a joint force comprising of ISF, PMUs, Kurdish Peshmerga and anti-ISIL coalition, was declared a success by the authorities with weapons caches, resources and hideouts of ISIL being seized.<sup>885</sup>

A significant security incident took place in late December 2019, when a rocket attack attributed to KH on the US-controlled K-1 military base near Kirkuk in northern Iraq killed a US contractor and wounded several US soldiers.<sup>886</sup> In March 2020, US Coalition forces transferred control of four Iraqi military bases in the area including the K-1 base near Kirkuk city to the ISF.<sup>887</sup> The base had hosted coalition forces and was used since 2017 to launch operations against ISIL.<sup>888</sup> ISF and CTS units used the base to conduct security operations against ISIL in the Hamrin and Mamah Gorah mountains areas.<sup>889</sup>

During the course of 2019, a number of protest demonstrations took place in Kirkuk, albeit on a much smaller scale than in other parts of Iraq.<sup>890</sup> The protests continued in 2020.<sup>891</sup>

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Kirkuk governorate in 2019 and the first seven months of 2020 included the following:

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 15 and 16 May 2019, seven members of the ISF were killed in Kirkuk in two hit-and-run attacks by ISIL fighters.<sup>892</sup>
- On 30 May 2019, five people were killed and 18 were injured in various bombings with IEDs in Kirkuk city.<sup>893</sup> The attacks were attributed to ISIL.<sup>894</sup>
- On 24 August 2019, an apparent ISIL mortar attack killed six civilians and wounded nine others in a soccer field situated near a Shiite shrine in Daquq.<sup>895</sup>

<sup>882</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>883</sup> Al-Monitor, Kirkuk tribesmen rally as IS launch new wave of attacks, 27 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>884</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>885</sup> Jamestown Foundation, Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 18 Issue: 12, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>886</sup> Jamestown Foundation, The Leadership and Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 18 Issue: 7, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>887</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 15

<sup>888</sup> AP News, US-led forces pull out of 3rd Iraqi base this month, 29 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>889</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>890</sup> Al-Monitor, Sunnis support protests in Iraq, yet fear involvement, 15 October 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Several killed as Iraq protests escalate, spread nationwide, 2 October 2019, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Protests in Iraq spread to disputed province of Kirkuk, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>891</sup> Al-Monitor, Iraqi protesters set sights on local governors, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>892</sup> EPIC, 16 May 2019, ISHM: May 10 – May 16, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>893</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State in Iraq is not over yet, 8 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>894</sup> ISW, ISIS Second Comeback. Assessing the Next ISIS Insurgency, June 2019, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>895</sup> Arab Weekly (The), ISIS mortar attack on soccer field kills 6 in Iraq, 25 August 2019, [url](#)

- On 27 December 2019, an attack attributed to Kata'ib Hezbollah on an Iraqi military base housing US forces near Kirkuk killed a US contractor and wounded two US service members.<sup>896</sup>
- On 28 December 2019, a family of five were killed at a fake checkpoint set up by ISIL in the sub-district of Rashad, in the district of Hawija.<sup>897</sup>
- On 15 January 2020, ISIL killed two farmers in the Zughaytun Valley, located south of Kirkuk province.<sup>898</sup>
- On 4 February 2020, ISIL kidnapped two sheep herders from al-Hawija district.<sup>899</sup>
- On 18 February 2020, suspected ISIL militants attacked a gathering of youths in the village of Chahmakha, northwest of Kirkuk.<sup>900</sup>
- On 9 March 2020, two members of an elite unit of the U.S. Marines involved in a clearing operation of a large cave complex were killed near Kirkuk City by ISIL fighters.<sup>901</sup>
- On 9 April 2020, two members of the ISF were wounded by ISIL militants in an attack south of Kirkuk. On the same day, two PMU fighters were killed in a clash with ISIL south of Kirkuk.<sup>902</sup>
- On 28 April 2020, a lone ISIL attacker attempted a suicide attack on an intelligence service headquarters in Kirkuk city. The attacker detonated his explosives before reaching the building. Several men were wounded but none killed.<sup>903</sup>
- On 10 May 2020, ISIL stormed a village near Rashad and kidnapped the son of a tribal leader.<sup>904</sup>
- On 16 May 2020, ISIL attacked a security control point in southern Kirkuk, killing one police officer.<sup>905</sup>
- On 7 July 2020, ten mortar shells hit a village in Buhriz district injuring 5 civilians.<sup>906</sup>
- On 16 July 2020, an IED exploded in central Kirkuk, damaging a shop and vehicle and a further IED near Mussalla area in central Kirkuk wounded one civilian and damaged several vehicles.<sup>907</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

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<sup>896</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 October 2019 – 31 December 2019, 13 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 14, 18

<sup>897</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS kills 5 family members at fake checkpoint in Kirkuk: security sources, 28 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>898</sup> iMMAP - IHF Humanitarian, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>899</sup> EPIC, Enhance Understanding, ISHM January 30 – February 6, 2020, ISHM, [url](#)

<sup>900</sup> EPIC, Enhance Understanding, ISHM February 13 – February 20, 2020, ISHM, [url](#)

<sup>901</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 October 2019 – 31 December 2019, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 28; New York Times (The), U.S. Military Reviewing Iraq Operations After 2 Troops Die Fighting ISIS, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>902</sup> EPIC, ISHM: April 9 - April 16, 2020, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>903</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>904</sup> EPIC, Enhance Understanding, ISHM May 7 – May 14, 2020, ISHM, [url](#)

<sup>905</sup> AA, Daesh/ISIS terror attack kills police in Kirkuk, Iraq, 16 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>906</sup> EPIC, Enhance Understanding, ISHM July 2 – July 9, 2020, ISHM, [url](#)

<sup>907</sup> EPIC, Enhance Understanding, ISHM July 16 – July 23, 2020, ISHM, [url](#)



Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
<b>Kirkuk</b>	73	68	156	<b>224</b>	17	13	21	<b>34</b>

Table 9: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Kirkuk governorate.<sup>908</sup>

## Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 141 battles, 153 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 30 cases of violence against civilians, 0 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 324 security incidents of these types in Kirkuk governorate, the majority taking place in the capital Kirkuk City. 24 protests were also reported in Kirkuk governorate during the reference period.<sup>909</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

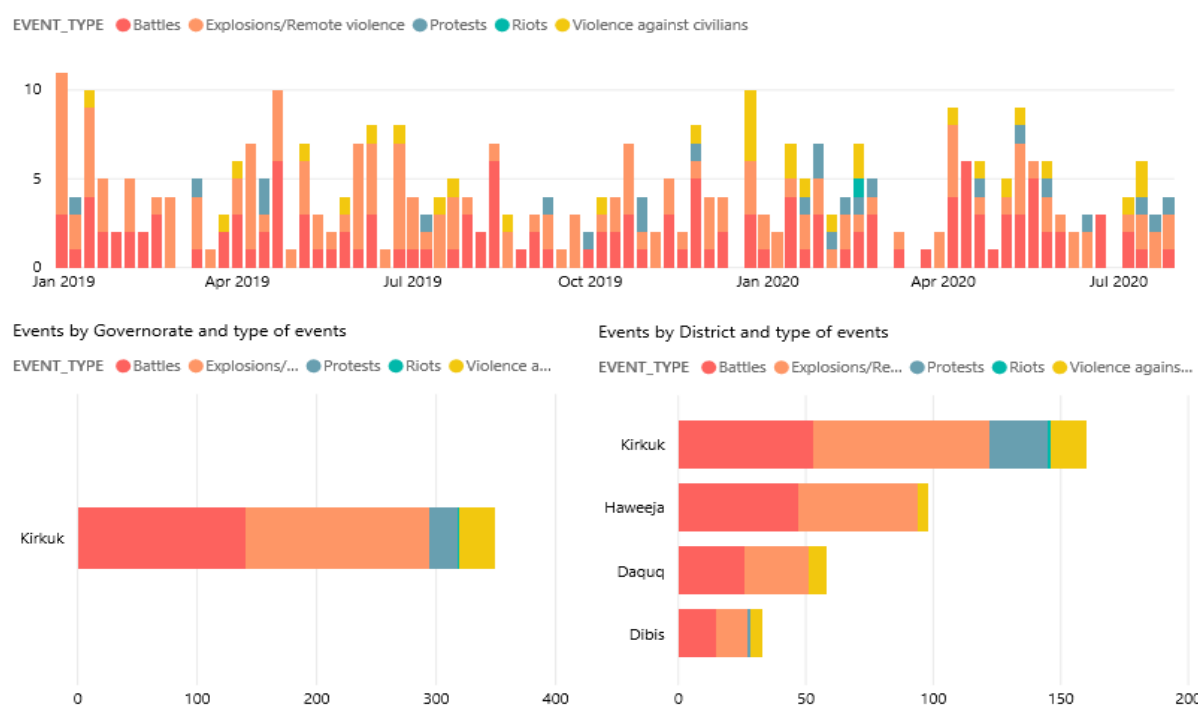


Figure 12: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Kirkuk governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data.<sup>910</sup>

## 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 \(2018\)](#).

<sup>908</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 July 2020

<sup>909</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>910</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)



The ousting of the Kurdish security forces from Kirkuk governorate following the Kurdish independence referendum in October 2017, created a security vacuum that was only partially filled by the ISF.<sup>911</sup> Security gaps in governorate have been identified by several sources<sup>912</sup>, especially in parts of Daquq and Dibis district as a result of the removal of Kurdish Peshmerga forces from the governorate and the distance between deployed forces ranging from 1 to 5 km.<sup>913</sup> The US Combined Joint Task Force-OIR reported that the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga lack strong cooperation creating 'operational seams' which ISIL exploits and that they operate from 'ungoverned' territory across parts of Kirkuk.<sup>914</sup> The difficult terrain in Kirkuk and the wider Hamrin basin which included mountains, valleys, tunnels and caves, added to the challenge of securing the area.<sup>915</sup>

The security set-up in Kirkuk was assessed by ICG to be potentially dangerous to public safety. This is attributed in part to the fact that the security actors are competing with each other rather than cooperating, while the lack of an overall command structure and coordination has allowed some security actors to become involved in profitable criminal activities.<sup>916</sup> The proliferation of security forces is confusing to civilians as to which force has responsibility for what, not helped by forces blaming each other for misconduct.<sup>917</sup> Security actors, including the CTS, have been involved in oil smuggling in tandem with local gangs, while PMUs have been accused of setting up illegal checkpoints and charging fees, and extorting shop owners for protection money.<sup>918</sup>

The behaviour of some ISF and PMUs has been assessed to contribute to the instability in the area. The Federal Police was reported to occupy civilian houses in Kirkuk, thus preventing the return of IDPs. Sunni Arabs in Hawija have complained about being discriminated by the Federal Police who harasses them for having lived in previously ISIL-controlled territory and/or being supporters of ISIL.<sup>919</sup> Extortion of civilians and harassment of women at checkpoints by security actors has also been reported.<sup>920</sup>

As reported by representatives of CTS, local police and federal police officials interviewed by ICG in March and July 2019, tensions among security actors such as the CTS, Federal Police and PMUs led to almost weekly incidents between them, which can include exchanges of fire and casualties.<sup>921</sup> Attacks on security forces by unknown perpetrators, usually attributed by the federal forces to Kurdish armed gangs who do not approve of the federal forces' presence in Kirkuk, have also been reported. An Asayish representative interviewed by ICG in September 2019, acknowledged that he would retaliate with 'non-lethal attacks' on federal forces harassing the Kurdish residents.<sup>922</sup>

The predominantly Arab and Shiite composition of the security forces in the multi-ethnic and predominantly Sunni Kirkuk has led to mistrust from segments of the civilian population. Kurdish residents are reported to be fearful of the Arab federal forces due to their treatment under the

<sup>911</sup> Schoenborn, T., Iraq's Diyala Faces a New Insurgency, International Review, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>912</sup> Rudaw, ISIS insurgents move freely in disputed Kirkuk: locals, 21 May 2019, [url](#); CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 3; ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>913</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>914</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>915</sup> Jamestown Foundation, Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 18 Issue: 12, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>916</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>917</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

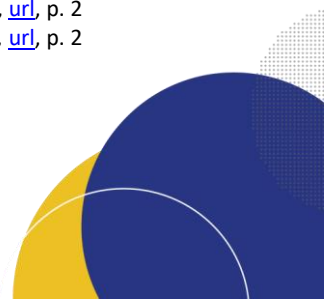
<sup>918</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>919</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>920</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>921</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>922</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13



previous regime. The predominantly Sunni population of the governorate reportedly fears the Shiite dominated security forces such as the federal police and the PMUs.<sup>923</sup> In Hawija district, the relations between the largely Shia security actors and Sunni civilian population remained weak and was marked by ethnic tensions. This was further enhanced by the fact that the Federal Police generally withdrew from the population centres as early as 2pm for fear of ISIL attacks, leaving the civilian population unprotected.<sup>924</sup> Earlier anecdotal reporting from December 2018, suggests that the Federal Police is 'failing to protect civilians', in part due to remaining at their security bases at night, arriving late to assist villages under attack and detaining or disarming the wrong people.<sup>925</sup>

The ISF in Kirkuk and the Kirkuk Operations Command lacked protocols to track incidents of civilian harm caused by the security forces and there were no designated community outreach officers to resolve any civilian protection concerns. They were also reportedly slow in responding due to concerns about being ambushed, and lack patrolling and surveillance capabilities.<sup>926</sup>

According to USDOS reporting on 2019, since the Iraqi government regained control of Kirkuk in 2017, ISF and PMUs have committed abuses including violence and forced displacement of Kurds, Turkmens, Kaka'i and Christians in the province.<sup>927</sup>

In May 2019, ethnic tensions between Kurds and Arabs in the province were heightened after Kurdish residents claimed that Arab armed actors set hundreds of acres of Kurdish wheat and barley crops on fire 'in an attempt to drive Kurds out of their lands'. There were claims that either ISIL or paramilitary forces such as the PMUs were responsible for the arson.<sup>928</sup>

In April 2019, the peace organisation PAX surveyed the population in all four districts of Kirkuk governorate for their opinions on the security situation in the region. The majority of respondents (52 %) indicated that the security situation had improved over the past year but just over half of the respondents reported feeling safe in their communities. At the same time, about 48 % of the respondents expected that it was likely they will become a victim of violence in the near future. Especially in the districts of Hawija (57 % of respondents) and Daquq (50 % of respondents), there was fear of indiscriminate violence. Respondents from the largely Kurdish district of Dibis feared violence because of their ethnicity or religious identity (80 % of respondents).<sup>929</sup>

Asked from which side they fear violence, 45 % responded that it was criminal violence while 27 % said they feared ISIL violence, a considerable drop from 2017 when 69 % of respondents identified ISIL as the most feared actor of violence. In the district of Hawija however, 71 % of respondents expected the perpetrator of violence to be ISIL.<sup>930</sup>

An Oxfam study on communities' perceptions of the main protection risks in Kirkuk published in March 2020, revealed that attacks by armed groups were the biggest protection threat as perceived by 21 %

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<sup>923</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>924</sup> Building Peaceful Futures, Conflict Analysis Sinjar and Hawija, Iraq, 2019, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>925</sup> Knights, M., The Islamic State Inside Iraq: Losing Power or Preserving Strength?, CTC, Vol. 11, Issue 11, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>926</sup> CIVIC, "We Just Want Someone To Protect Us"; Civilian Protection Challenges in Kirkuk, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>927</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>928</sup> Saeed, Y., After Arson in Kirkuk Against Kurdish Farmers, Kurdish Parties Remain Divided, 31 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>929</sup> Based on 613 interviews conducted in all four districts of Kirkuk governorate. PAX, Human Security Survey Kirkuk, Iraq - 2019, 19 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>930</sup> Based on 613 interviews conducted in all four districts of Kirkuk governorate. PAX, Human Security Survey Kirkuk, Iraq - 2019, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 3

of household survey respondents, followed by kidnapping of civilians as indicated by 12 % of respondents.<sup>931</sup>

### Infrastructural damage and remnants of war

Around 7 % of houses in Kirkuk governorate were assessed by a World Bank 2018 study to be either ‘partially damaged’ or ‘completely destroyed’. Furthermore, 7.1 % of water resources and 27 % of the WASH infrastructure in the province were also damaged.<sup>932</sup>

In 2019, an area of 32 750 084 square meters was reported to be contaminated by mines and IEDs as per the end of 2018.<sup>933</sup> Unexploded mines and bombs, as well as ‘huge volumes of debris’ were reported in the reference period as preventing the return of IDPs to their places of residence in Kirkuk governorates.<sup>934</sup> Mines and other unexploded ordnance often mix with rubble to be cleared, causing additional hazard.<sup>935</sup>

Between 1 January and 31 December 2019, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) removed around 862 explosive remnants of war (ERW), 423 IED, 135 IED main charges, and 40 suicide belts in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates. No specific details on the situation of ERW in Kirkuk were provided.<sup>936</sup>

### Displacement and return

As of 30 June 2020, IOM recorded 100 026 IDPs and 341 106 returnees in Kirkuk governorate.<sup>937</sup> More than half of the IDPs recorded in Kirkuk were displaced within the governorate while the rest came mainly from Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates. Around 81 000 IDPs were located in Kirkuk district alone as of June 2020.<sup>938</sup> As of December 2019, Kirkuk city hosted around 73 000 IDPs, the majority of whom have been displaced for more than three years.<sup>939</sup>

IOM noted that the rate of return<sup>940</sup> to Kirkuk, as of June 2019, stood at 76 %, representing 8 % of all returns.<sup>941</sup> The pace of return to Kirkuk has slowed compared to the May 2017–May 2018 period.<sup>942</sup> Between May 2018 and June 2019 the number of returnees increased by 37 548.<sup>943</sup>

According to IOM’s Return Index, from March 2020, a total of 348 returnees to Kirkuk faced ‘high severity’ return conditions in four locations, 90 354 face ‘medium severity’ conditions in 74 locations and 248 364 face ‘low severity’ conditions in 125 locations.<sup>944</sup> The sub-district of Al-Riyad was cited as

<sup>931</sup> The research was conducted 13 locations in Kirkuk where data was collected from 147 households, in Kirkuk), 27 focus group discussions and 27 Key informant interviews. OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>932</sup> World Bank, Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 15, 53, 96

<sup>933</sup> HALO trust (The), Mine Advisory Group, Norwegian People’s Aid, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 129

<sup>934</sup> Middle East Monitor, 70 % of unexploded ordnances remain under rubble in Iraq, 10 June 2019, [url](#); UNEP, As conflict abates, Iraqi villages begin to tackle “huge” problem of rubble, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>935</sup> UNEP, As conflict abates, Iraqi villages begin to tackle “huge” problem of rubble, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>936</sup> UNMAS, Iraq, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>937</sup> IOM, Iraq DTM, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>938</sup> IOM, Iraq DTM Dashboard, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>939</sup> IOM DTM, Urban Displacement in Iraq: A Preliminary Analysis, 2020, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>940</sup> 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

<sup>941</sup> IOM Iraq, Integrated location assessment IV, 03 February 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>942</sup> IOM Iraq, Integrated location assessment IV, 03 February 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>943</sup> IOM Iraq, Integrated location assessment IV, 03 February 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>944</sup> IOM’s Return Index correlates all data available on returnee population numbers with indicators on (a) livelihoods and basic services and (b) social cohesion and safety perceptions to create a score at location level (i.e., individual village, town



a ‘hotspot’, meaning they score highly in terms of severity on at least one of the two scales (either livelihoods and basic services, or safety and social cohesion) or if they score medium in terms of severity but also host relatively large numbers of returnees.<sup>945</sup>

The vast majority of the returnees registered in Kirkuk governorate were located in the districts of Hawija (around 162 000) and Kirkuk (around 153 000).<sup>946</sup> Between March 2018 and December 2019, IOM DTM identified 21 locations in Kirkuk governorate where all families had re-displaced after having returned.<sup>947</sup> Most households re-displaced were recorded in Hawija and Kirkuk.<sup>948</sup>

As of April 2020, IOM identified 13 locations recording no returns in Kirkuk, all situated in the districts of Hawija (Al-Riyad sub-district) and Kirkuk (Al-Multaqa sub-district). The main reasons for the lack of returns were linked to destroyed buildings, lack of services, presence of mines and IEDs, security problems, and the presence of ISIL.<sup>949</sup>

Research by Oxfam in the April-May 2019 period showed that individuals and groups with perceived affiliation to extremist groups in Kirkuk and Diyala are prevented from returning, and face harassment and abuse at checkpoints.<sup>950</sup> Moreover ‘most displaced families mentioned that they do not have the security clearance needed to travel to their area of origin to apply to the Civil Status Directorate to have their identity document issued’ and ‘lack of identity documents causes severe restrictions on movement, as families cannot or are afraid to pass through checkpoints, and it compounds other pre-existing problems and vulnerabilities’.<sup>951</sup>

The return process to a governorate and districts inside it varies, depending on the context and local dynamics. In the case of IDPs who wish to return to Kirkuk governorate from other districts within the governorate or from other governorates, they must:

‘fill a return form obtained from the Mayor’s office with information that include names of family members, number of the HH [household] individuals, area of displacement, history of displacement, and so on. They are also required to provide copies of personal documents of every returning HH member (mainly the Iraqi ID or Jinsiyah), the residence card of the head of HH and the camp departure letter (if displaced in a formal camp) or a letter from the *Mukhtar* (if displaced out of camps), before submitting the documents to the security committee for vetting’.<sup>952</sup>

The application usually takes two weeks to be processed and upon receiving security approval is sent to the Mayor for final approval.<sup>953</sup>

Regarding the situation of families of ISIL fighters, the governor of Kirkuk stated that he supported their return, as did Arab Sunni tribes, Sunni Turkmen and Kurds in the governorate. The main obstacle to their returns was, according to the governor, the opposition of PMUs and Shiite Turkmen to the returns, despite the families having security clearance. They have blocked previous attempts to

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or neighbourhood) that measures the severity of conditions or quality of return. See IOM Iraq, Return Index Findings round 8- Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>945</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Index Findings round 8- Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>946</sup> IOM, Iraq DTM Dashboard, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>947</sup> IOM, Re-Displaced: An Exploration of Displacement after Attempted Return in Iraq, February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>948</sup> IOM, Re-Displaced: An Exploration of Displacement after Attempted Return in Iraq, February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>949</sup> IOM DTM, Iraq RWG, Areas of origin having witnessed no return, April 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>950</sup> OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>951</sup> OXFAM, Protection Landscapes in Diyala and Kirkuk, Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 17-18

<sup>952</sup> IOM DTM, Iraq RWG, Return Process: Hawiga, Kirkuk, July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>953</sup> IOM DTM, Iraq RWG, Return Process: Hawiga, Kirkuk, July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

resettle families in, Daquq, Bashir, Dibis, and Amerli, Sulaiman Bek and Tuz Khurmatu (the last three located in Salah al-Din governorate). In Hawija, the Jubour and Shammar tribes together with the PMUs forced families of ISIL fighters that had not surrendered to leave the area, under the suspicion of collaborating with ISIL on recent attacks.<sup>954</sup>

For 2020, UNOCHA assessed that 282 458 persons were in need of humanitarian assistance in Kirkuk.<sup>955</sup> Forced and coerced movements from camps and informal settlements in Kirkuk governorate, made some populations vulnerable to secondary displacement.<sup>956</sup>

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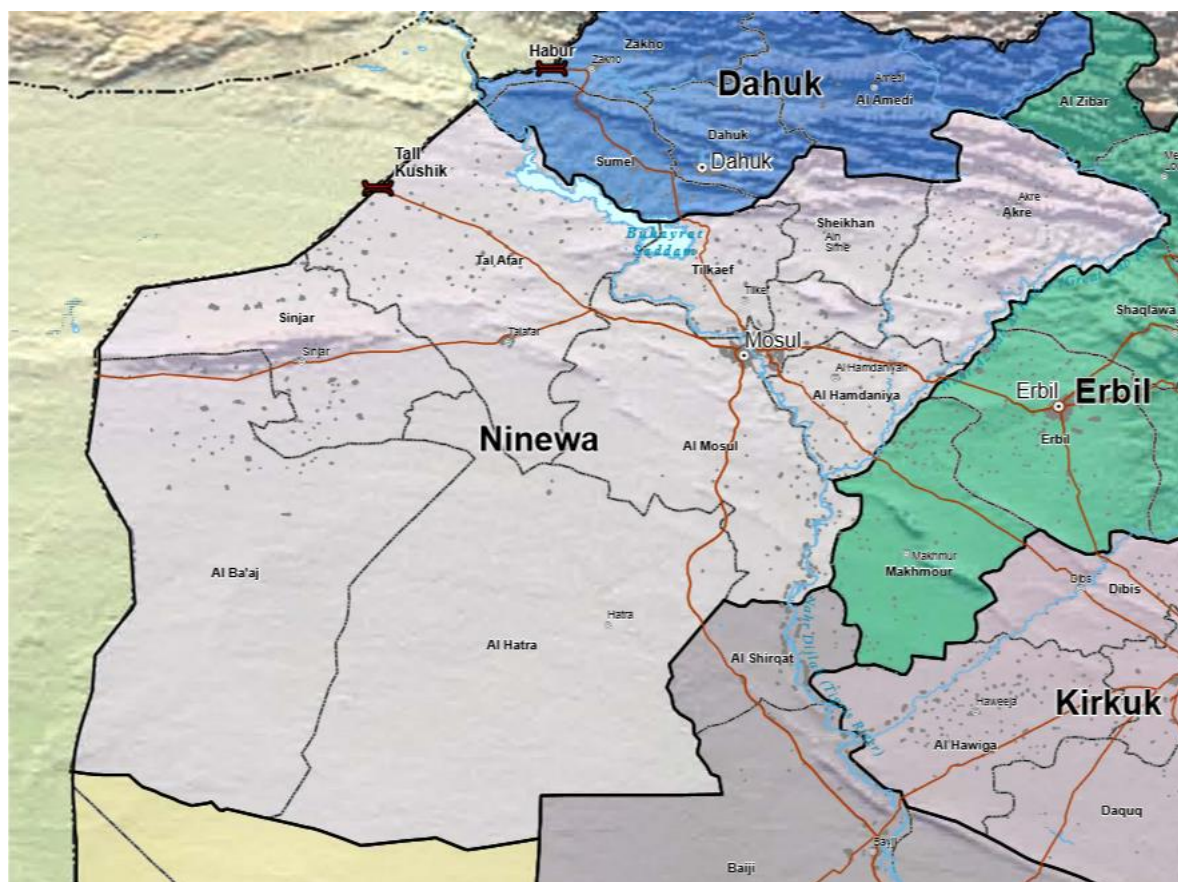
<sup>954</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: The Challenge of Reintegrating 'ISIL Families'*, CG Policy, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>955</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq*, November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>956</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq*, November 2019, [url](#), p. 22



## 2.6 Ninewa



Map 11: Ninewa governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.<sup>957</sup>

### 2.6.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

The governorate of Ninewa (or Nineveh) is located in north and north-west Iraq. It borders to Syria and the Iraqi governorates Dohuk, Erbil (both part of KRI), Salah al-Din and Anbar.<sup>958</sup> Ninewa is the third largest governorate at 37 323 km<sup>2</sup> (8.6 % the total size of Iraq). The capital is Mosul City, located in the north-east.<sup>959</sup>

The governorate is divided into nine districts: Mosul, Tel Kayf, Sheikhan, Akre, Tal Afar, Sinjar, Ba'aj, al-Hatra, and Hamdaniya. Akre and Sheikhan districts have been administered by the KRG since the establishment of the Green Line by the ceasefire between Saddam and the Kurds in 1991.<sup>960</sup>

<sup>957</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>958</sup> NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>959</sup> CIA, the World Factbook, Iraq, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>960</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

## Population

Mosul governorate had a population estimated at 3 828 197 inhabitants in 2019.<sup>961</sup> The estimated population of Mosul was 1.630 million in 2019.<sup>962</sup> The second largest city is Tal Afar, north-west of Mosul. Other major towns are Sinjar to the west and Qayara in the south.<sup>963</sup>

## Ethnicity

Ninewa is one of the most ethnically diverse governorates of Iraq. Sunni Arabs constitute the majority, but other groups also share power and influence: the Kurds are dominant in Akre and Sheikhan districts. The Ninewa Plains, east and north-east of Mosul, are the territory where the majority of the governorate's Christian and Shabak population lives (this area contains also major oil fields). In Tal Afar, the Turkmen (both Sunni and Shia) are prominent, while in Sinjar, the Yezidis are the majority, as well as in their holy city of Lalish in Sheikhan district.<sup>964</sup>

## Economy

Mosul is an important regional traffic hub: It has direct road connections with Baghdad, Kirkuk, Erbil, Dohuk, and also to Syria and Turkey, through Tal Afar and the Syrian border at Rabia in the north, and towards Sinjar and Syria in the west.<sup>965</sup>

An IOM report on the Legacies of the Conflict on rural economies and communities in Sinjar and the Ninewa Plains from November 2019 shows that the recovery of the economy in these rural areas is suffering from the legacy of ISIL: the damage to the agricultural infrastructure and livestock has been large, for instance in the Sinjar district.<sup>966</sup> Unemployment due to failed agricultural reconstruction runs high in these districts, and 70% of returning IDPs are economically inactive.<sup>967</sup> Some agricultural activities have restarted in Sinjar, but not to pre-conflict levels, when the region heavily relied on agriculture.<sup>968</sup>

## Road security

According to Deutsche Welle, the Shia militia in Ninewa were still manning checkpoints in cities in August 2019, and this source reported of problems in many places. In the summer of 2019, the 30th PMU Brigade blocked a highway east of Mosul and it came to armed confrontation with the Iraqi army which tried to take over its checkpoints.<sup>969</sup>

According to iMMAP, the explosive hazard risk level on the roads in Ninewa Governorate from February until the end of June 2020 show different stretches of the main roads from Mosul to Sinjar, Tal Afar (and the Syrian border), to Dahuk, to Erbil, to Makhmur district and to Sahlah al-Din

<sup>961</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 قديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by province, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>962</sup> CIA, the World Factbook, Iraq, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>963</sup> NCCI, Ninewa NCCI Governorate Profile, December 2010, [url](#), p. 2; Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>964</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>965</sup> ABC News, Why the Battle for Mosul Is Important, 16 October 2016, [url](#); Ahn, J., et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>966</sup> IOM Iraq, Rural Areas in Ninewa – Legacies of Conflict on Rural Economies and Communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

<sup>967</sup> IOM Iraq, Rural Areas in Ninewa – Legacies of Conflict on Rural Economies and Communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>968</sup> IOM Iraq, Rural Areas in Ninewa – Legacies of Conflict on Rural Economies and Communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>969</sup> Deutsche Welle, Iraq: Caught between militias and 'Islamic State', 7 August 2019, [url](#)

governorate being indicated as primary risk roads in the governorate. The Mosul-Sinjar road stands out with more recurrent high risk stretches during this period than the other main roads.<sup>970</sup>

## 2.6.2 Background conflict dynamics and armed actors

### Background conflict

In Ninewa the ISIL occupation was preceded by ‘years of overlapping violent extremism and organized crime by militia groups, some of which were IS progenitors and/or rivals’.<sup>971</sup> Located within Iraq’s disputed territories and having a diverse ethnic composition, Ninewa is considered to be a ‘longtime center of Sunni Arab nationalism in Iraq’ and was once the ‘center of gravity for al-Qaeda in Iraq’.<sup>972</sup>

Mosul was taken over and occupied by ISIL in June 2014. ISIL attacks on Sinjar, Zummar and the Ninewa Plains in August 2014 displaced nearly 1 million people within weeks.<sup>973</sup> The fall of Mosul in June 2014 and the withdrawal of the Kurdish Forces from large parts of the governorate in August 2014 led to widespread targeting of Iraq’s minority communities by ISIL: Turkmen, Christians, Yezidis, Shabak, Kaka’i and other groups<sup>974</sup> who were subjected to torture, public executions, crucifixions, kidnappings, and sexual slavery.<sup>975</sup>

The battle for Mosul lasted more than nine months<sup>976</sup>, and the victory over ISIL was not officially announced until the beginning of July 2017.<sup>977</sup> The battle, and especially its second part with the capturing of the historic town of western Mosul was the hardest confrontation between ISIL and the Iraqi government forces during the whole conflict from 2014 until present.<sup>978</sup> Mosul - the second city of Iraq – sustained heavy damage, a high number of civilians was killed during the hostilities with the estimates of civilian casualties ranging from 4 194 killed and wounded<sup>979</sup> up to 9 000-11 000 killed<sup>980</sup>, and one source indicated that over 40 000 civilians could have been killed as a result of the massive firepower used against the city by the ISF, the International Coalition and ISIL.<sup>981</sup>

Minority communities responded to the threat by ISIL and the fact that the Iraqi Army and the Peshmerga abandoned their posts during the ISIL offensive of 2014 by developing many of the local militias and their allegiances.<sup>982</sup>

<sup>970</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Ninewa Governorate 01-29 February 2020, 4 March 2020, [url](#); iMMAP-IHF, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Ninewa Governorate 01-31 March 2020, 6 April 2020, [url](#); iMMAP-IHF, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Ninewa Governorate 01-30 April 2020, 6 May 2020, [url](#); iMMAP-IHF, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Ninewa Governorate 01-31 May 2020, 7 June 2020, [url](#); iMMAP-IHF, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Ninewa Governorate 01-30 June 2020, 6 April 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#); iMMAP-IHF, Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Ninewa Governorate, 01-31 July 2020, 9 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>971</sup> Rise Foundation, Mosul and Tel Afar Context Analysis, December 2017, [url](#), p. 6.

<sup>972</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>973</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>974</sup> HRW, Iraq: ISIS Abducting, Killing, Expelling Minorities, 19 July 2014, [url](#)

<sup>975</sup> Gaston, E., Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>976</sup> Al-Jazeera, More than 9,000 killed in battle for Mosul: AP, 20 December 2017, [url](#)

<sup>977</sup> Huffington Post, Iraq Declares A Brilliant Victory In Mosul: What Are The Lessons? 10 July 2017, [url](#)

<sup>978</sup> BBC News, Major General: Battle for Mosul is ‘toughest since WWII’, 26 June 2017, [url](#); PBS, Frontline, “The Toughest Battle I’ve Ever Covered”: A Q&A With “Mosul” Director Olivier Sarbil, 18 October 2017, [url](#); Defense One, Watson, B., What the Largest Battle of the Decade Says About the Future of War, 28 June 2017, [url](#)

<sup>979</sup> UNAMI, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the context of the Ninewa Operations and the retaking of Mosul City, 17 October 2016 – 10 July 2017, 2 November 2017, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>980</sup> AP News, Mosul is a graveyard: Final IS battle kills 9,000 civilians. 21 December 2017, [url](#)

<sup>981</sup> Independent (The), The massacre of Mosul: 40,000 feared dead in battle to take back city from Isis as scale of civilian casualties revealed. 19 July 2017, [url](#)

<sup>982</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzi-Horváth, A., GPPI, Fracturing of the State. Recent Historical Events Contributing to the Proliferation of Local, Hybrid, and Sub-State Forces, 24 August 2017, [url](#)



Insurgent violence after the ISIL collapse remained high in Ninewa in 2017.<sup>983</sup> After the loss of its territorial control in the province, ISIL continued to carry out asymmetric attacks against ISF in Ninewa, amongst other governorates in north-central Iraq and in the central region.<sup>984</sup>

### Armed actors

As of July 2020, the majority of the governorate of Ninewa was under the control of the Iraqi government. The KRG was in control of the Akre and Sheikhan districts, a wedge between Dohuk and the Syrian border, and a band between the Line of Control of 2003 and Bashiqa.<sup>985</sup>

The main security actors operating in Ninewa can be classified in the following main categories:

- Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)
- Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)
- Kurdish Security Forces
- militias aligned with the KRG
- non-aligned militias
- foreign forces<sup>986</sup>

### Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

The formal ISF in Ninewa fall under the authority of the Ninewa Operations Command (NOC), with the exception of the Counterterrorism Service (CTS), which reports directly to the Iraqi government. The NOC is located in east Mosul.<sup>987</sup> As of December 2019, ISF presence and activity was reported in the eastern and western part of Mosul and the Ninewa Plains, Tal Afar, Baaj as well as in Hadar, Kairouan and all the western areas of the province to the borders with Syria and in the south-west towards Anbar.<sup>988</sup>

#### *Counterterrorism Service (CTS, *jihaz mukafahat al-irhab*)*

CTS presence was reported in Ninewa governorate<sup>989</sup> and in 2020, CTS units conducted anti-terror operations in the Hatra desert<sup>990</sup> and Makhmur mountains.<sup>991</sup>

<sup>983</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>984</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/359], 17 April 2018, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>985</sup> Based on reading of Figure 1. Iraq: Areas of Influence and Operation, US CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 116th Congress, 17 July 2020, Figure 1. Iraq: Areas of Influence and Operation, As of July 8, 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>986</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 14, 33; USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; UN Security Council: Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>987</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>988</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, CG Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>989</sup> Arab Weekly (The), As ISIS rears its head in Iraq, new anti-terror chief pledges to “root out” extremist group, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>990</sup> Diyaruna, Iraq's CTS hunts down ISIS remnants in mountainous areas, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>991</sup> US, CJTF-OIR, Defeating Daesh Highlights of the Week July 1, 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

*Iraqi Army (IA, Jayish)*

The Iraqi Army maintains a large presence in Ninewa, the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions have served in the governorate since the liberation of Mosul.<sup>992</sup> In June 2019, the commander of the Ninewa Operations Command (NOC), Major General Najm Abdullah al-Jubouri, was replaced by Major General Nuam Abdul al-Zubai, who changed over from leading the Salah al-Din Operations Command.<sup>993</sup> In September 2020, Maj. Gen. Ismail Shihab al-Mahlawi was in charge of the NOC.<sup>994</sup>

*Iraqi Police Service (IPS, Local Police)*

The IPS is the local police force operating within the governorate. Less militarised than the Federal Police, the IPS often patrols in non-armoured vehicles and carries only light firearms. The Ninewa Province Police (shurta muhafiza Ninewa) is responsible for the day-to-day security duties and is theoretically closest to the local population. Their officers are the first responders and the first line of defence against terrorism and criminality. Because of this, they are exposed to the ‘greatest risk of being targeted by insurgent attacks’. They are locally recruited, but this also means that they and their families are easier targets for kidnapping or assassination.<sup>995</sup>

*National Security Service (NSS, jihaz al-amn al-watni)*

The NSS is the primary intelligence service within the governorate, but it is often present at checkpoints throughout the governorate to identify individuals, and they also conduct raids, arrests and interrogations. Their activities has led them to clash with other security forces, such as IA and ISOF units operating in Mosul.<sup>996</sup>

*Iraqi Border Guards (haras hadud allraq)*

The Iraqi Border Guards operate primarily on the Syrian border in western Ninewa, especially in the border town of Rabia. The Border Guards are also responsible for preventing ISIL fighters from entering Ninewa from Syria, but they receive assistance from the PMU in securing remote border regions.<sup>997</sup>

**Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)**

Michael Knights asserted in an August 2019 analysis that the western desert is under the influence of pro-Iranian militia under control of the Badr Organization, but that the areas around Tal Afar, Sinjar and the Nineveh Plains are under shared control of the Iraqi army and Badr Organisation.<sup>998</sup> The multitude of smaller brigades in Ninewa are nominally answering to the PMF Nineveh Operations Command under Ali Kadhim al-Musawi, but – as Michael Knights pointed out – Ninewa is an area where local and outsider militias are acting in their own interests.<sup>999</sup>

<sup>992</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 15; US, CJTF-OIR, Defeating Daesh Highlights of the Week, 27 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3; The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, Spotlight on Global Jihad (January 23-29, 2020), 30 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>993</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Reshuffling Iraqi Generals: Who Benefits? 6 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>994</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Khadimi’s Rolling Reshuffle (Part 1): Military Command Changes, 14 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>995</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>996</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 17; FP, Goodbye, Islamic State - Hello, Anarchy, 24 March 2017, [url](#)

<sup>997</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq., 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>998</sup> Knights, M. Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>999</sup> Knights, M. Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

As of December 2019, PMU forces were reported to be present and active in a wide range of areas inside Ninewa, including Tal Safuk, Mosul, west-Ninewa (Al-Qayrawan), Zummar, Rabia, Al-Sakar, Tel Afar city and region, Ninewa Plains, and in the area around Sinjar.<sup>1000</sup>

In the Ninewa Plains and eastern Mosul city, two local militias supported by the central Hashd command have repeatedly refused orders from the Iraqi government to leave Christian areas. One is Liwa al-Shabak/Quwat Sahl Nineveh (Brigade 30), and the other is the Babylon Brigade (Brigade 50). Liwa al-Shabak (Brigade 30) is recruiting within the local Shia Shabak community, while the Babylon Brigade (Brigade 50) is supposedly Christian, but according to Michael Knights, many of its fighters are non-Christians from Sadr City (Baghdad), Muthanna and Thi Qar.<sup>1001</sup> Another source noted that although it is led by a Christian, the Babylon Brigade (Brigade 50) rank and file members consist primarily of Shia Arabs and Shabaks.<sup>1002</sup> The groups have been accused of harassing civilians at checkpoints, looting, intimidating the local population and preventing the return of IDPs.<sup>1003</sup>

Other local groups include:

- **Ninewa Plains Protection Units (NPU):** a predominantly Christian militia. Despite its nominal affiliation to the PMU, it operates independently of PMU leadership and reports directly to the NSS. The NPU was the only Assyrian force authorised to participate in anti-ISIL operations, and it received training and some support from the US-led Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve.<sup>1004</sup> Following the liberation of the Nineveh Plains, the NPU became the dominant factor in Bartella, but the competition of the PMU brigade 30 (see also below) acquired more size and influence due to the backing of the Badr Organization. The NPU became outnumbered by its competitor and according to the Assyrian Policy Institute, citing an article by AP, it controlled only two checkpoints in Bartella in February 2019.<sup>1005</sup>
- Other PMU's, including the Shia Turkmen Al-Hashd al-Turkmani<sup>1006</sup>, the Yezidi Lalish regiment (36<sup>th</sup> Brigade)<sup>1007</sup> and the Sunni Ninewa Guards (Haras Ninewa)<sup>1008</sup> were reported in previous years to be present in the province.

Non-local groups included:

- **Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Kataeb Hezbollah:** These large non-local PMUs are present in Ninewa and have significant influence over many of the smaller local groups, but their limited presence prevents them from directly controlling territory. These Iranian proxy groups are the main link between the national PMU umbrella and the local Shia Hashd groups. Their attempts to recruit among the local Sunni population have proven largely ineffective. Despite their lack of overt presence, they still were seen as major players in the governorate.<sup>1009</sup> According to Michael Knights, Badr Organisation asserts control over the

<sup>1000</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, CG Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1001</sup> Knights, M., Normalizing Security in the Nineveh Plains, 5 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1002</sup> Assyrian Policy Institute, Contested Control: The Future of Security in Iraq's Nineveh Plain, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>1003</sup> Knights, M., Normalizing Security in the Nineveh Plains, 5 July 2019, [url](#); Assyrian Policy Institute, Contested Control: The Future of Security in Iraq's Nineveh Plain, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1004</sup> Assyrian Policy Institute, Contested Control: The Future of Security in Iraq's Nineveh Plain, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>1005</sup> Assyrian Policy Institute, Contested Control: The Future of Security in Iraq's Nineveh Plain, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 35; AP, Abuelgasim, F., Iraqi Christians fear returning home, wary of Shiite militia, 13 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1006</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 20; Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Hashd Brigade Numbers Index, 31 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1007</sup> Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Hashd Brigade Numbers Index, 31 October 2017, [url](#); Ahn, J., et. al, The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 19; International Review, Koontz K., Sinjar's Yezidi Militias, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1008</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 20, 24; ICG, Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1009</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 20

smaller groups in the western desert, through the brigades 28, 29 and 35.<sup>1010</sup> The names of these brigades are Saraya Ansar al-Aqeeda (brigade 28), Kata'ib Ansar al-Hujja (brigade 29) and Quwat al-Shaheed al-Sadr (brigade 35).<sup>1011</sup>

- **Saraya Ashura (Brigade 8):** Affiliated with Ammar al-Hakim, who used to lead the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI).<sup>1012</sup>
- **Liwa Ali al-Akbar (Brigade 11):** This is a unit loyal to Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, it has a significant presence in western Ninewa (Tal Afar and the Jazeera Desert).<sup>1013</sup>
- **Quwat al-Shahid al-Sadr (Brigades 15, 25, 35):** This unit is affiliated with the Shia Dawa party.<sup>1014</sup>
- **Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah (Brigade 26):** Affiliated with the Abbas Shrine in Karbala and the Iraqi Ministry of Defence.<sup>1015</sup>
- **Liwa al-Shabab al-Risali/Quwat Wa'ad Allah (Brigade 33):** Linked to the Sadrist trend. Active in several places between Mosul and the western border.<sup>1016</sup>
- **Kata'ib al-Imam Ali (Brigade 40):** affiliated with the Islamic Movement of Iraq, pro-Iranian.<sup>1017</sup>
- **Liwa Ansar al-Marjiyah (Brigade 44):** led by a representative of Ayatollah Sistani.<sup>1018</sup>
- **Liwa al Hussein (Brigade 53):** Active in the Tal Afar area, affiliated with Badr Organisation.<sup>1019</sup>

#### ***Tribal Mobilization Forces (TMF, Hashd al-Asha'ari)***

According to a single source from August 2019, the Sunni Tribal Mobilization Forces in Ninewa are 'deployed in regions and villages inside Mosul, including Tal Afar and Sinjar'.<sup>1020</sup> According to Inna Rudolf in a contribution for the Century Foundation in February 2020, approximately 18 000 tribal elements are registered under the Ninewa PMU.<sup>1021</sup>

<sup>1010</sup> Knights, M. Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1011</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 206

<sup>1012</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 204; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1013</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 21; Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 204

<sup>1014</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 205-206; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1015</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 206; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1016</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 206; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1017</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 207; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1018</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 207; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1019</sup> Knights, M., Malik, H., Jawad Al-Tamimi, A., Honored, not Contained, the Future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 130, 207; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1020</sup> Rasanah, International Institute for Iranian Studies, Firas, E., The Nineveh Plains Military Zones in Iran's Regional Strategy, 28 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1021</sup> Century Foundation, (The), Rudolf, I. The Sunnis of Iraq's "Shia" Paramilitary Powerhouse, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

## Kurdistan Regional Government Security Forces

### *KDP Peshmerga*

The US Congressional Research Service stated that by 8 July 2020, the KRG was in control of the Akre and Sheikhan districts, a wedge between Dohuk and the Syrian border, and a band between the Line of Control of 2003 and Bashiqa.<sup>1022</sup> As of December 2019, Peshmerga forces were present in the Nawran and Bashiqa area, as well as in the Zertik Mountain and Faidah sub-district.<sup>1023</sup>

A number of militias aligned with the KRG which operated in Ninewa, including:

- **Ezidkhan Defense Force (Hêza Parastina Ezidkhane, HPE):** Sources interviewed during the April 2018 DIS/Landinfo FFM to KRI identified Ezidkhan Protection Force (HPE) and the Sinjar Resistance Unit (YBS) [seen as PKK affiliated] as the two security actors that control most of Sinjar district. The HPE ‘seems to work within the quite open PMU system’.<sup>1024</sup> According to a June 2020 report by Kayla Koontz, ‘the HPE openly coordinates with the Iraqi military’.<sup>1025</sup>
- **Rojava Peshmerga:** according to an article in the Jerusalem Post from 31 August 2019, the Rojava Peshmerga was present on the roads near Sinjar.<sup>1026</sup>
- **Ninewa Plains Guard Force (NPGF):** According to the Assyrian Policy Institute in June 2020, this force plays only a minor security role limited to Tel Eskof, and most of its men are not in active duty.<sup>1027</sup>

## Non-Aligned Militias

### *Sinjar Protection Units (Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê, YBS)*

The YBS is a Yezidi PKK affiliate group in Sinjar.<sup>1028</sup> The Yezidi forces are predominantly located in the Sinjar area. They have had the same pattern of affiliation as the other minority forces, mainly to the KDP, PMU, and also to the PKK.<sup>1029</sup> The YBS capitalised on the KRG withdrawal after the Kurdish referendum, and aligned itself with the Iraqi military and the PMUs in the region. The YBS forces have grown since the Peshmerga’s retreat and include now about 5 000 to 6 000 soldiers. According to a report by Kayla Koontz for the International Review, the YBS operates in coordination with the Iraqi Army which operates primarily in rural areas of Sinjar, while the Iraqi police and YBS carry out security operations inside cities. Likewise, the Iraqi police and YBS work together at checkpoints and provide internal security.<sup>1030</sup> Tensions between YBS and the Iraqi military over PKK smuggling activities and illegal border crossings caused a clash between the Iraqi army and YBS units in March 2019.<sup>1031</sup> The conflict was soon defused through a meeting between YBS and Iraqi army officials.<sup>1032</sup>

<sup>1022</sup> US CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 116th Congress, 17 July 2020, Figure 1. Iraq: Areas of Influence and Operation, As of July 8, 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1023</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, CG Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1024</sup> 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. 17

<sup>1025</sup> International Review, Koontz K., Sinjar’s Yezidi Militias, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1026</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Frantzman, S., After ISIS: The Sinjar area remains key to securing Iraq, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1027</sup> Assyrian Policy Institute, Contested Control: The Future of Security in Iraq’s Nineveh Plain, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>1028</sup> USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The Hopes and Fears of Religious Minorities In Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 29;

Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 23;

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. 17

<sup>1029</sup> Gaston, E., Derzsi-Horváth, A., The Global public Policy Institute, Iraq After ISIL, March 2018, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>1030</sup> International Review, Koontz K., Sinjar’s Yezidi Militias, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1031</sup> Kurdistan24, Kosar N., Iraqi forces, Yezidi PKK-affiliated militia clash near Syrian border, 18 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1032</sup> International Review, Koontz K., Sinjar’s Yezidi Militias, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

### *Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK)*

According to a June 2020 report, the PKK forms still alliances with the YBS and political parties like the Yezidi Freedom and Democracy Party (BADI), and during protests against Turkish airstrikes, PKK and Öcalan flags and banners are displayed in Sinjar. However, according to the same source, the YBS units do not show the PKK flags above their bases since their incorporation into the Iraqi military.<sup>1033</sup> In a December 2019 conflict map PKK presence was reported around Kocho village, south of Sinjar.<sup>1034</sup> The PKK is on the European Union's list of designated groups which have been involved in terrorism<sup>1035</sup>, as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey<sup>1036</sup>, the United States<sup>1037</sup>, and Australia.<sup>1038</sup>

### Foreign Security Services

The three primary foreign actors involved in Ninewa are Iran, Turkey and the International Coalition to Defeat ISIL. Iran is involved through its Quds Force, a division of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is typically embedded with some of the main Shia PMU units in an advising and assisting capacity. Turkey has a presence through the Turkish Armed Forces TSK, which run a camp near Bashiqa (the town is under ISF control).<sup>1039</sup> Turkey conducted airstrikes in Sinjar on different occasions in 2019<sup>1040</sup> and 2020.<sup>1041</sup>

On 19 March 2020, the U.S.-led coalition and the Iraqi Joint Operations Command announced the handover al-Qayyarah Camp south of Ninewa and Ninewa Operations Command Camp (amongst others in other governorates). According to the Center for Global Policy, the withdrawal had been agreed between the coalition against ISIL and the Iraqi authorities already months before, and not because of the recent rocket attacks against these bases. The threat of COVID-19 made troops from the US and other coalition member states interrupting their training and advisory missions and planning a return to their own countries.<sup>1042</sup>

### ISIL presence and activity

Despite not having territorial control in the governorate, ISIL continued to carry out asymmetric attacks against ISF and civilians in Ninewa in 2019 and 2020.<sup>1043</sup>

According to a Center for Global Policy analysis from May 2020, ISIL came under pressure by the operation "Will of Victory" of the ISF with the U.S.-led coalition from 7 July 2019 until the end of the year in Ninewa and neighbouring provinces.<sup>1044</sup> However, the increasing tension between the US and Iran together with COVID-19 created new opportunities for the terrorist group: the removal of U.S.

<sup>1033</sup> International Review, Koontz K., Sinjar's Yezidi Militias, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1034</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, CG Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1035</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1036</sup> Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1037</sup> US, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1038</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Listed terrorist organisations, n.d., [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1039</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1040</sup> NRTTV, Turkish Aircraft Bomb Amedi's Kurazhar Mountain and Sinjar's Khanasur, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1041</sup> Rudaw, Wali Z.Z., Turkey launches air offensive targeting suspected PKK locations in northern Iraq, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1042</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., The Coalition Withdrawal from Iraq: Fact and Fiction, 0 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1043</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/903], 22 November 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1044</sup> Hassan, H., ISIS in Iraq and Syria: Rightsizing the Current 'Comeback', 12 May 2020, [url](#)

advisors from frontline headquarters hampered the coordination of the coalition intelligence and air support with the Iraqi forces.<sup>1045</sup>

In Ninewa, ISIL uses sparsely populated areas to hide and attack from, but according to Knights/Almeida, it tries to build relatively strong bases in the rural belts of major cities and towns, in order to return to mass-casualty attacks, as the authors suspect.<sup>1046</sup> Husham Al-Hashimi also considered in May 2020 that ISIL is trying to gain foothold in rural areas surrounding cities, amongst other in Tal Afar and Qayara.<sup>1047</sup> Al-Hashimi saw ISIL focussing on 'settling deserted villages across northern and central Iraq where natural geographic barriers and terrain – such as valleys, mountains, deserts, and rural areas – make conventional military operations challenging'.<sup>1048</sup> According to Al-Hashimi, ISIL had some 350-400 active fighters each sector it operated, including Ninewa governorate, which were supported by some 400 inactive fighters who focused on logistics.<sup>1049</sup>

According to the ICG writing in October 2019, ISIL was mainly active within the southern and south-western part of Ninewa (together with other areas in different provinces).<sup>1050</sup> Husham Al-Hashimi assessed in a December 2019 conflict map that ISIL retained a presence in Baaj, south of Ninewa desert.<sup>1051</sup> The DIA stated in March 2020 that Rutbah district, the Hadr desert and Ba'aj in western Ninewa are the areas of the governorate where ISIL remained most active.<sup>1052</sup>

In an article published in May 2020, Knights/Almeida identified eleven specific areas of ISIL activity in Ninewa (in contrast to six in 2018) including: East Mosul; Ash Shura/Hammam al-Alil; Qayyarah; Sharqat; Jurn triangle; the Hatra/Iraq-Turkey Pipeline corridor southwest of Mosul; Badush/Atashana/west Mosul; Tal Afar/Muhallabiyah; Tal Afar/Ayadhiyah; Sinjar/Ba'aj; Lake Sunnislah/Jazeera.<sup>1053</sup>

### 2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

Security incidents occurred throughout the province during 2019: in addition to air attacks by the Iraqi Air Force and the international coalition on presumed ISIL hideouts, there were military ground operations by the ISF and PMF against ISIL<sup>1054</sup>, as well as attacks by ISIL on the ISF, and also on civilians.<sup>1055</sup> The Turkish Air Force attacked positions of the Kurdish/ Yezidi YBS in Sinjar.<sup>1056</sup> There were

<sup>1045</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1046</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1047</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#); Al-Hashimi was assassinated in Baghdad on 6 July 2020. See Al-Monitor, Prominent Iraqi analyst and advisor shot dead in Baghdad, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1048</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1049</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1050</sup> ICG, Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria, 11 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1051</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, CG Policy, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1052</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 15 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1053</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1054</sup> Iraqi News, Ebraheem, M. U.S. airstrike kills two terrorists inside Nineveh tunnel, 16 July 2019, [url](#); AP, Iraq hunts IS remnants spreading fear in former 'caliphate', 13 May 2019, [url](#); ISW, Cafarella, J., Wallace, B., Zhou, J., ISIS's Second Comeback, Assessing the Next ISIS Insurgency, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>1055</sup> ISW, Cafarella, J., Wallace, B., Zhou, J., ISIS's Second Comeback, Assessing the Next ISIS Insurgency, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>1056</sup> Kirkuk Now, Sinjar and Makhmour bombed for three hours by Turkish aircraft, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

also demonstrations protesting corruption by the deposed governor<sup>1057</sup>, and protests by members of a PMF brigade against the order given them to leave Mosul and the Ninewa Plains.<sup>1058</sup>

Michael Knights and Alex Almeida assessed the insurgency of ISIL in Ninewa in 2018 as “patchy and reasonably weak”, but they noticed a sudden uptick in attacks in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2019 that amounted to about the double of the previous year and according to them, this rate of attacks was sustained during the first quarter of 2020. However, the same authors stressed the large difference in the number of attacks between their peak in 2013 and the present. In 2013, Ninewa counted 278 attacks per month, three quarters of them in Mosul city, against only 31 attacks in March 2020. The attacks became more sophisticated from the second half of 2019 and into 2020. According to Knights/Almeida the nocturnal raids to kill *mukhtars* that terrorised the Tigris river valley in 2018, became less frequent. The authors assess that ISIL has a wider range of attack cells in the governorate than a year before, and with attack groups operational in eleven areas in the first quarter of 2020, versus only six by the end of 2018.<sup>1059</sup>

The number of incidents during 2019 and 2020 recorded by Joel Wing remained within the same margin between 9 and 25 monthly attacks<sup>1060</sup>, but according to Knights/Almeida, the rate of attacks was already steadily increasing by the end of 2018, and this changed to a more sudden uptick in the second half of 2019, with 34.1 attacks per month, about doubling the 2018 levels. The same source stated that this rate of insurgent attacks was sustained in the first quarter of 2020, and the authors assessed it as a fairly stable new level of attacks (32.3 ISIL attacks per month during the first quarter of 2020).<sup>1061</sup> USDOD recorded between 25 and 30 ISIL attacks in Ninewa for the period between January and April 2020<sup>1062</sup> and 24 between April June 2020.<sup>1063</sup>

According to Joel Wing, in February, March, April and May 2020, Ninewa was a secondary front for the insurgents.<sup>1064</sup> Michael Knights and Alex Almeida stated in their analysis of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, that the surge of attacks by ISIL in Ninewa since the summer of 2019 and the sustained level in 2020 was primarily due to an increase in the number and quality of roadside bombings. The same analysts saw a gradual proliferation of more advanced tactics in the use of IEDs, like chains of multiple IEDs to enlarge impact zones, booby-trapping of houses to kill security forces and using attacks as a bait to draw forces onto roadside bombs.<sup>1065</sup> The majority of casualties from roadside bombings are members of the security forces, as the reporting of incidents by ACLED and Joel Wing indicate. However, there are also civilian casualties.<sup>1066</sup>

<sup>1057</sup> Guardian (The), Ghaith A., ‘I’ve seen death in this city, but nothing as sad as this’: how a ferry disaster exposed the corruption devastating Iraq, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1058</sup> New Arab (The), Iran-linked militia ignores Iraq army demand for handover of positions, 5 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1059</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1060</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State Offensive In Iraq Takes Off In May, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1061</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1062</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1063</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 April 2020 – 30 June 2020, 4 August 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1064</sup> Wing, J., Violence Largely Unchanged In Iraq In February 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Drops In Iraq In March 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Spike In Violence In April 2020 But Can It Be Sustained?, 1 May 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Security In Iraq, May 1-7, 2020, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

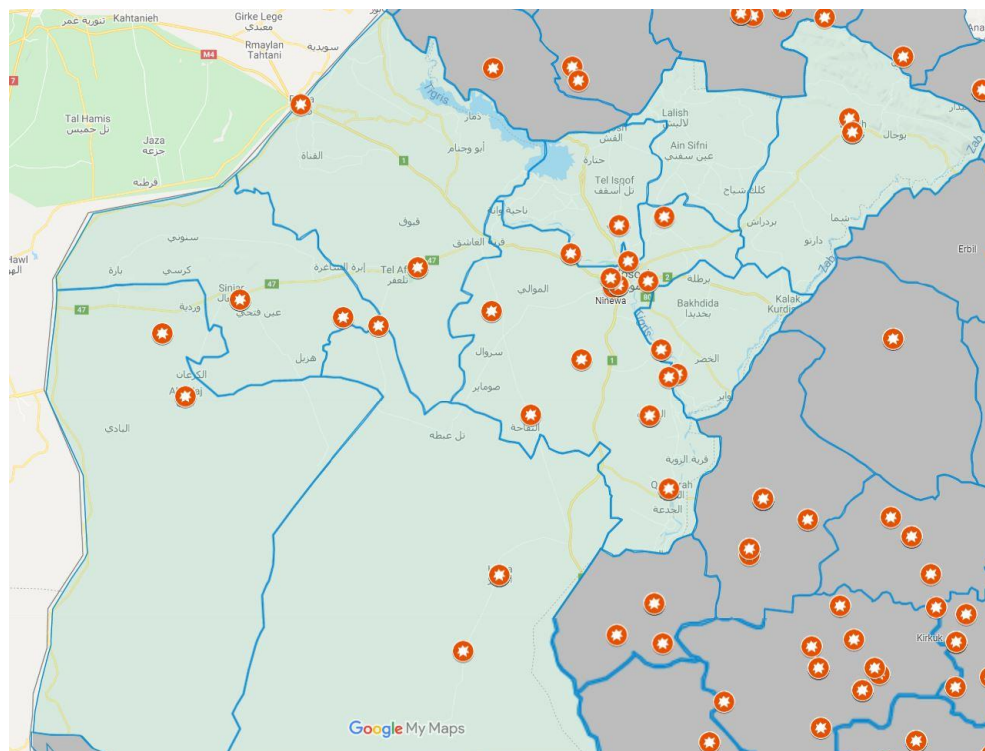
<sup>1065</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1066</sup> ACLED, Real Time Data, Iraq, 1 February – 22 June 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Largely Unchanged In Iraq In February 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Drops In Iraq In March 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Spike In Violence In April 2020 But Can It Be Sustained?, 1 May 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Largely Unchanged In Iraq In February 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)



The geographical pattern of the insurgent attacks in 2019 indicates that all districts of Ninewa were affected, with the exception of the north-eastern parts under Kurdish control.<sup>1067</sup> Typical hotspots for ISIL activity were the Tigris River Valley areas south of Mosul, and in general rural areas within striking distance of the areas of ISIL activity as pointed out in the chapter ‘ISIL insurgents’ above.<sup>1068</sup>

The following map shows the places where ACLED registered incidents in the period from 1 January until 19 June 2020. The map does not reflect all the incidents in the governorate, only the geographic areas affected. ACLED registered 66 incidents during this period. The incidents recorded in Akre in the northeast corner of Ninewa governorate were Turkish airstrikes:



Map 12: Incidents recorded by ACLED and EPIC from 1 January until 26 June 2020, compilation by Cedoca on Google Maps<sup>1069</sup>

The different types of incidents during the first half of 2020 included regular armed clashes between the security forces and ISIL insurgents, including shootings or attacks with explosives, security operations against insurgent hideouts in rural and remote areas, but also near or in populated places.<sup>1070</sup> For instance, there was an insurgent attack on the power grid near Qayyarah in May 2020, where three high voltage towers were hit.<sup>1071</sup>

ISIL is using different tactics like planting IEDs next to roads where the security forces are patrolling or firing mortar or small arms rounds into populated areas.<sup>1072</sup> Another tactic used by the insurgents is

<sup>1067</sup> ACLED, Real Time Data, 1 February 2019 – 31 January 2020, [url](#); Belgium, Cedoca (CGVS/CGRA), COI Focus Iraq Security Situation in Central and Southern Iraq, 20 March 2020, [url](#), p. 76

<sup>1068</sup> Knights, M., Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1069</sup> ACLED, Real Time Data, Iraq, 1 February – 22 June 2020, [url](#), map compiled by Belgium, Cedoca, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1070</sup> NINA, 70 IEDs, 5 Tunnels Found, Vehicle Destroyed In Nineveh And Salah Al-Din, 4 May 2020, [url](#); ACLED, Real Time Data, Iraq, 1 February – 22 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1071</sup> NINA, ISIS Detonate 3 Electricity Towers, South Of Mosul, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1072</sup> NINA, اموصل جنوب هاون قذيفة سقوط جراء بجروح مدنيين ثلاثة اصابة, (Three civilians were wounded by a mortar shell south of Mosul), 10 May 2020, [url](#); ACLED, Real Time Data, Iraq, 1 February – 22 June 2020, [url](#)

the attacking and killing of village *mukhtars*. Although less frequent than in former years, as pointed out by Knights/Almeida, this form of violence still occurs in 2020.<sup>1073</sup>

Mass graves of victims of the conflict with ISIL between 2014 and 2017 are still found in 2020, the biggest such grave was found in Tal Afar region in February 2020.<sup>1074</sup> On 17 May 2020, the new Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi gave instruction to use all available resources to uncover the fate of kidnapped and forcibly disappeared Iraqis. Most reports of missing people are from Ninewa.<sup>1075</sup>

Airstrikes against ISIL positions were conducted by the Iraqi Air Force and the International coalition<sup>1076</sup>, while the Turkish Air Force has attacked positions of Kurdish and Yezidi militia with ties to the PKK in Sinjar and Akre districts in 2019 and 2020.<sup>1077</sup> Turkish airstrikes have resulted in civilian casualties.<sup>1078</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Ninewa governorate between 1 January 2019 and 31 July 2020 included the following:

#### ISIL attacks on *mukhtars*:

- On 9 May 2019, the *mukhtar* of al-Lazaka village in the Hammam al-Alil district was killed together with four members of his family by ISIL militants. Two other family members were wounded in the attack.<sup>1079</sup>
- On 18 November 2019, the *mukhtar* of the village of Ahlila was killed in East Mosul.<sup>1080</sup>
- On 26 February 2020, ISIL militants attacked the home of a *mukhtar* in Al Muhallabiyah, west of Mosul leaving the *mukhtar* killed and his son injured.<sup>1081</sup>

#### Armed attacks by ISIL:

- On 22 December 2019, ISIL attacked the village of Al-Rusif in the district of Shoura (South Mosul), killing two civilians and injuring another.<sup>1082</sup>
- On 10 May 2020, unidentified armed men using a mortar shelled a civilian home in al Qayyarah south of Mosul, leaving three members of the household injured.<sup>1083</sup>

#### IEDs by ISIL or unidentified perpetrators:

<sup>1073</sup> NINA, *استشهاد مختار واصابة نجله في هجوم لداعش غرب الموصل* (Mukhtar killed and his son wounded in an ISIL attack west of Mosul), 26 February 2020, [url](#); NINA, *3 Soldiers Injured By IED South Of Mosul*, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1074</sup> Rudaw, Wali, Z.Z., *Sinkhole containing 1,000 ISIS victims uncovered in Iraq's Tal Afar*, 19 February 2020, [url](#); NINA, *A Cemetery Found West Of Mosul, Containing The Remains Of 32 Victims Killed By ISIS*, 17 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1075</sup> EPIC, ISHM: May 14 – May 21, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1076</sup> NINA, *مقتل 7 ارهابيين بضرية جوية للتحالف الدولي في نينوى*, (7 terrorists killed by air strike by international coalition in Nineveh), 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1077</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Frantzman S.J., *Turkey bombs Sinjar villages in Iraq where genocide survivors live*, 6 November 2019, [url](#); Washington Kurdish Institute, *Kurdistan's Weekly Brief January 28, 2020*, 28 January 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Wali Z.Z., *Turkey launches air offensive targeting suspected PKK locations in northern Iraq*, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1078</sup> CIVIC, *Turkish Airstrikes Kill Five Civilians and Hinder Recovery in Northern Iraq after ISIS*, 24 June 2020, [url](#); Middle East Eye, *Fear and anger greets Turkish air strikes in northern Iraq*, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1079</sup> Rudaw, *Gunmen kill 5, wound 2 including Mukhtar in unstable Mosul*, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1080</sup> iMMAP-IHF, *Humanitarian Access Response, Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News, 14 to 20 November 2019*, 21 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1081</sup> NINA, *استشهاد مختار واصابة نجله في هجوم لداعش غرب الموصل* (Mukhtar killed and his son wounded in an ISIL attack west of Mosul), 26 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1082</sup> iMMAP-IHF, *Humanitarian Access Response, Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News, 19-25 Dec 2019*, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1083</sup> NINA, *اموصل جنوب هاون قذيفة سقوط جراء بجروح مدنيين ثلاثة اصابة*, (Three civilians were wounded by a mortar shell south of Mosul), 10 May 2020, [url](#)

- On 22 May 2019, a civilian was killed when an IED exploded in al-Shoura district in Mosul.<sup>1084</sup>
- On 9 November 2019, an IED exploded on a transport vehicle in the village of Qaraj, southwest of Mosul, three civilians were injured by the explosion.<sup>1085</sup>
- On February 12, 2020, a civilian was killed and 10 others injured by the explosion of an ISIL IED in al-Rashidiyah area, north of Mosul.<sup>1086</sup>
- On 3 March 2020, an unidentified planted IED exploded in Tel Kayf, Ninewa province, injuring two civilians.<sup>1087</sup>
- On 7 May 2020, an unidentified IED planted near Ghuzayl village, south of Mosul exploded, leaving two electricity department employees injured.<sup>1088</sup>

#### Clashes with security forces:

- On 8 November 2019, unknown attackers fired four rockets at the military base of Qayyara. The security services retaliated and killed three attackers.<sup>1089</sup>
- On 24 March 2020, Iraqi forces killed three ISIL militants wearing explosive belts in a village near Qayyarah.<sup>1090</sup>

#### Airstrikes:

- On 20 August 2019, the media cell of the security forces reported the death of six ISIL militants inside a tunnel in an airstrike conducted by Coalition Forces in the Atshana Mountains west of Mosul.<sup>1091</sup>
- On 4 November 2019, the Turkish Air Force bombed Khanasur in Sinjar. Two YBS fighters were wounded.<sup>1092</sup>
- On 15 May 2020, an airstrike by the International Coalition Forces against ISIL in a desert area southwest of Hatra targeted an ISIL cave, leaving seven militants killed.<sup>1093</sup>
- On 15 June 2020, Turkey launched airstrikes against multiple targets in Iraq, also against positions of the Yezidi Resistance Units (YBS) in Sinjar District. According to Yezidi sources, at least three members of the YBS were wounded.<sup>1094</sup>

<sup>1084</sup> Iraqi News, Bomb blast kills Iraqi civilian in Mosul city, 22 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1085</sup> iMMAP - IHF Humanitarian, Access Response, , Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News, 1 to 13 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1086</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response, Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News (6-12 FEB 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1087</sup> NINA, اصابة مدنين بانفجار عبوة ناسفة في تلكيف بنيوى (Civilians injured by an explosive device in Tel Kayf, Ninewa), 3 March, [url](#)

<sup>1088</sup> NINA, اصابة موظفين بالكهرباء بانفجار عبوة ناسفة جنوب الموصل, Electricity employees were injured by an explosive device, south of Mosul, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1089</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response, Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News, 1 to 13 November 2019, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1090</sup> BAS News, Rezan, A., مقتل 3 ارهابيين انتحاريين جنوب الموصل (3 suicide bombers were killed south of Mosul), 24 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1091</sup> بناء على معلومات استخبارية، قوة مشتركة من اللواء ٦٦ واللواء ٢٢ بالفرقة العشرين، تشتبك مع عناصر (Security Media Cell) خلية الإعلام الأمني إرهابية في سلسلة جبال عطشانة، حيث تم محاصرة ٦ عناصر من داعش، وقد حاولوا الهروب والاختباء في إحدى الإنفاق في المنطقة أعلاه، حيث تمت معالجتهم وفقا لمعلومات من قيادة عمليات نينوى بواسطة طيران التحالف الدولي، مما أسفر عن تدمير النفق وقتل الإرهابيين الذين كانوا بداخله. ٢٠١٩ اب ٢٠, Facebook, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1092</sup> NRTTV, Turkish Aircraft Bomb Amedi's Kurazhar Mountain and Sinjar's Khanasur, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1093</sup> NINA, مقتل 7 ارهابيين بضرية جوية للتحالف الدولي في نينوى (7 terrorists killed by air strike by international coalition in Nineveh), 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1094</sup> Rudaw, Wali Z.Z., Turkey launches air offensive targeting suspected PKK locations in northern Iraq, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

## Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Ninewa	62	68	106	<b>174</b>	27	14	33	<b>47</b>

Table 10: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Ninewa governorate. Data from UNAMI.<sup>1095</sup>

## Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 92 battles, 150 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 46 cases of violence against civilians, 4 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 292 security incidents of these types in Ninewa governorate, the majority taking place in the Mosul District. 21 protests were also reported in Ninewa governorate during the reference period.<sup>1096</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

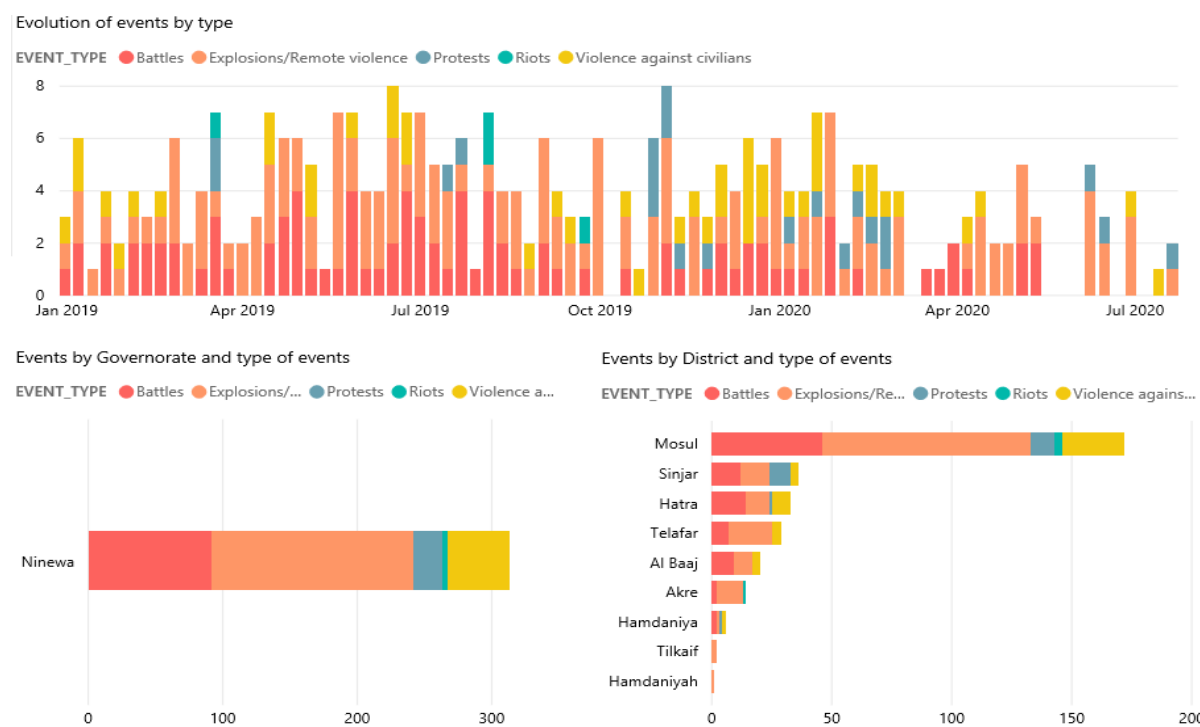


Figure 13: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Ninewa governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1097</sup>

<sup>1095</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>1096</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1097</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

## 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 \(2018\)](#).

ISF and PMUs controlling Ninewa are accused of using their power for gaining revenue through illegal activities which in turn weakens their combat capabilities and creates uncertainty in the local community.<sup>1098</sup>

In September 2019, in a high-profile case members of the 30<sup>th</sup> PMF Brigade (Liwa al-Shabak) stopped the motorcade of the deputy governor of Ninewa and a member of parliament at a checkpoint outside Mosul. Four bodyguards were injured and arrested. This was one of several incidents involving this brigade which had already been ordered by the central authorities to leave Ninewa in August 2018 and again in July 2019. This Shabak militia was accused of expelling Christians, confiscating property, denying access to aid organisations, and extorting money at their manned checkpoints. Its members were also accused of committing kidnapping and rape. In July 2019, the same group protested for two days against its removal, blocking the connecting road between Mosul and Erbil.<sup>1099</sup> The 50<sup>th</sup> Brigade, (Kata'ib Babilun, Babylon Brigade), a self-declared Christian militia, was also condemned for similar actions. The leaders of both militias have been issued with sanctions by the US government.<sup>1100</sup>

According to the Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC), there was a demonstration by dozens of inhabitants of the Ninewa Plains on 6 February 2020, against the presence of PMF and affiliated militia in the towns of the region. The protesters of different communities (Arabs, Kurds, Shabaks, Yezidis, Christians and Turkmen, many of them IDPs) accused the militias of perpetuating the displacement of the IDPs and imposing illegal taxation on road traffic through the plains. They called on the federal government to expel the militia and restore order in the region.<sup>1101</sup>

On 21 May 2020, Shafaaq reported that the Ninewa crisis cell was closing the entrances to the governorate to all arrivals (with the exception of food and fuel transport, as well as health and service personnel), due to the heightened COVID-19 risk.<sup>1102</sup> On 24 June 2020, the governor Najm Al-Jubouri announced a 3-day curfew for the governorate starting from 25 June.<sup>1103</sup>

On 29 May 2020, a Ninewa representative said that the province's international and internal borders were not in complete control of the security forces. He denounced the smuggling of grain and that on some routes between Ninewa and Kirkuk and Salah al-Din, illegal fees were imposed at some checkpoints. The representative urged the security forces to investigate the matter.<sup>1104</sup>

## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

The program director for Mosul at the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) declared that the explosives contamination in Mosul is 'of a previously unseen magnitude'.<sup>1105</sup> UN and Iraq joint assessments estimated that the destruction in Mosul created around eight million tons of rubble. The

<sup>1098</sup> Jamestown Foundation, Conditions in Mosul Ripen for Return of Islamic State; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 17 Issue: 1, 11 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1099</sup> Wing, J. Hashd's 30th Brigade In Ninewa Assaults Dep Governor and MP, 16 September 2019, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Mylroie, L., US sanctions Nineveh Plain's militia leaders for terrorizing population, blocking IDPs' return, and corruption 19 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1100</sup> Kurdistan24, Mylroie, L., US sanctions Nineveh Plain's militia leaders for terrorizing population, blocking IDPs' return, and corruption 19 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1101</sup> EPIC, ISHM: January 30 – February 6, 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1102</sup> Shafaaq News, Nineveh closes its entrances to arrivals, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1103</sup> Shafaaq News, 241 recoveries in Dhi Qar.. and a total curfew in Nineveh, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1104</sup> EPIC, ISHM: May 28 – June 4, 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1105</sup> New Arab (The), Explosives contamination in Mosul is 'of previously unseen magnitude', 06 December 2017, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 19 – 25, 2018, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

debris is heavily contaminated with explosive devices of different kinds which includes unexploded ordnance and booby-traps.<sup>1106</sup>

According to articles in Medialine, Al-Jazeera and France24, the reconstruction of the destroyed neighbourhoods of Mosul is only advancing at a slow pace, due to the extent of the damage and the lack of funding by the Iraqi state.<sup>1107</sup> According to governor Najm Al-Jubouri in an interview with Al-Jazeera, the startling bureaucracy has hindered the pace of reconstruction. The funding is not sufficient, but moreover, some of the funding has 'returned to state coffers because of bureaucracy'.<sup>1108</sup> According to both sources, the level of discontent within the population is very high.<sup>1109</sup>

The lack of access to basic services (water, electricity, education) is a challenge to the rural areas of the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar.<sup>1110</sup> In 2019, IOM estimated that it would take years of reconstruction efforts to achieve previous levels of economic activity in these regions. Returning residents of these areas found that a large proportion of their belongings, including their livestock had been destroyed or stolen. Farmers in these regions find it difficult to bring their holdings back to pre-war levels. Around 85 % of settlements in Sinjar depend on agriculture.<sup>1111</sup>

The head of Tal Afar municipality indicated in an interview with Kirkuk Now in May 2019, that the war with ISIL left about 35 % or 5 000 of the houses in the Tal Afar district damaged, while about 600 were completely destroyed.<sup>1112</sup> In an article by the Turkish news agency TRT World, the mayor of Tal Afar estimated in August 2019 that about 20 percent of the buildings in Tal Afar City have suffered damage or destruction during the conflict, and that only little repair work had been effectuated in the first two years following the liberation from ISIL.<sup>1113</sup>

In the Christian settlements in the Ninewa Plains, about 54% of the destroyed and damaged properties have been restored, according to data from 6 April 2020. While only 90 of 1 200 damaged houses in Tel Kayf have been restored, 545 of 580 of the damaged houses in Bashiqa are already restored.<sup>1114</sup> In July 2019, the US treasury Department accused Liwa al-Shabak fighters of taking over property in Bashiqa, looting houses and intimidating locals. Michael Knights noted that this 'has prevented resettlement by Christians and Arabs'.<sup>1115</sup>

UNMAS recorded in February 2020 that 'Over the past two years, UNMAS teams have found and removed over 62 000 explosive hazards in Mosul and the surrounding areas.'<sup>1116</sup> The district of Sinjar is also suffering from an intense contamination with unexploded ammunition and IEDs deliberately left by ISIL.<sup>1117</sup>

<sup>1106</sup> UNEP, Rising from the rubble: Iraq's Mosul takes steps to deal with war debris, 26 March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1107</sup> Medialine (The), Slow Pace of Rebuilding Mosul Angers Residents, 30 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Two years after ISIL defeat, Mosul still in ruins, YouTube Video, 9 December 2019, [url](#); France 24, Three years after IS, slim funds keep Mosul in ruins, 10 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1108</sup> Al-Jazeera, Two years after ISIL defeat, Mosul still in ruins, YouTube Video, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1109</sup> Medialine (The), Slow Pace of Rebuilding Mosul Angers Residents, 30 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Two years after ISIL defeat, Mosul still in ruins, YouTube Video, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1110</sup> IOM Iraq, Rural Areas in Ninewa – Legacies of Conflict on Rural Economies and Communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1111</sup> IOM Iraq, Rural Areas in Ninewa – Legacies of Conflict on Rural Economies and Communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1112</sup> Kirkuk Now, Talafari, J., Talafar lies in ruins amid Iraqi government negligence, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1113</sup> TRT World, Porter, L., The difficulty of normality in Tal Afar, the former Daesh stronghold, 27 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1114</sup> Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC), Nineveh Plains Reconstruction Process, 6 April 2020, [url](#); Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC), Telekef Restoration Process and Returnees, 6 April 2020, [url](#); Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC), Bashiqa Restoration Process and Returnees, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1115</sup> Kurdistan24, US sanctions Nineveh Plain's militia leaders for terrorizing population, blocking IDPs' return, and corruption, 19 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1116</sup> UNMAS Newsletter Iraq, February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1117</sup> Mines Advisory Group, MAG phone calls help Yazidi families returning to mine-ridden Sinjar, 3 August 2020, [url](#)

## Displacement and return

As of 30 June 2020, 324 078 individuals from Ninewa remained displaced, out of which 319 128 were displaced inside the governorate.<sup>1118</sup> According to IOM June 2020 data, Ninewa governorate ranks first amongst the top governorates of return with 1 807 170.<sup>1119</sup> UNOCHA's 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview noted that 'Considerable secondary displacement has been caused by forced and premature returns and forced or coerced departures from camps and informal settlements in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Anbar, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates', and 'Beginning in August 2019, a wave of government-initiated security screenings, camp closures and consolidations, in several instances using forced or coercive measures, led to new population movements, with significant reductions in particularly of the in-camp populations Ninewa populations and returnees.'<sup>1120</sup>

HRW noted in its annual 2019 report, published in January 2020 that security forces in Ninewa launched screenings across IDP camps to determine origins and possible links to ISIL of the inhabitants. In August and September 2019, the authorities in Ninewa and Salah al-Din expelled hundreds of IDPs, in some cases transporting them to their home communities despite security concerns.<sup>1121</sup>

HRW also noted in July 2020, that the KRG authorities blocked Arabs from returning to five villages northeast of Rabia in the area under Kurdish control. According to locals, about 1 200 Arab families have been prevented to return to these villages.<sup>1122</sup> In a statement reacting to the HRW report, the KRG authorities denied that only Arabs were prevented to return, and asserted that those villages were mostly destroyed during the conflict with ISIL in 2016 and 2017. Moreover, the locals were unable to return 'due to fears of unnamed armed groups, ISIS sleeper cells, Turkish airstrikes, the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and restrictions on movement due to the Coronavirus.'<sup>1123</sup>

The highest number of returns over time are towards Mosul District, followed by Tal Afar, and Al-Hamdaniya districts. Mosul has by far the most returnees with 1 034 430. The most returns happen within the governorate, followed by people coming back from displacement in the KRG-administered governorates Erbil and Dohuk.<sup>1124</sup> Returns from the de facto KRG-administered district of Sheikhan and Akre are counted as intra-governorate.<sup>1125</sup>

In a report by The Assyrian Policy Institute (API) from June 2020, the numbers of returnees into Christian areas in the Nineveh Plains are compared against the dominant local security actors, and API states that for the Christian IDPs, the single most important factor regarding a return remains the security situation. API points out that the return rates to areas secured by the Christian NPU are far higher than the return rates in towns outside NPU control.<sup>1126</sup> According to the Administrator for the Middle East Bureau at USAID in September 2019, the return rates are higher in Qaraqosh, because of

<sup>1118</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Displacement Master List, Displacement Dashboard, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1 of 5, 3 of 5 (select Ninewa Governorate)

<sup>1119</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return Master List, Returns Dashboard, Return Timeline, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>1120</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, November 2019, [url](#), pp. 5,17

<sup>1121</sup> HRW, World Report 2020 - Iraq, 14 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 297, 299

<sup>1122</sup> HRW, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Arabs Blocked From Returning, 19 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1123</sup> Kurdistan 24, KRG responds to HRW report accusing Kurdistan Region of 'blocking' Arabs from returning to their villages, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1124</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return Master List, Returns Dashboard, 15 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 3 of 5

<sup>1125</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Return Master List, Returns Dashboard, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4 of 5

<sup>1126</sup> Assyrian Policy Institute, Contested Control: The Future of Security in Iraq's Nineveh Plain, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 41

‘comparatively good security’.<sup>1127</sup> In the same testimony, the Administrator of USAID said that because of security reasons, the returns to Sinjar and Batnaya were blocked.<sup>1128</sup>

The same source stated on 26 September 2019 that:

‘Lack of security remains the primary barrier to returns. In Sinjar the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) runs unchecked, conscripting young Yazidi boys into its forces. Elsewhere in Ninewa the largest threat comes from Iranian-backed elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces which continue to occupy swathes of the Ninewa Plains long after ISIS’s defeat. Militias such as the 30th and 50th Brigades have become part local mafia, part Iranian proxy. They terrorize those families brave enough to have returned, extort local businesses, and openly pledge allegiance to Iran. According to Chaldean representatives, Christian returns to towns like Batanaya and Telkaif have reached only one to two percent because of persecution by these militias. In Bartela, the Christian community is under siege by the 30th Brigade that routinely resorts to anti-Christian rhetoric and puts up placards of Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khameni at entrances [of] the town.’<sup>1129</sup>

IOM stated in a report from April 2020, that between September and December 2019, almost 49 000 individuals left IDP camps to live in non-camp settings in Ninewa due to the closure of the camps. 85 % of them returned to their districts of origin, but the rest moved to new displacement outside of camps. The districts of Al-Ba’aj and Hatra host two thirds of these new arrivals.<sup>1130</sup> In Hatra, most new arrivals returned to their areas of origin, and only few experienced a new displacement. In Al-Ba’aj however, about half of the recently returned moved into their areas of origin, the other half became new non-camp IDPs in Markaz Ba’aj, the district capital.<sup>1131</sup> According to IOM, the most important problems for the returnees in Markaz Al-Ba’aj are related to the security situation: Next to the fear of new ISIL attacks and ethno religious tensions, the returnees have concerns about the excessive number of security actors in the area.<sup>1132</sup>

The same security concerns are the main issue for the returnees to Qaeyrrawan subdistrict of Sinjar district and Markaz Tal Afar, the capital of Tal Afar district.<sup>1133</sup> In Zummar, the returnees complain about the absence of a reconciliation process as an important problem. IOM considers this issue together with blocked returns to this district and fear for violence as the main drivers for the degradation of the social cohesion in this district.<sup>1134</sup> Blocked returns are not limited to Zummar. In Markaz Al-Ba’aj and Markaz Tal Afar, reports of blocked returns together with the illegal occupation of private properties add to the severity of the living conditions for the returnees in these locations.<sup>1135</sup> Husham al-Hashimi noted in July 2020, that the PMF in Tal Afar, ‘has made the return of these ISIS families contingent on the government’s provision of services to victims’ families.’<sup>1136</sup> According to the same source, the victim’s families are upset because of the delays of justice and compensations, confronting the authorities with the double problem of appeasing the victim’s families and welcoming back the families of the perpetrators at the same time.<sup>1137</sup>

<sup>1127</sup> Ferguson, H., Testimony before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, hearing on “Religious Minorities’ Fight to Remain in Iraq.” 26 September 2019 [Video], [url](#) (from 20:45)

<sup>1128</sup> Ferguson, H., Testimony before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, hearing on “Religious Minorities’ Fight to Remain in Iraq.” 26 September 2019, [Video], [url](#) (from 20:45)

<sup>1129</sup> Ferguson, H., Testimony before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, hearing on “Religious Minorities’ Fight to Remain in Iraq.” 26 September 2019, written statement, [url](#)

<sup>1130</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1131</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1132</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1133</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1134</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1135</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

<sup>1136</sup> Al-Hashimi, Husham, ISIS in Iraq: The Challenge of Reintegrating ‘ISIS Families’, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1137</sup> Al-Hashimi, Husham, ISIS in Iraq: The Challenge of Reintegrating ‘ISIS Families’, 7 July 2020, [url](#)



According to UNOCHA writing in November 2019, the highest number of people in need are in Ninewa governorate with 1 358 908.<sup>1138</sup> This is a significant reduction from a year before, when UNOCHA estimated a 2 168 222 people in need in Ninewa.<sup>1139</sup> Looking at the 'scale 2 severity' handled by IOM to evaluate the severity of the living conditions for the returnees<sup>1140</sup>, the whole Sinjar district scores high, together with the subdistricts Markaz al-Ba'aj (Al-Ba'aj), Hamam al-Aleel (Mosul District), Ayadiya, Markaz Tal Afar and Zummar subdistricts (Tal Afar).<sup>1141</sup>

According to Kirkuk Now, the Yezidi started to return to Sinjar in bigger numbers in June 2020. According to official data of the local administration cited by Kirkuk Now, more than 250 families moved back from IDP camps in Duhok to Sinjar district within ten days.<sup>1142</sup> The Turkish airstrikes against Sinjar in June 2020 hampered the return of the Yezidi. According to a leading official for the Iraqi administration for migration and displacement in Duhok, the return of the IDPs to Sinjar has halted because of two reasons: 'the Turkish airstrikes and the deployment of the Turkish commando forces to Haftanin area in Zakho district' (Duhok).<sup>1143</sup>

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<sup>1138</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 06

<sup>1139</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1140</sup> Community reconciliation, multiple security actors, blocked returns, checkpoints controlled by other security actors, illegal occupation of private residences, mines and sources of violence. Scale 1 is on livelihoods and basic services. IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

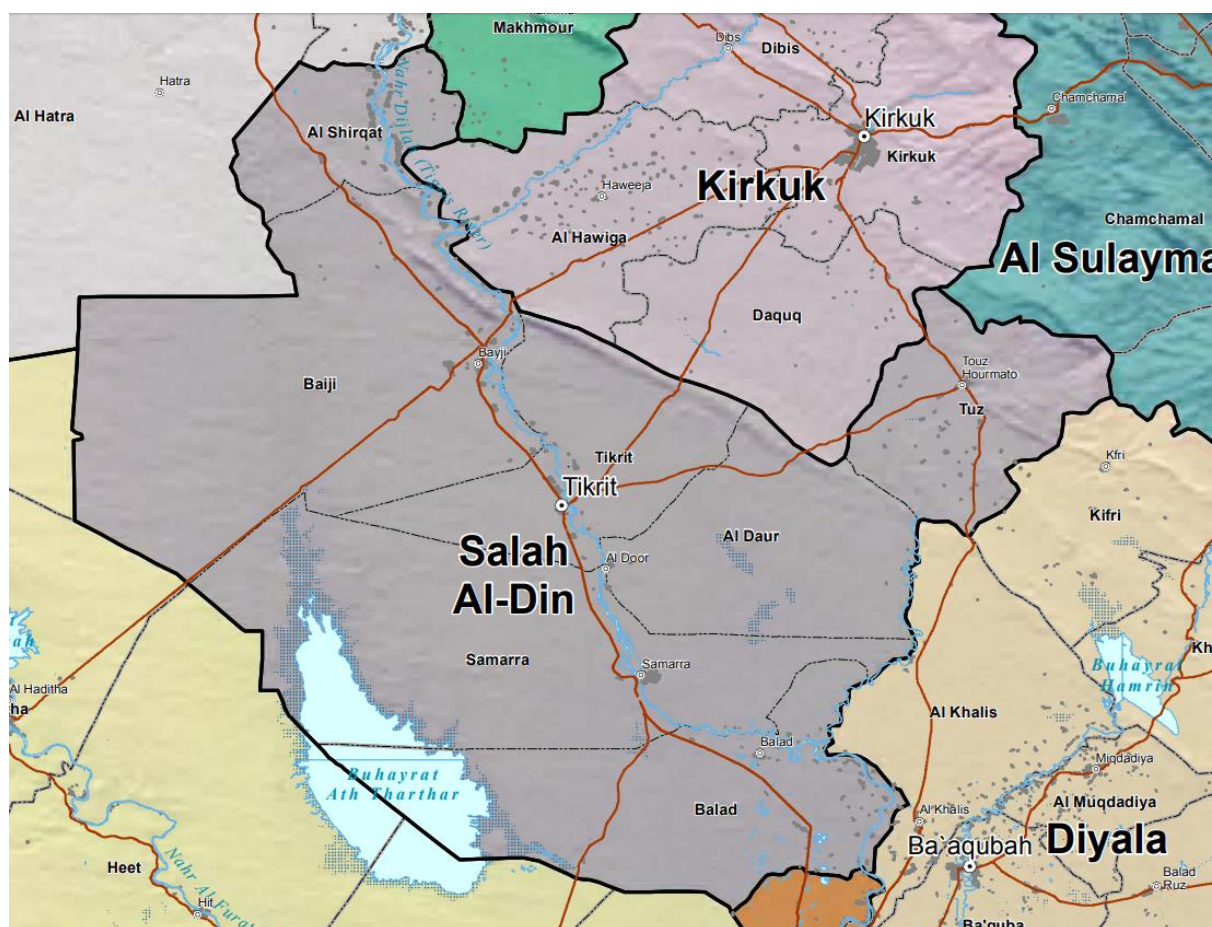
<sup>1141</sup> IOM Iraq, Return Dynamics in Ninewa Governorate, April 2020, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1142</sup> Kirkuk Now, Aziz A., Ezidis return home after six years of displacement, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1143</sup> Kirkuk Now, Aziz A., Turkish airstrikes hinder Ezidi return to Sinjar, 20 June 2020, [url](#)



## 2.7 Salah al-Din



Map 13: Salah al-Din with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations.<sup>1144</sup>

### 2.7.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

The governorate is divided into nine districts: al-Dour, al-Shirqat, Balad, Baiji, Fares, Samarra, Thethar, Tuz, and Tikrit.<sup>1145</sup> Tikrit city, the governorate's capital, and its surrounding areas, had an estimated pre-ISIL population of 200 000 inhabitants.<sup>1146</sup> It was also Saddam Hussein's place of birth and has been viewed as an important power centre of the Sunni Arabs.<sup>1147</sup> The only district of the governorate to come under the 'Disputed Internal Boundaries' as per Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution was Tuz (Khurmatu).<sup>1148</sup>

<sup>1144</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1145</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Salah Al-Din Governorate profile and monthly humanitarian response (January - December 2019), 5 February 2020, [url](#).

<sup>1146</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>1147</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>1148</sup> PAX, Human Security Survey Salahaddin, Iraq - 2019, Summary of Key Findings, 2019, [url](#), p. 1

## Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>1149</sup> the governorate's population at 1 637 232.<sup>1150</sup> The majority of Salah al-Din governorate's population was reported to be residing in rural areas.<sup>1151</sup>

## Ethnicity

Salah al-Din governorate is predominantly inhabited by Sunni Arabs, but also hosts a Shia Arab minority, as well as Turkmen and Kurdish minority groups.<sup>1152</sup> The population in Tuz district is particularly multi-ethnic and is reported to be 'split almost evenly among Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen (Shi'a and Sunni).'<sup>1153</sup> The governorate was 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.<sup>1154</sup>

Salah al-Din governorate is home to several Iraqi tribal confederations.<sup>1155</sup> The confederation, which is based in and around Tikrit 'unites a number of prominent tribes, perhaps the most notable being the Albu Nasir, which is the tribe of the former dictator Saddam Hussein and many of his closest associates.'<sup>1156</sup> According to a 2003 report the governorate also hosted other prominent tribes, such as the Jubur (al-Shirqat), Obeid (al-Alam), al-'Azza (Balad), Luhayb (al-Shirqat) and Harb (al-Dour).<sup>1157</sup>

## Road security

Tuz is a 'northern transportation hub' on the Baghdad-Kirkuk highway.<sup>1158</sup> Attacks staged by insurgent groups, including ISIL, continue to be reported on roads in Salah al-Din governorate throughout 2019 and 2020.<sup>1159</sup> Checkpoints in the governorate were also reported to be targeted during the same period.<sup>1160</sup> iMMAP assessed that between January and December 2019 there were large stretches of 'primary risk' and 'secondary risk' roads in Salah al-Din.<sup>1161</sup> According to iMMAP in June 2020, risks of

<sup>1149</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1150</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 إحصاءات سكانية العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by province, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1151</sup> PAX, Human Security Survey Salahaddin, Iraq - 2019, Summary of Key Findings, 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1152</sup> IOM, Kirkuk, Ninewa & Salah al-Din, governorate profile, June 2008, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1153</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 52. See also, ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries - Middle East Report N°194, 14 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>1154</sup> Time, How the Fate of One Holy Site Could Plunge Iraq Back into Civil War, 26 June 2014, [url](#); The New York Times, Blast destroys shrine in Iraq, setting off sectarian fury, 22 February 2006, [url](#)

<sup>1155</sup> Haddad, F., Comment made during the review of the 2019 EASO report, 18 January 2019, in: EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1156</sup> Gospodinov, I., Leiden University, The Sunni Tribes of Iraq: Tribal consolidation, through turbulent years 2003-2009, 2015, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1157</sup> Baram, A., The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Sadam Tribal System, Brookings Institution, 8 July 2003, [url](#)

<sup>1158</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries - Middle East Report N°194, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1159</sup> For examples of roadside bombs, IEDs and other attacks on roads in Salah al-Din governorate, see: The Baghdad Post, 3 truck drivers killed and a fourth wounded by gunmen in Salah al-Din, 17 December 2019, [url](#); Bas News, IS Temporarily Seizes Control of Kirkuk-Baghdad Road, 15 September 2019, [url](#); Talos, IED attack against Baiji Police Chief on Highway 1 in Salah al-Din Province, 2 May 2019, [url](#); Iraqi News, Back-to-back blasts kill 3, wound 11 in Iraq's Salahuddin, 27 January 2019, [url](#); The National, ISIS attacks resurgent on Iraq's 'Highway of Death', 7 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1160</sup> Bas News, IS Attacks Checkpoint, Kills and Wounds Six Iraqi Policemen, 31 May 2020, [url](#); VOA, Islamic State Attack Kills 2 Security Forces Near Northern Iraqi Oil Fields, 21 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1161</sup> iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Salah Al-Din Governorate from January to December 2019, 12 January 2020 [url](#)

explosive hazards on roads in Salah al-Din governorate were reported on the highway linking the cities Baghdad and Baiji, as well as on the road linking the towns Tikrit and Tuz Khurmatu.<sup>1162</sup>

## Economy

Salah al-Din governorate hosts Alas and Ajil oilfields in Tikrit district and Baiji refinery in Baiji district. Baiji refinery was considered integral to the Iraqi economy as the country's largest oil refinery along with its auxiliary industries, such as a fertilizer factory and a power plant.<sup>1163</sup> Baiji refinery was the scene of considerable levels of conflict and violence after ISIL took over control in June 2014.<sup>1164</sup> According to a 2017 report by GPPI, significant parts of Baiji district were under PMU control, including the refinery, although prolonged clashes between ISIL and pro-government forces as well as looting by the PMUs have left the refinery and the wider district 'decimated' and only minimal returns have taken place to the district.<sup>1165</sup> On 30 July 2020, anti-explosives control department were able to dismantle an anti-tank mine on the road adjacent to the oil pipeline in Baiji district in Salah al-Din governorate. The mine was suspected to have been planted by ISIL militants in an effort to target the 'oil wealth', according to local Iraqi news reports.<sup>1166</sup>

Alas oilfield was used by ISIL as a major source of revenue between 2014 and 2017.<sup>1167</sup> In 2019, the oilfield was reported to have been the continued target of ISIL attacks.<sup>1168</sup> For example, in March 2019, ISIL fighters attacked police forces at the oilfield during which the group sustained an unknown number of casualties, according to a media report.<sup>1169</sup> In May and July 2019, ISF repelled three separate attacks by ISIL on security forces stationed at the Alas oilfield.<sup>1170</sup> In October 2019, ISIL fighters staged an attack on security forces at a checkpoint near the oilfield, in an attempt to destabilise security efforts by targeting a 'symbolic or economically vital target', according to an analyst of the ISW.<sup>1171</sup> Two members of the security forces were killed, while three were wounded.<sup>1172</sup>

Iraqi authorities repaired Ajil oilfield in October 2018, after it had been set on fire by ISIL in 2015, according to media reports.<sup>1173</sup> The oilfield was reported to have resumed oil production since then.<sup>1174</sup>

<sup>1162</sup> iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Salah Al-Din Governorate 01-30 June 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#). For an overview of explosive hazards risk level on roads in Salah Al-Din Governorate since 2019, see iMMAP's monthly updated maps.

<sup>1163</sup> Derzsi-Horváth, A. et al., Iraq after ISIL: Baiji, 13 September 2017, GPPI, [url](#)

<sup>1164</sup> Derzsi-Horváth, A. et al., Iraq after ISIL: Baiji, 13 September 2017, GPPI, [url](#). See also, Iraq Oil Report, Once fixable, Baiji refinery plundered beyond repair, 28 January 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1165</sup> Derzsi-Horváth, A. et al., Iraq after ISIL: Baiji, 13 September 2017, GPPI, [url](#). See also, World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 76-77

<sup>1166</sup> NINA, Anti- Explosives Force Defuses A Mine Planted To Target An Oil Pipeline In Salah al-Din, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1167</sup> Business Insider, ISIS is staging attacks in symbolically important places to send a message: We're back, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1168</sup> Business Insider, ISIS is staging attacks in symbolically important places to send a message: We're back, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1169</sup> ANF News, ISIS attacked Alas oil field near Kirkuk, 25 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1170</sup> Kurdistan 24, Iraqi forces repel third ISIS attack in 2019 on oilfields in Salahuddin, 29 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1171</sup> Business Insider, ISIS is staging attacks in symbolically important places to send a message: We're back, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1172</sup> Reuters, ISIS attack kills two security forces near northern Iraqi oilfields, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1173</sup> Reuters, Iraq repairs Ajil oilfield torched by Islamic State: minister, 9 October 2018, [url](#); Xinhua Net, Iraq rehabilitates Ajil oilfield destroyed by IS militants, 9 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1174</sup> Reuters, Iraq repairs Ajil oilfield torched by Islamic State: minister, 9 October 2018, [url](#); Xinhua Net, Iraq rehabilitates Ajil oilfield destroyed by IS militants, 9 October 2018, [url](#)

## 2.7.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

As part of ISIL's rapid expansion across large swathes of Iraq in the summer of 2014, ISIL forces captured parts of Salah al-Din governorate, including Tuz district, the oil town of Baiji and the governorate's capital Tikrit as well as al-Shirqat.<sup>1175</sup> The towns of Samarra and Amerli were reported to have been successfully defended against ISIL forces by PMUs and the areas remained unconquered.<sup>1176</sup>

Salah al-Din governorate was among the first to be liberated as part of the Iraqi forces' led offensive against ISIL having retaken most of the key population centres from ISIL's control by mid-2015. Salah al-Din was also one of the first governorates to witness large-scale return of IDPs, with 130 000 IDPs having returned by July 2015 and 360 000 by December 2016, mostly Sunni Arabs. Despite ISIL's ousting, however, the governorate experienced 'much higher rates of abduction, killing, forced evictions, unlawful detentions, and property destruction than other governorates', especially against families and tribes accused of affiliation with ISIL. This development is largely attributed to the dominant role that PMUs played in the governorate, which influenced existing political divisions.<sup>1177</sup>

Since ISIL's expulsion from Salah al-Din governorate in 2015, Tuz district has been under split control between Kurdish Security Forces holding the northern part of the district and different PMU factions dominating the remaining parts of the district.<sup>1178</sup> The district's capital, Tuz Khurmatu, was also divided between Kurdish Security Forces and PMUs and remained a hotbed for clashes between those groups as well as 'tit-for-tat retaliation against civilians.'<sup>1179</sup> Following the 2017 Kurdish independence referendum, Tuz district became caught up in high levels of violence during the military stand-off between the Iraqi government forces, including PMUs, and Kurdish forces over the disputed territories.<sup>1180</sup>

In October 2017, violence escalated in the ethnically mixed city of Tuz Khurmatu in significant clashes between Kurdish Security Forces and ISF, supported by PMUs.<sup>1181</sup> These clashes and ensuing sporadic violence over the following two months, led to civilian casualties, displacement, destruction of civilian property and infrastructure along ethnic lines.<sup>1182</sup> Tuz district was reported to have 'suffered more

<sup>1175</sup> PAX, Human Security Survey Salahaddin, Iraq - 2019, Summary of Key Findings, 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Norway, Landinfo, Irak: Salah al-Din provins - sikkerhetssituasjonen i perioden juli - september 2018 [Salah al Din Governorate – Security situation July-September 2018], 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 2; Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1176</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1177</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>1178</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 44; Al-Monitor, Why Tuz Khormato clashes were more than just local skirmishes, 5 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1179</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 44; Al-Monitor, Why Tuz Khormato clashes were more than just local skirmishes, 5 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1180</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries - Middle East Report N°194, 14 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 15, 17; UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Al, Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1181</sup> UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Al, Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of thousands forced to flee Tuz Khurmatu amid indiscriminate attacks, lootings and arson, 24 November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1182</sup> UNAMI/OHCHR, Report on Human Rights in Iraq – July to December 2017, 8 July 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Al Shahid, Security and stability has returned to Tuz Khurmatu after months of clashes, 24 January 2018, [url](#); OHCHR, Press briefing notes on Iraq executions, Iraq: Tuz Khurmatu clashes and El Salvador, 15 December 2017, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Fresh evidence that tens of

violence than other disputed areas in the immediate aftermath of the October 2017 takeover by the Iraqi army and Hashd [PMU].<sup>1183</sup>

Following the withdrawal of Kurdish Security Forces from the disputed areas, Sunni PMUs took full control of Tuz district's rural areas, while Tuz Khurmatu was controlled by local ISF and police, who were reported to be mostly of the Shia sect, according to the ICG.<sup>1184</sup> According to media reports, the central government's Rapid Response Forces were deployed to Tuz Khurmatu in January 2018.<sup>1185</sup> According to reports, one of the Badr Organization's longstanding top commanders established himself as the 'strongman' in Tuz Khurmatu, along with his 'personal militia' that he formed with local Shia Turkmen, who were reported to be involved in looting and arms- and drugs trafficking.<sup>1186</sup> The ICG's assessment in December 2018 was that 'security dominance by a single group – a minority in the district and even more so in the governorate – is a recipe for continued violent conflict.'<sup>1187</sup>

The UN reported that between 23 and 27 November 2017, ISF conducted the last military offensive in central northern Iraq, aimed at clearing remnants of ISIL from the Jazirah desert expanse, which spans across the governorates of Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninawa.<sup>1188</sup> 14 000 km<sup>2</sup> and 175 villages in the Jazirah and upper Euphrates areas were cleared.<sup>1189</sup> Following this operation, the Prime Minister of Iraq at the time, Haider al-Abadi, declared final victory over ISIL on 9 December 2017.<sup>1190</sup> However, despite this declaration, ISIL continued carrying out asymmetric attacks targeting security forces and civilians and causing civilian casualties throughout 2018, including in Salah al-Din governorate.<sup>1191</sup> ISIL was also reported in late 2017 to roam the countryside, attacking villages at night.<sup>1192</sup> The security vacuum in rural parts of Salah al-Din governorate has enabled ISIL militants to operate and control limited amounts of territory, which has led to an increase in the number of attacks from 2017 to 2018 in the governorate.<sup>1193</sup>

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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 November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1183</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries - Middle East Report N°194, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1184</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries - Middle East Report N°194, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1185</sup> Rudaw, Iraq's Rapid Response Force deployed to Tuz Khurmatu, 13 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1186</sup> Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1187</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries - Middle East Report N°194, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1188</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/42], 17 January 2018, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>1189</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/42], 17 January 2018, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>1190</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/42], 17 January 2018, [url](#), para. 1

<sup>1191</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2421 (2018) [S/2019/101], 1 February 2019, [url](#), paras 14, 35

UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2421 (2018) [S/2018/975], 31 October 2018, [url](#), paras 22, 43, 44; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2367 (2017) [S/2018/677], 9 July 2018, [url](#), para. 20. See also, Flood, D., From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC Volume 11, Issue 8, September 2018, [url](#), p. 33; The Washington Post, ISIS is making a comeback in Iraq just months after Baghdad declared victory, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1192</sup> ICG, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq's Disputed Internal Boundaries - Middle East Report N°194, 14 December 2018, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1193</sup> Markusen, M., The Islamic State and the Persistent Threat of Extremism in Iraq, CSIS, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

## Armed actors

### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

The ISF have the overall responsibility of the security within the governorate and predominantly consist of units from the Iraqi army, federal police and to some extent special forces.<sup>1194</sup> In many of the rural areas the ISF are reportedly sparsely present, particularly since many have been redeployed to contain anti-government protests.<sup>1195</sup> According to the US-led Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, the ISF do not have a large enough force to control large desert areas, have also been unable to retain control of territory cleared of ISIL in Salah al-Din governorate, and have limited access to ISIL support zones in both Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates.<sup>1196</sup> In a May 2020 report Husham Al-Hashimi noted the presence of ISF in Samarra, Smarra island and Dhuluiya, Dujail, Ishaqi, Balad, Al-Dour, Tikrit, Al Alam, Baijji, Sharqat, Makhoul, Siniya, Salah al-Din Desert, and the areas around Tuz Khurmatu as of December 2019.<sup>1197</sup>

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.<sup>1198</sup> Salah al-Din governorate is split between the Salah al-Din Operations Command (SDOC), covering the northern part of the governorate, including Tikrit, Baiji and al-Shirqat,<sup>1199</sup> the Samarra Operations Command (SOC) covering Samarra, large parts of the Jazeera desert west of Samarra and southern Salah al-Din governorate,<sup>1200</sup> as well as the Dijla Operations Command (DOC), covering all of Diyala governorate, eastern Salah al-Din governorate and Tuz Khurmatu town, the Alas and Ajil oilfields, and the Hamrin Mountain Range.<sup>1201</sup> According to the ISW, the SDOC and SOC did not exist in 2013 and were likely created to support forward operations in the fight against ISIL.<sup>1202</sup> During 2019 and 2020, several sources reported on units operating under the SDOC and SOC having been involved in anti-ISIL military operations of various scales throughout Salah al-Din governorate.<sup>1203</sup>

### *Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)*

PMUs played a significant role in the liberation of areas of Salah al-Din governorate from ISIL, leading or accompanying ISF in the recapturing of Tuz, Tikrit, al-Dour, al-Alam, Baiji, and parts of al-Shirqat districts.<sup>1204</sup> Present in large numbers across the governorate, Shia PMUs exerted control over strategic locations and even areas beyond their official responsibility.<sup>1205</sup> Shia PMUs also developed their own auxiliary forces, by mobilising a local Turkmen PMU that controlled half of Tuz and

<sup>1194</sup> Landinfo, Irak: Salah al-Din provins-sikkerhetssituasjonen i perioden juli-september 2018 (Salah al-Din Governorate - Security Situation July-September 2018), 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1195</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#); Landinfo, Irak: Salah al-Din provins-sikkerhetssituasjonen i perioden juli-september 2018 (Salah al-Din Governorate - Security Situation July-September 2018), 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1196</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2019 – October 25, 2019, 19 November 2019, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1197</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1198</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1199</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>1200</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1201</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1202</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1203</sup> NINA, Salah Al-Din Operations Command carries out a broad military operation, 27 July 2020, [url](#); The Baghdad Post, Combined force arrests 2 terrorists, finds den in Salah al-Din, 8 May 2020, [url](#); CJTF-OIR, 27 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

<sup>1204</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>1205</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 44

establishing a number of Sunni tribal PMUs in Tikrit and surrounding areas, as well as in Baiji and Shirqat.<sup>1206</sup>

According to a 2017 ISW report on the Iraqi Order of Battle, different factions of PMUs 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 command.<sup>1207</sup> Sources stated to DIS/Landinfo during their April 2018 FFM to KRI that there was ‘a substantive proliferation of militias and armed groups that are not under government control’ in Salah al-Din.<sup>1208</sup>

According to analysts Michael Knights<sup>1209</sup> and Phillip Smyth in 2019,<sup>1210</sup> the PMU militia Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq was the dominant security, economic and political actor in the northern Baghdad belts as well as in southern Salah al-Din governorate, including Taji, Dujail, and Balad. Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq was reported to engage in extortion, intimidation and looting in their areas of control, including demanding ‘protection payments’ from local business owners.<sup>1211</sup> Moqtada al-Sadr’s militia, Saraya Salam, was reported to exclusively control the shrine city of Samarra, while Camp Speicher, a large and unused military base west of Tikrit, was reported to have been dominated by Kata’ib Hezbollah, Kata’ib Al-Imam Ali, and Kata’ib Jund Al-Imam (PMU Brigade 6).<sup>1212</sup> Kata’ib al-Tayyar al-Risali (PMU Brigade 31) exercised control and were most active in Baiji district. Alas oilfield in Tikrit district was controlled by militias, who engaged in diverting oil for trucking to Iran (and the Gulf ports) via the KRI.<sup>1213</sup> The Badr forces reportedly control all areas east of the Tigris River in Diyala, the Jallam desert east of Samarra and Tuz district, as well as Kirkuk.<sup>1214</sup>

According to reports, militia recruits in Tuz Khurmatu were primarily drawn from the Shia Turkmen community in response to ISIL anti-Shia violence in 2014/2015.<sup>1215</sup> Iraqi security expert Michael Knights wrote in a 2019 research paper on Iraqi militias that Tuz Khurmatu and Kirkuk were controlled by the Turkmen PMU Northern Axis led by Abu Ridha Yilmaz al-Najjar.<sup>1216</sup> The same source reported in 2019 that local Turkmen militia groups operating in Tuz Khurmatu were implicated in illicit oil extraction and smuggling to Iran.<sup>1217</sup> According to a study by GPPI from 2017, ‘Turkmen PMF were at the forefront of many of the significant human rights abuses while they held territory or engaged in operations with Shi’a PMF, including summary executions, kidnappings, arbitrary detention, torture, looting, and the mass destruction of houses.’<sup>1218</sup>

<sup>1206</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>1207</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 17, 22, 23

<sup>1208</sup> 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, [source: an Iraqi analyst], [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1209</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1210</sup> Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1211</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Diyaruna, Iran-backed militias in Iraq demand ‘protection money’, 2 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1212</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4; The Atlantic, Nation Building at Gunpoint, Can Samarra, a Sunni-majority city run by Shia militias, be a test case for fixing a broken Iraq?, 10 May 2019, [url](#); PAX, Human Security Survey Salahaddin, Iraq - 2019, Summary of Key Findings, 2019 [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1213</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1214</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>1215</sup> IISS, Iran’s Networks of Influence in the Middle East - Chapter Four: Iraq, November 2019, [url](#); Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Tuz, GPPI, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1216</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1217</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1218</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 26.



In a May 2020 report Husham al-Hashimi noted the presence of PMUs in Dujail, Tuz Khurmatu, Amirili, east and west Salah-al Din, Tikrit and areas east of Tikrit, Salah al-Din – Baghdad Road, Samarra, Balad, Mutubijaha northeast Ishaqi, Makhould Mountains, Therthar Lake, Shaiat, Baiji, al-Alam, al-Dour, Makhoul and Khanuqa Mountains (South Tikrit), Zawiyah as of December 2019.<sup>1219</sup>

### *Sunni Tribal Militias*

Few Sunni tribal groups have mobilised their support to the PMU forces within the governorate. An estimated 2 000 to 3 000 fighters have been recruited by PMUs, primarily by the Badr Brigades and the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, in Salah al-Din governorate, which is relatively few, in comparison to Ninewa governorate where an estimated 18 000 have been recruited into a Sunni Tribal Mobilization Force.<sup>1220</sup> The low number of Sunni recruits in Salah al-Din governorate are mainly attributed to the deep mistrust Sunni tribal leaders feel towards the Shia dominated PMUs.<sup>1221</sup>

For example, a major Sunni tribal militia was reported to be Liwa Salahaddin (51<sup>st</sup> Brigade), which was based in northern Salah al-Din governorate, mostly in Shirqat, Tikrit and Baiji districts.<sup>1222</sup> It was reportedly led by Yazan al-Jabouri, the son of Iraqi MP and former Ba'athist insurgent leader Mishan al-Jabouri. The 51<sup>st</sup> Brigade was said to collaborate with Iranian-affiliated Shia PMUs and claimed to have received weapons and intelligence support from Iran.<sup>1223</sup> According to a GPPI 2017 study, the 51st Brigade enjoyed backing from the PMU when it engaged in illegal activities, such as when 'there were significant allegations of misconduct against the 51<sup>st</sup> Brigade, including looting (notably in Tikrit), robbery, abductions, and revenge killings, as well as smuggling goods to ISIL fighters.'<sup>1224</sup> However, at times, the 51<sup>st</sup> Brigade was also called on to carry out activities at the behest of the PMU, including conducting inspection tours and house searches on behalf of the Shia PMU.<sup>1225</sup>

### *ISIL*

According to the UN Security Council, '[w]hile the overall level of violence related to ISIL has decreased, the group remains a significant threat and has shifted to insurgent tactics, with attacks continuing in different parts of the country.'<sup>1226</sup> Security vacuums caused by re-deployments 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.<sup>1227</sup> In remote areas of Iraq, ISIL is reported to continue to mount attacks on official checkpoints, infrastructure and against officials.<sup>1228</sup> ISIL operations in many rural areas in Salah al-Din governorate in 2020 have been described as an 'assassination campaign' by the

<sup>1219</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1220</sup> Gaston, E., *Sunni Tribal Forces*, GPPI, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1221</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., *Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control*, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 25.

<sup>1222</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., *Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control*, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), pp. 48-49.

<sup>1223</sup> IISS, *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East - Chapter Four: Iraq*, November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1224</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., *Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control*, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 49.

<sup>1225</sup> Gaston, E. and Derzsi-Horvath, A., *Iraq after ISIL: Iraq After ISIL, Sub-State Actors, Local Forces, and the Micro-Politics of Control*, GPPI, March 2018, [url](#), p. 49.

<sup>1226</sup> UN Security Council, *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

<sup>1227</sup> *The New York Times*, *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., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#); CNBC, *America is ignoring Iraq's turbulent protests at its peril*, security experts say, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1228</sup> UN Security Council, *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

late security analyst Husham al-Hashimi.<sup>1229</sup> The ICG further assessed in May 2020 that the militant group's attacks have become 'more assertive' and have been primarily focused on a 'rural belt reaching across Iraq's centre north, in Kirkuk, Salahuddin and Diyala provinces.'<sup>1230</sup> It is also reported that ISIL has 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.'<sup>1231</sup>

Michael Knights and Alex Almeida have observed a pattern of rising levels of recovery, activity and attacks associated with ISIL since 2019 in Salah al-Din governorate and identified the strongest ISIL operating environment in Salah al-Din government to be the Jallam Desert, from where the group has access to a range of target areas, including Samarra,<sup>1232</sup> the Alas oilfield, Tuz Khurmatu, and the governorate borders with southern Kirkuk and western Diyala.<sup>1233</sup> They have moreover identified the following areas in Salah al-Din governorate as housing active ISIL attack cells: Eastern Thar Thar in Balad district, southern Jallam Desert in Mutaibijah district, Udham and northeastern Thar Thar in Tikrit district, Baiji, Siniyah, Makhul, and northern Jallam Desert in Hamrin district, Tuz, Pulkhana, and Zarga.<sup>1234</sup> The ISW identified the Hamrin Mountains as a favourable support zone for ISIL allowing for links with other support zones in Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates.<sup>1235</sup> ISIL stored weapons and other supplies in tunnel systems in this area, and its leaders used the area to regroup. The Hamrin Mountains provide for opportunities to launch attacks in areas around Tuz Khurmatu.<sup>1236</sup>

According to Husham al-Hashimi, as of December 2019, ISIL had around 350 to 400 active fighters in the Salah al-Din 'sector', who are supported by 400 inactive fighters or 'sleeper cells' and mainly deal with logistics.<sup>1237</sup> Small patrols of nine to 11 men operated in various places and carried out attacks. In March 2020, ISIL adopted a new approach by activating autonomous sleeper cells to carry out attacks in rural areas south of Samarra and north of Baghdad.<sup>1238</sup> According to the ICG, many of these active ISIL fighters are Iraqis and local to their respective areas of operation.<sup>1239</sup>

### 2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

Successive UN Security Council reports from 2019 and the first half of 2020 continue to report that ISIL remnants frequently carry out asymmetric attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, especially in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates.<sup>1240</sup>

<sup>1229</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1230</sup> ICG, *When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard*, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1231</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1232</sup> 'ISIL's encroachment on Samarra city aims to force Salah al-Din province to further rely on PMF divisions, which ISIL hopes will worsen Sunni-Shiite tensions.' Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1233</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., *Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020*, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 16. See also, Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1234</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., *Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020*, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 23. See also, Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#); ISW, *ISIL Resurgence Update - April 2019*, 19 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1235</sup> ISW, *ISIL's second comeback assessing the next ISIS insurgency*, 23 July 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1236</sup> ISW, *ISIL's second comeback assessing the next ISIS insurgency*, 23 July 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1237</sup> 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., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1238</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., *ISIL in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities*, CGP, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1239</sup> ICG, *Averting an ISIS Resurgence in Iraq and Syria*, Middle East Report N°207, 11 October 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1240</sup> UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 24; UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019)*; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 23; UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019)*, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/903], 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 29; UN Security Council, *Implementation of resolution*

According to Michael Knights' and Alex Almeida's report from May 2020, Salah al-Din governorate has consistently been ranked the lowest or second lowest of the six governorates suffering from the ISIL insurgency in terms of attacks throughout 2019 and early 2020, but has still seen signs of ISIL recovery.<sup>1241</sup> The analysis on Salah al-Din governorate further shows that '[a]ttacks per month rose from 13 in Q1 2019 to 24.6 in Q3 and 35 per month in Q4, and then stayed close to this level in Q1 2020. For comparison, this is still far lower than the 116 monthly attacks in 2013 or the 84 monthly attacks in 2017, but higher than 2012 levels of 19 attacks per month.'<sup>1242</sup> The same report notes an emerging trend of bomb-making and roadside bomb emplacement capability in the third quarter of 2019, as well as a focus on attacking isolated checkpoints in stand-up fights involving platoon-sized ISIL units.<sup>1243</sup> The targeting of ISIL-opposed Sunni preachers and Tribal Mobilization Force officers was reported to have been on the increase.<sup>1244</sup> Moreover, ISIL 'continued to assassinate village leaders and others accused of cooperating with the military while kidnapping farmers and demanding cuts of their profits', including in rural villages in Salah al-Din.<sup>1245</sup>

According to open sources data from ACLED, EPIC and Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency database, ISIL conducted around 30 attacks in Salah al-Din governorate from January to March 2020.<sup>1246</sup>

Analysis by Joel Wing of Musings on Iraq shows that ISIL launched a 'spring campaign' across Iraq as the months of April and May 2020 saw a significant surge in violence, which largely subsided by June 2020.<sup>1247</sup> Salah al-Din governorate has seen 11 incidents in April, 45 incidents in May and 13 incidents in June 2020, illustrating that the governorate 'has turned into a secondary front for IS where its main priority is to rebuild.'<sup>1248</sup>

Following continued and heightened activity of ISIL, including in parts of Salah al-Din governorate in 2019/2020, the ISF have launched several major coordinated anti-ISIL military operations in response.<sup>1249</sup> In 2019, the Iraqi government launched Operation Will of Victory, which was aimed at expelling ISIL fighters from remote areas, including in Salah al-Din governorate.<sup>1250</sup> In February 2020,

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2470 (2019), Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/660], 5 August 2019, [url](#), para 19; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018), Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/365], 2 May 2019, [url](#), para. 18

<sup>1241</sup> In 2019, the following numbers of ISIL attacks were recorded in the top six governorates in Iraq: Diyala (550), Nineveh (293), Kirkuk (228), Baghdad (214), Salah al-Din (142), and Anbar (105); Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 14, 16

<sup>1242</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1243</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1244</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A., Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, CTC, Vol. 13, Issue 5, May 2020, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1245</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2019 - March 31, 2019, 7 May 2019, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>1246</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020 - March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1247</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1248</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1249</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 24; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 23; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/903], 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 29; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/660], 5 August 2019, [url](#), para 19; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018), Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/365], 2 May 2019, [url](#), paras. 18, 19

<sup>1250</sup> UN Security Council, 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. 5. See also, UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 23; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), Report of the Secretary-General [S/2019/903], 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 29

the ISF launched a new military operation against ISIL entitled ‘Heroes of Iraq’.<sup>1251</sup> The first phase of the operations took place in May 2020 and focused on Anbar, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates.<sup>1252</sup> The second phase was announced on 2 June 2020 and focused on ISIL holdouts on the fringes of Salah al-Din and Kirkuk governorates and the third phase was launched on 22 June 2020 in order to clear areas of Salah al-Din, Diyala, Samarra, and Kirkuk governorates from ISIL remnants.<sup>1253</sup> According to the US-led Combined Joint Task Force thousands of ISF members, consisting of the Iraqi Army, ‘Qwat al-Khasah’ Special Forces Brigade, Iraqi Air Force, Emergency Response Divisions, federal police, PMUs, and Iraqi security and intelligence agencies, cleared over 4,800 km<sup>2</sup> searching for ISIL hideouts during the third phase of ‘Heroes of Iraq’ in Salah ad-Din governorate between 22 and 24 June 2020.<sup>1254</sup> Phase four, launched in mid-July 2020 focused on Diyala governorate mainly.<sup>1255</sup> According to Joel Wing, Iraq’s extensive military efforts to clear areas of ISIL presence, have slowed ISIL’s activity, but not eliminated it.<sup>1256</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 8 January 2019, an ISIL Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED) detonated at a checkpoint in Tikrit, Salah ad-Din governorate.<sup>1257</sup>
- In early February 2019, ISIL militants killed three brothers after abducting them in the norther part of Salah al-Din governorate, where they were picking truffles on Makhoul Mountain.<sup>1258</sup>
- On 22 May 2019, ISIL militants staged an attack on a checkpoint near Alas oilfield in Salah al-Din governorate during which one police officer was killed and four others were injured.<sup>1259</sup>
- In early August 2019, armed men who had claimed allegiance to ISIL, publicly beheaded a police officer in a rural village south of the city of Samarra in Salah al-Din governorate.<sup>1260</sup>
- On 7 September 2019, a civilian was killed by a bomb that exploded inside his car in an area west of Samarra city in Salah al-Din governorate.<sup>1261</sup>
- On 9 February 2020, three civilians were injured by an ISIL IED explosion in Al-Mahzam village in Tikrit district.<sup>1262</sup>
- On 24 February 2020, suspected ISIL militants killed three civilians and injured a fourth in an attack on a soccer field and a coffee shop in the town of Balad.<sup>1263</sup>
- On 16 March 2020, suspected ISIL militants detonated a motorcycle-borne IED at a market in Tuz injuring 6 people.<sup>1264</sup>

<sup>1251</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>1252</sup> Rudaw, Iraqi forces launch third phase of ‘Heroes of Iraq’ anti-ISIS operation, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1253</sup> Rudaw, Iraqi forces launch third phase of ‘Heroes of Iraq’ anti-ISIS operation, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1254</sup> CJTF-OIR, Iraqi Security Forces demolish Daesh safe havens during “Heroes of Iraq III”, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1255</sup> Rudaw, Iraq continues fourth phase of anti-ISIS operation in Diyala, 26 July 2020, [url](#); Diyaruna, Iraqi forces kick off 4th phase of ‘Heroes of Iraq’ campaign, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1256</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State’s Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#). See also, ICG, When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Los Angeles Times, Iraq’s new war against Islamic State: Halting the group’s budding rural resurgence, 8 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1257</sup> ISW, ISIS’s second comeback assessing the next ISIS insurgency, 23 July 2019, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>1258</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS executes three brothers after kidnapping in Iraq’s Salahuddin, 8 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1259</sup> Anadolu Agency, 2 Iraqi policemen killed in attacks in Saladin, Diyala, 23 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1260</sup> The New York Times, ISIS Is Regaining Strength in Iraq and Syria, 19 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1261</sup> Reuters, Four killed, including a civilian, across Iraq in day of militant attacks, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1262</sup> iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response, Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News (6-12 FEB 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1263</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: 20 February – February 27, 2020, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1264</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: March 11 - 17, 2020, 17 March 2020 [url](#)

- According to the ICG, on 1 May 2020, ISIL launched a complex operation described as ‘one of its most ambitious operations in Iraq in recent memory’<sup>1265</sup>, suggesting that the operation was well planned.<sup>1266</sup> Several ISIL units attacked Iraqi PMUs and secured a rural section of Salah al-Din governorate near the city of Samarra. Ten PMU fighters were killed during hours-long clashes.<sup>1267</sup>
- On 15 May 2020, an armed group stormed and set fire to a house killing all residents and destroyed two vehicles and their wheat field in Al-Jalam, north of Samarra district.<sup>1268</sup>
- On 13 June 2020, ISIL attacked the home of Salah ad-Din deputy governor Ismail al-Halloub in the Ishaqi subdistrict in southeastern Salah al-Din and clashes injured one ISF member and one other person.<sup>1269</sup>
- On 2 July 2020, an IED targeted a PUM patrol west of Baji, killing two intelligence officers from PMU brigade 35.<sup>1270</sup>
- On 15 July 2020, a US convoy was targeted with a series of explosions in Makeshifa area in Samarra district.<sup>1271</sup>
- On 17 July 2020, an IED killed two civilians and injured three near Al-Namil village and Al-Shirqat district.<sup>1272</sup>
- On 25 July 2020, ISIL militants attacked the village of Sumoum, located northwest of killing five civilians, including the village mukhtar.<sup>1273</sup>
- On 27 July 2020, a roadside bomb in Shirqat district hit a civilian vehicle and killed a father and his daughter, while his wife and two other children sustained serious injuries.<sup>1274</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Salahadin	31	39	58	<b>97</b>	12	16	33	<b>49</b>

Table 11: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Salah ad Din governorate.<sup>1275</sup>

<sup>1265</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1266</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1267</sup> SIPRI, The resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq: Political and military responses, 9 June 2020, [url](#); ICG, When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 1; BBC, Islamic State militants kill ten Iraqis in ‘fierce clashes’, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1268</sup> iMMAP-Humanitarian Access Respond, Weekly Explosive Hazard Incidents Flash News- 14-20 May 2020, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1269</sup> EPIC, ISHM: June 11 – June 18, 2020, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1270</sup> EPIC, ISHM: July 2 – July 9, 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1271</sup> NINA, News About Targeting An American Convoy Makeshifa Area In Samarra, 15 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1272</sup> iMMAP, Weekly Explosive Hazard Incidents Flash News- 16-22 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1273</sup> EPIC, ISHM: July 23 – July 30, 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1274</sup> Shafaq News, Two victims in an explosion in Saladin, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1275</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 July 2020

## Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 155 battles, 151 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 21 cases of violence against civilians, 0 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 327 security incidents of these types in Salah ad Din governorate, the majority taking place in Daur district. 3 protests were also reported in Salah ad Din governorate during the reference period.<sup>1276</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

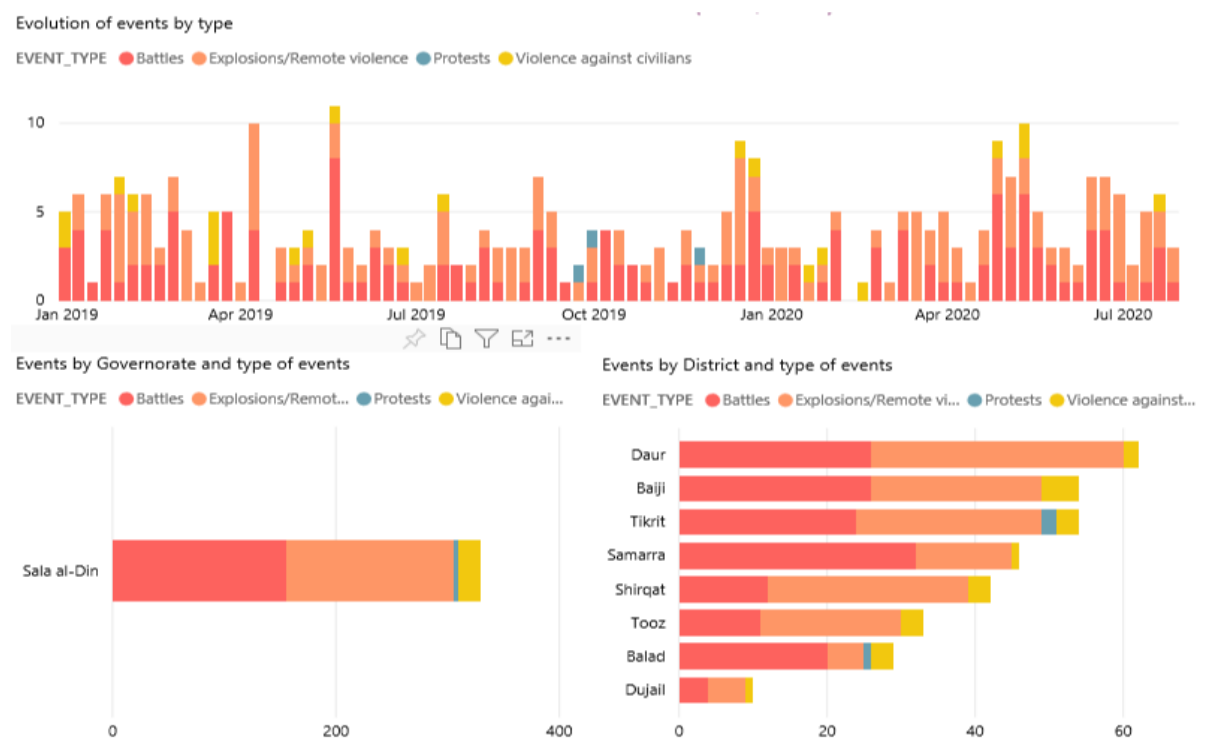


Figure 14: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Salah ad Din governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data.<sup>1277</sup>

## 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 \(2018\)](#).

The resurgence of ISIL and heightened level of attacks carried out in spring 2020, in particular, have taken place mostly in the ‘rural belt reaching across Iraq’s centre north, in Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala provinces.’<sup>1278</sup> ISIL fighters have taken shelter in especially rugged terrain in these areas following their territorial defeat in 2017.<sup>1279</sup> These areas are reportedly difficult for Iraqi security actors to control, despite continuous anti-ISIL military operations, which are reported to be limited in their

<sup>1276</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1277</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1278</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3. See also: Wing, J., Islamic State’s Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1279</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

effects.<sup>1280</sup> According to the USDOD's report to US Congress from May 2019, corruption was described as rampant in Iraq's security institutions and government, which also affected counter-ISIL efforts.<sup>1281</sup>

In addition, ISIL is reported to be exploiting the stretches of 'no-man's land' in the disputed areas separating federal Iraqi and Kurdish security forces, as well as failures of coordination between them.<sup>1282</sup> The US Combined Joint Task Force-OIR similarly reported that the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga lack strong cooperation creating 'operational seams' which ISIL exploits and that ISIL operates from a largely 'ungoverned' swath of territory including across parts of Salah al-Din.<sup>1283</sup> According to observers, the recent spike in ISIL attacks has also shown a shift in ISIL's targets by more frequently and directly taking aim at the ISF and affiliated pro-government forces, thereby weakening these security actors' ability to provide protection to civilians.<sup>1284</sup>

According to the ICG, the so-called 'resurgence' of ISIL cannot be compared with the group's capabilities in the wake of declaring its 'caliphate' in Iraq in 2014, '[b]ut for Iraqis – particularly in the rural areas most vulnerable to the group's attacks – that sort of resurgent ISIS would again be terrifying and lethal.'<sup>1285</sup>

PMUs reportedly enjoy freedom of movement and are in de facto control of much of Salah al-Din governorate, while the ISF and police force nominally exercise control.<sup>1286</sup> According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, PMUs are engaged in supporting the counter-ISIL fight, including conducting clearing operations and supporting ISF mostly in Diyala and Salah al-Din governorates, however, those PMUs are reported to also engage in criminal actions, including extortion and smuggling, which, 'may distract from and diminish their security obligations.'<sup>1287</sup> For example, in July 2020, seven PMU members who were working at a checkpoint in Amerli sub-district in Tuz Khurmatu district, were arrested for unlawfully levying tolls on transport trucks.<sup>1288</sup>

Reports of serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killing, detention, or abuse of civilians, property destruction, looting, and the blocking of IDPs' returns perpetrated by PMUs have declined since 2017. However, GPPi reported in February 2019 that many IDPs, including from Salah al-Din governorate, particularly Sunni Arab families who are perceived as ISIL affiliates, fear the continued presence of PMUs as security actors in their home areas and see this as a major obstacle to returning home. GPPi reported that Baiji district has seen particularly low numbers of returnees for this reason.<sup>1289</sup>

<sup>1280</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#); ICG, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Los Angeles Times, Iraq's new war against Islamic State: Halting the group's budding rural resurgence, 8 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1281</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2019 - March 31, 2019, 7 May 2019, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>1282</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Flood, D., From Caliphates to Caves: The Islamic State's Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq, CTC, September 2018, Volume 11, issue 8, [url](#), p. 30. See also additional information about ISIL as an armed actor above.

<sup>1283</sup> 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. 25

<sup>1284</sup> Wing, J., Islamic State's Spring Offensive In Iraq Ends In June, 6 July 2020, [url](#); ICG, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2

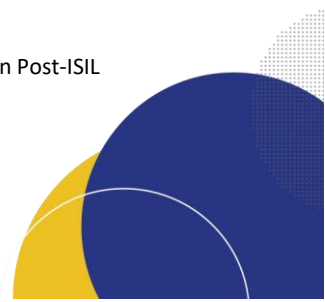
<sup>1285</sup> ICG, When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1286</sup> See additional information on the PMU and ISF as armed actors above.

<sup>1287</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2019 - March 31, 2019, 7 May 2019, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>1288</sup> Kirkuk Now, Seven PMU members working at a checkpoint arrested, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1289</sup> Gaston, E., and Domisse, M., At the Tip of the Spear: Armed Groups' Impact on Displacement and Return in Post-ISIL Iraq, GPPi, 18 February 2019, [url](#)



## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Salah al-Din is also one of the governorates with particular high scores of infrastructure damage as a result of conflict, particularly in relation to damage to housing,<sup>1290</sup> to the agricultural sector,<sup>1291</sup> and to the water, sanitation and hygiene sector.<sup>1292</sup> 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 damage. The governorate sustained the highest percentage of destruction to rural housing assets across the seven governorates affected by conflict, which were assessed.<sup>1293</sup>

Amnesty International reported that reconstruction in governorates badly affected by the conflict, including Salah al-Din, was slow throughout 2019.<sup>1294</sup>

Explosive ordnance contamination is reported to pose an obstacle to safe returns of IDPs as well as to the implementation of humanitarian activities in more than one third of districts assessed in Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates by the Humanitarian Country Team in Iraq.<sup>1295</sup> For example, on 9 February 2020, an explosive remnant of war thought to be left behind by ISIL detonated at a quarry in the village of al-Mihzin injuring three quarry workers.<sup>1296</sup>

## Displacement and return

As of 30 June 2020, 11 % of the total IDP population in Iraq originated from Salah al-Din governorate, with the main districts of origin being Tuz Khurmatu (40 194 individuals), Balad (28 632) and Baiji (27 804).<sup>1297</sup> At the same time, Salah al-Din governorate hosted a total number of 68 700 IDPs, the sixth highest number of IDPs of all 18 governorates of displacement.<sup>1298</sup> Furthermore, 29 % of IDPs in Salah al-Din governorate were assessed to be living in 'critical shelters'.<sup>1299</sup> During 2019, many IDPs were forced into secondary displacement due to 'forced and premature returns and forced or coerced departures from camps and informal settlements in Ninewa, Salah Al-Din, Al-Anbar, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates'.<sup>1300</sup>

Returns to Salah al-Din governorate outpace displacement and Salah al-Din governorate continues to rank third amongst the top governorates of return, with a total of 692 142 returnees recorded as of

<sup>1290</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1291</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), pp. XVIII-XIX

<sup>1292</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 94

<sup>1293</sup> World Bank Group, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment – Part 2 Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates, January 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1294</sup> AI, Human rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Review of 2019, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1295</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>1296</sup> EPIC, ISHM: February 6 – February 13, 2020, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1297</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1298</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1299</sup> 'Critical shelters include informal settlements, religious buildings, schools and unfinished or abandoned buildings. For returnees, it also includes habitual residences that are severely damaged or destroyed and for IDPs, long-term rental accommodations that are unfit for habitation (having characteristics of unfinished or severely damaged buildings).' IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 8

<sup>1300</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Iraq 2020, 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 5. See also, UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Iraq: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of Internally Displaced Persons\* (A/HRC/44/41/Add.1), 13 May 2020, [url](#), para. 27; UNHCR, UNHCR Iraq Protection Update - August 2019, 14 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 3; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Iraq October 2019, 30 October 2019, [url](#), p. 1



30 June 2020.<sup>1301</sup> The three main districts of return were Tikrit with 175 236 returnees; Al-Shirqat with 159 060 returnees and Baiji with 112 908 returnees.<sup>1302</sup>

According to IOM, Salah al-Din governorate hosted the highest number of returnees (273 036 individuals) living in severe conditions (indicating a lack of livelihoods, services, social cohesion and security) as well as the governorate with the highest proportion of returnees, namely 25 %, living in severe conditions.<sup>1303</sup> Between March 2018 and December 2019, IOM DTM identified 18 locations in Salah al-Din governorate where families had re-displaced after having returned.<sup>1304</sup> Most of these were in the districts of Tikrit, followed by Balad, Al-Shirqat and Baiji.<sup>1305</sup> IOM identified 38 locations in Salah al-Din governorate to which no returns had taken place as of April 2020, due to '[b]locked returns, lack of security, tribal/ethnoreligious tensions, presence of [unexploded ordnance], and damaged infrastructure.'<sup>1306</sup>

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<sup>1301</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1302</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1303</sup> IOM, Return Index Findings Round Nine – Iraq July 2020, 9 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1. See also, UNOCHA, Response Plan Humanitarian Monitoring Report January-May 2019, 27 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 10

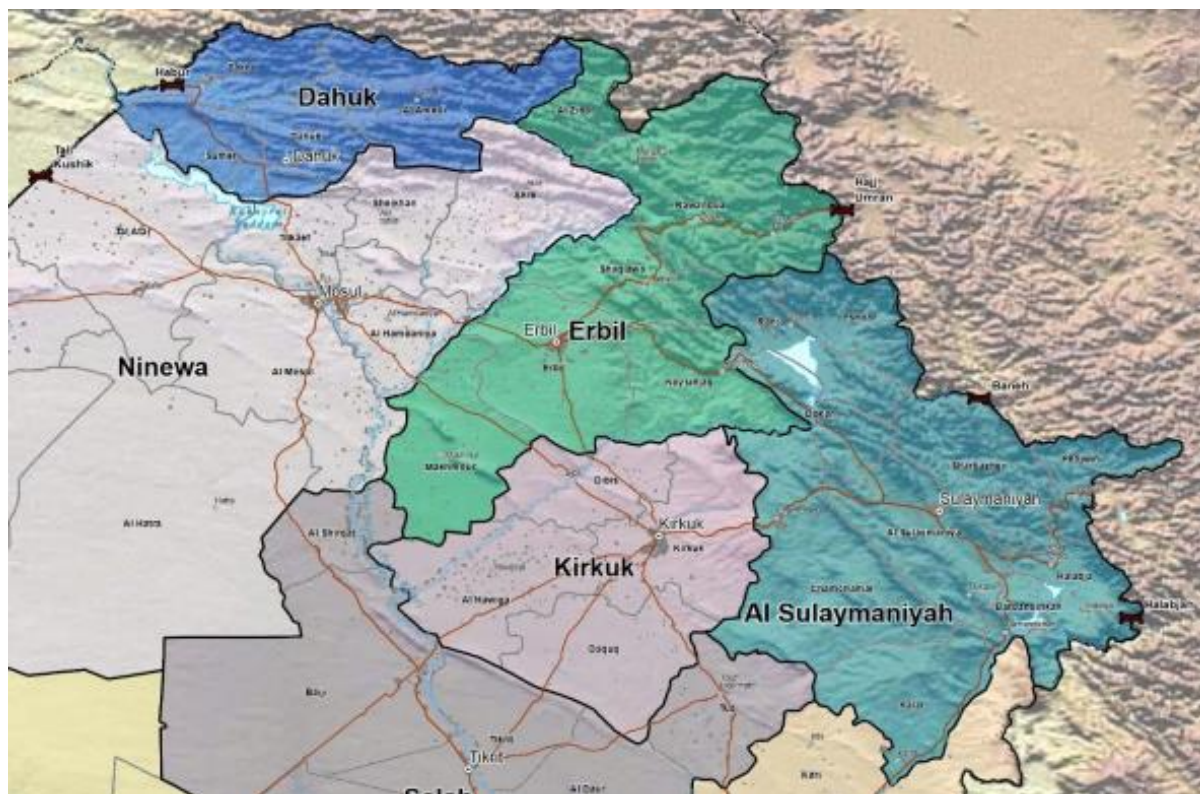
<sup>1304</sup> IOM, Re-Displaced: An Exploration of Displacement after Attempted Return in Iraq, February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1305</sup> IOM, Re-Displaced: An Exploration of Displacement after Attempted Return in Iraq, February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1306</sup> IOM, Areas of origin having witnessed no return – April 2020, June 2020, [url](#), p. 1



### 3. Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah)



Map 14: Governorates of Kurdistan Region with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1307</sup>

The Iraqi Constitution recognises the Kurdistan Region as a federal region, along with its ‘existing authorities’.<sup>1308</sup> The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) is based in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region.<sup>1309</sup> As of September 2020, the KRG informed that it administers the governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk, and Halabja.<sup>1310</sup> The central Iraqi government recognised Halabja as a governorate in 2016, but ‘routine fails’ to recognise its status as a governorate.<sup>1311</sup>

The Garmiyan Administration is a disputed territory between Baghdad and Erbil, located within Sulaymaniyah governorate, and an unofficial governorate in the KRI that includes the three districts of Kalar, Kifri, and Chamchamal.<sup>1312</sup>

The KDP exercise its power over Dohuk and Erbil governorates, while Sulaymaniyah governorate is contested between the PUK and Gorran.<sup>1313</sup>

<sup>1307</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1308</sup> Constitute Project (The), Iraq’s Constitution of 2005, Article 117, [url](#)

<sup>1309</sup> Kurdish Regional Government, Kurdish Regional Government, 4 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1310</sup> Kurdish Regional Government, Kurdish Regional Government, 4 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1311</sup> WKI, Kurdistan Weekly Brief September 24, 2019, [url](#), 24 September 2019

<sup>1312</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS kidnaps 7 civilians at fake checkpoint in Kurdistan’s Garmiyan region, 31 January 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, ‘Peshmerga blood on his hands’: ISIS emir arrested in Garmiyan, 3 April 2020, [url](#)

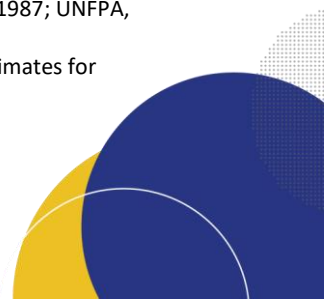
<sup>1313</sup> Wahab, B., Iraqi Kurdistan’s new government, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>1314</sup> the population in Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah together, at 5 449 364.<sup>1315</sup> The ethnic composition of the KRI governorates is covered under the individual governorate chapters.

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<sup>1314</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1315</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 قديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)



## 3.1 Dohuk



Map 15: Dohuk governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1316</sup>

### 3.1.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Dohuk governorate is part of the KRI and is Iraq's northernmost governorate. It is located in the north-west of Iraq and shares an international border with Turkey and Syria.<sup>1317</sup> Internally, Dohuk has borders with the governorates of Ninawa and Erbil.<sup>1318</sup> The area of the governorate is 6 553 km<sup>2</sup><sup>1319</sup>, its capital is Dohuk<sup>1320</sup>, and it has four districts: Amedi, Dohuk, Sumel and Zakho.<sup>1321</sup> Moreover, according to the Dohuk General Directorate of Tourism, the governorate is divided into six territories 'managerially': Dohuk, Semeal, Zakho, Amedeye, Sheikhan, and Akri.<sup>1322</sup> Akri (Akre) and Sheikhan districts are parts of Ninewa governorate but have been administered by the KRG since the establishment of the Green Line by the ceasefire between the Iraqi government and the Kurds in 1991.<sup>1323</sup>

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 KDP exercises its power over Dohuk and Erbil governorates and the PUK controls Sulaymaniyah governorate.<sup>1324</sup>

<sup>1316</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1317</sup> NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Iraq: Duhok Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1318</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Duhok Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1319</sup> NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1320</sup> NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1321</sup> IOM, Dohuk, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah: governorate profiles, June 2008, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1322</sup> Iraq, KRI, General Directorate of Tourism: Duhok, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1323</sup> Ahn, J. et al., The Politics of Security in Ninewa: Preventing an ISIS Resurgence in Northern Iraq, 7 May 2018, pp.5-6, [url](#)

<sup>1324</sup> Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPR), 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). OFPR invited him as a guest speaker in December and the source confirmed the notes via email.

## Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>1325</sup> the governorate's population at 1 326 562.<sup>1326</sup>

## Ethnicity

According to USCIRF, most of the KRI's inhabitants are Sunni Kurds, in addition to Sunni Arabs, Christians, Circassians, Fayli Kurds, Shabaks, Shia and Sunni Turkmen, Yarsan (including Kaka'i), as well as Yazidis.<sup>1327</sup> The main ethnic group in Dohuk governorate are Kurds, with smaller minorities of Turkmen and Arabs.<sup>1328</sup> 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.<sup>1329</sup> IOM stated that 50 % of IDPs in Dohuk were Sunni and Shia Kurds, 35 % Yazidis, 9 % Sunni Muslim Arabs, 4 % minorities (Christians, Kaka'i, Shabaks) and 1% Turkmen (Sunni and Shia Muslims).<sup>1330</sup>

## Economy

Information about the governorate's economy covering the reference period, has not been found. An assessment by the NCCI published in December 2015, described the economy as sustained by foreign investment, bilateral trade with Turkey, tourism, construction, some agriculture and some oil exploration.<sup>1331</sup>

## Road security

Scarce information about road security and checkpoints in Dohuk governorate was found during the drafting of this report. Local sources reported that in early September 2019, the rehabilitation of the main road linking the cities of Mosul and Dohuk had started. Reportedly, the road suffered great damage during the military operations against ISIL.<sup>1332</sup> Furthermore, UNDP stated that in 2018-2019, it implemented 12 projects to rehabilitate infrastructure in Dohuk governorate, including roads.<sup>1333</sup>

## 3.1.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

Following the US-brokered agreement that put an end to the Kurdish civil war in 1998, Dohuk came under the control of the KDP, together with Erbil.<sup>1334</sup> ICG stated that Iraq's 2005 Constitution 'demarcated Iraq's internal boundaries, establishing a federal Kurdistan region in Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimaniya governorates'.<sup>1335</sup> According to NCCI, in 2015, Dohuk governorate was not affected by the

<sup>1325</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1326</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 إحصاءات السكان والعائلة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1327</sup> USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1328</sup> NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1329</sup> Iraq, Duhok Province, Demographics, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1330</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment IV, 30 March 2020, [url](#), p. 62

<sup>1331</sup> NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>1332</sup> Basnews, دھوك – المباشرة بتأهيل طريق الموصل [The Beginning of the Mosul-Dohuk Road Rehabilitation], 2 September 2019, pp. 2-3 [url](#); Al-Naeem News, بدء تأهيل طريق موصل-دهوك بعد خروجه عن الخدمة [The Beginning of the Rehabilitation of Mosul-Dohuk Road after it Being Put out of Service], 4 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1333</sup> UNDP, التمكين الاقتصادي وإعادة تأهيل الخدمات الأساسية بينان الاستقرار في دھوك [Economic Empowerment and Rehabilitation of Basic Services Secure Stability in Dohuk], 22 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1334</sup> Hassan, F., PUK-KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1335</sup> ICG, Iraq: Fixing Security in Kirkuk, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

ISIL conflict, however, ‘criminality, civil unrest and cross-border smuggling ... pose[d] a limited but persistent security threat.’<sup>1336</sup> IOM observed in October 2017 that Dohuk, as well as the rest of the KRI, have enjoyed a ‘stable security situation’ since the beginning of the 2014 ISIL conflict, despite the Turkish and PKK activities in the governorate<sup>1337</sup>, which according to Al-Monitor have been taking place since the 1990s.<sup>1338</sup> Additionally, ACCORD’s compilation of ACLED data for 2019 showed that Dohuk governorate came third in terms of the number of conflict incidents (390) following Diyala and Erbil. According to the report, incidents affected the following locations among others: Amadiya, Barwari, Cemanke, Chiya-e Gara, Dahuk, Dereluk, Gulkah, Haftanin, Kani Masi, Khantur Mountain, Metin, Metina, Sheladiz, Shiladiza, Sigiri, Uzmana, Zakho.<sup>1339</sup> According to the UN Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit (IAU), some issues remained unresolved between the governorates of Dohuk and Ninawa ‘regarding the administrative status of Al-Shikhan, Telaftar, Tilkaif, Akre and Sinjar districts’.<sup>1340</sup>

## Armed actors

### *KRG-commanded Peshmerga*

Security forces of the KRI are the Peshmerga, having 14 infantry brigades and 2 support brigades, and the Asayish intelligence services, in addition to KPD and PUK-controlled militias.<sup>1341</sup> Most of these forces’ members are politically divided between the KDP and the PUK, to which they answer directly.<sup>1342</sup> According to the Defense Post, ‘there are 14 Peshmerga brigades roughly evenly divided between the KDP in Dohuk and Erbil in the north of the region and the PUK in Sulaymaniyah, in the south.’<sup>1343</sup>

Historically, Peshmerga fighters have been divided in allegiance between the KDP and PUK, and there have been several attempts to unify all Peshmerga fighters. The Ministry for Peshmerga Affairs was re-established in 2006. Currently, there are 14 Regional Guard Brigades (RGBs) comprising 40 000 KDP and PUK fighters, however, the command structure of those RGBs remain divided along political affiliations.<sup>1344</sup> Rudaw also stated that the Peshmerga was not ‘a fully integrated national force’, but rather divided between the two KRI ruling parties, with a smaller number of independent Peshmerga fighters operating under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. The source added that ‘both the KDP and PUK have their security and intelligence apparatus in the areas of Kurdistan Region under their control’ and that Dohuk governorate is under the control of the KDP.<sup>1345</sup> In addition to Peshmerga, each of the two parties maintained separate Asayish (internal security) forces and intelligence services.<sup>1346</sup>

The Center for Global Policy’s map showed that the Peshmerga were active in Faysh Khabur and Zakho District as of 3 December 2019.<sup>1347</sup>

On 9 July 2020, the Kurdish media outlet, Rudaw, reported that the KRG’s Ministry of Interior ‘deployed Zeravani Peshmerga to Duhok’s Mount Matin [...] amid intensified Turkish bombing against

<sup>1336</sup> NCCI, Dohuk Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1337</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 13, 37, 55

<sup>1338</sup> Al-Monitor, Baghdad’s row with Ankara could benefit each side, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1339</sup> ACCORD, Iraq, Year 2019: Update on incidents according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 23 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 5

<sup>1340</sup> UN-IAU, Dahuk Governorate Profile, July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1341</sup> US, USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights for 2017 – Iraq, 20 April 2018, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>1342</sup> ICG, Arming Iraq’s Kurds: Fighting IS, inviting conflict, 12 May 2015, [url](#), pp. 8-11

<sup>1343</sup> Defense Post (The), Coalition drives to build Iraqi Kurdistan’s Peshmerga into a self-sustaining force, 27 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1344</sup> MERI, Institutionalisation of the Peshmerga: tipping the balance of Iraq’s stability, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1345</sup> Rudaw, PUK Peshmerga’s death in custody raises tensions with KDP, 21 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1346</sup> US, USDOS, Iraq 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p.2

<sup>1347</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

suspected PKK positions in the region'.<sup>1348</sup> According to Global Security, the Zeravani forces are part of the Peshmerga and constitute paramilitary police. It is in charge of border security, protection of vital infrastructure, as well as other security duties.<sup>1349</sup> The Iraqi news agency, Gilgamesh, cited a Kurdish official who stated that the Zeravani forces report to the Ministry of Interior of the KRG and are affiliated with the KDP.<sup>1350</sup>

### *Turkish forces*

In recent years, Turkey has set up about 13 military bases in key areas such as Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Zakho.<sup>1351</sup> In July 2020, the Turkish Consul General announced that Turkish army military operations would continue in the KRI until the end of the presence of the PKK.<sup>1352</sup> Following the June 2020 launch of the military operations Operation Claw-Eagle and Operation Claw-Tiger, additional military bases were erected to target PKK strongholds in northern Iraq and the KRI, particularly in Sinjar (Ninewa governorate), Qandil (Iran-Iraq border), Karacak, Zap, Avasin-Basyan and Hakurk (Dohuk governorate).<sup>1353</sup> According to Rudaw, the Turkish Presidency confirmed in July 2020 the existence of 37 Turkish military points across the KRI, including two inside the cities of Dohuk and Zakho.<sup>1354</sup> Other military points had already previously been erected in the towns and villages of Kuna Masi, Sheladiz, Amedi, and Zakho Valley in Dohuk governorate.<sup>1355</sup> A Liveuamaps map dated 8 July 2020 corroborates the existence of several military bases across Dohuk governorate.<sup>1356</sup>

### *Iraqi forces*

According to Rudaw, in July 2020, the Iraqi Border Guard Force 1 established bases in five strategic points in Zakho District to de-escalate the situation between Turkey and the PKK and to prevent losses of civilian lives.<sup>1357</sup> The deployment of the Iraqi Border Guard took place on 1 July 2020 and was coordinated with the Kurdish Peshmerga forces.<sup>1358</sup>

### *PKK*

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a Marxist-Leninist group that was founded in the 1970s, launching an armed struggle against the Turkish government in 1984 and calling for an independent Kurdish state in Turkey.<sup>1359</sup> The PKK is on the European Union's list of designated groups which have been involved in terrorism<sup>1360</sup>, as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey<sup>1361</sup>, the

<sup>1348</sup> Rudaw, New Iraqi border force bases stopping PKK-Turkey clash spill into populated areas: commander, 9 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1349</sup> Global Security, Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Guard Forces (peshmerga), 10 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1350</sup> Gilgamesh Press, امين عام البيشمركة: يحق لأي مواطن عربي التطوع بصفوف قواتنا [Peshmerga Commander: Any Arab Citizen Has the Right to Volunteer in Our Ranks], 27 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1351</sup> Shafaaq, American report: Turkey has set up 13 military bases in Kurdistan region, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1352</sup> Nina News, Operations Until The End Of The PKK, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1353</sup> See: Anadolu Agency (AA), Turkey launches operation Claw-Eagle, 15 June 2020, [url](#); TRT World, Turkey begins fresh anti-terror Operation Claw-Tiger in northern Iraq, 16 June 2020, [url](#); Ahval, Turkish offensive in north Iraq extends beyond usual anti-PKK campaign – analysis, 22 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1354</sup> Rudaw, Ankara has built nearly 40 'military points' in Kurdistan Region: Turkish presidency, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1355</sup> BBC, القواعد العسكرية التركية في إقليم كردستان العراق وأهدافها [The Turkish Military Bases in the KRI and Their Purposes], 29 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1356</sup> Liveuamaps, Iraq, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1357</sup> Rudaw, Iraqi border guards set up bases in five 'strategic' positions in Zakho: commander, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1358</sup> Rudaw, Iraqi border guards set up bases in five 'strategic' positions in Zakho: commander, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1359</sup> BBC News, Who are Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1360</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1361</sup> Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

United States<sup>1362</sup>, and Australia.<sup>1363</sup> The PKK has developed its territorial presence and control over mountainous areas in the KRI including in the Zab Mountains, in Dohuk governorate along the Turkish border. Its PKK bases and populations are located there.<sup>1364</sup> Local officials interviewed by Rudaw in 2016 estimated on their part that as many as 650 communities might live under the PKK in the KRI, although some of the villages have been evacuated due to the conflict.<sup>1365</sup> From these areas, the PKK has launched cross-border attacks in Turkey, to which the Turkish Air force has retaliated with regular raids.<sup>1366</sup> According to one analyst in September 2019, the PKK is 'considered as a major new actor within the Iraqi geopolitical scene'.<sup>1367</sup>

#### *Kurdish insurgent groups and Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups*

Scarce relevant information specific to Dohuk governorate was found during the drafting of this report.

In 2017, it was reported that armed groups active in the KRI's mountainous areas include Kurdish insurgent groups and Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups.<sup>1368</sup> These comprise the PKK's Iranian offshoot, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, PJAK), as well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (PDKI, or in Kurdish: Hîzbê Dêmuokratî Kurdistanî Êran) and its splinter group the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP-I, or in Kurdish: Hizba Dêmuokrata Kurdistanê-Îran)<sup>1369</sup>, Society of Revolutionary Toilers (Komala), and the Kurdistan Free Party (PAK).<sup>1370</sup>

### 3.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Security developments 2019-2020

As observed in the previous EASO security report of March 2019, the conflict between Turkey and the PKK continued to scale up further.<sup>1371</sup> Various sources reported on Turkish military operations in Dohuk governorate in 2019 and 2020. On 8 July 2020, Al-Monitor reported that 'according to Kurdish sources, the Turkish forces have pushed forward 50 kilometers (30 miles) inside Iraqi Kurdistan, setting up 12 new bases and checkpoints.' Al-Monitor added that the Turkish military campaign 'significantly affected civilian areas' and cited the secretary-general of the KRG who stated that 'nearly 100 villages have been evacuated over the past month in the Zakho and Amedi region alone'.<sup>1372</sup> According to the independent platform, Irfaa Sawtak (Raise Your Voice), Turkish air strikes targeted the villages of Sheladiz, Batifa and Kane Mase, and the region of Berwari on 23 June 2020. In an interview with the platform, a resident of Berwari region claimed that in the air strikes, one person

<sup>1362</sup> US, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, , [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1363</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Listed terrorist organisations, n.d., [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1364</sup> Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, Noria, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1365</sup> Rudaw, PKK bases in border areas provoke Turkish airstrikes, local mayors say, 14 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1366</sup> Wing, J., Large Drop In Violence In Iraq November 2018, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 3 December 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Islamic State Returns To Baghdad While Overall Security In Iraq Remains Steady, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 6 October 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 2 August 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., 649 Deaths, 275 Wounded Feb 2018 In Iraq, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 3 March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1367</sup> 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, The PKK in Iraq: A Geopolitical Reading, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1368</sup> CPT, Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017), 17 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1369</sup> Al-Monitor, IRGC masses troops on Iraq border amid rising tensions with Kurdish groups, 16 October 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Iranian bombardment in Kurdistan: 14 dead, 40 wounded, two more missing, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1370</sup> CPT, Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017), 17 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1371</sup> EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, [url](#), p. 153

<sup>1372</sup> Al-Monitor, Baghdad's row with Ankara could benefit each side, 8 July 2020, [url](#)



was killed and that substantial material damage was incurred.<sup>1373</sup> Shafaq News reported on 4 July 2020 that Turkish air strikes and shelling have been heavily targeting border areas in the KRI where PKK elements were allegedly present. The source cited the prefects of Kane Mase and Darkar who confirmed ground-based attacks and air strikes on a village and different locations in their prefectures.<sup>1374</sup> On 24 August 2019, the news outlet Kurdistan 24 announced that the Turkish Army launched 'Operation Claw 3' in Dohuk governorate. The aim of the operation was 'to destroy the terrorists and their caves and shelters in the Sinat-Haftanin region' as stated by the Turkish Defense Ministry.<sup>1375</sup> The UN Security Council stated that on 23 August 2019, Turkey launched phase III of Operation Claw, with a focus on the Sinat-Haftanin area, located to the north of Dohuk governorate. The Turkish Ministry of National Defence, cited in the same UN Security Council report, announced that 417 PKK elements had been killed since 27 May 2019, without specifying the number of those killed in Dohuk governorate.<sup>1376</sup> Moreover, on 26 January 2019, protesters stormed a Turkish military base in Sheladiz in the wake of Turkish air strikes that caused civilian casualties on 24 January 2019. Reportedly, two protesters were killed, and on 27 January 2019, the Asayish arrested several protesters, activists and journalists.<sup>1377</sup>

On 5 July 2020, the Arab Weekly, citing Iraqi security officials, stated that the Iraqi army started 'enforcing positions along the border with Turkey to prevent Turkish forces from advancing deeper into Iraqi territory'.<sup>1378</sup> This deployment of the Iraqi Border Guard, according to Rudaw, was coordinated with Turkey. The source quoted the Commander of the Iraqi 1<sup>st</sup> Border Guard Unit, who said 'Turkey has asked to build cooperation with us in order to secure the areas on the Iraqi-Turkish border'.<sup>1379</sup> Reportedly, this deployment of the Iraqi Border Guard unit 'has reassured locals under threat from Turkish airstrikes'.<sup>1380</sup> Alongside the deployment of the Iraqi Border Guard, Peshmerga forces were deployed as well. On 9 July 2020, the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs announced the deployment of Peshmerga units in the district of Amedi, at the border area to the north of Dohuk governorate. Reportedly, the purpose of this move was to protect the residents of the region and to prevent any displacement that might occur due to the volatile security situation.<sup>1381</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- According to the BBC, on 26 January 2019, Kurdish protestors stormed a Turkish military base in Dohuk and burnt two tanks and other military equipment. The same article stated that two protestors were killed when they entered the Turkish military base in Sheladiz.<sup>1382</sup>
- On 14 May 2020, Rudaw reported that PKK fighters attacked a Turkish military point in Kane Mase sub-district. Reportedly, a clash lasted for one hour and was followed by a power outage in the area.<sup>1383</sup>
- A report published by the UN Security Council stated that on 27 May 2019, the Turkish armed forces 'continued to launch regular air strikes against positions held by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah Governorates'. According to the Turkish Ministry

<sup>1373</sup> Irfaa Sawtak, بالأرقام "مخلب النمر" خسائر كردستان في قتلى ونازحون وحرائق... [Deaths, Displaced, and Fires... Losses of Kurdistan during 'Tiger's Claw' in Numbers, 23 June 2020, [url](#)]

<sup>1374</sup> Shafaq News, المدفعية التركية تفصف قرية في دهوك [Turkish Artillery Targets a Village in Dohuk], 4 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1375</sup> Kurdistan 24, Turkey begins 'Operation Claw 3' against PKK in Kurdistan's Duhok province, 24 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1376</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), 22 November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1377</sup> Al, Iraq 2019, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1378</sup> New Arab (The), Iraq enforces border positions to prevent Turkish advance, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1379</sup> Rudaw, Iraqi border forces to cooperate with Turkey to 'secure' border areas, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1380</sup> Rudaw, Zakho locals relieved as Iraq increases military presence amid Turkish offensive, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1381</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1382</sup> BBC, القواعد العسكرية التركية في إقليم كردستان العراق وأهدافها [The Turkish Military Bases in the KRI and Their Purposes], 29 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1383</sup> Rudaw, Fresh PKK-Turkey clashes cause power outage in Duhok province: official, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

of Defence, between 27 May and 10 June 2019, 43 PKK fighters were captured or killed. No civilian casualties or damage to civilian infrastructure were reported by the source.<sup>1384</sup>

- On 30 May 2020, a father and a son were killed in a Turkish air strike.<sup>1385</sup> According to Xeber 24, the incident took place in the village of Etit in the region of Dayralok to the north of Dohuk city.<sup>1386</sup>
- On 17 June 2020, the Turkish News Agency (Anadolu) reported on the launching of Operation Claw-Tiger against the PKK in Dohuk governorate. The source added that ‘Turkish commandos supported by the Air Force, ATAK helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) have entered the region in an air attack operation.’<sup>1387</sup> Air raids and shelling that targeted several villages and areas in the region were reported<sup>1388</sup>, and fear and anger were expressed by the locals of Keshani village in the governorate.<sup>1389</sup>
- Iraq Body Count (IBC) documented the death of six people in a Turkish air strike in Dohuk, on 19 June 2020.<sup>1390</sup> Irfaa Sawtak reported that on the same day, three people were killed in a village in Sheladiz when their car was hit in a Turkish air strike.<sup>1391</sup> Rudaw reported on at least four deaths in this air strike, three of which occurred in Sheladiz and one in Kane Mase.<sup>1392</sup>
- On 20 June 2020, Rudaw reported on a demonstration that turned violent as protestors attempted to storm Turkish observation points in Sheladiz following air strikes that caused several deaths. Reportedly, security forces used tear gas and two protestors and four policemen were injured.<sup>1393</sup>
- On 2 July 2020, Turkish warplanes targeted locations in the Amedi District and caused damage to farms in the region.<sup>1394</sup>
- On 15 July 2020, Rudaw reported that Turkish air force ‘heavily bombarded three villages’ in the Batifa sub-district of Zakho. According to the source, there were no casualties, but a number of villages were abandoned due to the military operations in the region.<sup>1395</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

<sup>1384</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019), S/2019/660, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1385</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1386</sup> Xeber 24, Turkish state planes once again target the villages of North “Dohuk”, 30 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1387</sup> AA, Turkey launches Operation Claw-Tiger in northern Iraq, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1388</sup> ANHA, Turkish occupation bombs villages of Dohuk governorate, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1389</sup> Republic World, Kurdish Civilians Scared Over Turkey’s Shelling, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1390</sup> IBC, Recent Events, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1391</sup> Irfaa Sawtak, خسائر كردستان في "مخلب النمر" بالأرقام [Deaths, Displaced, and Fires... Losses of Kurdistan during ‘Tiger’s Claw’] in Numbers, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1392</sup> Rudaw, Four civilians killed amid Turkish airstrikes near Duhok: local officials, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1393</sup> Rudaw, Two protesters wounded in demonstration against Turkish airstrikes in Duhok province, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1394</sup> Kurdiu, Turkish warplanes bombed Amedi area of Dohuk Governorate, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1395</sup> Rudaw, Heavy Turkish aerial bombardment reported in three Zakho villages: local officials, 15 July 2020, [url](#)

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Dohuk	19	6	30	<b>36</b>	59	10	2	<b>12</b>

Table 12: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Dohuk governorate<sup>1396</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 127 battles, 620 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 4 cases of violence against civilians, 0 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 751 security incidents of these types in Dohuk governorate, the majority taking place in Amedi District. 8 protests were also reported in Dohuk governorate during the reference period.<sup>1397</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.<sup>1398</sup>

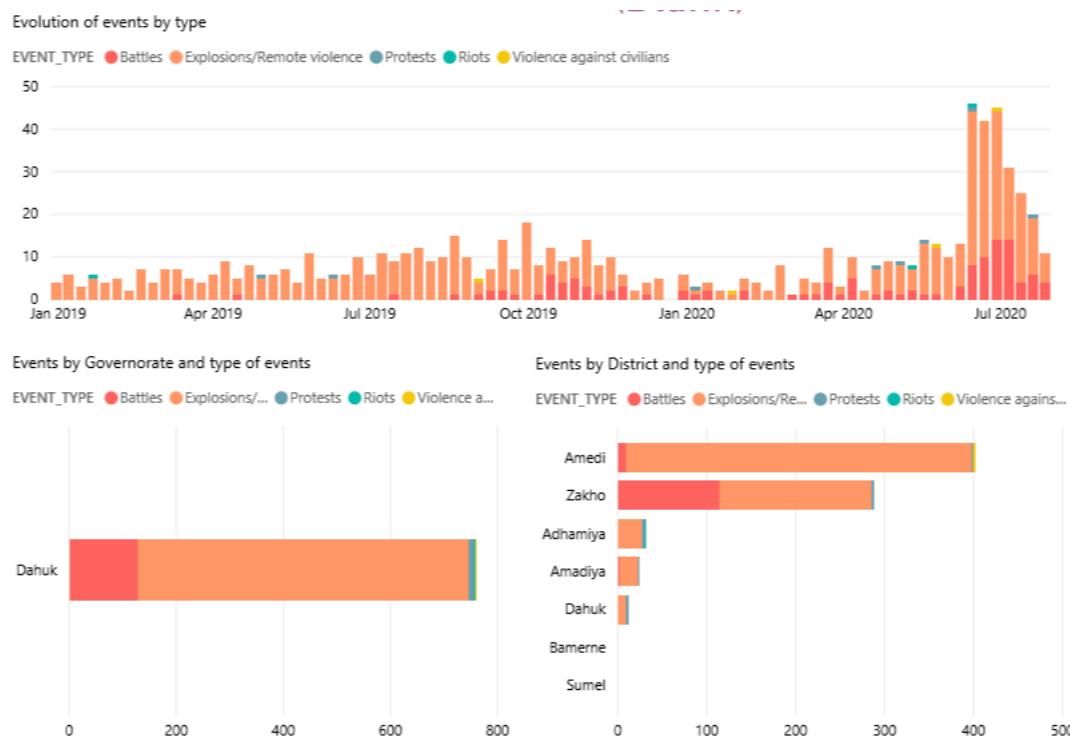


Figure 15: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Dohuk governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1399</sup>

<sup>1396</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>1397</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1398</sup> Bamene is a subdistrict under Amedi district: IOM, Dohuk, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profiles, Post-February 2006 IDPs Needs Assessment, December 2007, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1399</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

## 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 \(2018\)](#).

On 11 April 2020, Rudaw reported that during the curfew imposed in Dohuk to limit the spread of COVID-19, Kurdish security forces and the Zeravani Forces patrolled the closed markets and registered no incidents of theft during March 2020.<sup>1400</sup>

In its 2019 human rights report, the US Department of State (USDOS), stated that human rights organisations reported that security forces in Iraq, including Asayish and Peshmerga, ‘frequently’ ignored the law and engaged in a range of human rights violations, including ‘arbitrary arrest’, ‘abductions’, ‘physical abuse’, and torture.<sup>1401</sup>

## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

The Turkish military operations against the PKK in Dohuk have impacted the lives of villagers in the areas targeted by air strikes. In an interview conducted in June 2020 with the independent platform, Irfaa Sawtak, the Prefect of Kane Mase stated in July 2020 that there have been enormous economic losses as farmers were not able to cultivate their crops due to the air strikes that targeted their farms. He added that 20 villages in his prefecture were inaccessible, which caused shortage in services.<sup>1402</sup> Moreover, the Assyrian Policy Institute stated in the period 2-6 October 2019, that Turkish air strikes targeted Assyrian villages in the Nahla region of Dohuk governorate, which resulted in extensive damage to farmlands, property, and infrastructure. No more details were provided by the source.<sup>1403</sup>

With regard to mines, the KRI recorded mine contamination of 181 km<sup>2</sup> at the end of 2018, 14 % less than at the end of 2017.<sup>1404</sup> Mine Action Review stated that at the end of 2018, an area of 20 793 723 m<sup>2</sup> was contaminated with mines specifically in Dohuk governorate.<sup>1405</sup> According to the report, 203 265 m<sup>2</sup> of land was cleared of mines in 2018, in 16 areas in Dohuk governorate.<sup>1406</sup>

This data did not include areas on the Turkish border, which have never been surveyed owing to continued fighting and air strikes, reported Mine Action Review.<sup>1407</sup>

## Displacement and return

OCHA’s Humanitarian Response Plan, published in January 2020, reported that more than 40% of all IDPs displaced during the 2014-2017 conflict sought safety in the KRI – a figure which OCHA described as holding ‘steady or even declined’ in 2019.<sup>1408</sup>

On 20 July 2020, the Ministry of Interior of the KRI issued the latest Humanitarian Situation report indicating the IDP movement within the three governorates. According to the report, Dohuk had 208 530 IDPs and 87 330 refugees. The report added that 154 307 IDPs and 58 259 refugees were residing in camps. Regarding displacement and return movement during July, the report stated that no refugees or IDPs entered Dohuk governorate, while 5 208 IDPs and 1 850 refugees left the

<sup>1400</sup> Rudaw, شرطة دهوك: عدم تسجيل أي حوادث سرقة على مدى شهر [Dohuk Police: No Incidents of Theft were registered during a month], 11 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1401</sup> US, USDOS, Iraq 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), pp.12, 13, and 22

<sup>1402</sup> Irfaa Sawtak, بالأرقام "مخالب النمر" خسائر كردستان في قتلى ونازحون وحرائق... [Deaths, Displaced, and Fires... Losses of Kurdistan during ‘Tiger’s Claw’] in Numbers, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1403</sup> Assyrian Policy Institute, Turkish airstrikes in Assyrian villages in northern Iraq continue, 6 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1404</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1405</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1406</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 136

<sup>1407</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1408</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq, January 2020, [url](#), p. 31

governorate. Finally, the report indicated that in Dohuk governorate there were 16 IDP and five refugee camps.<sup>1409</sup>

IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix indicated in its Master List Report 116 that as of 30 June 2020, Dohuk governorate had 319 062 IDPs, the second highest number in Iraq, residing in three main districts: Sumel (176 652), Zakho (104 106) and Dohuk (31 368). According to the report, 99 % of those IDPs originated from Ninawa governorate, while 1 % originated from Salah Al-Din, Anbar, Kirkuk, and Baghdad.<sup>1410</sup> In its previous Master List Report 115 IOM noted that 11 % of IDPs in Dohuk governorate were assessed to be living in critical shelters.<sup>1411</sup>

Between 18 June and 1 August 2019, REACH conducted an intentions survey in three IDP camps in Dohuk governorate and interviewed 188 households. REACH found that 98 % of IDPs intended to remain in displacement for the three months following the survey, and 90 % 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 (47 %), unavailability of services in the areas of origin (34 %), and fear and trauma associated with the areas of origin (34 %). Moreover, 83 % of the interviewed households considered their areas of origin to be unsafe.<sup>1412</sup> With regard to Dohuk city, IOM stated that 'the high levels of safety and security in Dohuk city, with few security incidents excluding petty crime taking place, appear to be key reasons for delaying relocation back to areas of origin for many IDPs.' Reportedly, 'coexistence with the host community is peaceful overall.'<sup>1413</sup>

With regard to returnees, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix report of May and June 2020 observed that as of 30 June 2020, 768 IDPs returned to their area of origin, which was Zakho. According to the report, all the returnees were displaced in Dohuk District.<sup>1414</sup> Furthermore, USAID reported on 30 September 2019 that on 27 August 2019, 90 Iraqi refugees returned from Turkey to Iraq via Dohuk governorate through the voluntary return program of the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement.<sup>1415</sup> The final destinations of the returnees were not specified in the report.

The Turkish military operations in the region have caused displacement as residents of several villages have fled their homes to seek safety, according to sources. On 23 August 2019, the media outlet Kurdistan 24 reported that the local authorities of Dohuk governorate stated that 'over 18 villages have been evacuated lately due to the threat of Turkish warplanes.' The Mayor of Sheikhan town, cited by Kurdistan 24, stated that 'in addition to significant damage to agricultural lands, the environment, and villages' infrastructure, the air strikes have triggered an exodus of people, from villages to urban areas.'<sup>1416</sup> Displacement due to the Turkish military operations in Dohuk governorate continued in 2020. AP reported on 22 June 2020 that dozens of the residents of Keshani village left their homes in the wake of the Turkish military operations in their area.<sup>1417</sup> On 27 June 2020, Rudaw stated that 'a ban has now been put in place to prevent people from travelling to affected villages, putting 50 villages under essential lockdown.'<sup>1418</sup> This trend continued as on 10 July 2020, the residents of another village in Dohuk, namely Avla, abandoned their village.<sup>1419</sup> On 14 July 2020, Rudaw stated that several villages in the sub-district of Kane Mase have been emptied as the area was targeted on several occasions, 'with locals left "terrified" after a strike in the village of Dargale Musa

<sup>1409</sup> Iraq, KRI, Ministry of Interior, Humanitarian Situational Report (SitRep): No. (2-20) for February 2020, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1410</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1411</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 115, March - April 2020 – Iraq, 18 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1412</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), p.

<sup>1413</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Urban Displacement in Iraq: A Preliminary Analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>1414</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1415</sup> USAID, IRAQ - COMPLEX EMERGENCY, 30 September 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1416</sup> Kurdistan 24, Evacuation of villages continues in Kurdistan as Turkish shellings intensify against PKK, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1417</sup> AP, Iraqis flee border areas as Turkey strikes Kurdish militants, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1418</sup> Rudaw, Zakho villagers flee Turkish airstrikes, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1419</sup> Rudaw, Zakho Kurds vacate another village as Turkey deploys more troops: officials, 10 July 2020, [url](#)



Bag' on May 18 [2020]'.<sup>1420</sup> With regard to minority villages, the Mayor of Zakho District told Kurdistan 24 on 1 July 2020 that 'out of 11 Christian villages in the area, nine of them have been completely evacuated' since the beginning of the recent Turkish military operations in northern Iraq.<sup>1421</sup> According to Al-Monitor, those evacuations and the casualties incurred by the Turkish military operations 'have turned up pressure on the KRG, while the reactions of the Baghdad government, in which the Kurds are represented, have been tougher than Ankara expected'. The Government of Iraq summoned the Turkish ambassador twice and threatened to take the issue to The Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation or the UN Security Council and to impose economic sanctions against Turkey.<sup>1422</sup>

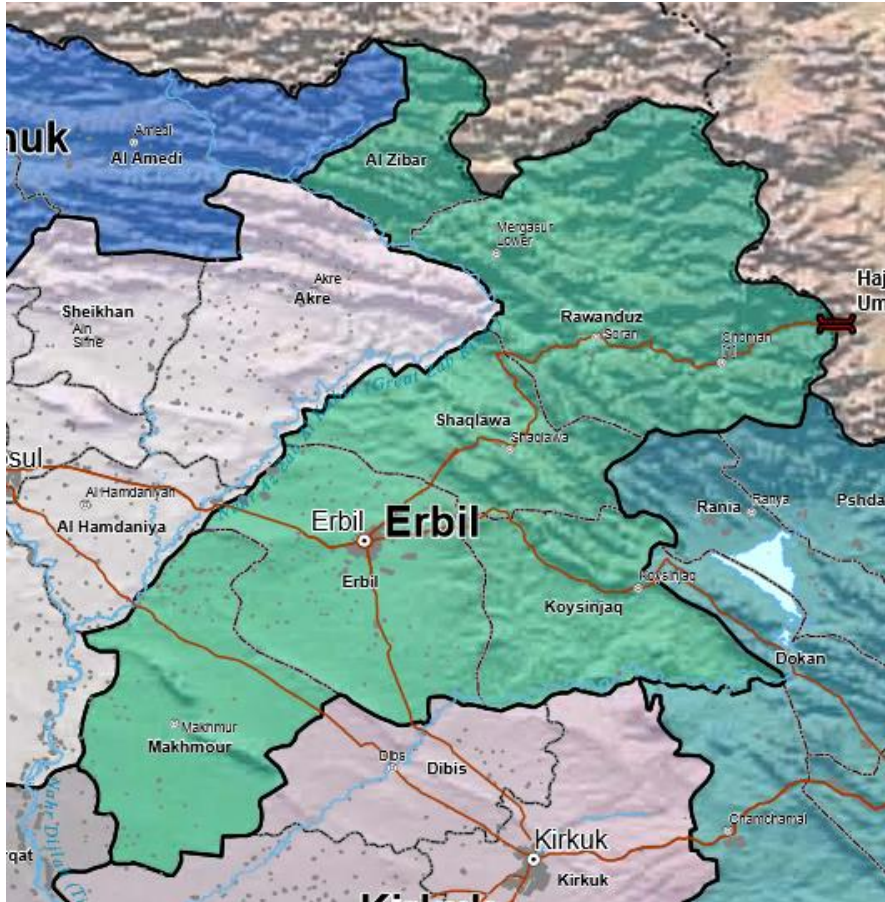
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<sup>1420</sup> Rudaw, Turkish airstrikes empty villages in Kani Masi, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1421</sup> Kurdistan 24, Over 10 Christian villages evacuate as PKK-Turkey clashes intensify, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1422</sup> Al-Monitor, Baghdad's row with Ankara could benefit each side, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

## 3.2 Erbil



Map 16 Erbil governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1423</sup>

### 3.2.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Erbil governorate is 15 074 km<sup>2</sup> (3.5 % of Iraq) and its capital has the same name, Erbil, which is also the capital of the KRI.<sup>1424</sup>

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.<sup>1425</sup> Erbil governorate is divided into the following districts: Choman, Erbil (the capital of the KRI), Koyasinaq, Makhmur, Mergasur, Shaqlawa, and Soran.<sup>1426</sup>

Makhmur 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'.<sup>1427</sup> There has not been an official decree transferring it to Ninewa thus its administrative status remains

<sup>1423</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1424</sup> IAU, Erbil Governorate Profile, August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1425</sup> IAU, Erbil Governorate Profile, August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1426</sup> IOM, Dahuk, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah: Governorate Profiles, June 2008, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1427</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Irak – Makhmour, June 4 2018, [url](#), p. 4

to be determined.<sup>1428</sup> According to Lifos's 2018 report, Makhmur remains 'among the least developed districts of Iraq'.<sup>1429</sup> For more information, see the chapter on [Ninewa](#).

## Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated<sup>1430</sup> the governorate's population at 1 903 608.<sup>1431</sup> Over half of Erbil governorate's population lives in the city of Erbil.<sup>1432</sup>

## Ethnicity

The main ethnic group in Erbil governorate are Kurds.<sup>1433</sup> Other groups present include Assyrian, Arab and Turkmen minorities.<sup>1434</sup> Most of the inhabitants of Erbil governorate are Sunni Muslims.<sup>1435</sup> Additional religious minorities include Christians (Chaldeans, Assyrians and Armenians), Yezidis and Kakai's.<sup>1436</sup>

## Economy

Scarce information about how the economy is affecting the security situation or vice versa in Erbil governorate was found during the drafting of this report.

Erbil is the 'commercial and administrative centre' of the KRI.<sup>1437</sup> A stable security situation attracted foreign investment, cross-border trade with Turkey and tourism, until the invasion of ISIL to north-western Iraq.<sup>1438</sup> However, the governorate has been affected by unemployment, inflation and lack of modern infrastructure and equipment.<sup>1439</sup>

According to IAU reporting in August 2020 'although few of Erbil's residents are among Iraq's poorest, the governorate performs relatively poorly according to humanitarian and developmental indicators.'<sup>1440</sup>

## Road security

For the year 2019 iMMAP-IHF documented the Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Erbil governorate and found that the main road leading from Ninewa governorate over Erbil governorate into Sulaymaniayah governorate was categorised on certain road sections as a 'Primary Risk Road', whilst roads around Makhmur were considered 'Secondary Risk' roads.<sup>1441</sup>

In July 2019, the 30<sup>th</sup> PMU Brigade (Liwa al-Shabak) blocked the connecting road between Mosul and Erbil for two days.<sup>1442</sup>

<sup>1428</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Irak – Makhmour, June 4 2018, [url](#), p. 4; IAU, Erbil Governorate Profile, August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1429</sup> Sweden, Lifos, Irak – Makhmour, June 4 2018, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1430</sup> It should be noted that the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987; UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1431</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 قديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1432</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1433</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1434</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1435</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1436</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1437</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1438</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1439</sup> NCCI, Erbil Governorate Profile, Updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1440</sup> IAU) Erbil Governorate Profile, August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1441</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Risk Level on Roads in Erbil Governorate from January to December 2019, 12 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1442</sup> Wing, J. Hashd's 30th Brigade In Ninewa Assaults Dep Governor and MP, 16 September 2019, [url](#)



Following the July 2019 attack in Erbil against a Turkish diplomat and two Iraqi civilians, checkpoints were set up in the area and roads closed, including the road between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Kirkuk, and Erbil and Makhmur.<sup>1443</sup>

As part of the COVID-19 related measures, the KRI restricted internal and cross-border movement on 22 February 2020, imposed a curfew between 13 March and 23 April 2020, and closed all airports.<sup>1444</sup> On 25 July 2020, travel restrictions were lifted to Erbil governorate; people from northern and southern Iraq were allowed to travel to Erbil governorate again for ‘important business’ or if they are residents, whilst in general the KRI also eased restrictions on internal movements.<sup>1445</sup>

### 3.2.2 Conflict background and armed actors

#### Conflict background

In October 2017, IOM described Erbil’s security situation as ‘stable’ and security incidents, such as terrorist attacks, as ‘not recurrent’.<sup>1446</sup> The IAU described Erbil governorate’s security situation in August 2020 as remaining ‘generally calm’, mentioning that the administrative status of Makhmur District, which borders Ninewa governorate, had yet to be officially determined.<sup>1447</sup>

Following the US-brokered agreement that put an end to the Kurdish civil war in 1998, Erbil governorate had come under the control of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), together with Dohuk, whilst Sulaymaniyah was administered by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).<sup>1448</sup> According to Lecturer Farhad Hassan Abdullah, since 2005 attempts have been made to unify the two Kurdish administrations under one government based in Erbil.<sup>1449</sup>

The September 2017 KDP-led independence referendum backfired, resulting in a reaction from the Iraqi central government, causing the loss of territorial control over most of the disputed territories retaken by Baghdad, and as the ICG observed ‘forced the leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan’s two main political parties to consider rebuilding their partnership and jointly re-engaging with Baghdad’.<sup>1450</sup> National and regional parliamentary elections followed in 2018, reaffirming the KDP’s and PUK’s ‘dominance’ in the KRI.<sup>1451</sup> Despite announcing in March 2019 a four-year political agreement allowing for the formation of the KRG cabinet and a set of joint positions on a number of issues<sup>1452</sup>, journalist Bekir Aydoğan warned in April 2020 however of a ‘near-breakdown of cooperation’ between the KDP and the PUK.<sup>1453</sup>

The KDP and PUK each maintain an independent security apparatus and separately control additional Peshmerga units, Asayish forces<sup>1454</sup> and intelligence services, the Zanyari (PUK) and the Parastin (KDP).<sup>1455</sup>

<sup>1443</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>1444</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 13

<sup>1445</sup> Rudaw, Erbil authorities ease travel restrictions with Iraqi provinces, 25 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1446</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment II, Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 13 and 14

<sup>1447</sup> IAU, Erbil Governorate Profile, August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1448</sup> Hassan, F., PUK–KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1449</sup> Hassan, F., PUK–KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1450</sup> ICG, After Iraqi Kurdistan’s Thwarted Independence Bid, 27 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1451</sup> ICG, After Iraqi Kurdistan’s Thwarted Independence Bid, 27 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1452</sup> US, CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, Updated 17 July 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1453</sup> Knights, M. (Middle East Research Institute), Iraqi Kurdistan: Priority Issues for international mediation, 13 July 2020, [url](#). See also Aydoğan, B., The Iraqi Kurds’ Destructive Infighting: Causes and Consequences, 15 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1454</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1455</sup> US, USDOS, 2017 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Iraq, 20 April 2018 [url](#)

## Armed actors

### *Peshmerga and Asayish*

The KDP maintain an independent security apparatus and separately control additional Peshmerga units and Asayish internal security services.<sup>1456</sup> The Peshmerga comprise a range of forces, including traditional army forces, military and intelligence units<sup>1457</sup>, and militias of the KDP, which ‘maintained order’ in the KRI, according to the USDOS.<sup>1458</sup> In 2017, the Peshmerga was estimated to have around 190 000 to 250 000 fighters.<sup>1459</sup>

In 2017 the KDP-commanded Peshmerga Division 80 had approximately 50 000 fighters and as of 3 December 2019 were active in Makhmur District and Gwer, as well as in Debaga sub-district.<sup>1460</sup>

### *Turkish state forces*

In recent years Turkey has set up military bases in key areas including Erbil governorate.<sup>1461</sup>

### *PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party)*

Founded in the 1970s, the PKK launched an armed struggle against the Turkish government in 1984 calling for an independent Kurdish state in Turkey, which it continued to date.<sup>1462</sup> The PKK is on the European Union’s list of designated groups which have been involved in terrorism<sup>1463</sup>, as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey<sup>1464</sup>, the United States<sup>1465</sup>, and Australia.<sup>1466</sup> The PKK fought against ISIL in Makhmur.<sup>1467</sup> The PKK has developed its territorial presence over mountainous areas along the border between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates and Iran (Qandil Mountains) and Makhmur District.<sup>1468</sup> Given PKK’s presence in these areas, Turkey has launched regular cross-border attacks into the KRI targeting PKK fighters, which resulted also in civilian casualties.<sup>1469</sup>

### *Iranian state forces*

Iranian intelligence operations took place in Erbil governorate during 2018.<sup>1470</sup> Iran’s IRGC continued to launch missile and drone attacks into the KRI, including Erbil governorate’s border areas, targeting mainly Iranian Kurdish opposition groups during the timeframe for this report.<sup>1471</sup>

<sup>1456</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1457</sup> GPPi, Who’s Who: Quick Facts About Local and Sub-State Forces, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1458</sup> US, USDOS, 2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1459</sup> GPPi, Who’s Who: Quick Facts About Local and Sub-State Forces, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1460</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1461</sup> Shafaq, American report: Turkey has set up 13 military bases in Kurdistan region, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1462</sup> BBC News, Who are Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1463</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1464</sup> Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a ‘terrorist’ organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1465</sup> US, Bureau of Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a ‘terrorist’ organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1466</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Listed terrorist organisations, n.d., [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a ‘terrorist’ organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1467</sup> GPPi, Who’s Who: Quick Facts About Local and Sub-State Forces, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1468</sup> 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, The PKK in Iraq: A Geopolitical Reading, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1469</sup> Reuters, Turkish air strikes ‘neutralize’ 15 Kurdish militants in Iraq: military, 10 November 2018, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, PKK main reason Turkey bombs Kurdistan’s border: KRG spokesperson, 16 November 2018, [url](#); 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, The PKK in Iraq: A Geopolitical Reading, 9 September 2019, [url](#); US, USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1470</sup> Denmark, DIS, Iranian Kurds, Consequences of political activities in Iran and KRI, February 2020 [source: journalists A and B in KRI], [url](#), pp. 76 and 84

<sup>1471</sup> Rudaw, Iran launches cross-border drone strikes on Kurdish opposition groups, 12 July 2019, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, Iran Mobilizes Forces on Border with Kurdistan, 19 August 2019, [url](#); CPT, Turkish and Iranian Cross-border Bombings in Iraqi Kurdistan (2017-2019), 25 September 2019, [url](#); Forbes, Iran just struck U.S. bases in Iraq with ballistic missiles. Here’s why

### *Kurdish insurgent groups and Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups*

Armed groups active in the KRI's mountainous areas in 2017 included Kurdish insurgent groups and Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups.<sup>1472</sup> It was reported in June 2020 that two border villages in Erbil were hosting headquarters of the Iranian Kurdish KDPI and Komalah opposition groups, and that they had been shelled by Iranian forces.<sup>1473</sup>

### *ISIL*

ISIL threats in the KRI continued to exist in 2018, according to researcher Adel Bakawan, although the KRI was largely untouched by ISIL violence.<sup>1474</sup> The KRI has been largely spared ISIL attacks since 2014, however Makhmour District, which fell close to the frontline with ISIL territory, was hit by attacks between 2014 and 2017.<sup>1475</sup> It was described by IOM as the only location in 2017 in Erbil governorate that experienced terrorist attacks.<sup>1476</sup> During the reporting period for this report ISIL was successful at recruiting Iraqi Kurds to create a 'new insurgent threat' based in Erbil governorate<sup>1477</sup>, as well as settling in the Qarachogh Mountains.<sup>1478</sup> In June 2019 the ISW reported that ISIL was 'asserting control' over the civilian population in Makhmur, from its stronghold in Mount Qarachogh.<sup>1479</sup> Reportedly around 1 000 ISIL members were located in Qarachogh Mountain in Makhmur District as of December 2019, who carry out attacks against Peshmerga and ISF in the disputed territory.<sup>1480</sup> The Center for Global Policy created a map outlining ISIL's main presence being in Makhmur as of 3 December 2019.<sup>1481</sup>

## 3.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### Developments 2019-2020

In its report to the US Congress covering 1 January to 31 March 2019, the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve reported that insurgent activity had 'slightly increased' in Erbil governorate without providing further detail.<sup>1482</sup> The IAU described Erbil governorate's security situation in August 2020 as remaining 'generally calm', mentioning that the administrative status of Makhmur District, which borders Ninewa governorate, had 'yet to be officially determined'.<sup>1483</sup>

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they're Tehran's favored weapon, 7 January 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), paras. 28 and 30; Rudaw, Iran and Turkey conduct military operations in Haji Omaran for second day straight: officials, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1472</sup> CPT, Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017), 17 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1473</sup> Eastern Herald (The), Iran pushes hard to destroy Iraqi Kurdistan movement, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1474</sup> Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFpra), 10 December 2018, in: EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, March 2019, [url](#), p. 149

<sup>1475</sup> UNAMI, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1 November 2015 – 30 September 2016, 30 December 2016, [url](#); IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1476</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1477</sup> ISW, ISIS Re-Established Iraqi Sanctuary: March 7, 2019, March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1478</sup> Rudaw, Is ISIS winning hearts and minds in Iraq's Makhmour?, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1479</sup> ISW, ISIS's Second Comeback, Assessing the next ISIS insurgency, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>1480</sup> Kurdistan 24, Kurdish villagers in Iraq's disputed Makhmour district repel ISIS attack, 19 December 2019, [url](#). See also Rudaw, Is ISIS winning hearts and minds in Iraq's Makhmour?, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1481</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1482</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2019 – March 31, 2019, 7 May 2019, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>1483</sup> IAU, Erbil Governorate Profile, August 2020, [url](#)

## Turkey-PKK conflict

During the reporting period for this report, the UN regularly reported on the continuation of Turkish air strikes against PKK strongholds, which inflicted mainly material damage.<sup>1484</sup> In July 2020, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees noted that Turkey's air strikes were 'significantly more intensive' than previous Turkish military operations.<sup>1485</sup> According to one analyst in September 2019, the PKK is 'now considered as a major new actor within the Iraqi geopolitical scene'.<sup>1486</sup> ACLED reported an 'intensification of the conflict in Iraqi Kurdistan' and 'increased use of air and drone strikes by Turkish forces' over the last three years.<sup>1487</sup> The Center for Global Policy created a map showing that the PKK and affiliates were active in Sidakan sub-district and Qandil Mountain in northern Erbil governorate as of 3 December 2019.<sup>1488</sup>

Following the targeted attack in July 2019, in Erbil against a Turkish diplomat, an increase of Turkish air strikes in the KRI was reported.<sup>1489</sup> The assassination of a Turkish diplomat in Erbil in July 2019 was attributed to the PKK.<sup>1490</sup> The ICG reported that the Turkish army conducted at least 76 cross-border air operations between May and September 2019 against PKK hideouts and ammunition depots in the KRI, especially in and around the Qandil mountains and in Hakurk; no civilian casualties were recorded by the ICG during that time.<sup>1491</sup>

In March 2020, Kurdistan Peshmerga Forces under the control of the KDP and the PUK respectively stationed their military forces on the Zine Asterokan mountain range, in proximity to the towns of Warte (Erbil governorate) and Shawre (Sulaymaniyah governorate), which reportedly resulted in cross-border bombardments by the Turkish Air Force in April and May 2020.<sup>1492</sup> CPTs documented 15 civilian casualties in the first six months of 2020 due to Turkish military operations in the KRI.<sup>1493</sup>

In June 2020, Turkey launched Operation Claw-Eagle and Operation Claw-Tiger, air and ground offensives as well as establishing military bases, against PKK targets in northern Iraq and the KRI, particularly against bases in Sinjar (Ninewa governorate), Qandil (Iran-Iraq border), Karacak, Zap, Avasin-Basyan and Hakurk (Dohuk governorate).<sup>1494</sup> In July 2020, the Turkish Consul General announced that Turkish army military operations would continue in the KRI until the end of the presence of the PKK.<sup>1495</sup> By 6 July 2020, Turkish forces had set up 37 'military points' in border areas of the KRI, notably along the Iraq-Turkey and Iraq-Iran borders, and including four in Erbil, Duhok, Soran and Zakho cities.<sup>1496</sup> CPTs documented on 21 July 2020 that since the launch of these military

<sup>1484</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General, 2 May 2019, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 25; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 35; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 35; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>1485</sup> Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Briefing Notes, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1486</sup> 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, The PKK in Iraq: A Geopolitical Reading, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1487</sup> ACLED, Turkey – PKK Conflict: Summer 2020, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1488</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1489</sup> WFP, WFP Iraq, Situation Report #65, July 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1490</sup> 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, The PKK in Iraq: A Geopolitical Reading, 9 September 2019, [url](#); US, USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1491</sup> ICG, Assessing the Fatalities in Turkey's PKK Conflict, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1492</sup> CPT, Civilian impacts of the New military Bases on Zine Asterokan, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1493</sup> CPT, Response to Turkish Consul General's claim that Turkish military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan did not target civilians, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1494</sup> AA, Turkey launches operation Claw-Eagle, 15 June 2020, [url](#); TRT World, Turkey begins fresh anti-terror Operation Claw-Tiger in northern Iraq, 16 June 2020, [url](#); Ahval, Turkish offensive in north Iraq extends beyond usual anti-PKK campaign – analysis, 22 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1495</sup> Nina News, Operations Until The End Of The PKK, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1496</sup> Rudaw, Ankara has built nearly 40 'military points' in Kurdistan Region: Turkish presidency, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

operations on 15 June 2020 at least 6 civilians had been killed and at least 4 civilians wounded, including in Erbil governorate, whilst agricultural lands, orchards and livestock were burned.<sup>1497</sup> The ISW reported in June 2020 that Iran and Turkey were coordinating their military operations against Iraqi Kurdish targets near the north-eastern Iraqi border in Erbil governorate.<sup>1498</sup>

Turkish military operations in Sidakan District have caused displacement as residents of several villages have fled their homes to seek safety according to sources, though the scale of displacement has not been provided.<sup>1499</sup>

### Iranian activity

In June 2019, ‘heavy’ Iranian shelling in Sidakan District resulted in the displacement of ‘numerous’ families reported Christian Peacemaker Teams.<sup>1500</sup> Following the death of the Commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, General Qasem Soleimani in a January 2020 US air strike, Iran launched missiles at the US airbase in Erbil governorate, with no reported casualties.<sup>1501</sup>

In June 2020, Rudaw reported that Iran’s IRGC joined forces with Turkey to fight what they called ‘Kurdistan Region-based cross-border “terrorism”’.<sup>1502</sup> Iranian forces shelled the Iranian-Kurdish opposition party, Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) in areas inside the KRI, including surroundings of the Makhmour refugee camp and the Qandil mountains.<sup>1503</sup> According to IRGC-affiliated ISWNEWS and as recorded by Rudaw, the IRGC shelled PJAK positions near the border area of Haji Omaran.<sup>1504</sup> According to reports, Iranian military operations in June 2020 have prompted residents to flee their homes.<sup>1505</sup>

### ISIL activity

According to the UN Secretary-General, between 23 November 2019 and 6 May 2020, remnants of ISIL ‘continued to launch frequent asymmetric attacks’ against Iraqi civilians and security forces, including in Erbil governorate.<sup>1506</sup> According to the sources listed below most of ISIL’s attacks and activities focused on Makhmour District. A May 2019 news report highlighted that ISIL had returned to ‘earlier insurgency tactics’ through the ambush of security forces, the use of ‘kidnapping and executions of suspected informants, as well as the extortion of money from vulnerable rural civilians’.<sup>1507</sup> It was reported in May 2019 that ISIL torched a number of crop fields at the base of Mount Qarachogh Mountains of Makhmur, as farmers refused to pay them taxes.<sup>1508</sup> In September

<sup>1497</sup> CPT, Response to Turkish Consul General’s claim that Turkish military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan did not target civilians, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1498</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 17 – 23, 2020, 20 June 2020, [url](#). See also ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 10 – 16, 2020, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1499</sup> Rudaw, Bombed by both neighbours: Kurdistan Region border areas deserted in fear, 7 June 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Bradost beekeeping takes a hit in ongoing PKK-Turkey clashes, 9 June 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, Iran and Turkey conduct military operations in Haji Omaran for second day straight: officials, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1500</sup> CPT, Turkish and Iranian Cross-border Bombings in Iraqi Kurdistan (2017-2019), 25 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1501</sup> Forbes, Iran just struck U.S. bases in Iraq with ballistic missiles. Here’s why they’re Tehran’s favored weapon, 7 January 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), paras. 28 and 30

<sup>1502</sup> Rudaw, Iran and Turkey conduct military operations in Haji Omaran for second day straight: officials, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1503</sup> Kurdistan 24, Iran targeted PDKI bases in two-day shelling of Kurdistan Region: statement, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1504</sup> Rudaw, Iran and Turkey conduct military operations in Haji Omaran for second day straight: officials, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1505</sup> Rudaw, Bombed by both neighbours: Kurdistan Region border areas deserted in fear, 7 June 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Iran shells Kurdistan Region for second day in row, forcing locals to flee, 17 June 2020, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Iran targeted PDKI bases in two-day shelling of Kurdistan Region: statement, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1506</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 23; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 24

<sup>1507</sup> Rudaw, ISIS burns crop fields in Makhmour after farmers refuse to pay tax, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1508</sup> Rudaw, ISIS burns crop fields in Makhmour after farmers refuse to pay tax, 14 May 2019, [url](#); Bellingcat, Torching and Extortion: OSINT Analysis Of Burning Agriculture In Iraq, 3 June 2019, [url](#)

2019, the US-led coalition, together with the Peshmerga killed ten ISIL fighters in Qarachogh Mountain in Makhmur District.<sup>1509</sup> In December 2019, residents of the village of Ali-Rash, located in Baqrte sub-district, Makhmur District, forced back an attack by ISIL.<sup>1510</sup>

In March 2020, following a joint air assault by US Marine Raiders and Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) soldiers on an ISIL cave complex in Qarachogh Mountain in Makhmur District, two marines were killed and four soldiers were wounded.<sup>1511</sup> In June 2020, military operations by the Iraqi CTS, some of which were supported by the international coalition, included 59 air raids on ISIL hideouts in the Qarachogh mountains near Makhmur, 89 searches of villages for ammunition and fighters, and the killing of twelve ISIL members.<sup>1512</sup>

According to open source data from ACLED, EPIC and Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency database, ISIL conducted around 12 attacks in Erbil governorate from January to March 2020.<sup>1513</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 27 April 2019, ISIL ambushed a group of Kurds whilst they were hunting for truffles near Makhmur, including an off-duty Asayesh officer. Upon learning his identity ISIL kidnapped and later executed the man.<sup>1514</sup>
- On 15 May 2019, a 50-year-old man died because of a Turkish air strike in the Barzan region.<sup>1515</sup>
- On 5 June 2019, a Turkish air strike on Xakurke in the Qandil mountains injured four civilians, one of them seriously.<sup>1516</sup>
- On 10 July 2019, Iranian or Turkish artillery bombardment killed an 18-year-old woman in Barbezin area, sub-district of Sidakan (Bradost), District of Soran.<sup>1517</sup>
- On 10 July 2019, Iranian forced shelled KDP sites in Choman District, killing 3 civilians including a 14-year-old girl.<sup>1518</sup>
- On 17 July 2019, shooters attacked a restaurant in Erbil, killing a Turkish diplomat and two Iraqi civilians.<sup>1519</sup>
- In February 2020, ISIL members stole livestock from the village of Azikand, which resulted in a 'clash' between ISIL and members of the 'protection forces' of nearby Makhmur refugee camp who came to the villagers' help.<sup>1520</sup>

<sup>1509</sup> Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Briefing Notes, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration, 16 September 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1510</sup> Kurdistan 24, Kurdish villagers in Iraq's disputed Makhmour district repel ISIS attack, 19 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1511</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: March 4 – 10, 2020, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1512</sup> Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Briefing Notes, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration, 29 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1513</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, 1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020, 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>1514</sup> Antiwar.com, ISIS Executes Kurdish Intelligence Agent; Three Killed in Iraq, 2 May 2019, [url](#); Rudaw, ISIS burns crop fields in Makhmour after farmers refuse to pay tax, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1515</sup> Airwars, Civilian Casualties, TI021a, 15 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1516</sup> Airwars, Civilian Casualties, TI022a, 5 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1517</sup> Airwars, Civilian Casualties, TI024a, IRI003, 10 July 2019, [url](#); CPT, "What hope is there for us", 17 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1518</sup> EPIC, Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor (ISHM): July 4 – July 11, 2019, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1519</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>1520</sup> Iraqi National News Agency, ISIS Launched An Attack On A Refugee Camp In Makhmour, 2 February, 2020, [url](#)

- On 15 April 2020, Turkish air raids killed between two and three female civilians from the Makhmur refugee camp.<sup>1521</sup>
- On 28 April 2020, Turkish air strikes in Xakurke area killed two civilians and severely injured one man.<sup>1522</sup>
- On 10-11 May 2020, ISIL members torched farms in south-west Erbil.<sup>1523</sup>
- Between 10 and 16 June 2020, Iran reportedly shelled the Choman region, but no information as to target and/or casualties was recorded.<sup>1524</sup>
- On 17 June 2020, a Turkish air strike killed a nomadic shepherd in Khnera heights in the sub-district of Sidakan (Bradost), district of Soran.<sup>1525</sup>
- On 12 July 2020, Turkish bombing resulted in a five-day forest fire, which caused economic damage.<sup>1526</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Erbil	16	5	12	<b>17</b>	12	4	1	<b>5</b>

Table 13: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Erbil governorate<sup>1527</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 162 battles, 438 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 13 cases of violence against civilians, 0 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 613 security incidents of these types in Erbil governorate, the majority taking place in Soran District. 56 protests were also reported in Erbil governorate during the reference period.<sup>1528</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the table below.

<sup>1521</sup> Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Briefing Notes, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration, 20 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>1522</sup> Airwars, Civilian Casualties, TIO35, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1523</sup> EPIC, Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor (ISHM): May 7 – May 14, 2020, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1524</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: June 10 – 16, 2020, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1525</sup> CPT, Response to Turkish Consul General's claim that Turkish military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan did not target civilians, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1526</sup> Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Briefing Notes, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1527</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 July 2020

<sup>1528</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

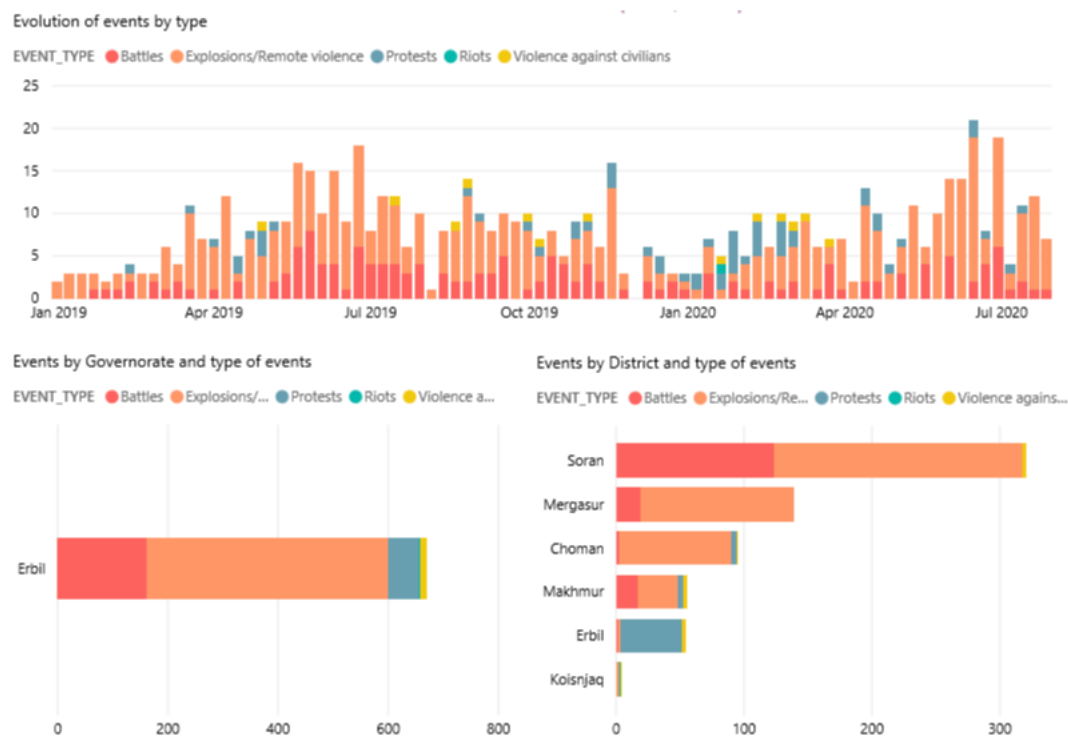


Figure 16: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Erbil governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1529</sup>

### 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 \(2018\)](#).

The KRG maintains its own internal security force, but the KDP, also maintains its own controlled security apparatus, additional Peshmerga units, Asayish forces<sup>1530</sup> and intelligence services, the Parastin.<sup>1531</sup> Freedom House reported that KRG suffers from corruption similar to the rest of Iraq<sup>1532</sup>, other sources also report on corruption, nepotism<sup>1533</sup>, and patronage in the KRG administration<sup>1534</sup>.

The US Overseas Security Advisory Council's (OSAC) Crime & Safety Report for the KRI of May 2020 described KRI's crime statistics and crime reporting mechanisms as 'unreliable', but reported on the KRI's police capacity to quickly response to security incidents, including terrorist attacks, and criminal activities, and further noted that the police and security services are equipped with 'modern weapons and security equipment', without specifying whether they do so in practice.<sup>1535</sup> DFAT noted that: 'Although the KRI is generally regarded as a more benign security environment, its borders are insecure. Violent crime is common, and kidnappings, murders and robberies occur frequently.'<sup>1536</sup>

<sup>1529</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1530</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1531</sup> US, USDOS, 2017 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Iraq, 20 April 2018 [url](#)

<sup>1532</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the world 2019 – Iraq, 4 February 2019, [url](#), accessed 15 July 2020

<sup>1533</sup> Rudaw, 16 April 2019, KRG's corruption probe slowed by lack of staff, resources: Commission, [url](#), accessed 15 July 2020

<sup>1534</sup> Bali, A.O., The roots of clientelism in Iraqi Kurdistan and the efforts to fight it, p. 99, [url](#), accessed 15 July 2020

<sup>1535</sup> US, OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Erbil, 12 May 2020, [url](#). Note that despite the name of the source implying that it focuses on either Erbil city or Erbil governorate, the information contained in the report refers almost exclusively to the whole of the KRI.

<sup>1536</sup> Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report Iraq, 17 August 2020, [url](#), para. 2.58



Following an ambush by ISIL fighters against paramilitias in Makhmur, the deputy speaker of the Iraqi parliament ‘slammed “lax” security that allowed the ambush to happen’ and questioned the absence of intelligence efforts.<sup>1537</sup>

Commentators noted that the severe oil price crash, which began in March 2020 and which they foresee will extend through 2021, ‘imposes yet more strain’ on the KRI’s security forces ‘in terms of maintaining civil order in cities’.<sup>1538</sup>

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

IOM found that as of June 2019 around 5 % of returnees had critical access to infrastructure, services and land – defined as incorporating electricity, water, schools, health clinics and hospital, waste collection and latrines, market, office for the replacement of civil documentation and legal services for Housing, Land and Property issues - in particular in the district of Makhmur.<sup>1539</sup>

The January 2019 iMMAP-IHF published a map showing the ‘legacy contamination by landmines and ERW and the new contamination of explosive hazards, including IED) in areas liberated from ISIS since 2014’, which illustrated that the district of Choman, followed by southern parts of Soran District, were the highest contaminated areas in Erbil governorate.<sup>1540</sup> iMMAP-IHF also produced a map documenting the ‘Explosive Hazard Incidents Risk Level’ in Erbil governorate from January to December 2019, which depicted low to moderate risk levels in the district of Makhmur.<sup>1541</sup>

The KRI recorded mine contamination of 181 km<sup>2</sup> at the end of 2018, 14 % less than at the end of 2017.<sup>1542</sup> Of these, roughly 49 km<sup>2</sup> have been surveyed in Erbil governorate.<sup>1543</sup> This data did not include areas on the Turkish border, which have never been surveyed owing to continued fighting and air strikes, reported Mine Action Review.<sup>1544</sup>

The US OSCA’s Crime & Safety Report for Erbil of May 2020 noted that whilst roadside IEDs are ‘not common’ in the KRI, smaller handheld explosives and unexploded ordnance (UXO) ‘are present, especially in areas previously under ISIS control’.<sup>1545</sup>

In August 2020, iMMAP-IHF monitored the risk level of four categories of incidents: ‘Armed clash, Explosive Hazard, Airstrike & Others’ in seven governorates, including Makhmur District, from June 2019 to July 2020, which can be viewed in detail [here](#).<sup>1546</sup>

### Displacement and return

According to IOM, Erbil governorate has been a ‘common’ destination for the displaced since the start of the conflict [2014] and as of October 2017 hosted 15 % of Iraqi IDPs (over 310 000 individuals), hosting the second largest displaced population after Salah al-Din.<sup>1547</sup> In October 2017, over 90 % of Erbil’s IDPs originated from Ninewa and Anbar governorates, whilst Makhmur was the only district of

<sup>1537</sup> Rudaw, ISIS attack Hashd in deadly ambush near Makhmour killing 6, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1538</sup> Knights, M. and Almeida, A. (CTC Sentinel), Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020, May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1539</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment IV, 30 March 2020, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1540</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Monthly security incidents situation report, January 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1541</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Explosive Hazards Incidents Risk level in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates from December to January 2019, 12 January 2020, [url](#) [Note that the title of the map is slightly misleading as the source also states that the ‘Explosive Hazard data’ is “From Jan to Dec 2019”]

<sup>1542</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1543</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1544</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1545</sup> US, OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Erbil, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1546</sup> iMMAP, Humanitarian Access Response: Risk level monitoring maps of the 4 categories of Incident “Armed clash, Explosive Hazard, Airstrike & Others” for the 7 Governorates Jun. 2019 – Jul. 2020, 9 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1547</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment II, Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 13

displacement in Erbil.<sup>1548</sup> Over 40 % of all IDPs displaced during the 2014-2017 ISIL conflict sought safety in the KRI – a figure which OCHA described as having held ‘steady or even declined’ in 2019.<sup>1549</sup>

As of 30 June 2020, Erbil governorate had 236 496 IDPs residing in three main districts: Erbil (215 472), Makhmur (9 984) and Shaqlawa (5 154).<sup>1550</sup> 47 % of those IDPs originated from Ninewa, 29 % from Anbar, 10 % from Salah al-Din, and 14 % from elsewhere.<sup>1551</sup> During May and June 2020, 7 IDPs were re-displaced following their return to their areas of origin ‘due to security concerns’, whilst IOM highlighted that movements between governorates were ‘limited’ due to COVID-19 related restrictions imposed since March 2020.<sup>1552</sup> OCHA estimated that by January 2020, 15 981 IDPs lived in formal camps and 170 000 IDPs lived out-of-camp or in informal settlements.<sup>1553</sup>

OCHA reported in January 2020 that 38 500 displaced people in Makhmur District presented unmet ‘high or very high severity of needs’.<sup>1554</sup> As a comparison, in February 2019, OCHA estimated this figure to be 56 000 people.<sup>1555</sup>

REACH conducted an intentions survey in three IDP camps in Erbil governorate between 18 June and 1 August 2019, interviewing a total of 197 households.<sup>1556</sup> REACH found that 89 % of IDP households intended to remain in displacement for the three months following the survey, and 67 % for the 12 months following the survey.<sup>1557</sup> According to the report, the reasons behind the IDPs’ intention to remain in displacement for the 12 months following the survey, were lack of security forces in the areas of origin (46 %), fear and trauma associated with the areas of origin (40 %), and homes damaged or destroyed in the areas of origin (37 %).<sup>1558</sup> Of those who considered their areas of origin to not be safe at the time of the survey, 46 % feared extremist groups, 36 % armed security actors, and 35 % explosive hazards.<sup>1559</sup> In its report covering the period from 5 August to 22 November 2019, the UN reported on the closure of vital services in the field of gender-based violence, due to lack of funding, for IDPs, returnees and host communities, amongst others in Erbil governorate, whilst ‘serious’ gender-based violence incidents were reported in both camps and informal settlements perpetrated by armed actors.<sup>1560</sup> Following her visit to Iraq, including to Erbil governorate, in February 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons found that in the KRI local integration was ‘rejected by authorities in hosting areas’ fearing changes in their demographics.<sup>1561</sup>

An April 2020 IOM assessment found that there were 124 614 out-of-camp IDPs in Erbil city – the largest recipient of IDPs.<sup>1562</sup> The assessment noted that amongst IDPs settled in Erbil city, 38 % were willing to return in the short term while 57 % were willing to return in the long term.<sup>1563</sup> The relatively low willingness to return was attributed to the perceived worsening of living conditions and livelihood

<sup>1548</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment II, Part II – Governorate Profiles, October 2017, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1549</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq, January 2020, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>1550</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 1 and 2

<sup>1551</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1552</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1553</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq, January 2020, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>1554</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq, January 2020, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>1555</sup> UNOCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan, January-December 2019, February 2019, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>1556</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Erbil p. 1

<sup>1557</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Erbil p. 1

<sup>1558</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Erbil p. 1

<sup>1559</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Erbil p. 2

<sup>1560</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 74

<sup>1561</sup> UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Visit to Iraq, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, 13 May 2020, [url](#), para. 14

<sup>1562</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1563</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

opportunities in their areas of origin.<sup>1564</sup> In about '10 % of locations, IDPs reported fear as a result of the changed ethno-religious composition at origin' as a reason not to return to their areas of origin.<sup>1565</sup>

OCHA reported in July 2020 that 60 % of respondents in camps reported a ban on entry into / exit from camps, but with exceptions: 37 % reported a ban on new admissions to camps; and 17 % reported that measures and regulations were applied more strictly to IDPs and/or returnees.<sup>1566</sup> 45% of respondents in camps noted that restrictions on freedom of movement were the first main protection concern affecting communities, 63 % noted that protection issues affecting women and girls had significantly or very significantly increased since the beginning of the pandemic, whilst 69 % reported that protection issues affecting children had significantly or very significantly increased.<sup>1567</sup>

IOM observed that as of 30 June 2020, 53 004 IDPs returned to their area of origin, all of whom to Makhmur.<sup>1568</sup> 73 % of these returnees were originally displaced within Erbil governorate, 15 % to Ninewa, 11 % to Kirkuk and 1 % to Salah al-Din.<sup>1569</sup> IOM found that as of June 2019 around 5 % of returnees had critical access to infrastructure, services and land – defined as incorporating electricity, water, schools, health clinics and hospital, waste collection and latrines, market, office for the replacement of civil documentation and legal services for Housing, Land and Property issues - in particular in the district of Makhmur.<sup>1570</sup>

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<sup>1564</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1565</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1566</sup> UNOCHA, Protection Cluster Iraq, Protection monitoring in response to COVID-19, Summary of findings – July 2019, July 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1567</sup> UNOCHA, Protection Cluster Iraq, Protection monitoring in response to COVID-19, Summary of findings – July 2019, July 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 3

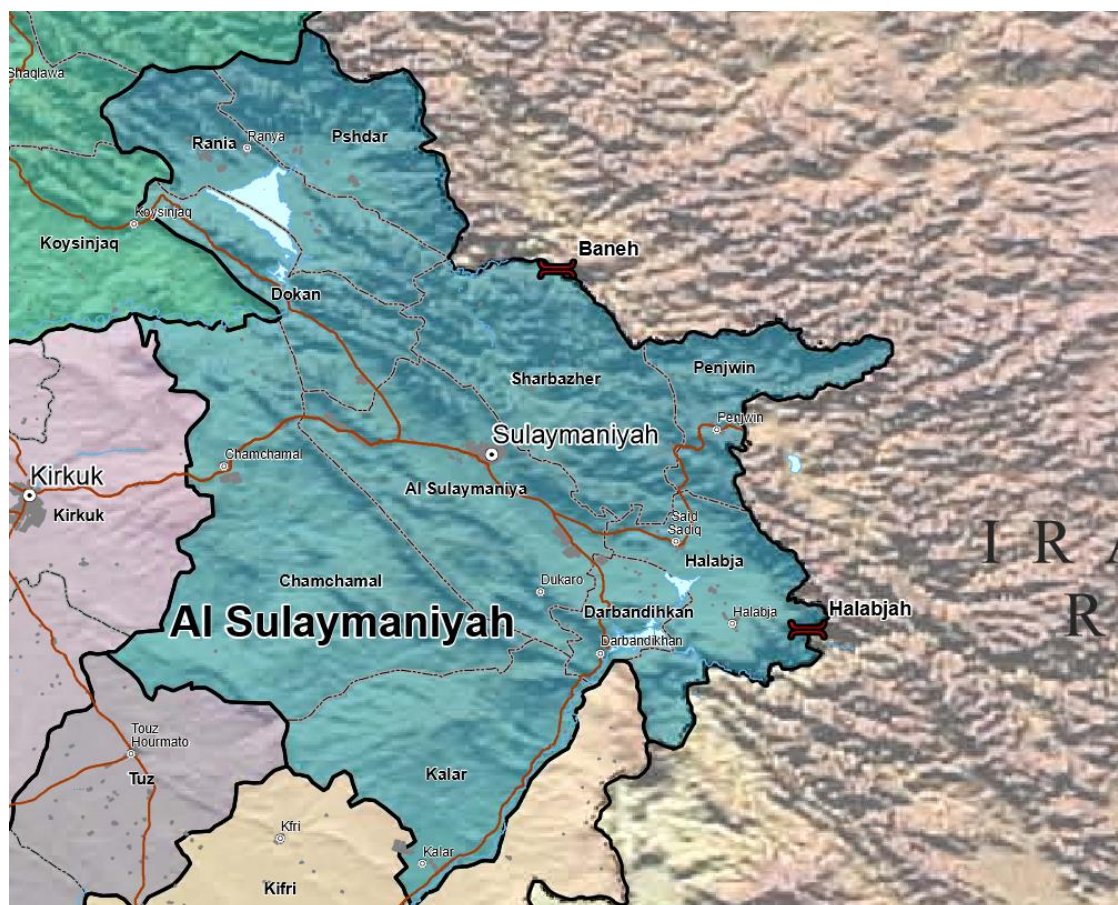
<sup>1568</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1569</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1570</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment IV, 30 March 2020, [url](#), p. 23



### 3.3 Sulaymaniyah



Map 17: Sulaymaniyah governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1571</sup>

#### 3.3.1 General description of the governorate

##### Basic geography

Sulaymaniyah governorate is part of the KRI and located in the north-eastern part of Iraq.<sup>1572</sup> It has internal borders with Erbil, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala and it also has an international border with the Islamic Republic of Iran to the east.<sup>1573</sup> Sulaymaniyah governorate is divided into the following districts: Chamchamal, Darbandihkan, Dokan, Halabja, Kalar, Penjwin, Pshdar, Rania, Sharbazher, Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1574</sup> The governorate borders some of the disputed areas claimed by both the KRG and the central government in Baghdad.<sup>1575</sup> Although Halabja was designated as a governorate by the Iraqi government in December 2013, many ministries and institutions considered it as part of Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1576</sup> The Garmiyan Administration is a disputed territory between Baghdad and Erbil,

<sup>1571</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1572</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1573</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Sulaymaniyah Governorate Reference Map 2020, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1574</sup> IOM, Dahuk, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah: governorate profiles, June 2008, [url](#), p. 2; IOM, Iraq Master List Report 114 January – February 2020, 29 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1575</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1576</sup> Rudaw, Years on, Halabja still waiting for full province status, 26 June 2017, [url](#)

located within Sulaymaniyah governorate, and an unofficial governorate in the KRI that includes the three districts of Kalar, Kifri, and Chamchamal.<sup>1577</sup>

Sulaymaniyah governorate is 17 023 km<sup>2</sup><sup>1578</sup> and its capital has the same name, Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1579</sup>

## Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated the governorate's population at 2 219 194.<sup>1580</sup> Most people live in urban areas (1 880 342), with a minority living in rural areas (338 852).<sup>1581</sup>

## Ethnicity

The main ethnic group in the governorate are Kurds.<sup>1582</sup> According to the USCIRF the main ethnic groups in the KRI are Sunni Kurds, in addition to Sunni Arabs, Christians, Circassians, Fayli Kurds, Shabaks, Shia and Sunni Turkmen, Yarsan (including Kaka'i), as well as Yezidis.<sup>1583</sup> Zoroastrians are also present in the governorate.<sup>1584</sup>

## Economy

It was reported in 2015 that the relatively stable security situation attracted foreign investments, tourism and a 'construction boom'.<sup>1585</sup> Sulaymaniyah also has large supplies of water and fertile plains contributing to agricultural production.<sup>1586</sup> 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 ISIS.<sup>1587</sup>

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.<sup>1588</sup>

## Road security

Scarce information about road security and checkpoints in Sulaymaniyah governorate was found during the drafting of this report.

Following the shooting of a Turkish diplomat in Erbil in July 2019, security forces enforced checkpoints in the area and closed roads, including the road between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1589</sup> In January 2020 ISIL was reported to have set up a fake checkpoint in the disputed territory of Garmiyan and subsequently kidnapped seven civilians.<sup>1590</sup>

<sup>1577</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS kidnaps 7 civilians at fake checkpoint in Kurdistan's Garmiyan region, 31 January 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, 'Peshmerga blood on his hands': ISIS emir arrested in Garmiyan, 3 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1578</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1579</sup> IOM, Dahuk, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah: governorate profiles, June 2008, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1580</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 العراق سكان المديرات حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1581</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 العراق سكان المديرات حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1582</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1583</sup> USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1584</sup> USCIRF, Wilting in the Kurdish Sun: The hopes and fears of religious minorities in Northern Iraq, May 2017, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1585</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1586</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1587</sup> Carnegie Middle East Center, Kurdistan's Politicized Society Confronts a Sultanistic System, 18 August 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1588</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2367 (2017), 17 January 2018, [url](#), para. 17

<sup>1589</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>1590</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS kidnaps 7 civilians at fake checkpoint in Kurdistan's Garmiyan region, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

As part of the COVID-19 related measures, the KRI restricted internal and cross-border movement on 22 February 2020, imposed a curfew between 13 March and 23 April 2020, and closed all airports.<sup>1591</sup>

### 3.3.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

#### Conflict background

Sources have described Sulaymaniyah as ‘relatively stable’ security wise since 2003.<sup>1592</sup> On 17 July 2019, shooters attacked a restaurant in Erbil, killing a Turkish diplomat and two Iraqi civilians.<sup>1593</sup>

Following the US-brokered agreement that put an end to the Kurdish civil war in 1998, Sulaymaniyah came under the control of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), while Erbil and Dohuk came under the leadership of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).<sup>1594</sup> According to Lecturer Farhad Hassan Abdullah, since 2005 attempts have been made to unify the two Kurdish administrations under one government based in Erbil.<sup>1595</sup> The September 2017 KDP-led independence referendum backfired, resulting in a reaction from the Iraqi central government, causing the loss of territorial control over most disputed territories retaken by Baghdad, and as the ICG observed ‘forced the leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan’s two main political parties to consider rebuilding their partnership and jointly re-engaging with Baghdad’.<sup>1596</sup> National and regional parliamentary elections followed in 2018, reaffirming the KDP’s and PUK’s ‘dominance’ in the KRI.<sup>1597</sup> Despite announcing in March 2019 a four-year political agreement allowing for the formation of the KRG cabinet and a set of joint positions on a number of issues<sup>1598</sup>, journalist Bekir Aydoğan warned in April 2020 however of a ‘near-breakdown of cooperation’ between the KDP and the PUK.<sup>1599</sup>

#### Armed actors

##### *Peshmerga and Asayish*

The security forces of the KRI are the Peshmerga, having 14 infantry brigades and two support brigades, the Asayish internal security unit, in addition to KPD and PUK-controlled militias.<sup>1600</sup> Most of these forces’ members are either affiliated with the KDP or with the PUK, to which they answer

<sup>1591</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 13

<sup>1592</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, 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

<sup>1593</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>1594</sup> Hassan, F., 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](#); Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFPRA), 10 December 2018 cited in EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, March 2019, [url](#), p. 149; LSE, The Iraqi Kurds’ Destructive Infighting: Causes and Consequences, 15 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1595</sup> Hassan, F., PUK–KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk, May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1596</sup> ICG, After Iraqi Kurdistan’s Thwarted Independence Bid, 27 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1597</sup> ICG, After Iraqi Kurdistan’s Thwarted Independence Bid, 27 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1598</sup> CRS, Iraq: Issues in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, Updated 17 July 2020, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1599</sup> Knights, M. (Middle East Research Institute), Iraqi Kurdistan: Priority Issues for international mediation, 10 July 2020, [url](#). See also Aydoğan, B., The Iraqi Kurds’ Destructive Infighting: Causes and Consequences, 15 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1600</sup> US, USDOS, 2017 Country Reports on Human Rights– Iraq, 20 April 2018, [url](#), pp. 11-12

directly.<sup>1601</sup> The leadership of each brigade, however, comes from both parties ‘to decrease the unit’s allegiance to one political party’.<sup>1602</sup>

According to the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) reporting in August 2017, there were approximately 48 000 PUK commanded Peshmerga fighters. PUK-affiliated units are typically divided according to regular units (Division 70) and Deja Terror (Counter-terrorism Forces).<sup>1603</sup> Peshmerga and Asayish forces from Sulaymaniyah governorate continued to conduct security operations to pursue ISIS members.<sup>1604</sup>

The Peshmerga were active in Kifri and Kalar District as of 3 December 2019.<sup>1605</sup>

#### *Iraqi state forces*

The UN Secretary General reported in February 2020 that ‘Iraqi security forces continued their action against ISIL cells’ and military operations took place in areas along the border between Diyala and Sulaymaniyah governorates.<sup>1606</sup> According to a Commander in the Peshmerga forces, frictions between Iraqi forces and the Peshmerga forces can occur in disputed territories.<sup>1607</sup> On 6 July 2020, there was a gunfire exchange between Iraqi forces and the Peshmerga when Iraqi forces entered into Kafri District in Garmyan, following a reported kidnapping.<sup>1608</sup>

#### *Turkish state forces*

In recent years, Turkey has set up military bases in key areas including Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1609</sup> The PUK is working on normalising its relations with Turkey, for example, by trying to close the headquarters of the organisations affiliated to the PKK in Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1610</sup> In July 2020, the Turkish Consul General announced that Turkish army military operations will continue in the Kurdistan region until the end of the presence of the PKK.<sup>1611</sup>

#### *PKK*

Founded in the 1970s, the PKK launched an armed struggle against the Turkish government in 1984 calling for an independent Kurdish state in Turkey, which it continued to date.<sup>1612</sup> The PKK is on the

<sup>1601</sup> ICG, Arming Iraq’s Kurds: Fighting IS, inviting conflict, 12 May 2015, [url](#), pp. 8-11; USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, April 1 2019- June 30 2019, 6 August 2019, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>1602</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve - Report to the United States Congress, April 1 2019- June 30 2019, 6 August 2019, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>1603</sup> GPPi, Who’s Who: Quick Facts About Local and Sub-State Forces, 16 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1604</sup> Shafaaq, A joint operation starts between Peshmerga forces and the international coalition to pursue ISIS, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Shafaaq, Peshmerga reinforcements between Diyala and Kurdistan, 22 June 2020, [url](#); Shafaaq, The Anti-

terrorism forces arrests two ISIS members, 23 July 2020, [url](#); ISW, Iraq Situation Report: July 8-14, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1605</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: From Abandoned Villages to the Cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1606</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>1607</sup> Shafaaq, A clash between Peshmerga and an Iraqi force near Garmyan, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1608</sup> Shafaaq, A clash between Peshmerga and an Iraqi force near Garmyan, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1609</sup> Shafaaq, American report: Turkey has set up 13 military bases in Kurdistan region, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1610</sup> Middle East Online, The Iraqi Kurdish parties and the PKK, 1 October 2019, [url](#); Bas News, PKK-Affiliated Party Opens Anonymous Offices in Sulaymaniyah, 26 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1611</sup> Nina News, Operations Until The End Of The PKK, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1612</sup> BBC News, Who are Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) rebels?, 4 November 2016, [url](#)

European Union's list of designated groups which have been involved in terrorism<sup>1613</sup>, as well as being listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey<sup>1614</sup>, the United States<sup>1615</sup>, and Australia.<sup>1616</sup>

The PKK has developed its territorial presence and control over mountainous areas along the Turkish and Iranian borders, including along the border between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates as well as Iran.<sup>1617</sup> Local officials interviewed estimated in 2016 that as many as 650 communities in remote villages might have lived under PKK control in total in KRI, although some of the villages have been evacuated due to the conflict.<sup>1618</sup> The reported presence of PKK fighters has also been a cause of tension with Turkey.<sup>1619</sup> From these areas, the PKK has launched attacks on Turkish forces, to which the Turkish Air force has retaliated with regular raids.<sup>1620</sup>

### ISIL

During the ISIL conflict, Sulaymaniyah did not see any direct military operations within its boundaries.<sup>1621</sup> ISIL control of swaths of northern Iraq however resulted in large-scale displacement, violence, and destruction in the governorate.<sup>1622</sup> Internal ISIL threats in KRI continued to exist in 2018 although the KRI was largely untouched by ISIL violence.<sup>1623</sup> ISIL has benefited from a support zone around the Halabja Mountains close to the Iranian border.<sup>1624</sup>

### Ansar Al-Islam (AAI)

Ansar Al-Islam (AAI), had previously controlled a number of villages in Sulaymaniyah and Halabja which the Peshmergas took back in 2003 with support from US forces.<sup>1625</sup> Since late 2016, AAI have used the Halabja Mountains close to the Iranian borders as a base for operations into Iran.<sup>1626</sup>

<sup>1613</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1614</sup> Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1615</sup> US Bureau of Counterterrorism, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, n.d., [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1616</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Listed terrorist organisations, n.d., [url](#); Euronews, Turkey slams Belgium court ruling that PKK is not a 'terrorist' organization, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1617</sup> Quesnay, A. and Beaumont, R., The Return of the State and Inter-Militia Competition in Northern Iraq, *Noria*, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1618</sup> Rudaw, PKK bases in border areas provoke Turkish airstrikes, local mayors say, 14 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1619</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 4; Wing, J., Large Drop In Violence In Iraq November 2018, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 3 December 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Islamic State Returns To Baghdad While Overall Security In Iraq Remains Steady, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 6 October 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 2 August 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., 649 Deaths, 275 Wounded Feb 2018 In Iraq, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 3 March 2018, [url](#); Council on Foreign Relations, Global Conflict Tracker, n.d. [url](#)

<sup>1620</sup> Wing, J., Large Drop In Violence In Iraq November 2018, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 3 December 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Islamic State Returns To Baghdad While Overall Security In Iraq Remains Steady, [Weblog Musings on Iraq], 6 October 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., Violence Slightly Down In Iraq July 2018, 2 August 2018, [url](#); Wing, J., 649 Deaths, 275 Wounded Feb 2018 In Iraq, 3 March 2018, [url](#); Council on Foreign Relations, Global Conflict Tracker, n.d. [url](#)

<sup>1621</sup> IOM, Reasons to Remain (Part 2): Determinants of IDP integration into host communities in Iraq, 18 April 2019, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1622</sup> World Bank, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment, Part 2, January 2018, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1623</sup> Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFpra), 10 December 2018, in: EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, March 2019, [url](#), p. 149

<sup>1624</sup> Brandon Wallace and Jennifer Cafarella: "ISIS's Second Resurgence", ISW, 2. October 2018, [url](#); Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFpra), 10 December 2018 in: EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, March 2019, [url](#), p. 149

<sup>1625</sup> Bakawan, Adel, Email to DIDR (OFpra), 10 December 2018 in: EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Iraq, Security situation, March 2019, [url](#), p. 149

<sup>1626</sup> Brandon Wallace and Jennifer Cafarella: "ISIS's Second Resurgence", ISW, 2. October 2018, [url](#)



Reportedly the Iraqi branch of AAI merged with ISIL in August 2014, though in October 2019 the group claimed it had placed two IEDs in Diyala governorate.<sup>1627</sup>

#### *Iranian state forces*

Iran has tried to take control of the Qandil and Halgurd Mountain areas several times, noting that the IRGC have attacked Kurdish opposition bases inside KRI several times using missiles and artillery fire.<sup>1628</sup> These attacks have resulted in grave material damages, and several civilian residents have been injured.<sup>1629</sup>

#### *Kurdish opposition groups and Kurdish insurgents*

Forces of all Kurdish parties are reported to be operating in the Qandil and Halgurd Mountains.<sup>1630</sup> In 2017, it was reported that armed groups active in the KRI's mountainous areas were Kurdish insurgent groups and Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups.<sup>1631</sup> Turkish forces have targeted PJAK members for decades<sup>1632</sup>, who reportedly have a hideout about 40 km north-west of Kuna Masi.<sup>1633</sup>

#### *Other: Self-Defense Force*

In June 2019, a new group called the Self-Defense Forces from the Qandil Mountains was established with the aim of targeting Turkish army bases inside the KRI in response to ongoing Turkish air strikes.<sup>1634</sup>

### 3.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

##### Turkey-PKK conflict

Various sources noted that the Turkish air force continued to launch regular air strikes against positions held by the PKK in Sulaymaniyah governorate as well as in Dohuk and Erbil in 2019 and 2020, causing mainly damage to agriculture and farmland, as well as forcing villagers to evacuate.<sup>1635</sup> The violence is directed at Dohuk, Erbil and to a lesser degree Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1636</sup>

<sup>1627</sup> Mapping Militants Organizations. "Ansar al-Islam." Stanford University. Last modified December 2018. [url](#); U.S. Country Reports on Terrorism 2019, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1628</sup> Denmark, DIS, Iranian Kurds Consequences of political activities in Iran and KRI, February 2020 [source: journalist in KRI], [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1629</sup> Denmark, DIS, Iranian Kurds Consequences of political activities in Iran and KRI, February 2020 [source: journalist in KRI], [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1630</sup> Denmark, DIS, Iranian Kurds Consequences of political activities in Iran and KRI, February 2020 [source: journalist in KRI], [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1631</sup> CPT, Civilian impacts of renewed Turkish and Iranian cross-border bombardments in Iraqi Kurdistan (2015-2017), 17 October 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1632</sup> EPIC, ISHM: July 13 – 19, 19 July 2018, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Turkish Airstrike Disregards Civilian Loss, 22 July 2020, [url](#); AI Monitor, Turkey, Iran, Iraq in shaky alignment against Iraqi Kurdistan, 29 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1633</sup> HRW, Iraq: Turkish Airstrike Disregards Civilian Loss, 22 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1634</sup> AI Monitor, Turkey continues bombing Iraqi Kurdistan amid Iraq's strong objection, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1635</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 35; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 25, Al Jazeera, One killed by Turkish strike on northern Iraq: Local official, 26 June 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2421 (2018) Report of the Secretary-General, 2 May 2019, [url](#), para. 26; ACLED, Turkey's Air War in Iraq, 2 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1636</sup> ACLED, Turkey's Air War in Iraq, 2 May 2018, [url](#); AI Monitor, Turkey conducts rare strike in Iraq's Sulaimaniyah province against PKK, 27 May 2020, [url](#)

According to one analyst in September 2019, the PKK is ‘now considered as a major new actor within the Iraqi geopolitical scene’.<sup>1637</sup> Over the past three years, the ACLED reported an ‘intensification of the conflict in Iraqi Kurdistan’ and ‘increased use of air and drone strikes by Turkish forces’.<sup>1638</sup> On 30 June 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey stated that cross-border operations against terrorists in Iraq would continue.<sup>1639</sup>

On 26 June 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq condemned recent air strikes in Sulaymaniyah governorate, which, it claimed, killed four civilians and wounded four others.<sup>1640</sup> On 29 June 2019, Turkish air forces bombed areas around the city of Sulaymaniyah, killing four and wounding four.<sup>1641</sup>

In March 2020, Kurdistan Peshmerga Forces respectively under the control of the KDP and the PUK stationed their military forces on the Zine Asterokan mountain range, in proximity to the towns of Warte (Erbil governorate) and Shawre (Sulaymaniyah governorate), which reportedly resulted in cross-border bombardments by the Turkish Air Force in April and May 2020.<sup>1642</sup> Turkish air raids targeted PKK militants in northern Sulaymaniyah governorate on 27 May 2020<sup>1643</sup> and a Turkish strike hit a pickup truck on 25 June 2020 in a rural area north of the city of Sulaymaniyah, killing one and wounding six.<sup>1644</sup> The news report did not specify whether those killed and wounded were civilians or fighters. CPTs documented 15 civilian casualties in the first six months of 2020 due to Turkish military operations in the KRI.<sup>1645</sup>

In June 2020, Turkey launched Operation Claw-Tiger and Operation Claw-Eagle, which sought to target the PKK and other terrorist organisations based in northern Iraq, particularly in Sinjar (Nineva governorate), Qandil (Iran-Iraq border), Karacak, Zap, Avasin-Basyan and Hakurk (Dohuk governorate).<sup>1646</sup> In July 2020, the Turkish Consul General in Erbil, Hakan Karacay announced that the military operations of the Turkish army would continue until the end of the presence of the PKK in the KRI, including Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1647</sup> CPT documented on 21 July 2020 that since the launch of these military operations on 15 June 2020, at least 4 civilians have been wounded following a drone attack in Kuna Masi.<sup>1648</sup>

<sup>1637</sup> 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, The PKK in Iraq: A Geopolitical Reading, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1638</sup> ACLED, Turkey – PKK Conflict: Summer 2020, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1639</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>1640</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General, 5 August 2019, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>1641</sup> Al Monitor, Turkey continues bombing Iraqi Kurdistan amid Iraq's strong objection, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1642</sup> CPT, Civilian impacts of the New military Bases on Zine Asterokan, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1643</sup> ICG, Global Overview May 2020, n.d., [url](#); Al Monitor, Turkey conducts rare strike in Iraq's Sulaymaniyah province against PKK, 27 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1644</sup> Al Jazeera, One killed by Turkish strike on northern Iraq: Local official, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1645</sup> CPT, Response to Turkish Consul General's claim that Turkish military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan did not target civilians, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1646</sup> AA, Turkey launches operation Claw-Eagle, 15 June 2020, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 14-20 June 2020, 24 June 2020, [url](#); Daily Sabah, Counterterrorism ops against PKK in N Iraq lawful, Ankara says, 6 July 2020, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 21 – 27 June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#); 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, “Operation Claw”: Turkey's simmering military campaign in Northern Iraq, 6 February 2020, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East, 9 July 2019, 9 July 2019, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Kurdistan parliament condemns deadly Turkish strikes inside Kurdistan Region, 6 July 2019, [url](#); Rudaw, Turkish drone strike 'killed PJAK fighters' – not PKK, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1647</sup> Al Monitor, Turkey mulls permanent military presence in northern Iraq, 26 June 2019, [url](#); Nina News, Operations Until The End Of The PKK, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1648</sup> CPT, Response to Turkish Consul General's claim that Turkish military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan did not target civilians, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

## ISIL activity

In February 2019, Kurdish security forces arrested three ISIL members in Garmiyan.<sup>1649</sup> According to Garmiyan regional security forces ISIL militants 'have secretly come into Kurdistan Region territories and settled in the Darbandikhan, Sarqalla and Sayda village'.<sup>1650</sup>

ISW noted in April 2019 that ISIL was expanding its networks in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the first quarter of 2019, Asayish Internal Security Forces claimed to detain three separate cells of Arab ISIL members in Sulaymaniyah governorate, including in Sulaymaniyah city, Chamchamal and Kalar.<sup>1651</sup> Asayish also arrested an ISIL militant in the southern part of Sulaymaniyah governorate in April 2019 for allegedly transiting fighters in Kirkuk governorate.<sup>1652</sup> Several Asayish members and Peshmerga fighters were killed by ISIL militants in the period December 2019 to April 2020.<sup>1653</sup>

## Protests

In June 2020, following the introduction of a lockdown to contain the coronavirus, demonstrations broke out in Sulaymaniyah to protest the lack of work and poor economic conditions.<sup>1654</sup> Protests turned into riots and KRI security forces dispersed demonstrators by shooting live bullets in the air.<sup>1655</sup>

## Illustrative security incidents

- On 29 June 2019, Turkish air forces bombed areas around the city of Sulaymaniyah, killing four and wounding four civilians.<sup>1656</sup>
- On 15 October 2019, a bomb explosion killed two Arab people in the Azmar mountain area.<sup>1657</sup>
- In January 2020, ISIL kidnapped seven civilians at a fake checkpoint in the disputed territory of Garmiyan.<sup>1658</sup>
- On 12 April 2020, two shepherds were killed by ISIL.<sup>1659</sup>
- On 25 June 2020, at least one PKK member was killed and six civilians injured by a Turkish air strike in Sulaymaniyah governorate. The strike targeted a car boarded by a member of the PKK in Kuna Masi.<sup>1660</sup>

## Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

<sup>1649</sup> Rudaw, Kurdish security forces arrest "three ISIS members" in Garmiyan, 4 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1650</sup> Rudaw, Kurdish security forces arrest "three ISIS members" in Garmiyan, 4 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1651</sup> ISW, ISIS Resurgence Update - April 2019, 19 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1652</sup> ISW, ISIS Resurgence Update - April 2019, 19 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1653</sup> Kurdistan 24, After ISIS attacks, Kurdistan Region deploys more Peshmerga to Garmiyan, 7 December 2019, [url](#); Shafaaq, Barzani about ISIS attack in Garmiyan: clear evidence of ISIS reorganization, 8 April 2020, [url](#); Shafaaq, Explosion targets Peshmerga and Asaish force in Garmiyan, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1654</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: May 27 - June 2, 2020, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1655</sup> Middle East Eye, Anger at 'politicisation' of coronavirus provokes unrest in Iraq's Kurdish region, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1656</sup> Al Monitor, Turkey continues bombing Iraqi Kurdistan amid Iraq's strong objection, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1657</sup> The Baghdad Post, Bomb Blast Kills Two Arabs in Sulaimaniya, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1658</sup> Kurdistan 24, ISIS kidnaps 7 civilians at fake checkpoint in Kurdistan's Garmiyan region, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1659</sup> Iraq Body Count, Recent Events, n.d., [url](#). Note that as the weeks progress this link does not remain static.

<sup>1660</sup> Rudaw, PJAK says one fighter killed in Kuna Masi airstrike, 26 June 2020, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Turkish Airstrike Disregards Civilian Loss, 22 July 2020, [url](#); AP, Iraq sets up border posts to try to prevent Turkish advance, 3 July 2020, [url](#); Shafaaq, Seven victims in a bombing in Al-Sulaymaniyah, 25 June 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: JUNE 25 – JULY 2, 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#); The National, Civilians killed and wounded in Turkish strike in north Iraq, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Sulaymaniyah	3	3	11	<b>14</b>	2	0	7	<b>7</b>

Table 14: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Sulaymaniyah governorate<sup>1661</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 7 battles, 16 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 12 cases of violence against civilians, 4 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 39 security incidents of these types in Sulaymaniyah governorate, the majority taking place in the capital Sulaymaniyah city. 114 protests were also reported in Sulaymaniyah governorate during the reference period.<sup>1662</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the table below.

<sup>1661</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>1662</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)



Figure 17: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Sulaymaniyah governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1663</sup>

### 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 \(2018\)](#).

The KRG maintains its own internal security force. The KDP and PUK each maintain an independent security apparatus and separately control additional Peshmerga units, Asayish forces<sup>1664</sup> and intelligence services, the Zanyari (PUK) and the Parastin (KDP).<sup>1665</sup>

Freedom House reported that KRG suffers from corruption similar to the rest of Iraq<sup>1666</sup>, other sources also report on corruption, nepotism<sup>1667</sup>, and patronage in the KRG administration<sup>1668</sup>.

<sup>1663</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1664</sup> US, USDOS, 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1665</sup> US, USDOS, 2017 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Iraq, 20 April 2018 [url](#)

<sup>1666</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the world 2019 – Iraq, 4 February 2019, [url](#), accessed 15 July 2020

<sup>1667</sup> Rudaw, 16 April 2019, KRG’s corruption probe slowed by lack of staff, resources: Commission, [url](#), accessed 15 July 2020

<sup>1668</sup> Bali, A.O., The roots of clientelism in Iraqi Kurdistan and the efforts to fight it, p. 99, [url](#), accessed 15 July 2020

<sup>1669</sup> The US Overseas Security Advisory Council's (OSAC) Crime & Safety Report for the KRI of May 2020 described KRI's crime statistics and crime reporting mechanisms as 'unreliable', but reported on the KRI's police capacity to quickly respond to security incidents, including terrorist attacks, and criminal activities, and further noted that the police and security services are equipped with 'modern weapons and security equipment', without specifying whether they do so in practice.<sup>1670</sup> DFAT noted that: 'Although the KRI is generally regarded as a more benign security environment, its borders are insecure. Violent crime is common, and kidnappings, murders and robberies occur frequently.'<sup>1671</sup> In the disputed territory of Garmiyan it was reported in December 2019 that Kurdish officials warned of a security vacuum in the area.<sup>1672</sup> Reportedly the vacuum has been 'created by the lack of coordination between the two forces [which] offers Islamic State sleeper cells the opportunity to regroup and stage attacks in nearby populated areas'.<sup>1673</sup>

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In 2015, NCCI found that 'Sulaymaniyah is still littered with minefields and unexploded ordnance.'<sup>1674</sup>

The KRI recorded mine contamination of 181 km<sup>2</sup> at the end of 2018, 14 % less than at the end of 2017.<sup>1675</sup> Of the 181 km<sup>2</sup> recorded mine contamination, roughly 12 km<sup>2</sup> were surveyed in Halabja and 100 km<sup>2</sup> surveyed in Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1676</sup> This data did not include areas on the Turkish border which have never been surveyed owing to fighting.<sup>1677</sup>

In 2018, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) cleared 11 areas in Sulaymaniyah covering an area of 125 385 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>1678</sup> 415 mines were destroyed and 40 UXOs were destroyed.<sup>1679</sup> Also in 2018, the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action cleared two areas in Sulaymaniyah governorate covering an area of 76 624 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>1680</sup> Two mines were destroyed at 91 UXOs were destroyed.<sup>1681</sup>

The January 2019, iMMAP-IHF published a map showing the 'legacy contamination by landmines and ERW and the new contamination of explosive hazards, including IEDs in areas liberated from ISIL since 2014' and illustrated that affected districts in Sulaymaniyah included Pshdar, Sharbazher, Penjwin and Halabja.<sup>1682</sup>

In 2020, Rudaw reported that following the Iran-Iraq war, there are 'tens of millions' of unexploded landmines and explosive ordnance across the KRI's borders with Iran.<sup>1683</sup>

In March 2020, the WFP published a map illustrating explosive hazards contamination in Iraq.<sup>1684</sup> It shows that the eastern part of the governorate and in particular the south-eastern area is heavily contaminated with levels there ranging between 12.1 % and 43 %.<sup>1685</sup>

<sup>1669</sup> UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with Regard To People Fleeing the Republic Of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 45, 46

<sup>1670</sup> US, OSAC, Iraq 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Erbil, 12 May 2020, [url](#). Note that despite the name of the source implying that it focuses on either Erbil city or Erbil governorate, the information contained in the report refers almost exclusively to the whole of the KRI.

<sup>1671</sup> Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report Iraq, 17 August 2020, [url](#), para. 2.58

<sup>1672</sup> Kurdistan 24, After ISIS attacks, villagers in Kurdistan Region call for security outpost, 18 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1673</sup> Kurdistan 24, After ISIS attacks, villagers in Kurdistan Region call for security outpost, 18 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1674</sup> NCCI, Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1675</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1676</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1677</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 130

<sup>1678</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 136

<sup>1679</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 136

<sup>1680</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 136

<sup>1681</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2019, 1 October 2019, [url](#), p. 136

<sup>1682</sup> iMMAP-IHF, Humanitarian Access Response: Monthly security incidents situation report, January 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1683</sup> Rudaw, Man dies after stepping on landmine near Iranian border, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1684</sup> WFP, Iraq Socio-Economic Atlas 2019, 30 March 2020, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1685</sup> WFP, Iraq Socio-Economic Atlas 2019, 30 March 2020, [url](#), p. 37

## Displacement and returns

Historically, a significant proportion of the 1.4 million people displaced in Iraq have sought refuge in one of the three governorates of the KRI.<sup>1686</sup> According to a January 2020 UNOCHA report, more than 40% of all IDPs displaced during the 2014-2017 conflict sought safety in the KRI – a figure which OCHA described as having stayed ‘steady or even declined’ in 2019.<sup>1687</sup>

As of 30 June 2020 Sulaymaniyah governorate had 139 860 IDPs residing in mainly three districts: Sulaymaniyah (88 602), Kalar (21 702) and Chamchamal (9 786).<sup>1688</sup> 26 % of those IDPs originated from Salah al-Din governorate, 18 % from Diyala, 17 % from Anbar, 17 % from Baghdad while the remaining 22 % originated from Ninewa, Babylon and Kirkuk.<sup>1689</sup>

IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix noted that as of 30 June 2020, despite the overall decrease in the total caseload of IDPs across the country, ‘666 individuals were recorded as displaced from their area of origin for the first time, mainly to Sulaymaniyah Governorate.’<sup>1690</sup> IOM reported that most of them fled from Baghdad, Salah Al-Din and Ninewa owing to the worsening security situation, lack of services, and a lack of employment opportunities.<sup>1691</sup>

IOM noted in a January 2019 assessment that ‘involuntary stay’ amongst IDPs is prevalent in Sulaymaniyah.<sup>1692</sup> The assessment found that in as many as 86 % of locations in Sulaymaniyah, IDPs have no other choice but to stay.<sup>1693</sup> IOM noted in a June 2019 report that ‘the presence of militias and/or a change in the ethnoreligious composition at the location of origin is among the top three reasons to stay for over half of IDPs willing to resettle in Diyala, Salah al-Din and Sulaymaniyah.’<sup>1694</sup>

REACH conducted an intentions survey in three IDP camps in Sulaymaniyah governorate between 18 June 2019 and 1 August 2019 interviewing a total of 189 households.<sup>1695</sup> REACH found that 71 % of IDPs intended to remain in displacement for the three months following the survey, and 54 % for the 12 months following the survey.<sup>1696</sup> The reasons behind the IDPs’ intention to remain in displacement were fear and trauma associated with the area of origin (52 %), lack of security forces in the areas of origin (47 %), and fear of discrimination in the area of origin (42 %).<sup>1697</sup> Moreover, 69 % of the interviewed households considered their areas of origin to be unsafe.<sup>1698</sup> Of those who considered their area of origin to not be safe, the top three reasons for perceived lack of safety in the area of origin were close to conflict (44 %), armed security actors (32 %) and extremist groups (29 %).<sup>1699</sup> Among the 99 % of households that reported owning a shelter in their areas of origin, 54 % reported that the level of shelter damage was completely destroyed.<sup>1700</sup>

An April 2020 IOM assessment found that there were 59 880 out-of-camp IDPs in Sulaymaniyah city.<sup>1701</sup> The assessment noted that amongst IDPs settled in there, no one was willing to return in the short term (0 %) while 66 % were willing to return in the long term, the lack of willingness driven by the perceived lack of security in the area of origin (for example, militias or changed ethno-religious

<sup>1686</sup> OCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Dashboard for KRI (January to December 2019), 5 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1687</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq, January 2020, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>1688</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1689</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1690</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1691</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1692</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment III, 3 January 2019, [url](#), p p. 6, 25

<sup>1693</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment III, 3 January 2019, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1694</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment Part 4, June 2019, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1695</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Al-Sulaymaniyah, p. Al-Sulaymaniyah 1

<sup>1696</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Al-Sulaymaniyah, p. Al-Sulaymaniyah 1

<sup>1697</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Al-Sulaymaniyah, p. Al-Sulaymaniyah 1

<sup>1698</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Al-Sulaymaniyah, p. Al-Sulaymaniyah 2

<sup>1699</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Al-Sulaymaniyah, p. Al-Sulaymaniyah 2

<sup>1700</sup> REACH, Intentions Survey, August 2019, [url](#), Al-Sulaymaniyah, p. Al-Sulaymaniyah 2

<sup>1701</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 14

composition).<sup>1702</sup> Another commonly reported obstacle for those willing to return was lack of security and home destruction.<sup>1703</sup> Conversely, security was the main reason for remaining in Sulaymaniyah city and IDPs felt 'relatively safe and secure in all locations'.<sup>1704</sup>

IOM further noted in February 2020 that militia presence and/or changes in the ethno-religious composition at the area of origin were among the top three reasons to stay for over half of IDPs willing to resettle in Sulaymaniyah governorate.<sup>1705</sup>

IOM observed that as of 30 June 2020 there were no returnee areas in Sulaymaniyah governorate.<sup>1706</sup>

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<sup>1702</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1703</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 15

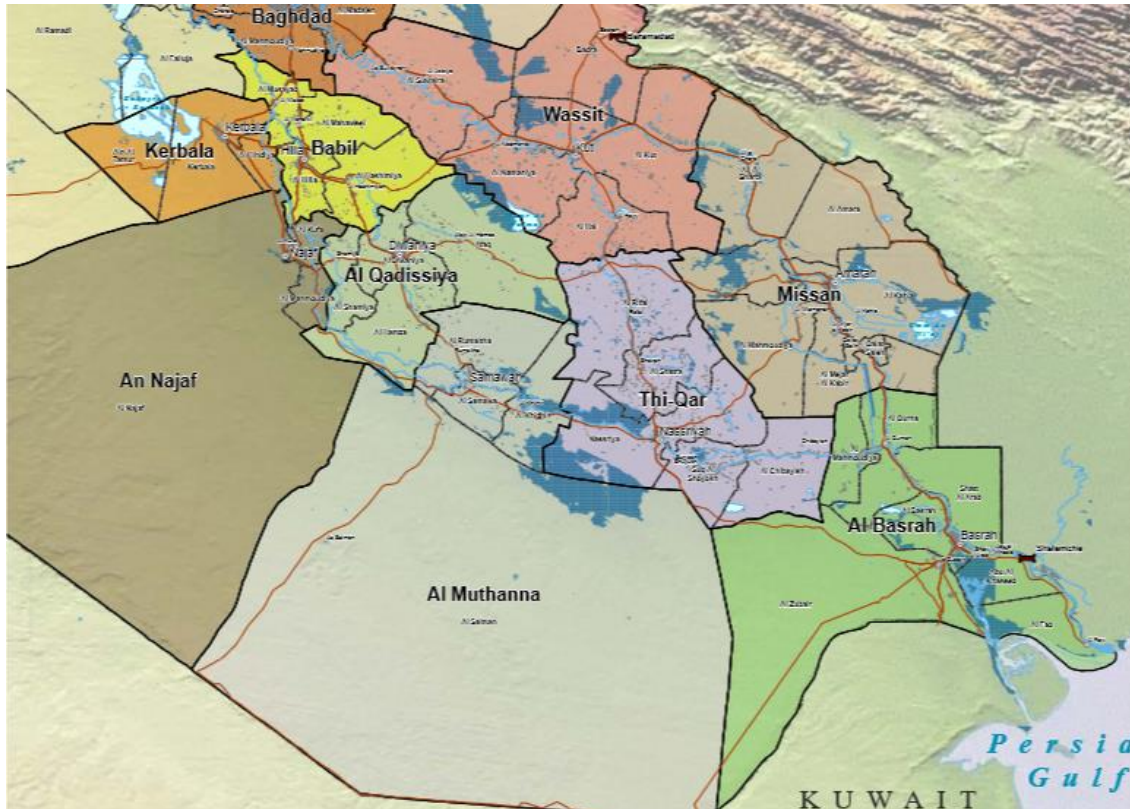
<sup>1704</sup> IOM, Urban displacement in Iraq: a preliminary analysis, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1705</sup> IOM, Integrated Location Assessment IV, 5 February 2020, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1706</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Iraq Master List Report 116: May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 7



## 4. The southern governorates (Basrah, Kerbala, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar, Wassit)



Map 18: The southern governorates with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1707</sup>

This subsection covers the ‘southern’ governorates organised for the report for this purpose to include: Basrah, Kerbala, Missan, Muthnana, Najaf, Thi-Qar, Qadissiya, and Wassit.

Information on the general situation of the governorates in the area is provided, with more specific information provided under each governorate chapter.

<sup>1707</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

## 4.1 Basrah



Map 19: Basrah governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1708</sup>

### 4.1.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Basrah is Iraq's southernmost governorate and has internal borders with Muthanna, Thi-Qar and Missan governorates. It is situated along the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which connects to the Persian Gulf. Basrah has international borders with Iran to the east and Kuwait to the south.<sup>1709</sup> The capital of the governorate is Basrah City.<sup>1710</sup> The governorate is divided into seven districts: Abu Al-Khaseeb, Al-Midaina, Al-Qurna, Al-Zubair, Basrah, Fao, and Shatt Al-Arab.<sup>1711</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Office) estimated the governorate's population at 2 985 073.<sup>1712</sup> However, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) estimated the population of Basrah governorate to be about 4.5 million in a September 2018 report.<sup>1713</sup>

<sup>1708</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1709</sup> UN Iraq Joint Analysis Unit, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1710</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, last revision May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1711</sup> NCCI, Basrah governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1712</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 قديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1713</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, Basrah fact finding mission report #1, 9 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

## Ethnicity

Shia Arabs constitute the majority of the governorate's population, but there is also a significant Sunni minority, as well as small Chaldean and Assyrian Christian communities and Sabeen Mandeans.<sup>1714</sup>

## Road security

In November 2019, demonstrators blocked the entrances to Iraq's only port town Umm Qasr south of Basrah.<sup>1715</sup> In the same month, protesters blocked roads and bridges in Basrah city, the governorate's capital.<sup>1716</sup> On 22 November 2019, the ISF reopened the port of Umm Qasr, near Basrah, the entrance of which was previously blocked by protesters.<sup>1717</sup> On 22 December 2019, protesters blocked the roads leading to the Rumaila oilfield, according to the Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor.<sup>1718</sup>

## Economy

Basrah governorate contains a significant proportion of Iraq's oil reserves, including the largest oilfield in Iraq, Rumaila.<sup>1719</sup> The port of Basrah and the port of Um Qasr, Iraq's only deep water port, are both located in the governorate, making Basrah a centre for trade, transportation and storage.<sup>1720</sup> In spite of being rich in resources, Basrah suffers 'from chronic unemployment and poverty, as well as poor public services and decaying infrastructure...'<sup>1721</sup> According to a 2018 article by the Guardian, the majority of Iraqis were not benefiting from the oil economy, with the latter being subject to corruption by local government officials, as well as local tribal and militia leaders.<sup>1722</sup>

## 4.1.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

In an interview with EASO in January 2019, a Senior Researcher on Iraq for HRW stated that there were few security incidents in the south. Many incidents involved tribes, PMUs, gangs, or a combination of all of the above.<sup>1723</sup> Besides human rights and sectarian abuses, political repression and manipulation PMUs engaged in 'mafia-like economic practices'.<sup>1724</sup> Some piers at Basrah's Umm Qasr port and the Shalamchek land border crossing to Iran were 'militia-controlled smuggling routes for Iraqi crude oil gathered by militias from oilfields such as Qayyarah and Alas,' Michael Knights remarked in August 2019.<sup>1725</sup> At Shalamchek border crossing, the Badr organisation and KH reportedly have a strong presence.<sup>1726</sup>

Reporting on Basrah's mounting drug problem, the New York Times stated that the fact that big traffickers either never get caught or escape from prison soon after capture added to suspicions of

<sup>1714</sup> NCCI, Basrah governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1715</sup> Al-Jazeera, Iraqi protesters block major port near Basrah as unrest continues, 2 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1716</sup> Al-Arabiya, Protesters block roads, bridges in Iraq's Basrah, announce general strike, 17 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1717</sup> AA (Anadolu Agency), Iraqi security forces reopen Umm Qasr port, 22 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1718</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: December 20, 2019 – January 2, 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1719</sup> EPIC/ ISHM, ISHM reference guide, last revision: May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1720</sup> NCCI, Basrah governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1721</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, Basrah fact finding mission report #1, 9 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1722</sup> Guardian (The), 'Iraq is dying': oil flows freely but corruption fuels growing anger, 27 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1723</sup> Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019 in: EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1724</sup> Felbab-Brown, V., Pitfalls of the paramilitary paradigm: the Iraqi state, geopolitics and Al-Hashd al-Shaabi, Brookings, June 2019, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>1725</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, Combating terrorism center (CTC), [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1726</sup> Hasan, H., Boundary disputes, Carnegie Middle East Centre, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

PMU involvement in the drug trade.<sup>1727</sup> A Basrah police chief informed Reuters that 80 % of drugs entering Basrah came from Iran.<sup>1728</sup>

### Armed actors

The ISW reported in December 2017 that the Basrah Operations Command (BasOC) was responsible for ensuring security in the governorate of Basrah.<sup>1729</sup> However, the BasOC has not been able to assert command over the governorate due to lack of manpower.<sup>1730</sup> As of December 2019, the ISF in Basrah governorate consist of Basrah Operations Command, 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 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.<sup>1731</sup> In July 2020 the Iraqi Joint Operations Command announced that BasOC would control the Shalamchek border crossing with Iran and the Safwan crossing with Kuwait.<sup>1732</sup> According to February 2020 article, Basrah was one of the governorates where security would be managed by the Joint Operations Command.<sup>1733</sup>

According to Michael Knights' analysis from August 2019, PMUs maintained two operational commands in southern Iraq: the PMU Rafidain Operations Command (in Missan and Thi-Qar) and the PMU Basrah Operations Command, both led by Badr organisation commanders.<sup>1734</sup> The PMU administrative head in Basrah also belongs to the Badr organisation.<sup>1735</sup> In September 2019, Chatham House reported that PMU Brigades 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 21, 22, 26 were present in the governorates Missan, Thi-Qar and Basrah.<sup>1736</sup>

A Senior Researcher on Iraq for HRW stated in January 2019, that although PMUs were present in Basrah they have not been redeployed there in large numbers and were not manning checkpoints in Basrah City like in Baghdad, Anbar, Salah al-Din or Diyala governorates.<sup>1737</sup> In a June 2019 Brookings report, analyst Vanda Felbab-Brown observed that both pro-Iran PMUs and pro-Sadr groups were 'strong' in Basrah.<sup>1738</sup>

<sup>1727</sup> New York Times (The), Iraq faces a new adversary: crystal meth, 14 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1728</sup> Reuters, Crystal meth and crowded jails: problems mount in Iraqi oil city, 9 April 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1729</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1730</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1731</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1732</sup> MEMO (Middle East Monitor), Iraq army to control border crossings with Iran, Kuwait, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1733</sup> MEMO (Middle East Monitoring), Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1734</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, Combating terrorism center (CTC), [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>1735</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, Combating terrorism center (CTC), [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1736</sup> 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

<sup>1737</sup> Human Rights Watch, EASO interview with Senior Iraq Researcher, 19 January 2019 in: EASO, COI Report: Iraq - Security situation, March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1738</sup> Felbab-Brown, V., Pitfalls of the paramilitary paradigm: the Iraqi state, geopolitics and Al-Hashd al-Shaabi, Brookings, June 2019, [url](#), p. 5,

### 4.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

In 2019 and 2020 mass protests erupted in Iraq's southern governorates.<sup>1739</sup> In Basrah most protests were reported in Basrah city and in the vicinity of the oilfields and the ports.<sup>1740</sup> UNAMI stated that 'abduction and disappearances occurred amid numerous incidents of additional violations and abuses targeting activists and protesters, including [...] excessive and unlawful use of force at demonstration sites.'<sup>1741</sup>

Between 1 October and 15 December 2019, 33 protester deaths and 1079 injuries were reported in Basrah.<sup>1742</sup> According to the ICG, Iran-backed PMUs were primarily responsible for the use of violence against demonstrators.<sup>1743</sup>

In Baghdad, Basrah, Thi-Qar, and Missan, tribal groups have taken the lead in crafting protest tactics, shutting down roads, and even retaliating against Iranian-backed groups.<sup>1744</sup> A couple of days later they tried to break into the West Qurna-1 oilfield, while others shut down the Maqal port, situated on the Shatt al-Arab waterway.<sup>1745</sup>

According to HRW, protesters reported on 20 January 2020 that masked armed men arrested five protesters near Bahrya Square and that on 21 January the police attacked the protesters with wooden sticks and arrested at least 10 protesters. The same source noted that on 25 January 2020 a convoy of military and security forces' vehicles arrived in Bahrya Square and, according to the protesters, 'men with weapons' assaulted and in some cases detained protesters and raided the protesters' camp.<sup>1746</sup>

Security incidents in Iraq's southern governorates result mainly from (intra-)tribal disputes and/or criminal activity.<sup>1747</sup> An Iraqi security source, quoted by Al-Sumariyah News, stated that between January and September 2019, 113 individuals were killed and 440 were wounded in tribal conflicts in Basrah.<sup>1748</sup>

In a January 2019 interview Benedict Robin D'Cruz, a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh who specialises in Iraq and Shia politics, observed that 'tribal fighting, militia-related violence and general

<sup>1739</sup> UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Demonstrations in Iraq; 1-9 October 2019, October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Demonstrations in Iraq: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Demonstrations in Iraq: 2nd update; 5 November - 9 December 2019, 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1740</sup> Reuters, Protesters block Iraq port as strikes take hold, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

BBC News, Iraq protests: security forces open fire on protesters, 24 November 2019, [url](#)

Oil Price, Iraq's largest oil fields threatened by anti-government protests, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

Al Jazeera, Iraq: Basrah protesters call for resignation of local governor, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1741</sup> UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1742</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 19-210

<sup>1743</sup> ICG, Rescuing Iraq from the Iran-U.S. Crossfire, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1744</sup> Smyth, P., Iran is losing Iraq's tribes, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1745</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: December 20, 2019 – January 2, 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1746</sup> HRW (Human Rights Watch), Iraq: Authorities Violently Remove Protesters, 31 January 2020, [url](#); DW (Deutsche Welle), Iraqi police kill demonstrators in crackdown on protest camps, 25 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1747</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Irak, 20 December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1748</sup> Basnews, Basrah: Over 550 People Killed, Injured in Tribal Fights This Year, 23 September 2019, [url](#)

criminality were reaching alarming levels, particularly in Basrah.<sup>1749</sup> He explained that the worst violence was normally due to tribal feuding, which could turn to armed street battles with civilian injuries and fatalities. Such tribal violence often had ‘an economic component, for example, competition over oil smuggling’.<sup>1750</sup> According to the same source, militias ‘tend to be more disciplined and targeted in their use of violence’.

While some of this violence has a clear economic motive, militias are also involved in political violence.<sup>1751</sup> According to DFAT, writing in October 2018, ‘violence between different Shi’a armed groups occurs in southern Iraq and is mostly related to control of land and oil revenues. Local sources suggest that intra-Shia violence predominantly affects those who are actively involved in a militia or tribal group.’<sup>1752</sup> On September 2019, the Ministry of Interior announced ongoing security enforcement operations in Basrah and the arrest of ‘tribal conflict rioters’.<sup>1753</sup>

On 16 March 2020, a one-week curfew was announced in Basrah as a precaution against COVID-19 infections.<sup>1754</sup> On 22 April 2020, the curfew was tightened in Basrah as confirmed cases of the disease rose alarmingly in the districts of Shatt al-Arab and al-Midaina.<sup>1755</sup> On 13 June 2020, ‘a complete lockdown’ was announced in Basrah, after the governorate witnessed a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 cases.<sup>1756</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 9 March 2019, at least three people were killed and seven more wounded in a firefight that broke out between the tribes of Albu Hamdan and al-Batut in the area of ‘Karma Ali,’ north of Basrah.<sup>1757</sup> In April 2019, serious fighting between both tribes continued. Fighting resulted in multiple casualties and fatalities as the two sides clashed using medium and heavy weapons, mortars and other explosives.<sup>1758</sup>
- In late August 2019, tribal clashes were reported in the northern districts of Basrah governorate. The use of small and medium weapons resulted in multiple casualties, prompting an intervention by the Emergency Response Division.<sup>1759</sup>
- On 6 October 2019, unknown gunmen assassinated the head of the municipal council and a local *mukhtar* in the Bahar area, south of Basrah.<sup>1760</sup>
- On 14 January 2020, unidentified gunmen riding on motorcycles shot and killed two civilians in central Basrah.<sup>1761</sup>

<sup>1749</sup> EPIC (The Education for Peace in Iraq Center), Violence in southern Iraq & Shia politics: interview with Benedict Robin D’Cruz – Part 1, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1750</sup> EPIC (The Education for Peace in Iraq Center), Violence in southern Iraq & Shia politics: interview with Benedict Robin D’Cruz – Part 1, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1751</sup> EPIC (The Education for Peace in Iraq Center), Violence in southern Iraq & Shia politics: interview with Benedict Robin D’Cruz – Part 1, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1752</sup> Australia, DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>1753</sup> Iraq News, Interior Ministry : Continuing Security operations in Basrah, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1754</sup> Shafaq News, Basrah announces curfew and announces exceptions, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1755</sup> Kurdistan 24, Basrah tightens curfew as virus cases rise, other Iraqi governorates ease restrictions, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1756</sup> Basnews, Iraq’s Basrah Announces Complete Lockdown as Coronavirus Infections Soar, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1757</sup> Kurdistan 24, WATCH: Clashes between Basrah tribes kill, injure ten people, 12 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1758</sup> Iraq After Occupation, South Iraq security report: April 2019, 1 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1759</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: August 22 – August 29, 29 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1760</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: October 3 – October 10, 2019, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1761</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: January 9 – January 16, 2020, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

- On 25 January 2020 protestors were hit with weapons and in some cases were arbitrarily detained by masked men, some of whom had hunting rifles. 130 tents were also destroyed.<sup>1762</sup>
- On 6 February 2020, unidentified gunmen assassinated Sheikh Hazim al-Halfi, a senior Sadrist, in Basrah city.<sup>1763</sup>
- On 7 March 2020, unidentified gunmen using silenced weapons assassinated a tribal leader from the Tamimi tribe in the Abu Al-Khaseeb district in Basrah governorate.<sup>1764</sup>
- On 9 March 2020, the residence of former governor of Basrah, Muhammad Musbih Al-Waeli, was attacked in central Basrah with an IED, injuring two of his family members.<sup>1765</sup>
- On 17 July 2020 activist Khaled al-Samer was shot in central Basrah. On the same day, an explosive device exploded on a bicycle in Abu al-Khaseeb District, south of Basrah killing a two-year-old child and injuring her father.<sup>1766</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Basrah	17	6	3	9	2	3	0	3

Table 15: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Basrah governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>1767</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 12 battles, 33 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 37 cases of violence against civilians, 74 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 156 security incidents of these types in Basrah governorate, the majority taking place in the capital Basrah city. 329 protests were also reported in Basrah governorate during the reference period.<sup>1768</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>1762</sup> HRW, Iraq: Authorities Violently Remove Protesters, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1763</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: January 30 – February 6, 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1764</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: March 5 – March 12, 2020, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

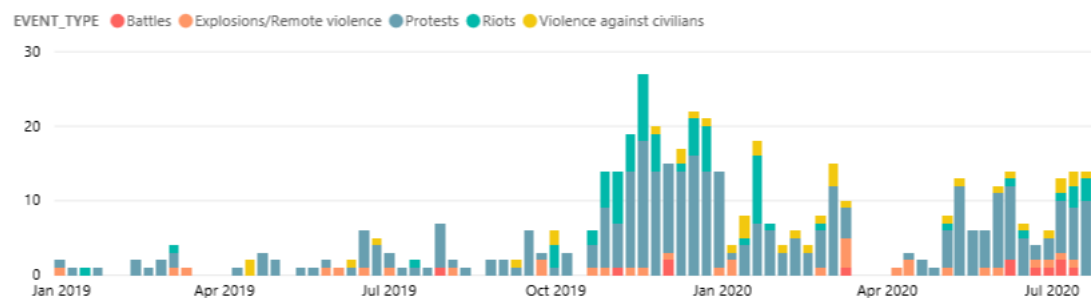
<sup>1765</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: March 5 – March 12, 2020, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1766</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: July 16-July 23, 2020, 23 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1767</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

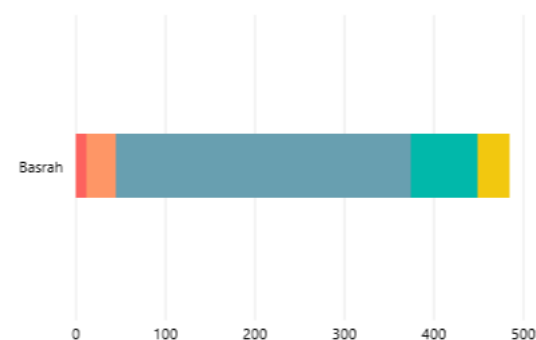
<sup>1768</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

## Evolution of events by type



## Events by Governorate and type of events

EVENT\_TYPE ● Battles ● Explosions/Remote violence ● Protests ● Riots ● Violence against civilians



## Events by District and type of events

EVENT\_TYPE ● Battles ● Explosions/Remote violence ● Protests ● Riots ● Violence against civilians

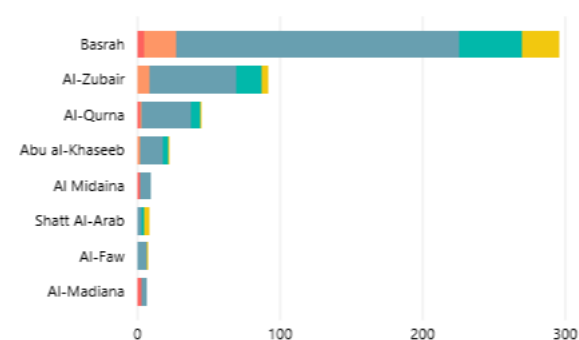


Figure 18: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Basrah governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1769</sup>

## State ability to secure law and order

A Brookings 2019 report noted that there was increasing resentment towards the practices of the of the Hashd groups, such as extortion, coercion and market monopolisation. Particularly in Basrah where such practices were ‘pervasive and the public goods collapsed’.<sup>1770</sup>

Following a clash on March 2019 between tribes in Basrah which resulted in at least 3 fatalities and 7 injuries, a news agency reported that ‘it is not easy for Iraq's security forces to intervene in clan disputes. On multiple occasions, Iraqi authorities have failed to disarm tribes who regularly resort to such measures to resolve disagreements when their form of diplomacy fails.’<sup>1771</sup>

On 11 May 2020, security forces raided the office of the Iran-aligned Thaar Allah party in Basrah. A number of militiamen who had fired on demonstrators, killing one and injuring several others, were reportedly arrested.<sup>1772</sup>

## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Mine Action Review, a research team funded by the Norwegian government, reported in 2019 that Basrah was among those southern governorates most affected by remnants of cluster munitions dating back to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion. The size of the area that was classified as ‘confirmed hazardous’ was set at 27 851 470 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>1773</sup>

<sup>1769</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1770</sup> Felbab-Brown, V., Pitfalls of the paramilitary paradigm: the Iraqi state, geopolitics and Al-Hashd al-Shaabi, Brookings, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1771</sup> Kurdistan 24, WATCH: Clashes between Basrah tribes kill, injure ten people, 12 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1772</sup> RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), Iraq Targets Iran-Aligned Militia Over Shooting Death Of Protester, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1773</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2019: Iraq, 2019. n.d., [url](#), p. 53



## Displacement and return

According to IOM, as of 15 June 2020, 6 528 IDPs were registered in Basrah. No IDPs originating from Basrah were registered elsewhere in the country.<sup>1774</sup> IOM noted that the three main districts of displacement were Basrah (2 910 IDPs), Al-Zubair (1 368) and Abu Al-Khaseeb (1 224). The governorates of origin for the IDPs in Basrah were Salah al-Din (33 %), Ninewa (30 %), Anbar (19 %), Kirkuk (10 %) and others - including Diyala, Babylon and Baghdad - (8 %).<sup>1775</sup>

IDMC reported around 34 000 people were estimated to be displaced in January 2019 from the four governorates of Basrah, Missan, Muthanna and Thi-Qar because of water shortages.<sup>1776</sup>

Basrah was not listed among the governorates with a presence of returnees.<sup>1777</sup>

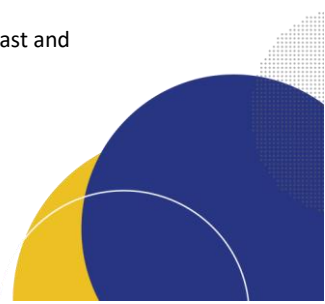
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<sup>1774</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Displacement Master List, Displacement Dashboard, Displacement overview, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1 of 5

<sup>1775</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1776</sup> IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020 - Middle East and North Africa, April 2020, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1777</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 7



## 4.2. Kerbala



Map 20: Kerbala governorate, Iraq with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1778</sup>

### 4.2.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Kerbala governorate is located in the central part of Iraq and has borders with Anbar, Najaf, Babil governorates. Kerbala governorate is divided into the following districts: Ain Al-Tamur, Al-Hindiya, Kerbala. The provincial capital is Kerbala.<sup>1779</sup> The governorate is very arid and has been going through considerable water shortages and droughts, leading to displacements.<sup>1780</sup>

#### Population

Population estimate for Kerbala in 2019 was 1 250 806.<sup>1781</sup> However, accurate population figures across Iraq are currently unavailable. The figure provided is based on projections by the Central Statistical Organization of Iraq and it is unclear if these estimates take into account demographic changes related to ongoing displacement and returns of Iraqis. According to UNFPA, the last comprehensive Population and Housing Census for Iraq was conducted in 1987.<sup>1782</sup>

<sup>1778</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1779</sup> NCC Iraq (NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq), Kerbala Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1780</sup> IOM, Assessing water shortage-induced displacement in Qadissiya, Najaf, Babylon, Wassit and Kerbala, 10 April 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 12-13

<sup>1781</sup> Iraq, CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1782</sup> UNFPA, Newsletter 2020 Census, Issue 1, December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

## Ethnicity

The southern governorates in general, including Kerbala, have a predominantly Shia Arab Muslim population, although a small community of Sunni Arabs also reside in the governorate.<sup>1783</sup> Kerbala city is considered one of the holy Shiite cities in Iraq, housing the Imam Hussain shrine.<sup>1784</sup>

## Road security

Most of the checkpoints along the main road from Kerbala to the border with Saudi Arabia are controlled by the Shi'a militia Al-Abbas Combat Division.<sup>1785</sup> In July 2020, protesters against the deteriorated electricity supply blocked several roads<sup>1786</sup> and barred a power plant in the Al-Jammaliya area.<sup>1787</sup> Also, checkpoints were targeted in bomb attacks or car bombs on roads, such as on 20 September 2019.<sup>1788</sup>

## Economy

Kerbala governorate's economy is mainly based on agriculture (fruit, vegetables) and religious tourism as millions of Shiite pilgrims visit the shrine of Imam Hussain every year. According to a 2015 country profile, religious tourism was negatively affected by insecurity and attacks on pilgrims in the past.<sup>1789</sup> The coronavirus has brought the religious tourism industry to a halt in Kerbala, where the holy shrines of Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas were disinfected and closed.<sup>1790</sup>

## 4.2.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

Insecurity in Kerbala was in the past years mainly connected to religious uprisings, demonstrations and protests of the Shiite population against the Iraqi government. Kerbala was one of the centres of the so-called Shia uprisings, which swept through southern Iraq in 1991.<sup>1791</sup> More recently, between July and September 2018, a wave of anti-government protests erupted in southern Iraq, including in Kerbala governorate, which claimed fatalities and casualties.<sup>1792</sup> While ISIL never held territory in Kerbala between 2014 and 2017, it staged attacks on Shiite targets in the governorate causing civilian casualties.<sup>1793</sup>

<sup>1783</sup> NCC Iraq (NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq), Kerbala Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1784</sup> NCC Iraq (NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq), Kerbala Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1785</sup> Al-Monitor, Abbas Combat Division, an example of Iran-independent faction, 24 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1786</sup> NINA, Demonstrators in Kerbala cut a number of streets to protest against the deterioration of electricity, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1787</sup> AA, Iraqis protest power outage in Kerbala, 19 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1788</sup> Al Jazeera, Multiple casualties after bomb goes off on bus outside Kerbala, 20 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1789</sup> NCC Iraq (NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq), Kerbala Governorate Profile, updated December 2015, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1790</sup> France24, Virus strikes another blow at religious tourism in Iraq, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1791</sup> Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Remembering the Iraqi Uprising Twenty-Five Years Ago, 5 March 2016, [url](#); EPIC/ ISHM, ISHM reference guide, last revision: May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1792</sup> International Peace Institute (IPI), Protests in Southern Iraq Intensify, Is Instability to Follow?, 24 July 2018, [url](#); The National, 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](#)

<sup>1793</sup> EPIC/ ISHM, ISHM reference guide, last revision: May 2020, [url](#); see examples: Independent (The), Kerbala suicide bombing: 30 killed in Iraq terror attack, 9 June 2017, [url](#); Deutsche Welle (DW), Eight killed in rare suicide attacks in Iraq's Kerbala region, 14 November 2016, [url](#); Xinhua, 15 killed in suicide attack on wedding in Iraq's Kerbala, 29 August 2016, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Deadly car bombings hit Iraq's Kerbala, 20 October 2014, [url](#)

## Armed actors

### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

The ISW reported in 2017 that the Iraqi military's Mid-Euphrates Operations Command (MEOC) was responsible for the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala, as well as the southern Anbar district of Nukhaib. MEOC is chiefly responsible for ensuring the security of Shia pilgrims and securing Iraq's southern governorates.<sup>1794</sup> ISF in Kerbala also include the battalion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local and federal police.<sup>1795</sup>

### *Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)*

The ISW reported in 2017 that large numbers of Iraqi Shia militias supplemented security in the MEOC, with many having kept headquarters in Kerbala, lending them legitimacy and popular support by securing pilgrimage routes.<sup>1796</sup> The PMUs' operations command in Kerbala was reportedly formed by the Shia militias Liwa Ali al-Akbar (Brigade 11) and the Al-Abbas Combat Division (Brigade 26).<sup>1797</sup> The Al-Abbas Combat Division is 'funded and politically backed by the custodian of the shrine of Imam Al-Abbas' in Kerbala, and controls most of the checkpoints along the main road from Kerbala to the border with Saudi Arabia.<sup>1798</sup> In September 2019, Chatham House reported that 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 Kerbala.<sup>1799</sup>

There are training camps for several militias in Kerbala governorate.<sup>1800</sup>

## 4.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### Developments 2019-2020

On 1 October 2019, the security forces discovered a bag with 750 kg of explosives, allegedly planned to be used for an ISIL attack on pilgrims, on their way to Kerbala for the annual religious Shi'a Arbaeen ceremony. This ceremony attracts about three million people each year and begins on 19 October. ISIL has earlier performed attacks on the Shi'a pilgrims.<sup>1801</sup>

On 1 October 2019 and the following days, large-scale anti-government protests took place in Baghdad, Kerbala and other governorates in southern Iraq. The spiralling violence and deployment of a variety of heavily armed ISF led to hundreds of arrests, 157 deaths and 5 494 injuries during the first week of October 2019, according to UNAMI.<sup>1802</sup>

A second wave of protests followed on 25 October 2019 until 4 November 2019 mainly in Baghdad and southern/central governorates Babil, Basrah, Thi-Qar, Kerbala, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, Qadisiyah and Wassit. UNAMI noted with concern, 'numerous human rights violations and abuses were committed, including the use of lethal force against demonstrators, the unnecessary, disproportionate and/or improper use of tear gas and stun grenades, continued efforts to limit media coverage of demonstrations, abductions and multiple arrests.' By 4 November 2019, 97 deaths and

<sup>1794</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19; March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1795</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIL in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1796</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1797</sup> Knights, M., et al., Honored, not contained, the future of Iraq's popular mobilization forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 41; Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1798</sup> Al-Monitor, Abbas Combat Division, an example of Iran-independent faction, 24 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1799</sup> 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, accessed 7 July 2020

<sup>1800</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained, the future of Iraq's popular mobilization forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 68;

<sup>1801</sup> Kurdistan24, Iraqi forces foil suspected ISIL attack on Shia pilgrims south of Baghdad, 1 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1802</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq, 1-9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 3-4

thousands of injured people, including members of the ISF, had to be added to the earlier number of casualties.<sup>1803</sup>

Specifically in Kerbala, UNAMI reported on ‘police forces wearing black uniforms, using live ammunition against demonstrators’, in the night of 28-29 October 2019, ‘which credible reports indicate may have killed 18 people and injured 143’. UNAMI concluded that there ‘are allegations that security forces reportedly used unlawful lethal force against demonstrators in Kerbala governorate and Baghdad’.<sup>1804</sup> AI also reported that the army resorted to ‘excessive and unlawful lethal force’ against protesters to disperse them.<sup>1805</sup>

Also in November and December 2019, demonstrations, ‘driven by protestors’ frustration at limited economic, social and political prospects’, occurred in Kerbala and other governorates. Most of these demonstrations were peaceful.<sup>1806</sup> In Kerbala, Shi’ites protested against Iran’s interference with Iraq policies.<sup>1807</sup> On 4 December 2019, the Iranian embassy in Kerbala city was set on fire.<sup>1808</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 4 February 2019, the Iraqi novelist and intellectual Alaa Mashthoub was killed by unknown gunmen outside his home in Kerbala city. Motive for the killing is unknown.<sup>1809</sup>
- On 28 July 2019, a car bomb killed one and injured three persons in Kerbala. Actors were not mentioned.<sup>1810</sup>
- On 20 September 2019, an ISIL bomb on a bus in Kerbala killed 12 persons. This was, according to Al Jazeera, ‘one of the worst attacks targeting civilians since the declaration of the group’s defeat in Iraq in 2017’.<sup>1811</sup>
- On 9 December 2019, a ‘prominent activist’ who participated in several demonstrations, was killed by unknown gunmen.<sup>1812</sup> Also in 2020, killings of civilians were reported by gunmen, often on motorcycles. Motive and identity of the killers was not known.<sup>1813</sup>
- On 13 March 2020, the US launched a series of air strikes on weapon depots of an Iran-backed Shi’ite militia group, Kataib Hezbollah, that earlier had reportedly attacked a US camp, killing and injuring British and American soldiers. One of the US missiles hit an airport under construction outside Kerbala city, killing one civilian and five military staff.<sup>1814</sup>

<sup>1803</sup> UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Demonstrations in Iraq: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, November 2019, [url](#), p. 2; AA, Iraq imposes curfew in Kerbala amid anti-gov’t protests, 28 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1804</sup> UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Demonstrations in Iraq: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, November 2019, [url](#), pp. 3, 7; see also AI, Iraq: Horrifying scenes as security forces resort to lethal force to disperse Kerbala protests, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1805</sup> AI, Iraq: Horrifying scenes as security forces resort to lethal force to disperse Kerbala protests, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1806</sup> UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Demonstrations in Iraq: 2nd update; 5 November - 9 December 2019, 11 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3. See also VOA News, Clashes in Southern Iraqi City of Kerbala Kill 2 Protesters, 6 November 2019, [url](#); NBC News, 18 killed in attack on protesters in Iraq’s Kerbala, 28 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1807</sup> France24, In Shiite holy city of Kerbala, Iraqis protest against Iranian ‘meddling’, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1808</sup> Al Jazeera, Three killed as Iraq protesters attack Iran consulate in Kerbala, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iranian consulates torched in Najaf and Kerbala, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1809</sup> Iraqi News, U.S. embassy mourns Iraqi novelist gunned down in Kerbala, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1810</sup> Iraqi News, Car bomb blast kills Iraqi citizen, wounds 3 others in Kerbala, 29 July 2019, [url](#); XinhuaNet, Civilian killed in bomb explosion near Iraq’s Kerbala, 28 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1811</sup> Al Jazeera, ISIL claims bus bombing in Iraq’s Kerbala that killed 12, 21 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1812</sup> Japan Times (The), Prominent activist gunned down in Iraq shrine city Kerbala, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1813</sup> NINA, Gunmen Assassinate A Citizen In Kerbala With A Silencer, 9 July 2020, [url](#); NINA, A civilian was killed in an armed attack in Kerbala, 31 May 2020, [url](#);

<sup>1814</sup> AP, US general says retaliatory airstrikes in Iraq destroyed 5 weapons depots — but many similar sites remain, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

- In July 2020, an old clan conflict flared up in Al-Hindiya District, resulting in two deaths, two injured and several arrests.<sup>1815</sup> Another armed conflict between two clans in the district of Ain al-Tamr resulted in 14 injured persons.<sup>1816</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Kerbala	8	13	4	<b>17</b>	8	1	0	<b>1</b>

Table 16: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Kerbala governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>1817</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 4 battles, 8 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 11 cases of violence against civilians, 34 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 57 security incidents of these types in Kerbala governorate, the majority taking place in the capital Kerbala City. 58 protests were also reported in Kerbala governorate during the reference period.<sup>1818</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>1815</sup> NINA, Kerbala police take control of a tribal conflict that killed two people and wounded others, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1816</sup> NINA, Armed conflict between two clans in Kerbala causing 14 injuries, 24 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1817</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>1818</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

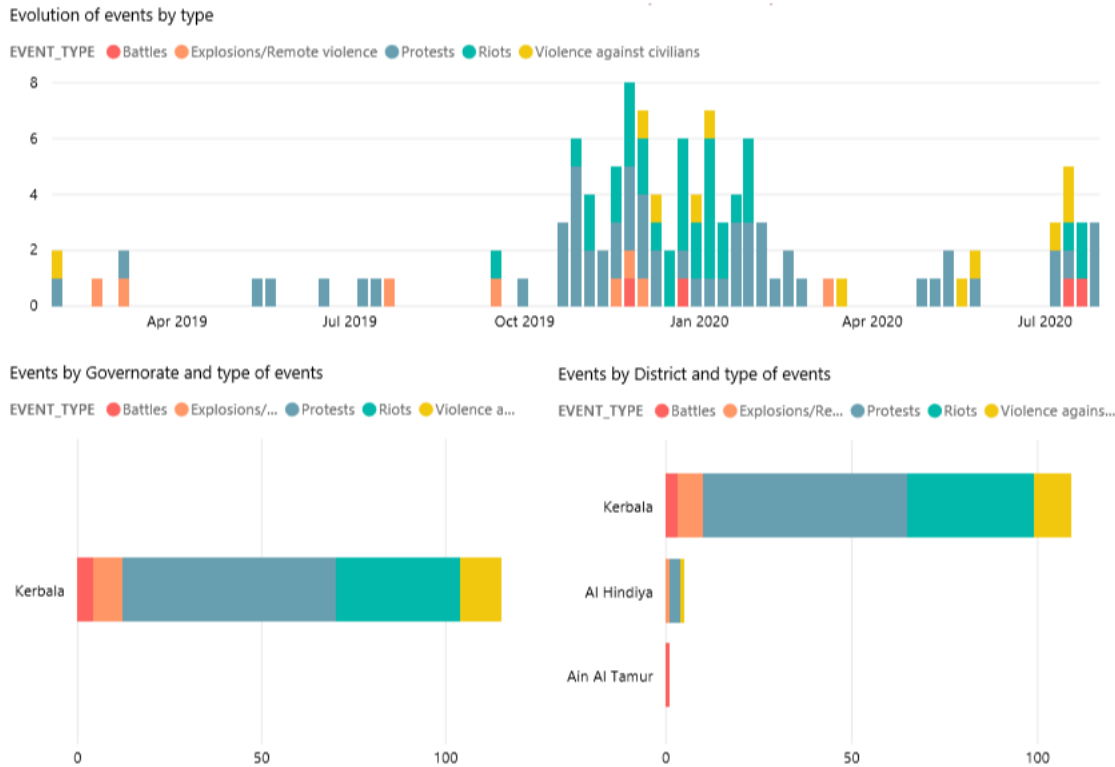


Figure 19: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Kerbala governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1819</sup>

### State ability to secure law and order

The security void resulting from the deployment of security forces in 2014 to fight ISIL insurgency in central and northern Iraq left the southern region open to tribal clashes, criminal activity and political violence.<sup>1820</sup> Knights et al. indicated in March 2020 that they consider Kerbala – and other southern governorates – as ‘areas of shared responsibility between the Iraqi army or police services and the Hashd [Brigades]’.<sup>1821</sup> In February 2020, the army forces stated that security in Kerbala governorate, ‘which is considered as a sensitive spot’, would be managed by the Joint Operations Command (the army). In other areas, security would be handed over to the police.<sup>1822</sup> As mentioned before, many checkpoints along the main road from Kerbala to the border with Saudi Arabia are controlled by the Al-Abbas Combat Division.<sup>1823</sup>

On 6 February 2020, protesters in Kerbala city were attacked with a variety of weapons by ‘armed men affiliated to Muqtada al-Sadr’, injuring several protesters and one police officer. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘the Iraqi army was reportedly present but did not intervene and Riot Police were called.’<sup>1824</sup> In earlier occasions, such as the above mentioned protests in October 2019, the Iraqi army resorted to ‘excessive and unlawful lethal force’ against protesters to disperse them.<sup>1825</sup>

<sup>1819</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1820</sup> Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq’s south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1821</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained – the future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 128-129

<sup>1822</sup> MEMO (Middle East Monitor), Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1823</sup> Al-Monitor, Abbas Combat Division, an example of Iran-independent faction, 24 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1824</sup> UN HRC, Press briefing note on Iraq, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1825</sup> AI, Iraq: Horrific scenes as security forces resort to lethal force to disperse Kerbala protests, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

There are no recent reports on infrastructure damage due to the violence and conflicts in Kerbala governorate, apart from the US strike on an airport under construction outside Kerbala city (see above).<sup>1826</sup>

## Displacement and return

Kerbala displacement figures as of 30 June 2020 amount to 15 558 individuals. Of these IDPs, 86 % originated from Ninewa, 8 % from Babylon, and 6 % from other governorates, such as Anbar, Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Baghdad.<sup>1827</sup>

Subdivided per district, the IOM gave the following numbers of IDPs from the mentioned governorates:

- Kerbala district 13 494
- Al-Hindiya 1 866
- Ain Al-Tamur 198<sup>1828</sup>

No returns were recorded. During the COVID-19 period (March-May 2020), movements between governorates were restricted by the authorities.<sup>1829</sup>

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<sup>1826</sup> AP, US general says retaliatory airstrikes in Iraq destroyed 5 weapons depots — but many similar sites remain, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

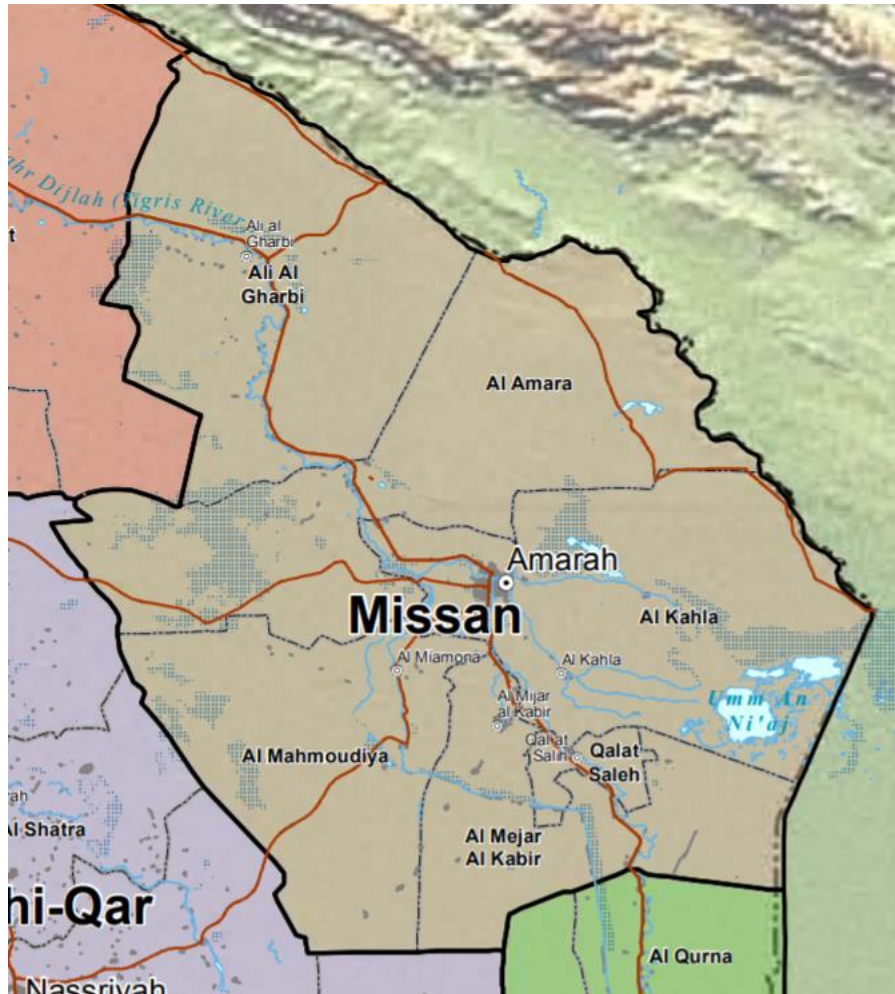
<sup>1827</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1828</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1829</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 4



## 4.3 Missan



Map 21: Missan governorate, Iraq with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1830</sup>

### 4.3.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Missan governorate is located in south-east Iraq and borders with Wassit, Basrah and Thi-Qar governorates and with Iran to the east.<sup>1831</sup>

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.<sup>1832</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Organization) estimated the governorate's population at 1 141 966.<sup>1833</sup>

<sup>1830</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1831</sup> UN Iraq Joint Analysis Unit, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1832</sup> NCCI, Governorate profile Missan, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1833</sup> Iraq, CSO, 2019 تقديرات سكان العراق حسب المحافظة والبيئة والجنس لسنة 2019 [Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019] (table), n.d., [url](#)

## Ethnicity

The majority of Missan's inhabitants are Shia Muslims. The governorate also hosts a Sunni minority and small communities of Christians and Mandeans, who live in the city of Amarah. A small group of Failli Kurds also lives in Missan.<sup>1834</sup>

## Road security

According to Phillip Smyth's analysis from December 2019, in Missan, as in Baghdad, Basrah and Thi-Qar, tribal groups have 'taken the lead in crafting protest tactics, shutting down roads, and even retaliating against Iranian-backed groups'.<sup>1835</sup>

## Economy

The marshlands which once covered two thirds of the governorate, shrunk drastically following the wetlands draining campaign of the 1990s. Much of the drained landscape has turned into desert.<sup>1836</sup> The agricultural sector has suffered greatly from the destruction of the marshlands<sup>1837</sup>, making Missan one of the poorest governorates in the country.<sup>1838</sup> IDMC reported that around 34 000 people were estimated to be displaced in January 2019 from the four governorates of Basrah, Missan, Muthanna and Thi-Qar because of water shortages.<sup>1839</sup> Halfaya is Missan's largest oilfield.<sup>1840</sup>

## 4.3.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

The 2014 takeover of large parts of Iraq by ISIL left Missan untouched.<sup>1841</sup> Rafidain Operations Command (ROC) oversaw military security in Missan as of ISW's Order of Battle for Iraq published in 2017.<sup>1842</sup> As the majority of ISF based in the ROC area were deployed to protect Baghdad or to combat ISIL, security forces in the area were stretched thin. In 2016 intra-Shia violence escalated in Iraq's southern governorates, prompting a military intervention and tribal reconciliation efforts.<sup>1843</sup>

### Armed actors

As of December 2019, the ISF units mentioned in Missan consisted of Al-Rafidain Operations Command, Commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local police and a brigade of the federal police.<sup>1844</sup>

As many destitute youths joined the Popular Mobilization Forces in 2014, Missan's capital Amarah, became a recruiting ground for Shia militias.<sup>1845</sup> The PMF Commission maintains administrative offices in each Iraqi governorate outside Kurdistan, including Missan, providing 'a necessary link to wounded fighters and families, as well as a recruitment hub and contact point for off-duty members'.<sup>1846</sup> In a

<sup>1834</sup> NCCI, Governorate profile Missan, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1835</sup> Smyth, P., Iran is losing Iraq's tribes, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1836</sup> NCCI, Governorate profile Missan, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1837</sup> NCCI, Governorate profile Missan, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1838</sup> EPIC, ISHM reference guide, last revision: May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1839</sup> IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020 - Middle East and North Africa, April 2020, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1840</sup> Reuters, Iraq lifts oil production at Halfaya oilfield to 370,000 BPD, 12 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1841</sup> NCCI, Governorate profile Missan, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1842</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1843</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1844</sup> See Iraq Conflict Map Areas of Control [map] in Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1845</sup> ICG, Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000", 8 August 2016, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1846</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, CTC, [url](#), p. 5

September 2019 report Chatham House noted that PMU Brigades 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 21, 22, 26 were present in the governorates of Missan, Thi-Qar and Basrah.<sup>1847</sup>

Security incidents in Iraq's southern governorates result mainly from (intra-)tribal disputes and/or criminal activity.<sup>1848</sup> Whilst southern Iraq is 'more secure' than other parts of the country, problems of criminality, drug abuse, and violence between Shia armed groups involved in militia and tribal groups occur.<sup>1849</sup> DFAT further observes in October 2018 that 'violence between different Shi'a armed groups occurs in southern Iraq and is mostly related to control of land and oil revenues. Local sources suggest that intra-Shia violence predominantly affects those who are actively involved in a militia or tribal group.'<sup>1850</sup> Another cause of tribal conflict in Iraq's southern governorates is the water scarcity affecting the region.<sup>1851</sup> Writing for the online platform, Iraq in Context, in December 2019, a platform for analysis of Iraq's economy, security situation and society, Iraq analyst Robert Tollast reported that Missan's tribes span 'a patchwork of political allegiances and in many cases could split apart in the event of conflict'.<sup>1852</sup>

### 4.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

In 2019 and 2020, mass protests erupted in Iraq's southern governorates.<sup>1853</sup> In Missan most protests took place in its capital Amarah.<sup>1854</sup> Excessive force by the ISF in repressing these protests caused numerous deaths and injuries.<sup>1855</sup> In the 1 October to 15 December 2019 period, 25 protester deaths and 243 injuries were reported in Missan.<sup>1856</sup> According to ICG, Iran-backed PMF's are primarily responsible for the disproportionate use of violence against demonstrators.<sup>1857</sup> Tribal leaders in southern Iraq have turned on security forces and hold pro-Iranian militia leaders responsible for the violent repression of the protests.<sup>1858</sup> On 25 October 2019, protesters were reportedly shot and killed in Amarah while trying to storm AAH offices in the city.<sup>1859</sup> UNAMI reported that 12 persons were shot and killed during the incident, while at least 110 persons were injured. Later, demonstrators beat to death an armed element commander and his brother.<sup>1860</sup>

<sup>1847</sup> 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

<sup>1848</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht Irak*, 20 December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1849</sup> Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report – Iraq*, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>1850</sup> Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report – Iraq*, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>1851</sup> Al-Monitor, *Tribal disputes flare in southern Iraq over water scarcity*, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1852</sup> Tollast, R., *A witch's brew of instability: Iraq's tribe-militia nexus*, Iraq in context, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1853</sup> UNAMI, *Demonstrations in Iraq*; 1-9 October 2019, October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, *Demonstrations in Iraq*: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, *Demonstrations in Iraq*: 2nd update; 5 November - 9 December 2019, 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, *Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq*: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1854</sup> Middle East Eye, *Scores of demonstrators dead as protests resume in Iraq*, 25 October 2019, [url](#); BBC News, *Iraq protests: death toll nears 100 as unrest enters fifth day*, 5 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1855</sup> UNAMI, *Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq*: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2; HRW, *Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters*, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1856</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, *Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq*, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 19-21

<sup>1857</sup> ICG, *Rescuing Iraq from the Iran-U.S. Crossfire*, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1858</sup> Guardian (The), *Iraq risks breakup as tribes take on Iran's militias in 'blood feud'*, 30 November 2019, [url](#)

Tollast, R., *A witch's brew of instability: Iraq's tribe-militia nexus*, Iraq in context, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1859</sup> Middle East Eye, *Scores of demonstrators dead as protests resume in Iraq*, 25 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1860</sup> UNAMI, *Demonstrations in Iraq*: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, November 2019, [url](#), p. 3

## Illustrative security incidents

- On 1 May 2019, security forces dismantled an IED planted at the Halfaya oilfield, located east of Amarah.<sup>1861</sup>
- On 29 July 2019, two members of ISIL were arrested in Missan.<sup>1862</sup>
- On 10 December 2019, there were reports of four bomb attacks in Amarah, three of them targeting AAH property.<sup>1863</sup>
- On 4 February 2020, an assassination attempt took place in the Rammaneh neighbourhood of Amarah on a prominent supporter of Moqtada al-Sadr. The man died the next day from his injuries.<sup>1864</sup>
- On 10 March 2020, unidentified gunmen killed activist Abdul-Qudous Qasim and lawyer Karrar Adel in Amarah.<sup>1865</sup>
- Also in March 2020, protesters reportedly set on fire the AAH headquarters in Missan after protesters were angry over the killing of two activists by unknown gunmen.<sup>1866</sup>
- On 23 May 2020, protesters in Amarah set fire to the provincial headquarters of AAH.<sup>1867</sup>
- On 15 June 2020, an IED exploded next to a house in al-Kahla District killing a woman and injuring three others.<sup>1868</sup>
- In July 2020, an official at Missan health department was shot at by unknown gunmen in an attempted assassination.<sup>1869</sup>

## Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Missan	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Table 17: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Missan governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>1870</sup>

<sup>1861</sup> Iraqi News, Security forces dismantle IED in Halfaya oilfield in Missan, 1 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1862</sup> Iraqi News, Iraq arrests two Islamic State jihadists in Missan governorate, 29 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1863</sup> Tollast, R., A witch's brew of instability: Iraq's tribe-militia nexus, Iraq in context, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1864</sup> EPIC, ISHM: January 30 – February 6, 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1865</sup> EPIC, ISHM: March 5 – March 12, 2020, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1866</sup> BBC Monitoring, Iraqi protesters reportedly set pro-Iran militia quarters ablaze, 12 March 2020, Factiva

<sup>1867</sup> ISW, Iraq Situation Report: May 20 - 26, 2020, [url](#); Al Araby, Gunmen set fire to Iraqi paramilitary group's headquarters amid rising anti-Iran sentiment, 25 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1868</sup> EPIC, ISHM: June 11 – June 18, 2020, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1869</sup> Shafaq News, A Official of Missan Health Directorate Injured in an Assassination Attempt, 29 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1870</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

## Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 6 battles, 11 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 15 cases of violence against civilians, 15 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 47 security incidents of these types in Missan governorate, the majority taking place in the capital Amara. 43 protests were also reported in Missan governorate during the reference period.<sup>1871</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

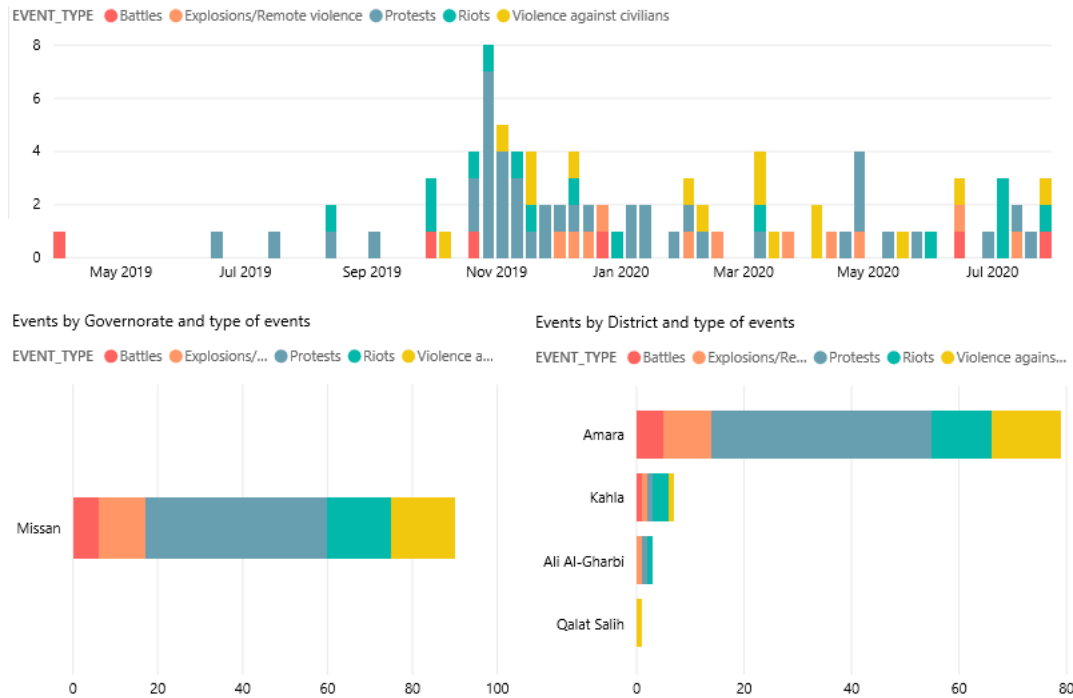


Figure 20: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Missan governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1872</sup>

## State ability to secure law and order

Information about the state's ability to secure law and order in the governorate covering the reference period, has not been found.

## Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Information about infrastructural damage and remnants of war in the governorate covering the reference period, has not been found.

## Displacement and return

According to IOM, as of 15 June 2020, 2 226 IDPs were registered in Missan. No IDPs originating from Missan were registered elsewhere in the country.<sup>1873</sup> In their July DTM matrix, IOM lists that for the 2 226 IDPS in Missan, they are distributed between Amara District (1 818), Al Amejar Al Kabir (168) and Qal'at Saleh (114). Most of them have come from Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Salah al Din.<sup>1874</sup>

<sup>1871</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1872</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1873</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Displacement Master List, Displacement Dashboard, Displacement overview, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1 of 5

<sup>1874</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 4

Missan was not listed among the governorates with a presence of returnees.<sup>1875</sup>

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<sup>1875</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 7

## 4.4 Muthanna



Map 22: Muthanna governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1876</sup>

### 4.4.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Muthanna governorate is located in south-western Iraq and borders with Najaf, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar and Basrah governorates and an international border with Saudi-Arabia.<sup>1877</sup> The governorate is divided into four districts: Al-Samawa, Al-Khidhir, Al-Rumaitha and Al-Salman.<sup>1878</sup> The capital of the governorate is Al-Samawa.<sup>1879</sup>

#### Population

The governorate has an estimated population of 835 797.<sup>1880</sup> The population is concentrated along the Euphrates River in the north of the governorate, while the southern desert districts are only sparsely populated.<sup>1881</sup>

<sup>1876</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1877</sup> UN Iraq Joint Analysis Unit, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1878</sup> NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#),

<sup>1879</sup> UN Iraq Joint Analysis Unit, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1880</sup> Iraq, المثنى [informal translation: 'Muthanna'] CSO, Population indicators and population estimates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1881</sup> NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#),

## Ethnicity

The majority of Muthanna's inhabitants are Shia Arabs<sup>1882</sup>, while an estimated 2 % of the governorate's population is Sunni Muslims.<sup>1883</sup> In the sub-district of Busaya, close to the border with Saudi Arabia, three quarters of the population are Sunni Muslims.<sup>1884</sup>

## Road security

Information about road security in the governorate covering the reference period, has not been found.

## 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.<sup>1885</sup> Muthanna is an important centre for the production of cement and other construction materials. Since 2005, the governorate has had an oil refinery, processing crude oil from the Kifl oilfield.<sup>1886</sup> Competition for jobs in the governorate was a source of tribal conflict, according to a Niqash report.<sup>1887</sup>

## 4.4.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

Ayatollah Sisitani's June 2014 appeal to take up arms against ISIL proved highly 'successful' in Iraq's southern governorates.<sup>1888</sup> Many Shia Arabs joined Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs), including in Muthanna.<sup>1889</sup> Having been spared the onslaught of ISIL's 2014 offensive, Muthanna governorate was assessed by the NCCI as one of the safest governorates of Iraq.<sup>1890</sup>

In October 2018, DFAT stated 'violence between different Shi'a armed groups occurred in southern Iraq and was mostly related to control of land and oil revenues. Local sources suggested that intra-Shia violence predominantly affected those who were actively involved in a militia or tribal group.'<sup>1891</sup> Problems of criminality, drug abuse, and violence between Shia armed groups involved in militia and tribal groups occurred.<sup>1892</sup> Another cause of tribal conflict in Iraq's southern governorates was the water scarcity affecting the region.<sup>1893</sup>

### Armed actors

According to the ISW, in 2017, Rafidain Operations Command (ROC) was in charge of overseeing security in Muthanna.<sup>1894</sup> As the majority of ISF based in the ROC were deployed to fight ISIL or protect Baghdad after ISIL's June 2014 offensive the manpower of the ROC in Muthanna was reduced.<sup>1895</sup> As of December 2019, the ISF in Muthanna governorate consisted of Al-Rafadin Operations Command,

<sup>1882</sup> NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#),

<sup>1883</sup> SIGIR, Interactive map of Iraq, 2010, [url](#)

<sup>1884</sup> Niqash, Why an Iraqi town, in the middle of the desert, has no cafés, 9 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1885</sup> NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1886</sup> NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1887</sup> Niqash, Provincial borders: Tensions Rise As Southern Iraqi Tribes Fight For Oil Jobs And Land, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1888</sup> Cigar, N., Iraq's Shia warlords and their militias: political and security challenges and options, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2015, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>1889</sup> Cigar, N., Iraq's Shia warlords and their militias: political and security challenges and options, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2015, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1890</sup> NCCI, Muthanna Governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1891</sup> Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>1892</sup> Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>1893</sup> Al-Monitor, Tribal disputes flare in southern Iraq over water scarcity, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1894</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1895</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23



9<sup>th</sup> Iraqi army Armored Division, a Commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local police and a brigade of the federal police.<sup>1896</sup>

The PMU Commission maintains administrative offices in Muthanna<sup>1897</sup>, ‘providing a link to wounded fighters and families, as well as a recruitment hub and contact point for off-duty members’.<sup>1898</sup> The administrative head of the PMU in Muthanna belongs to the Badr organisation.<sup>1899</sup> In September 2019, Chatham House reported that 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.<sup>1900</sup>

### 4.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

In 2019 and 2020, mass protests erupted in Iraq’s southern governorates.<sup>1901</sup> In Muthanna most protests were reported to have taken place in its capital Samawa.<sup>1902</sup> Excessive force by the ISF in repressing these protests caused numerous deaths and injuries.<sup>1903</sup> During the period of 1 October to 15 December 2019, one protester was reported dead and 324 injured in Muthanna.<sup>1904</sup> According to ICG, Iran-backed PMUs are primarily responsible for the disproportionate use of violence against demonstrators.<sup>1905</sup> On 25 October 2019, protesters in Samawa set fire to the offices of AAH and the Hikma movement.<sup>1906</sup>

Security incidents in Iraq’s southern governorates result mainly from (intra-)tribal disputes and/or criminal activity, according to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>1907</sup> In December 2019, Swedish immigration authorities indicated that the security situation in Iraq’s southern governorates was relatively good and the existing violence had a relatively low risk of affecting the civilian population. Although authorities found it difficult to curtail armed tribal and militia groups, the number of civilian deaths was low and occurred mainly in the event of protests or tribal and/or militia violence.<sup>1908</sup>

Between May and June 2019 crop fires were reported in the southern governorates of Babylon, Missan, Wassit, Qadissiya, Muthanna and Najaf. The Iraqi Directorate of Civil Defence hinted these

<sup>1896</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., CGP, ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1897</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>1898</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, CTC, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1899</sup> Knights, M., Iran’s Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, Combating terrorism center (CTC), [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1900</sup> 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

<sup>1901</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq; 1-9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, 5 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq), Demonstrations in Iraq: 2nd update; 5 November - 9 December 2019, 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1902</sup> Reuters, Iraqi protesters set fire to political party offices in Muthanna governorate, 25 October 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Several killed as Iraq protests escalate, spread nationwide, 2 October 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: January 9 – January 16, 2020, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1903</sup> UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2; HRW (Human Rights Watch), Iraq, Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1904</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 19-21

<sup>1905</sup> ICG, Rescuing Iraq from the Iran-U.S. Crossfire, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1906</sup> Reuters, Iraqi protesters set fire to political party offices in Muthanna governorate, 25 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1907</sup> The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Irak, 20 December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1908</sup> Sweden, Migrationsverket – Swedish Migration Agency, Rättsligt ställningstagande angående prövningen av ansökningar om internationellt skydd m.m. för medborgare i Irak, [informal translation : ‘Legal position concerning the examination of applications for international protection etc. for Iraqi citizens’], 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 17

fires were caused by cigarettes or harvest machines.<sup>1909</sup> While others designated these incidents as ‘subversive’, then Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi played down these narratives as ‘media hype’.<sup>1910</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- In July 2019, three mass graves were discovered in Muthanna, containing the remains of hundreds of victims, mostly Kurdish women and children killed in the 1980s by Saddam’s regime.<sup>1911</sup>
- On 5 July 2019, journalist Haidar Al-Hamdani received threats in Samawa. Al-Hamdani had spoken out about corruption and the poor quality of public services in Muthanna on Facebook.<sup>1912</sup>
- On 18 August 2019, dozens of people in the Suwei sub-district of Muthanna demonstrated demanding basic services. They called for officials in charge of electricity to be sacked.<sup>1913</sup>
- On 25 October 2019, 19 persons died after being trapped in burning buildings in Muthanna, Thi-Qar and Qadisiyah governorates. The building was set on fire by the protesters during demonstrations.<sup>1914</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Muthanna	4	1	1	2	2	2	0	2

Table 17: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Muthanna governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>1915</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 0 battles, 2 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 0 cases of violence against civilians, 24 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 26 security incidents of these types in Muthanna governorate, the majority mainly taking place in the capital As-Samawah. 226 protests were also reported in Muthanna governorate during the reference period also mainly taking place in the capital.<sup>1916</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>1909</sup> EPIC, ISHM: June 27 – July 4, 2019, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1910</sup> Kurdistan 24, Iraq releases latest crop fire figures; disputed territories worst hit, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1911</sup> EPIC, ISHM: July 18 – July 25, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1912</sup> RSF, Another Iraqi journalist threatened, 9 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1913</sup> EPIC, ISHM: August 15 – August 22, 2019, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1914</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1915</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>1916</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

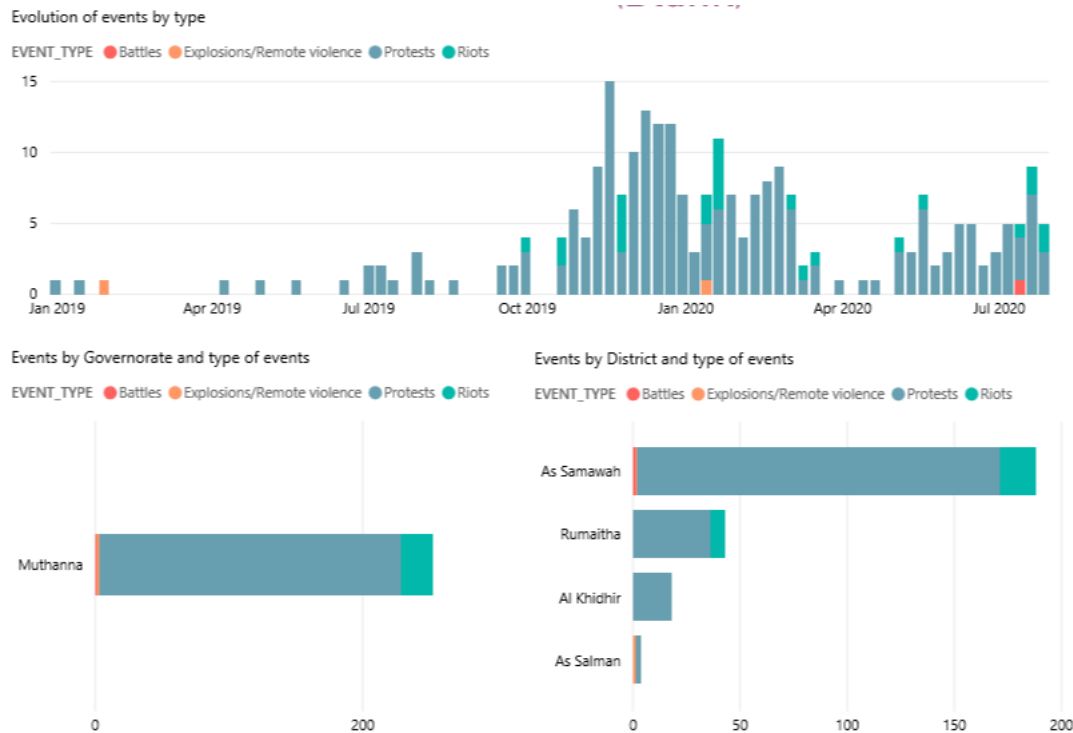


Figure 21: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Muthanna governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1917</sup>

### State ability to secure law and order

Information about the state's ability to secure law and order in the governorate covering the reference period, has not been found.

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Mine Action Review, a research team funded by the Norwegian government, reported in 2019 that Muthanna was among those southern governorates most affected by remnants of cluster munitions dating back to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion. The size of the area that was classified as 'confirmed hazardous' was set at 101 647 074 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>1918</sup>

### Displacement and return

According to IOM, as of 15 June 2020, 996 IDPs were registered in Muthanna. No IDPs originating from Muthanna were registered elsewhere in the country.<sup>1919</sup> IDMC reported that around 34 000 people were estimated to be displaced in January 2019 from four governorates including Basrah, Missan, Muthanna and Thi-Qar due to water shortages.<sup>1920</sup>

Muthanna was not listed among the governorates with a presence of returnees.<sup>1921</sup>

<sup>1917</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

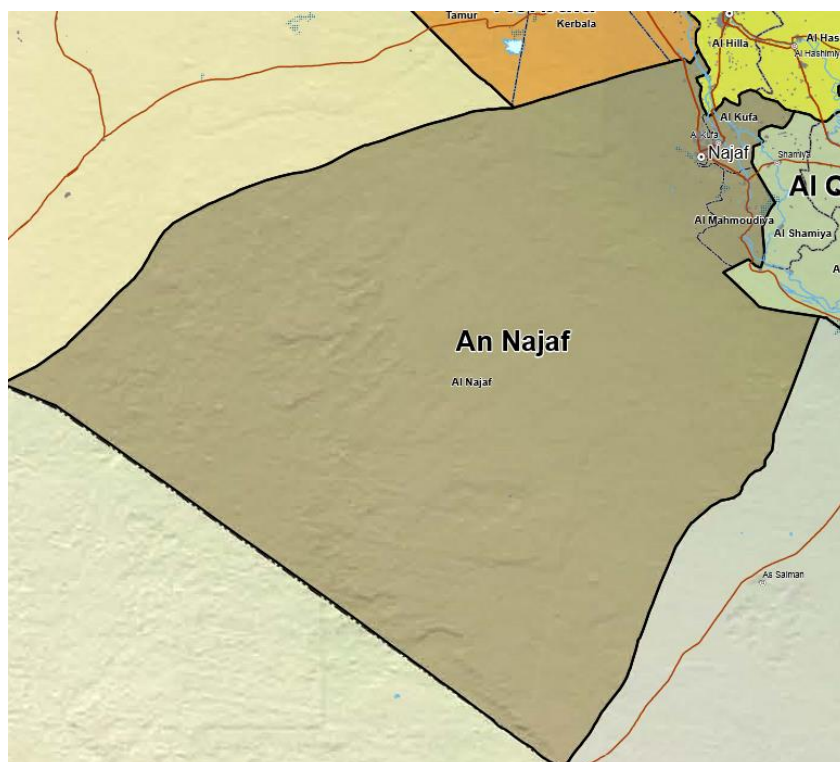
<sup>1918</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2019: Iraq, 2019. n.d., [url](#), p. 53

<sup>1919</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Displacement Master List, Displacement Dashboard, Displacement overview, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1 of 5

<sup>1920</sup> IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020 - Middle East and North Africa, April 2020, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>1921</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 7

## 4.5 Najaf



Map 23: Najaf governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1922</sup>

### 4.5.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Najaf governorate is located in the south-western part of Iraq. It borders Anbar, Babil, Qadissiya and Muthanna governorates, and shares an international border with Saudi Arabia to the south. The governorate is divided into three sub-districts: Najaf, Kufah and Al-Manathera. The capital is Najaf City.<sup>1923</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Office) estimated the governorate's population at 1 510 338.<sup>1924</sup>

#### Ethnicity

The majority population is Shia Arab.<sup>1925</sup>

<sup>1922</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1923</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1924</sup> Iraq, CSO, Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019 (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1925</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

## Road security

Roads in Najaf city have occasionally been blocked by protesters.<sup>1926</sup>

## Economy

Holy sites in Najaf City and Kufah, as well as the Wadi al-Salam (Valley of Peace) draw pilgrims and religious tourists to the governorate, making the tourism sector one of the most important components of the governorate's economy.<sup>1927</sup>

### 4.5.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

#### Conflict background

In the wake of the 2003 invasion, the governorate became a stronghold for the influential Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his Jaysh al-Mahdi militia.<sup>1928</sup> Battles were fought between the militia and coalition forces in 2004.<sup>1929</sup> A ceasefire ended the conflict, and security incidents became more infrequent.<sup>1930</sup> However, a security void resulted from the deployment of security forces in 2014 to fight ISIL insurgency in central and northern Iraq and left the southern region open to tribal clashes, criminal activity and political violence.<sup>1931</sup> ISIL has occasionally been staging attacks in the governorate causing civilian casualties.<sup>1932</sup> Public protests took place across the governorate in the reporting period.<sup>1933</sup> In November 2019, the protests escalated when protesters stormed the Iranian consulate and set fire to it.<sup>1934</sup>

#### Armed actors

##### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

The ISW reported in 2017 that the Iraqi military's Mid-Euphrates Operations Command (MEOC) was responsible for the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala, as well as the southern Anbar District of Nukhaib. MEOC was mainly responsible for ensuring the security of Shia pilgrims and securing Iraq's southern governorates.<sup>1935</sup> ISF in Najaf governorate also included the commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local and federal police.<sup>1936</sup> In February 2020, the Iraqi army handed over the responsibility for security in the governorate to the police, according to media reports.<sup>1937</sup> Knights et al. assessed in

<sup>1926</sup> Al-Shafaq News, Protest against the nomination of Suhail...Protesters block the roads in Diwaniyah and Najaf, 22 December 2019, [url](#); BBC, Iraq protesters: demonstrators block roads in Najaf, 1 February 2020, [url](#); Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, Iraqi protesters clash with Sadr backers in deadly Najaf standoff, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1927</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1928</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1929</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1930</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1931</sup> Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq's south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1932</sup> Al-Jazeera, ISIL attacks Iraqi police near Najaf, kills seven, 1 January 2017, [url](#); BBC, Iraq: Blasts kill 14 Shia pilgrims in Kerbala and Najaf, 8 November 2010, [url](#); National (The), Iraq fears ISIS resurgence after killing of fishermen, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1933</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, The Rising Tide of Change in Iraq: An assessment of the 2018 and 2019 Protests, 25 November 2019, [url](#) (PDF version not downloadable at the time of retrieval); Peoples Dispatch, Fresh protests in Iraq demand elections, justice for those killed by security forces, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1934</sup> Al-Jazeera, Iraq condemns attack on Iranian consulate in Najaf, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1935</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1936</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1937</sup> Middle East Monitor, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

2020 that all eight southern governorates should be considered areas of shared control between the Iraqi army or police, and the PMU.<sup>1938</sup>

#### *Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)*

The ISW reported in 2017 that large numbers of Iraqi Shia militias supplemented security in the MEOC.<sup>1939</sup> According to Knights et al. all eight southern governorates should be considered areas of shared control between the Iraqi army and police, and the PMUs. Hashd Brigade 11 (Liwa Ali al-Akbar) and Brigade 26 (Al-Abbas Combat Division) were reportedly deployed to Najaf governorate as protective units designated to the shrines. The PMU commander in the governorate belongs to Brigade 2 (Imam Ali Brigades).<sup>1940</sup> In September 2019, Chatham House reported that 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 Najaf governorate.<sup>1941</sup>

### 4.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

By mid-2019, the public protests being held across the southern part of the country, had become more subdued than they were the previous year.<sup>1942</sup> The protests have been directed mainly against corruption, unemployment and poor public services.<sup>1943</sup>

Demonstrations, occasionally violent, again broke out on 1 October 2020, and were met with harsher reactions than before.<sup>1944</sup> Protesters set fire to the headquarters of political parties, damaged government buildings and engaged in revenge killings. Several demonstrators have been killed and injured by government forces and supporting militias opening fire and attacking them. Protests were reported during the first week of October and again from 25 October in Najaf and other southern governorates.<sup>1945</sup> In November 2019, protesters attacked and set fire to the Iranian consulate in Najaf City, in what was reported as an outburst of anti-Iranian sentiment among the population.<sup>1946</sup>

Tensions escalated again in January 2020 when some protesters forcibly prevented students and teachers from accessing state educational institutions. The protests continued through February 2020.<sup>1947</sup> The protests then wound down during the winter and spring months. In May, protests resumed again in cities in the south. The number of protesters who turned out were lower than in December, though.<sup>1948</sup>

<sup>1938</sup> Knights, M. et al., (Knights, M., Malik, H. and Al-Tamimi, J.) Honored, not contained – the future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, pp. 128-129, 37, [url](#)

<sup>1939</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1940</sup> Knights, M. et al., (Knights, M., Malik, H. and Al-Tamimi, J.) Honored, not contained – the future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, pp. 128-129, 37, [url](#)

<sup>1941</sup> 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

<sup>1942</sup> Robin, B., 1 August 2019, South Iraq security and protest dynamics report: July 2019, [url](#), Monthly interactive maps

<sup>1943</sup> BBC, Iraq unrest: Protesters set fire to Iranian consulate in Najaf, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1944</sup> O' Driscoll, D., 9 January 2020, Tensions on Iraqi soil likely to overshadow anti-government protest demands, [blog], [url](#)

<sup>1945</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update 25 October – 4 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1946</sup> Guardian (The), 30 November 2019, Iraq risks breakup as tribes take on Iran's militias in 'blood feud', 30 November 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), Iraq Protesters Burn Down Iran Consulate in Night of Anger, 27 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1947</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Resolution 2470 (2019) – Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>1948</sup> Middle East Eye, 'Today is a message': Anti-government protests resume in Iraq, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

## Illustrative security incidents

- Five fishermen were killed in a suspected ISIS attack in Najaf governorate. Their bodies were found near Lake Tharthar in Najaf's Abbasid District.<sup>1949</sup>
- 45 protesters were killed by security forces in Najaf and Nasiriyah on 28 November 2019. It was not mentioned how many of the incidents that took place in Najaf, or if they took place in Najaf City only.<sup>1950</sup>
- Protesters burned the entrance to a shrine in Najaf City on 30 November 2019.<sup>1951</sup>
- On 28 November 2019, state forces killed 12 protesters in Najaf City in connection with protesters storming and setting fire to the Iranian consulate.<sup>1952</sup>
- In February 2020, two activists were kidnapped in Najaf and Baghdad.<sup>1953</sup> It was not mentioned whether the kidnapping took place in Najaf City or elsewhere in the governorate.
- On 6 February 2020, Al-Arabiya reported that 11 protesters were killed and 120 wounded when militant Sadrists attacked protesters in Najaf City.<sup>1954</sup>

## Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Najaf	10	4	15	19	1	0	0	0

Table 18: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Najaf governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>1955</sup>

## Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 2 battles, 5 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 5 cases of violence against civilians, 30 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 42 security incidents of these types in Najaf governorate. 67 protests were also reported in Najaf governorate during the reference period, the majority taking place in the capital Najaf City.<sup>1956</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>1949</sup> National (The), Iraq fears ISIS resurgence after killing of fishermen, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1950</sup> EPIC, ISHM, November 21 – December 5, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1951</sup> Reuters, Iraqi protesters burn shrine entrance in holy city, PM quitting “not enough”, 30 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1952</sup> EPIC, ISHM: 21 November, 2019 – 5 December, 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1953</sup> EPIC, ISHM: February 6 –February 13, 2020, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1954</sup> Al-Arabiya, Iraq: Death toll of assault on Najaf protesters hit 11, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1955</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>1956</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

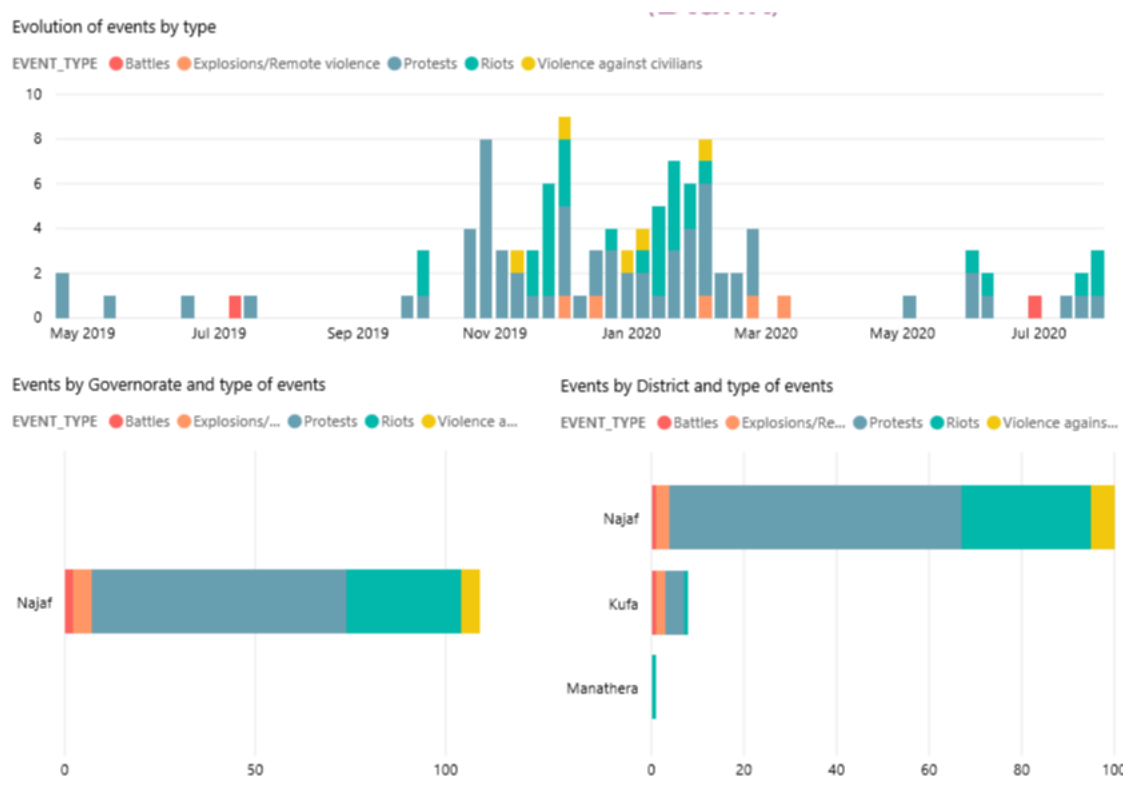


Figure 22: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Najaf governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>1957</sup>

### State ability to secure law and order

HRW reported that the Iraqi prime minister had issued orders to the state forces not to use live ammunition against protesters, but that protesters continued to get killed by them.<sup>1958</sup> In December 2019, courts in southern Iraq issued arrest warrants against officers in Najaf for excessive use of force and issuing orders that led to the killing of protesters. In the same report, the HRW asserted that the state seemed 'complicit' in the killings, but also that police and military commanders would be prosecuted for killing protesters.<sup>1959</sup>

Knights et al. stated that the PMU was operating its own command and control system to the extent that its leadership was able to act as a 'parallel state'. Accordingly, the authors asserted, PMU units could refuse legal orders issued by the state commander in chief, the prime minister, which it 'constantly' did.<sup>1960</sup>

State security units supposedly linked to Iran-backed PMU militias were insufficiently held accountable for killing protesters in Najaf and other governorates, the New York Times cited a member of Iraq's High Commission on Human Rights as saying. As a reaction to the killing of protesters in October 2019, Najaf's police commander was fired and publicly named and shamed.<sup>1961</sup>

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Najaf, together with Basrah and Muthanna governorates, accounted for 98 % of the prevalence of cluster munition contaminating the southern governorates, Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor

<sup>1957</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>1958</sup> HRW, Iraq: New protester death despite order not to fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1959</sup> HRW, Iraq: State Appears Complicit in Massacre of Protesters, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1960</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. ix

<sup>1961</sup> The New York Times, Iraq will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, October 2019, [url](#)



reported in November 2018, not specifying exact locations.<sup>1962</sup> One incident with such war remnants was reported in December 2018, when six shepherds were wounded by a cluster bomb in a desert area in the governorate.<sup>1963</sup> Newer information has not been found.

### Displacement and return

As of 30 June 2020, Najaf governorate hosted a total number of 12 546 IDPs with main districts of displacement being, Najaf (9 972), Kufah (2 178), and Al-Manathera (396).<sup>1964</sup> Of these IDPs, 99% originated from Ninewa governorate, while 1% originated from other governorates, including Diyala, Salah al-Din, Anbar and Kirkuk.<sup>1965</sup> IOM recorded no returns to Najaf governorate. During the COVID-19 period (March-May 2020), movements were limited between governorates.<sup>1966</sup>

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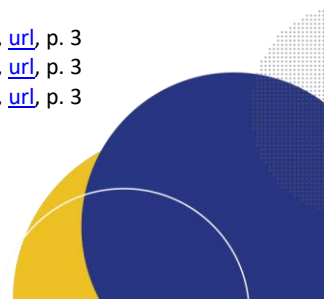
<sup>1962</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Iraq Mine Action, 16 November 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1963</sup> Iraqi News, Cluster bomb wounds six people in Iraq's Najaf governorate, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1964</sup> IOM, DTM (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix), Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1965</sup> IOM, DTM (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix), Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1966</sup> IOM, DTM (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix), Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3



## 4.6 Qadissiya



Map 24: Qadissiya governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>1967</sup>

### 4.6.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

Saddam Hussein renamed Al-Diwaniya governorate ‘Qadissiya’ in 1976 and the name was reverted in 2008.<sup>1968</sup> Qadissiya governorate is located in southern central Iraq and borders with Babil, Wassit, Thi-Qar, Muthanna and Anbar governorates.<sup>1969</sup> The governorate is divided into the following districts: Diwaniya, Afak, Al-Shamiya and al Al-Hamza.<sup>1970</sup> The capital city of the governorate is Diwaniya.<sup>1971</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Office) estimated the governorate’s population at 1 325 031.<sup>1972</sup>

<sup>1967</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1968</sup> EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1969</sup> UN Iraq JAU (Joint Analysis Unit), Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1970</sup> NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1971</sup> EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1972</sup> Iraq, CSO, Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019 (table), n.d., [url](#)

## Ethnicity

The majority of Qadissiya's inhabitants are Shia Arabs.<sup>1973</sup> In October 2015, Niqash stated that a community of Roma lived in Fawar, about 20 km south-east of the city of Diwaniya.<sup>1974</sup> However, European Network in Statelessness (ENS) and Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) stated in November 2019 that many of the Iraqi Dom people left Iraq after 2003, and that those who remained in Iraq are found in the outskirts of Baghdad, Mosul and Basrah.<sup>1975</sup> Additionally, an unknown number of Bidoon reside in the governorate.<sup>1976</sup>

## Road security

Information about road security in the governorate covering the reference period, has not been found.

## Economy

The spokesperson of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, cited by Al-Sumaria on 16 February 2020, stated that poverty rates in Qadissiya reached 48 % based on the poverty survey conducted in 2018.<sup>1977</sup> Oil resources in the area remain unexplored.<sup>1978</sup> The governorate's economy is largely agricultural<sup>1979</sup> and is known for its marshy fields where farmers grow aromatic ambar rice.<sup>1980</sup> According to IOM, Qadissiya governorate had 'the largest number of locations affected by water shortage, with 23 affected locations'. And further, the population in the affected locations relied on agriculture and livestock for livelihood, and were not 'able to access water due to the remoteness of their locations from rivers and irrigation canals'. Moreover, water shortage compelled the government to ban growing rice in parts of Al-Shamiya District due to the large quantities of water required to grow this crop.<sup>1981</sup>

## 4.6.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

The governorate largely escaped the onslaught of the 2014 ISIL conquest across large parts of north-western Iraq.<sup>1982</sup> In 2016, intra-Shia violence escalated in Iraq's southern governorates, prompting a military intervention and tribal reconciliation efforts.<sup>1983</sup>

DFAT assessed the situation in southern Iraq in 2018 as 'more secure' than other parts of the country, although problems of criminality, drug abuse, and violence between Shia armed groups involved in militia and tribal groups occurred.<sup>1984</sup> According to DFAT, writing in October 2018, 'violence between different Shia armed groups occurs in southern Iraq and is mostly related to control of land and oil

<sup>1973</sup> NCCI Qadissiya governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1974</sup> Niqash, Purveyors of immorality and crime? Iraq's gypsies, blockaded by police, harassed by authorities, 1 October 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1975</sup> ENS, ISI, Statelessness in Iraq; Country Position Paper, November 2019, [url](#), pp. 13, 14

<sup>1976</sup> ENS, ISI, Statelessness in Iraq; Country Position Paper, November 2019, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1977</sup> Al-Sumaria, تعرف على نسبة الفقر في المحافظات العراقية [Get Familiar with the Poverty Rates in Iraqi Governorates], 16 February 2020, [url](#); EPIC/ ISHM: May 23 – May 30, 2019, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1978</sup> Niqash, Iraq's poorest governorate: where locals sell their children to make ends meet, 10 December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1979</sup> IAU, Qadissiya Governorate Profile, November 2010, [url](#), p. 1

NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1980</sup> New York Times (The), Shiite rivalries slash at once calm Iraqi city, 21 June 2007, [url](#)

<sup>1981</sup> IOM, Assessing Water Shortage-induced Displacement in Qadissiya, Najaf, Babylon, Wassit and Kerbala, 10 April 2019, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1982</sup> EPIC/ ISHM, ISHM reference guide, last revision: May 2020, [url](#); NCCI, Qadissiya governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1983</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1984</sup> Australia, DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

revenues. Local sources suggest that intra-Shia violence predominantly affects those who are actively involved in a militia or tribal group.<sup>1985</sup> According to Al-Monitor reporting in 2019, another cause of tribal conflict in Iraq's southern governorates was the water scarcity affecting the region.<sup>1986</sup>

## Armed actors

### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

As of December 2019, the ISF in Qadissiya governorate consisted of the Middle Euphrates Operation Command (MEOC), a Commandos brigade, emergency regiments, local police and a brigade of the federal police.<sup>1987</sup> Rafidain Operations Command (ROC) oversaw military security in Qadissiya previously.<sup>1988</sup> As the majority of ISF based in the ROC area were deployed to protect Baghdad or to combat ISIL, security forces in the area were stretched thin following ISIL's June 2014 offensive.<sup>1989</sup> In January 2019, the Qadissiya provincial police announced that it had started taking over security from the MEOC, according to media reports.<sup>1990</sup> This transfer of responsibilities was presented as a result of the stabilisation of the security situation across Iraq's cities.<sup>1991</sup> On 14 February 2020, Middle East Monitor stated that Qadissiya was one of the five governorates in which 'the police took over the security file.'<sup>1992</sup>

### Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)

As many destitute youths joined the PMUs in 2014, Diwaniya city became a recruiting ground for Shia militias.<sup>1993</sup> According to Michael Knights' report from August 2019, the PMU Commission maintained administrative offices in each Iraqi governorate outside the KRI, including in Qadissiya governorate, 'providing a necessary link to wounded fighters and families, as well as a recruitment hub and contact point for off-duty members'.<sup>1994</sup> PMU administrative heads in Basrah, Thi-Qar, Qadissiya, Kirkuk, Muthanna, and Wassit governorates were reportedly provided by the Badr organisation.<sup>1995</sup> In September 2019, Chatham House reported that 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 Qadissiya.<sup>1996</sup>

<sup>1985</sup> Australia, DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Country Information Report – Iraq, 9 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>1986</sup> Al-Monitor, Tribal disputes flare in southern Iraq over water scarcity, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1987</sup> Al-Hashimi, H., ISIS in Iraq: from abandoned villages to the cities, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1988</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1989</sup> ISW, Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1990</sup> Al-Monitor, As Iraqi army retreats to borders, local police controls cities' security, 1 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1991</sup> Al-Monitor, As Iraqi army retreats to borders, local police controls cities' security, 1 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1992</sup> Middle East Monitor, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1993</sup> ICG, Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000", 8 August 2016, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1994</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, Combating terrorism center (CTC), [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1995</sup> Knights, M., Iran's Expanding Militia Army in Iraq: The New Special Groups, 13 August 2019, Combating terrorism center (CTC), [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1996</sup> 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

### 4.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### Developments 2019-2020

In 2019 and 2020, mass protests erupted in Iraq's southern governorates.<sup>1997</sup> In Qadissiya most protests were reported to have taken place in its capital Diwaniya.<sup>1998</sup> UNAMI observed that excessive force by the ISF in repressing these protests caused numerous deaths and injuries.<sup>1999</sup> Between 1 October and 15 December 2019, 23 protesters were reportedly killed and 421 injured in Qadissiya.<sup>2000</sup> According to the ICG, 'the main perpetrators of the violence are Iran-backed paramilitary groups part of a larger assembly of "popular mobilisation" forces (al-Hashd al-Shaabi) that legally are integrated into the state apparatus but in reality answer to their own separate command structures.'<sup>2001</sup> Tribal leaders in southern Iraq have turned on security forces and held pro-Iranian militia leaders responsible for the violent repression of the protests.<sup>2002</sup> On 20 December 2019, protesters in Diwaniya torched the office of Katai'b al-Imam Ali, a PMU militia faction.<sup>2003</sup> On 25 October 2019, twelve protesters died in Diwaniya after being trapped in a burning building.<sup>2004</sup> According to reports, the building, which was housing the local offices of the Badr organisation, was torched by protesters who were unaware that others were inside.<sup>2005</sup>

According to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, security incidents in Iraq's southern governorates result mainly from (intra-)tribal disputes and/or criminal activity.<sup>2006</sup>

Between June and May 2019, crop fires were reported in the southern governorates of Babil, Missan, Wassit, Qadissiya, Muthanna and Najaf.<sup>2007</sup> The Iraqi Directorate of Civil Defense stated that these fires were caused by cigarettes or harvest machines.<sup>2008</sup> However, according to UNOCHA's report from May 2019 'many [of the crop fires] are presumed to be intentionally lit', and 'ISIL has claimed responsibility for some of the arson attacks.'<sup>2009</sup>

#### Illustrative security incidents

- On 3 July 2019, a tribal dispute erupted between two families in Diwaniya. One woman died, and three persons were wounded.<sup>2010</sup>
- The Independent Arabic reported on 2 October 2019 that hundreds of Diwaniya residents protested in the city centre and were attacked by the security forces. According to the source,

<sup>1997</sup> UNAMI, Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 2nd update; 5 November - 9 December 2019, 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update; 25 October - 4 November 2019, November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq; 1-9 October 2019, October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1998</sup> ICG, Widespread protests point to Iraq's cycle of social crisis, 10 October 2019, [url](#), p. 1

BBC News, Iraq protests: death toll nears 100 as unrest enters fifth day, 5 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1999</sup> UNAMI), Human Rights Special Report - Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020: Abductions, torture and enforced disappearances in the context of ongoing demonstrations in Iraq, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2; HRW, Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2000</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 19-21

<sup>2001</sup> ICG, Rescuing Iraq from the Iran-U.S. Crossfire, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2002</sup> Guardian (The), Iraq risks breakup as tribes take on Iran's militias in 'blood feud', 30 November 2019, [url](#)

Tollast, R., A witch's brew of instability: Iraq's tribe-militia nexus, Iraq in context, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2003</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: December 19, 2019 – January 2, 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2004</sup> Reuters, At least 40 killed as protests engulf Iraq, 25 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2005</sup> Reuters, At least 40 killed as protests engulf Iraq, 25 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2006</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Irak, 20 December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>2007</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: June 27 – July 4, 2019, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2008</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: June 27 – July 4, 2019, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2009</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Snapshot, 10 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2010</sup> Iraqi News, Tribal clashes kill woman, wound three in Iraq's Qadisiyyah, 3 July 2019, [url](#)

the Iraqi Special Forces (known as SWAT) used tear gas and batons to disperse the protesters. Reportedly, eight protesters and 11 security forces members suffered from suffocation.<sup>2011</sup>

- Al-Hurra reported on 25 December 2019 that the Explosive Disposal Unit in Qadissiya governorate rescued a man whose hands and legs were tied with an IED attached to his back. According to Iraqi media sources cited by Al-Hurra, the man was previously kidnapped by an unidentified group in Refat neighbourhood in the centre of the governorate.<sup>2012</sup>
- On 27 January 2020, unidentified gunmen killed a civilian in Zaytoun, east of Diwaniya.<sup>2013</sup>
- On 28 February 2020, unknown assailants stabbed and killed activist Abdel Azim al-Rubaie outside his home in Ghamas neighbourhood, west of Diwaniya. According to a police statement the killing was related to a personal dispute, and was not politically motivated.<sup>2014</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Qadisiyyah	10	0	0	0	4	0	4	4

Table 19: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Qadissiya governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>2015</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reference period, ACLED reported 5 battles, 5 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 2 cases of violence against civilians, 52 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 64 security incidents of these types in Qadissiya governorate, the majority taking place in the capital Diwaniyah. 207 protests were also reported in Qadissiya governorate during the reference period.<sup>2016</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>2011</sup> Independent Arabic, الديوانية... ازدياد أعداد المتظاهرين وقوى الأمن "تتفنن" في طرق القمع [Diwaniya... Increase in the numbers of protesters and the security forces use various methods to crack down], 2 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2012</sup> Al-Hurra, عبوة ناسفة على ظهر مواطن مقيد في الديوانية [IED on the back of a tied citizen in Diwaniya], 25 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2013</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: January 23 – January 30, 2020, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2014</sup> EPIC/ ISHM: February 27 – March 5, 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2015</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>2016</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

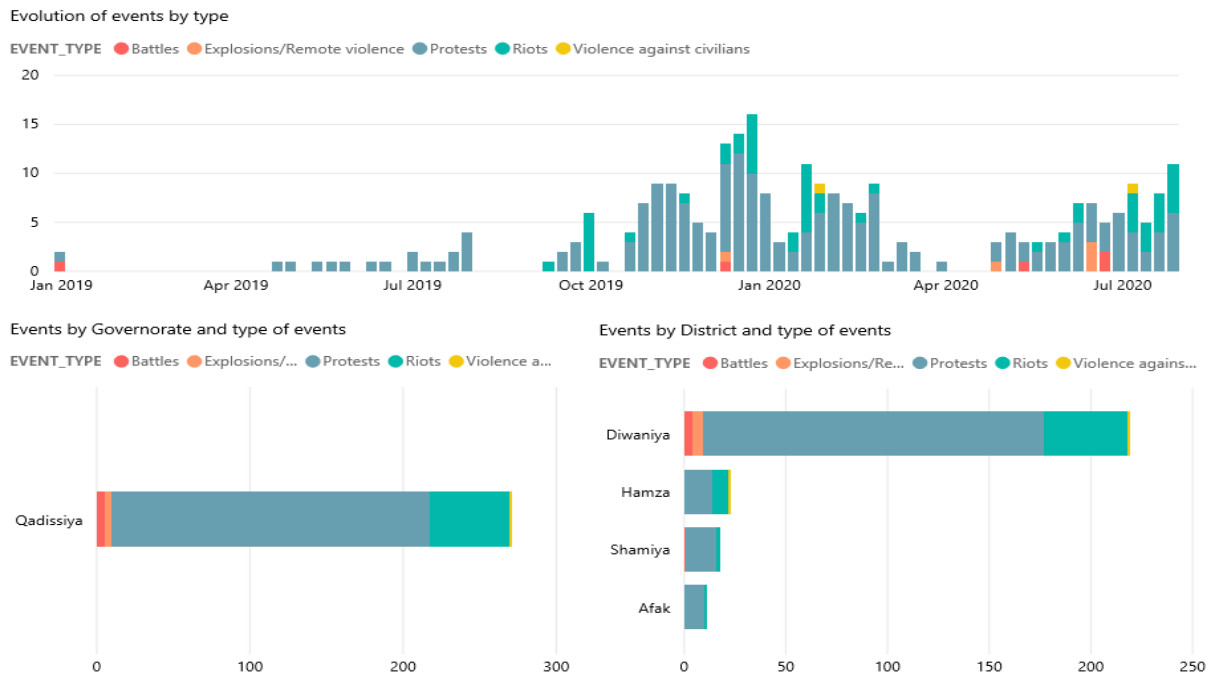


Figure 23: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Qadissiya governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>2017</sup>

### State ability to secure law and order

No information about the state's ability to secure law and order in Qadissiya was found during the drafting of this report.

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Scarce information specific to Qadissiya governorate was found during the drafting of this report.

According to a report by the WASH Cluster published on 13 April 2020, Iraq's southern governorates, including Qadissiya, 'have high severity of WASH needs, mainly due to reliance on small rivers as water sources, which are frequently contaminated and are vulnerable to shifts in the declining surface and ground water levels'.<sup>2018</sup>

Regarding explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnances, the Iraqi news website Al-Mirbad reported that on 18 July 2020 the Diwaniya police found nine mines, five 105 mm and 155 mm rockets, and 3 kg of C4 substance in Al-Muntadhar neighbourhoods, Afak District.<sup>2019</sup>

### Displacement and return

According to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), as of 30 June 2020, Qadissiya had 3 888 IDPs residing in the districts of Diwaniya (2 478), Afak (834), and Al-Shamiya (402).<sup>2020</sup> No IDPs originating from Qadissiya were registered elsewhere in the country.<sup>2021</sup>

<sup>2017</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>2018</sup> WASH Cluster, Strategic Operational Framework (SOF), 13 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>2019</sup> Al-Mirbad, عثور على ألغام وصواريخ و 3 كغم C4 الديوانية: القضاء عفاك [Al-Diwaniya: Mines, rockets and 3 Kilograms of C4 found in Afak district], 18 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2020</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), IRAQ MASTER LIST REPORT 116: MAY – JUNE 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>2021</sup> IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Displacement Master List, Displacement Dashboard, Displacement overview, 15 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1 of 5

Qadissiya was not listed among the governorates with a presence of returnees.<sup>2022</sup>

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<sup>2022</sup> IOM, Iraq Master List Report 116, May - June 2020 – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 7



## 4.7 Thi-Qar



Map 25: Thi-Qar governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>2023</sup>

### 4.7.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

The governorate borders Wassit to the north, Missan to the east, Basrah to the east and south, and Muthanna, Samawah and Qadissiya to the west. The capital is Nasiriyah.<sup>2024</sup> The governorate is divided into five districts: Al-Chibayish, Nasiriya, Al-Shatra, Al-Suq al-Shoyokh, and Al-Rifai.<sup>2025</sup>

#### Ethnicity

The majority of Thi-Qar's population is Shia Arab. There is also a Sunni Arab minority, and smaller communities of Assyrian and Chaldean Christians as well as Mandeans.<sup>2026</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Office) estimated the governorate's population at 2 150 338.<sup>2027</sup>

<sup>2023</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>2024</sup> IOM, Thi-Qar governorate profile Sept 2009, [url](#)

<sup>2025</sup> NCCI, Thi-Qar governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>2026</sup> EPIC, ISHM Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2027</sup> Iraq, CSO, Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019 (table), n.d., [url](#)

## Road security

In January 2020, demonstrators blocked the main bridges in the capital to create leverage for their demands<sup>2028</sup>, and blocked roads in order to restrain militias during mourning gatherings for the assassinated military leader Soleimani and militia leader al-Muhandis.<sup>2029</sup> A truck convoy carrying military equipment was attacked with roadside bombs in July 2020.<sup>2030</sup>

## Economy

The economy is largely rural. The food rationing Public Distribution Program has made the production of staple crops unprofitable. Drainage of the marshes carried out by the Saddam regime has devastated traditional fishing and farming in the marshlands. A number of oil refineries are located in the governorate.<sup>2031</sup> Badra oilfield, estimated to hold 3 billion barrels of oil, started production in 2013.<sup>2032</sup>

### 4.7.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

#### Conflict background

Following the 2003 invasion, the governorate became contested between various Shia factions and militias, causing clashes. From 2008 the governorate has been largely peaceful, following a settlement between militias and the Iraqi government. Thi-Qar did not become occupied by ISIL.<sup>2033</sup> 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, criminal activity and political violence.<sup>2034</sup>

Public mass protests were reported to have been taking place during the first week of October and again from 25 October 2019 in Thi-Qar and other southern governorates.<sup>2035</sup>

#### Armed actors

##### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

The ISW reported in 2017 that the Iraqi Army's Joint Operations Command (JOC) is responsible for the security in the governorate.<sup>2036</sup> The JOC coordinates joint operations of the Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmerga.<sup>2037</sup> Knights et al. assessed in 2020 that all eight southern governorates should be considered areas of shared control between the Iraqi army or police, and the PMU.<sup>2038</sup>

<sup>2028</sup> Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq (homepage), Demonstrators in Thi-Qar governorate, southern Iraq, have blocked the main bridges in the City of Nasiriyah, to confirm their general strike and sit-in until their demands are met, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2029</sup> Liveaump, Thi-Qar: The protesters in Nasiriyah announce a curfew on the militias in the city by cutting off roads after the attacks on peaceful demonstrators at funerals of Soleimani and the "Engineer", 5 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2030</sup> Saleh, I., Iraq: Twin bombings target support convoy for US forces, 22 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2031</sup> NCCI, Thi-Qar Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>2032</sup> Hydrocarbons Technology, Badra oil field, Wassit governorate, December 2013, [url](#), n.d.

<sup>2033</sup> NCCI, Thi-Qar Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>2034</sup> Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq's south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>2035</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update 25 October – 4 November, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>2036</sup> Middle East Monitor, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2037</sup> Kurdistan 24, 20 July 2020, Security talks resume between Peshmerga and Iraqi army in Erbil, [url](#)

<sup>2038</sup> Knights, M. et al., (Knights, M., Malik, H. and Al-Tamimi, J.) Honored, not contained – the future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, pp. 128-129, 37, [url](#)

### Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)

The Shia Militia Mapping Project, published by the Washington Institute in May 2019, provides an interactive map with all Iranian-backed Shia militias active in the Middle East, including Iraq. For Thi-Qar, the project mentioned two militias, one of them is Kataib Sayeed al-Shuhada (Brigade 14), an Iran-aligned militia. The other one is Saraya al-Jihad (Brigade 17), an armed wing of the Jihad and Development Movement which splintered from ISCI (the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a political party).<sup>2039</sup> In September 2019, Chatham House reported that PMU Brigades 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 21, 22, 26 were present in the governorates Missan, Thi-Qar and Basrah.<sup>2040</sup> The PMU commander in Thi-Qar belongs to the Badr militia, according to Knights et al.<sup>2041</sup>

## 4.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### Developments 2019-2020

Public protests took place in the governorate during the reference period.<sup>2042</sup> Sources reported about security forces as well as unidentified masked men in pickup trucks killing activists taking part in the protests<sup>2043</sup>, as well as when being shot at by police using live ammunition.<sup>2044</sup> Assassinations and targeted killings of prominent protest activists have also been reported<sup>2045</sup>, as well as protesters blocking roads and bridges.<sup>2046</sup> An attack by protesters on a police station in Nassiriyah in December 2019 was reported as prompted by police intercepting and shooting to death an activist the day before.<sup>2047</sup> The Gulf Center for Human Rights, an NGO based in Lebanon, documented a number of targeted lethal attacks on activists in early January 2020.<sup>2048</sup> At that time, PMU forces were reported as having fired at protesters with live ammunition.<sup>2049</sup> In February 2020, the governorate was reported as having become ‘the hub’, or ‘the capital’, of the protests.<sup>2050</sup>

In July 2020, Shafaaq News cited a parliamentarian from the governorate who asserted that security was in a state of ‘unprecedented’ deterioration. The parliamentarian referred to tribal conflicts, gang warfare and gang rule playing out as well as terrorist attacks, albeit not specifying the nature of the terrorist attacks nor the actors behind. The incidents were reported to be taking place in areas where security services were short.<sup>2051</sup>

<sup>2039</sup> Smyth P., The Shia Militia Mapping Project (Interactive Map), May 2019, [url](#); Knights, M., Malik, H., Al-Tamimi, A.J., Honored, not contained, the future of Iraq’s popular mobilization forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. 205

<sup>2040</sup> 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

<sup>2041</sup> Knights, M. et al., (Knights, M., Malik, H. and Al-Tamimi, J.) Honored, not contained – the future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 128-129, 37

<sup>2042</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, The Rising Tide of Change in Iraq: An assessment of the 2018 and 2019 Protests, 25 November 2019, [url](#) (PDF version not downloadable at the time of retrieval); Peoples Dispatch, Fresh protests in Iraq demand elections, justice for those killed by security forces, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2043</sup> Al-Jazeera, “Bloodbath”: Dozens of protesters killed as army deployed south, 29 November 2019, [url](#); Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Iraq: Authorities and armed groups continue to target protesters and activists, 9 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2044</sup> Kurdistan 24, Assassins kill activist in Nassiriyah, as protesters torch gov. parties, offices, 21 December 2019, [url](#); HRW, 10 October 2019, Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, [url](#)

<sup>2045</sup> Kurdistan 24, Assassins kill activist in Nassiriyah, as protesters torch gov. parties, offices, 21 December 2019, [url](#); Asharq al-Awsat, Activist’s assassination reignites tensions in Iraq’s Nassiriyah, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2046</sup> Al-Arabiya, Iraqi officials: one protester killed amid ongoing clashes, 26 November 2019, [url](#); The Baghdad Post, Protesters block roads, bridges in Iraq’s Dhi War governorate, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2047</sup> Kurdistan 24, Assassins kill activist in Nassiriyah, as protesters torch gov. parties, offices, 21 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2048</sup> Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Iraq: Authorities and armed groups continue to target protesters and activists, 9 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2049</sup> Saadoun, M., Are Iraq’s PMU planning to put an end to protests?, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2050</sup> Al-Sahly, S., Di Qar, the southern governorate at the heart of Iraq’s uprising, 2 February 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Nassiriyah becomes the Iraqi protest capital, [url](#)

<sup>2051</sup> Shafaaq News, Thi-Qar: Unprecedented deteriorating security situation, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

## Illustrative security incidents

Incidents reported in 2019 and 2020 include:

- Unidentified men broke into a government building in Thi-Qar and set fire to it in October 2019.<sup>2052</sup>
- In November 2019, state forces killed seven people during four days of demonstrations, Xinhua reported.<sup>2053</sup>
- In November 2019, protesters blocked a road leading to an oilfield.<sup>2054</sup>
- Protesters set fire to the residence of a military commander in December 2019.<sup>2055</sup>
- In January 2020, government forces fired live bullets, pellet guns and tear gas at protesters during a crackdown in Basrah and Thi-Qar. Citing the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, EPIC reported that over two days, 12 protesters were killed and 230 were injured.<sup>2056</sup>
- A tribal leader was shot and killed by unknown gunmen in February 2020.<sup>2057</sup>
- In February 2020, protesters closed a bridge and cut access to local government buildings in Nasiriyah, the incident resulting in 27 injured protesters.<sup>2058</sup>
- A lawyer representing detained protesters was wounded in an attempted assassination in Nasiriyah in February 2020.<sup>2059</sup>

## Number of civilian casualties

The number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties in the governorate recorded by UNAMI for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, is shown in the table below.

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<sup>2052</sup> Al-Shafaaq News, Local government building in Thi-Qar burnt, headquarters of “Asaib” group attacked in Missan, 25 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2053</sup> Xinhua, 11 protesters killed in anti-gov’t demonstrations over 4 past days in Iraq: statement, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2054</sup> EPIC, ISHM: 21 November – 5 December, 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2055</sup> Middle East Monitor, Iraqi protesters torch house of Thi-Qar commander, 1 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2056</sup> EPIC, ISHM: January 23 – January 30, 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2057</sup> Middle East Monitor, Unknown assassin kills prominent tribal leader in Iraq, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2058</sup> EPIC, ISHM: February 6 – February 13, 2020, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2059</sup> EPIC, ISHM: February 6 – February 13, 2020, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Thi-Qar	3	0	0	<b>0</b>	3	1	2	<b>3</b>

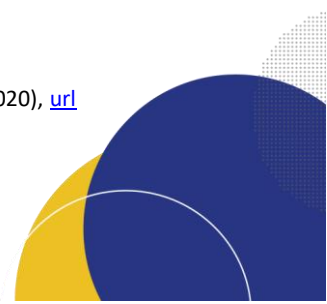
Table 20: Number of armed conflict related incidents and civilian casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Thi-Qar governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>2060</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reporting period, ACLED reported 12 battles, 23 incidents of remote violence/explosions, 24 cases of violence against civilians, 150 incidents of riots, riots, accounting for a total of 209 security incidents of these types in Thi-Qar governorate. 217 protests were also reported in the governorate during the reference period, the majority taking place in the capital Nasiriyah.<sup>2061</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>2060</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>2061</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)



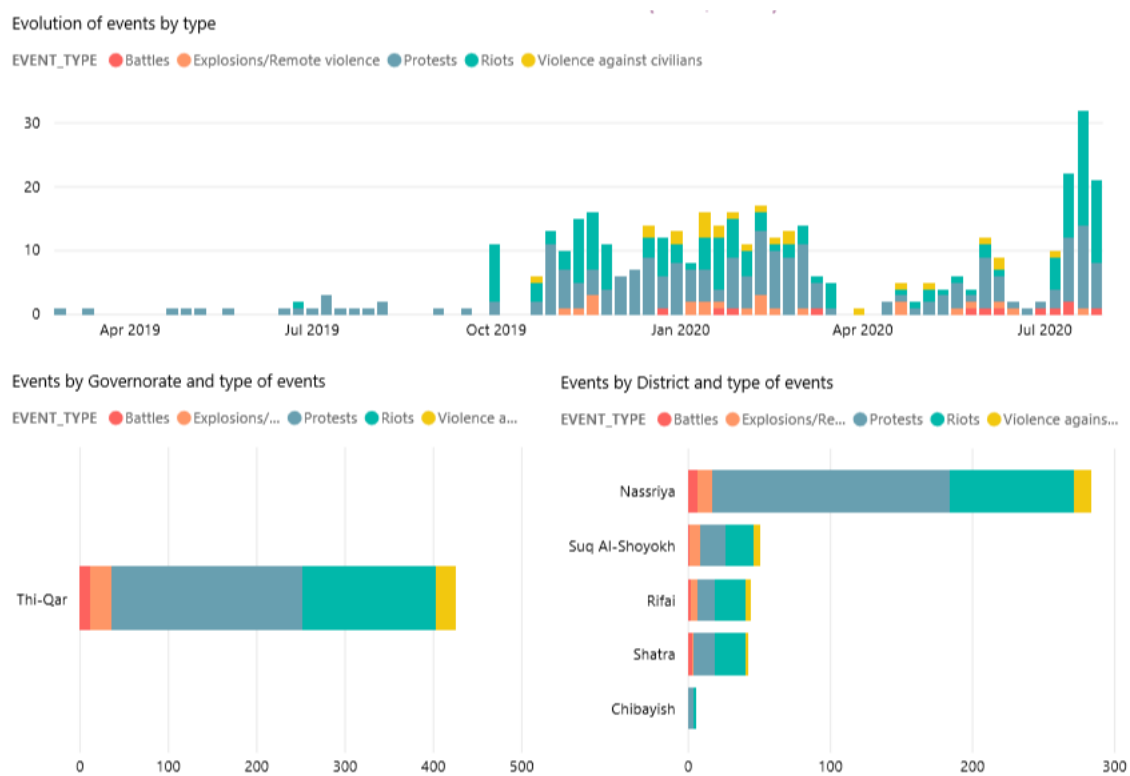


Figure 24: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Thi-Qar governorate 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>2062</sup>

## State ability to secure law and order

HRW reported that the Iraqi prime minister had issued orders to the state forces not to use live ammunition against protesters, but that protesters continued to get killed by them.<sup>2063</sup> In December 2019 courts in southern Iraq issued arrest warrants against officers in Najaf for excessive use of force and issuing orders that led to the killing of protesters.<sup>2064</sup> HRW reported that the state seemed ‘complicit’ in the killings, but also that police and military commanders would be prosecuted for killing protesters.<sup>2065</sup>

Knights et al. stated that the PMU is operating its own command and control system to the extent that its leadership is able to act as a ‘parallel state’. Accordingly, the authors asserted, PMU units can refuse legal orders issued by the state commander in chief, the prime minister, which it ‘constantly’ does.<sup>2066</sup>

HRW reported that southern courts in Iraq have issued arrest warrants against officers in Najaf and Thi-Qar for excessive force and issuing orders that led to the killing of protesters.<sup>2067</sup> Police and military commanders were reported to be prosecuted for killing protesters.<sup>2068</sup> On 29 November 2019, the Supreme Judicial Council, the supreme administration of the Iraqi Judiciary<sup>2069</sup>, announced the formation of a body to investigate deaths of protesters in Nasiriyah.<sup>2070</sup> In December 2019, Al-Arabiya

<sup>2062</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>2063</sup> HRW, Iraq: New protester death despite order not to fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2064</sup> HRW, Iraq: State Appears Complicit in Massacre of Protesters, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2065</sup> The New York Times, Iraq will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2066</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. ix

<sup>2067</sup> HRW, Iraq: State Appears Complicit in Massacre of Protesters, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2068</sup> The New York Times, Iraq will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2069</sup> Iraq, Supreme Judicial Council homepage, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>2070</sup> Al-Arabiya, Iraq protests continue after judiciary opens investigation into deaths, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

reported that the investigations were yet to be completed.<sup>2071</sup> More recent information about the proceedings has not been found.

State security units supposedly linked to Iran-backed PMU militias were insufficiently held accountable for killing protesters in Thi-Qar and other governorates, the New York Times cited a member of Iraq's High Commission on Human Rights as saying. As a reaction to the killing of protesters in October 2019, Thi-Qar's police commander was fired and publicly named and shamed.<sup>2072</sup>

Analyst Philip Smyth at the Washington institute, stated that some 'tribal elements' in Thi-Qar and other southern governorates had taken a lead in some protest activities.<sup>2073</sup> Tribal leaders were also reported to have intervened in confrontations between protesters and police.<sup>2074</sup>

### **Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

Infrastructure blocked by explosive remnants of war (ERW) was estimated at 1 %. Also access to roads blocked by ERW was estimated at 1 %, according to the Iraqi Directorate of Mine Action in 2018.<sup>2075</sup> More recent information has not been found.

### **Displacement and return**

As of 16 July 2020, Thi-Qar hosted a total number of 3 396 IDPs with main districts of displacement being Nasiriyah (1 920), Al-Rifai (756), and Suq al-Shoyokh (546). Of these IDPs, 60 % originated from Ninewa, 17 % from Anbar, 14 % from Kirkuk, and 9 % from other governorates. IOM recorded no returns to Thi-Qar governorate. During the COVID-19 period (March-May 2020), movements were limited between governorates.<sup>2076</sup>

<sup>2071</sup> Al-Arabiya, Investigations into violence against protesters in Thi-Qar still underway, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

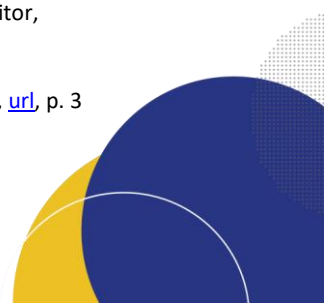
<sup>2072</sup> The New York Times, Iraq will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2073</sup> Smyth, P., Iran is Losing Iraq's Tribes, 4 Dec 2019, [url](#)

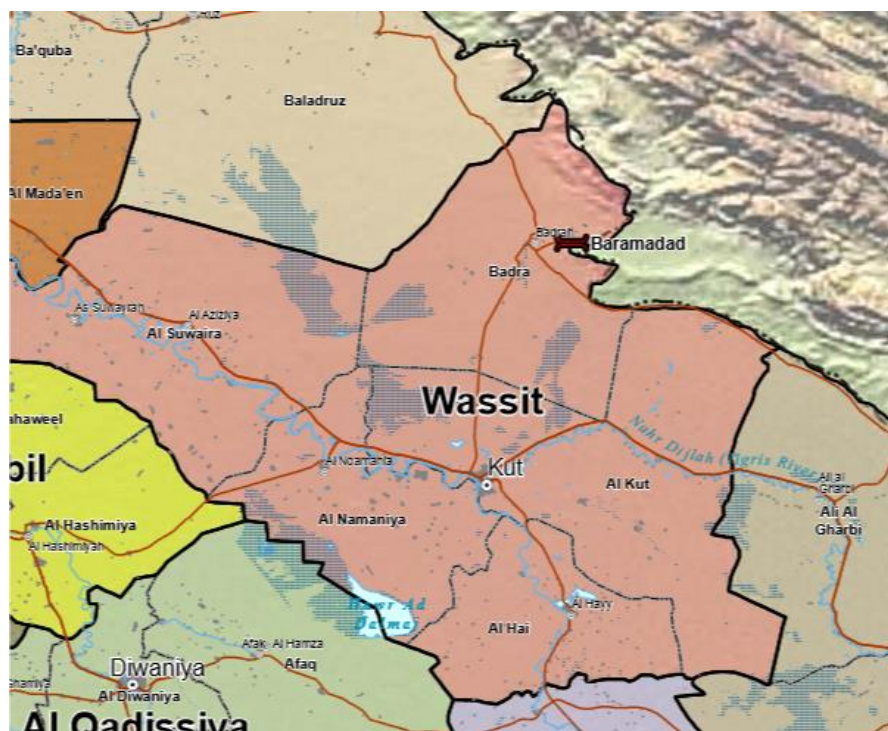
<sup>2074</sup> Al- Sahly, S., Di Qar, the southern governorate at the heart of Iraq's uprising, 2 February 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Nasiriyah becomes the Iraqi protest capital, [url](#)

<sup>2075</sup> Iraqi Directorate of Mine Action, 12-13 June 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>2076</sup> IOM, DTM (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix), Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3



## 4.8 Wassit



Map 26: Wassit governorate with district borders, district capitals and main roads, © United Nations<sup>2077</sup>

### 4.8.1 General description of the governorate

#### Basic geography

The governorate 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 Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates to the south.<sup>2078</sup> The governorate is divided into six districts: Al-Azezia, Badra, Kut, Al-Suwaira, Al-Namaniya, and al-Hai.<sup>2079</sup> The capital is Kut.<sup>2080</sup>

#### Population

For 2019, the Iraqi CSO (Central Statistical Office) estimated the governorate's population at 1 415 034.<sup>2081</sup>

#### Ethnicity

The majority of the population in Wassit governorate are Shia Arabs and communities of Fayli Kurds also reside in the governorate.<sup>2082</sup>

<sup>2077</sup> UN JAU, Iraq District Map, January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>2078</sup> BBC, Iraqi governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>2079</sup> NCCI, Wassit governorate profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>2080</sup> EPIC, ISHM, Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2081</sup> Iraq, CSO, Demographic and population indicators, Estimates for the population of Iraq by governorate, environment and gender for the year 2019 (table), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>2082</sup> EPIC, ISHM, Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)



## Road security

Road security has been affected by protesters blocking roads.<sup>2083</sup>

## Economy

Wassit is a hub for trade in commodities, connecting north to south, and for cross-border trade with Iran. Agriculture and industry are important sectors.

## 4.8.2 Conflict background and armed actors in the governorate

### Conflict background

The NCCI mentioned that following the Iraq/Iran war in the 1980s, Shia Fayli Kurds were forcibly displaced to Iran, and have been slow to return. Heavy fighting took place between US forces and Iraqi Republican Guard forces during the US-led invasion in 2003. Sadrist leader Muqtada al Sadr started a revolt against the occupying forces in 2004, which continued for some years. During the 2010s a number of bomb attacks targeted civilians in markets and schools, according to the NCCI.<sup>2084</sup> A report by the UN noted that ISIL's predecessor ISI (Islamic State in Iraq) 'originally' operated in parts of Wassit, not specifying exact time, activities and locations.<sup>2085</sup> Wassit was never occupied by ISIL.<sup>2086</sup> Since security forces were redeployed in 2014 to the north and west to fight ISIL and a security void opened in the south, fighting between rival Shia tribes over farmland, state construction contracts, and land ownership gradually undermined the stability of the region.<sup>2087</sup>

Public protests began across the governorate in the summer of 2018.<sup>2088</sup>

The governorate 'recently' experienced bombings by Sunni insurgents targeting Shia civilians, EPIC reported in May 2020.<sup>2089</sup> Corroborating information has not been found.

### Armed actors

#### *Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)*

The ISW reported in 2017 that the Iraqi army's Rafidain Operations Command was overseeing security in Wassit governorate.<sup>2090</sup> In February 2020, the Iraqi army handed over the responsibility for security in the governorate to the local police, according to media reports.<sup>2091</sup> The governorate's police chief thereby also took the command of the Rafidain Operations Command, while the Federal Police remained outside the police chief's command.<sup>2092</sup>

<sup>2083</sup> The Baghdad Post, Amid gov't negligence, corruption, lack of service control situation in Wassit, 27 January 2019, [url](#); Shafaaq News, Iraq protesters block a road leading to a border crossing with Iran, [url](#); Xinhua, 11 protesters killed in anti-gov't demonstrations over past 4 days in Iraq: statement, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2084</sup> NCCI, Wassit governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>2085</sup> UNAMI, Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq, 6 July – 10 September 2014, [url](#), p. 1, footnote 3

<sup>2086</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2087</sup> Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq's south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>2088</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, The Rising Tide of Change in Iraq: An assessment of the 2018 and 2019 Protests, 25 November 2019, [url](#) (PDF version not downloadable at the time of retrieval); Peoples Dispatch, Fresh protests in Iraq demand elections, justice for those killed by security forces, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2089</sup> EPIC Reference Guide, May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2090</sup> ISW, Iraqi security forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Order of Battle, December 2017, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>2091</sup> Middle East Monitor, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2092</sup> Middle East Monitor, Iraq: Army hands security duties over to police in Wassit, 14 February 2020, [url](#)



### Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs)

Knights et al. consider all eight southern governorates as areas of shared control between the Iraqi army or police, and the PMU. The Iran-backed Kataib al-Imam Ali militia has its appropriated military base in the north. The PMU commander in the governorate belongs to the Badr militia.<sup>2093</sup>

Both state forces and the PMU take part in handling the public protests in Wassit and other southern governorates.<sup>2094</sup> According to HRW, the PMU use tactics that are often lethal, such as shooting protesters in the head with military-grade tear gas ammunition, and using snipers who shoot to kill protesters.<sup>2095</sup> The HRW reported that protesters have been killed and abused also by state forces.<sup>2096</sup>

## 4.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### Developments 2019-2020

Protests against the government, sometimes violent and with fatalities, have occurred across the governorate since 2018.<sup>2097</sup> Protesters have set fire to a number of militia headquarters and politicians' offices in Wassit and other southern governorates.<sup>2098</sup> In its second update of its report on demonstrations in Iraq, UNAMI noted that mass protests broke out early in October 2019, and again, in a second wave in the end of the month in Wassit and other southern governorates.<sup>2099</sup> Numbers presented by ACLED for the reference period show spikes in the protest activity in the months of November 2019, and then in January, February, May and July 2020. Other types of security incidents such as battles, explosions and targeted violence against civilians occurred only in low numbers.<sup>2100</sup>

### Illustrative security incidents

- Between 15 and 19 September, unknown militants shot and killed six civilians in Wassit and other governorates.<sup>2101</sup>
- In January 2019, protesters clashed violently with state security forces outside the university campus in the capital Kut.
- Clashes were reported between students and riot police in Kut in January 2020.<sup>2102</sup>
- In January 2020, security forces injured 'at least 20' protesters.<sup>2103</sup>
- In April 2020, unidentified armed men attacked the governor's private residence.<sup>2104</sup>

<sup>2093</sup> Knights, M. et al., (Knights, M., Malik, H. and Al-Tamimi, J.) Honored, not contained – the future of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 128-129, 131, 37

<sup>2094</sup> The New York Times, Iraq will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2095</sup> HRW, Iraq: New Protester Deaths Despite Order Not to Fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#); Mansour, R. et al (Mansour, R., Cambanis, T, Hanna, M. W.), These Iraqi militias are attacking protesters and getting away with it. Here's why, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2096</sup> HRW, Iraq: New Protester Deaths Despite Order Not to Fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2097</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, The Rising Tide of Change in Iraq: An assessment of the 2018 and 2019 Protests, 25 November 2019, [url](#) (PDF version not downloadable at the time of retrieval); Peoples Dispatch, Fresh protests in Iraq demand elections, justice for those killed by security forces, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2098</sup> Al-Rubaie, A., Protests in Iraq: Against Domestic Corruption and Iranian Influence, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2099</sup> UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update 25 October – 4 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>2100</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>2101</sup> EPIC, ISHM, 12 September – 19 September 2019, 19 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2102</sup> Middle East Monitor, Over 50 injured in Iraq protests, 13 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2103</sup> EPIC, ISHM, 23 January – 30 January, 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2104</sup> Basnews, Iraq: Armed Men Attack Wassit Governor's House, 15 April 2020, [url](#)

- In May 2020, protesters blocked roads in Kut, demanding protesters to be released from arrest.<sup>2105</sup>
- On 27 June [2020], gunmen killed a senior police officer in Wassit.<sup>2106</sup>
- In May 2020, security forces attacked protesters at a protest camp at an oilfield and burned their tents and damaged their cars.<sup>2107</sup>

### Number of civilian casualties

Casualty figures and number of incidents in Wassit governorate reported by UNAMI through the reference period, are shown in the table below.<sup>2108</sup>

Governorate	2019 (Jan – Dec)			2019 total casualties (killed and injured)	2020 (Jan – Jul)			2020 total casualties (killed and injured)
	# of incidents	Killed	Injured		# of incidents	Killed	Injured	
Wassit	4	0	0	0	6	1	1	2

Table 21. Number of armed conflict related incidents and casualties 1 January 2019 – 31 July 2020, Wassit governorate. Data from UNAMI<sup>2109</sup>

### Number of security incidents

In the reporting period, ACLED reported 1 battle, 1 incident of remote violence/explosions, 1 case of violence against civilians, 38 incidents of riots, accounting for a total of 41 security incidents of these types in Wassit governorate. 124 protests were also reported in Wassit governorate during the reference period, the majority taking place in the capital Kut.<sup>2110</sup> The evolution of all the types of security events through the reference period is shown in the figure below.

<sup>2105</sup> EPIC, ISHM, 14 May – 21 May, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2106</sup> EPIC, ISHM: June 25 – July 2, 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2107</sup> Al-Monitor, Iraq protests resume as new government support for reform, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2108</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO, 24 July 2020

<sup>2109</sup> UNAMI, Email to EASO 24 July 2020

<sup>2110</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

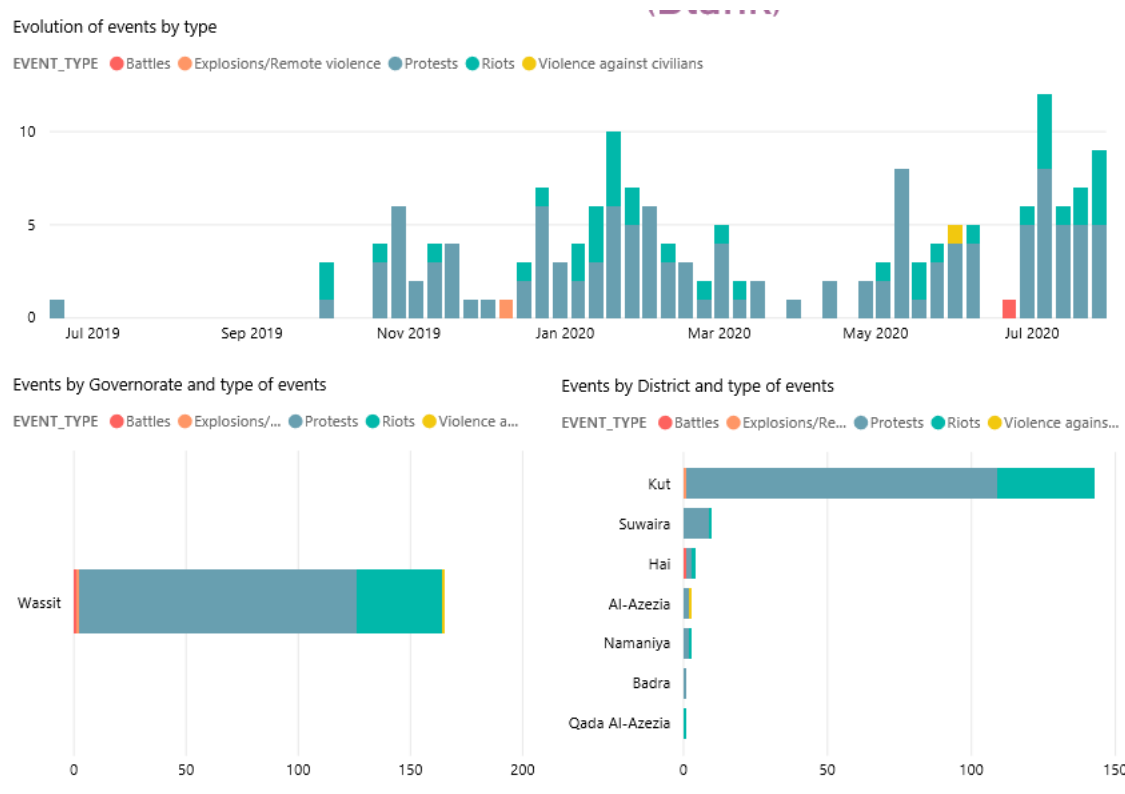


Figure 25: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, riots and protests in Wassit governorate 1 January 1919 – 31 July 2020, based on ACLED data<sup>2111</sup>

### State ability to secure law and order

According to a media report from 2017, the security vacuum in the southern region of Iraq weakened the state’s ability to provide security.<sup>2112</sup> Civilian protesters are reported to have been killed by state forces.<sup>2113</sup> Protesters have demanded better public services such as electricity, drinking water, jobs, and an end to corruption.<sup>2114</sup> The killing of protesters by state forces prompted a court trial in which two officers were convicted, one of them to death, by the criminal court in Wassit in late 2019.<sup>2115</sup>

Knights et al. stated that the PMU is extensively operating its own command and control system. PMU units ‘constantly’ refuse legal orders issued by the state commander in chief (the prime minister).<sup>2116</sup> The New York Times cited a member of Iraq’s High Commission on Human Rights saying that state security units supposedly linked to Iran-backed PMU militias were insufficiently held accountable for killing protesters in Wassit and other governorates.. As a reaction to the killing of protesters in October 2019, Wassit’s police commander was fired and publicly named and shamed.<sup>2117</sup>

<sup>2111</sup> EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

<sup>2112</sup> Reuters, Tribal clashes, political void threaten oil installations in Iraq’s south, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>2113</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, The Rising Tide of Change in Iraq: An assessment of the 2018 and 2019 Protests, 25 November 2019, [url](#); UN News, Iraq: Solutions needed ‘urgently’ to quell ongoing violence, break political deadlock, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>2114</sup> The Baghdad Post, Amid gov’t negligence, corruption, lack of service control situation in Wassit, 27 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2115</sup> The Baghdad Post, Iraqi court sentences commando to death for killing protesters, 1 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2116</sup> Knights, M. et al., Honored, not contained. The future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, March 2020, [url](#), p. ix

<sup>2117</sup> The New York Times, Iraq will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, October 2019, [url](#)

### Infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

NCCI noted in 2015 that unexploded ordnances and mines dating from past wars remained a 'lingering threat' in the governorate. No details were given about their exact locations.<sup>2118</sup> In August 2019, a landmine believed to be a remnant of the 1980s Iraq-Iran war exploded in Zurbatya District near the Iranian border, severely injuring four civilians, EPIC reported.<sup>2119</sup>

### Displacement and return

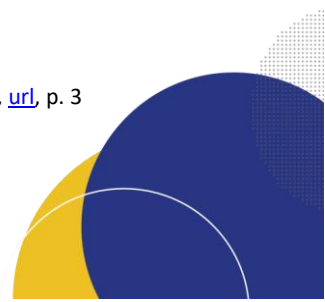
As of 30 June 2020, Wassit governorate hosted a total of 6 084 IDPs with main districts of displacement being Kut (4 074), Al-Azezia (582), and Al-Na'maniya (432). Of these IDPs, 76% originated from Ninewa, 10% from Kirkuk, and 14% from other governorates (Diyala, Salah ad Din, Anbar). No returns were recorded. During the COVID-19 period (March-May 2020), movements were limited between governorates.<sup>2120</sup>

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<sup>2118</sup> NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), Wassit Governorate Profile, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>2119</sup> EPIC, ISHM: 8 August – 15 August, 2019, 15 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2120</sup> IOM, DTM (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix), Iraq Master List Report 116, May-June 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3



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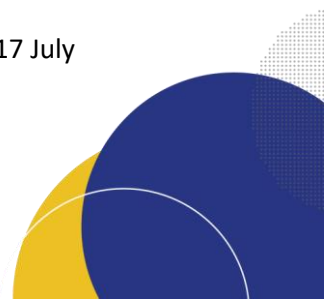
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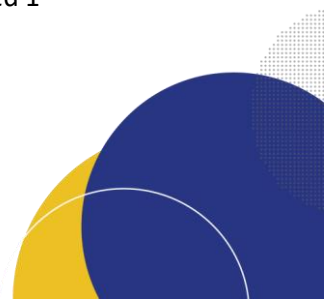
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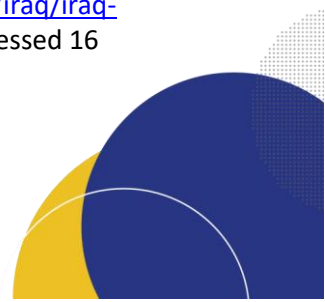
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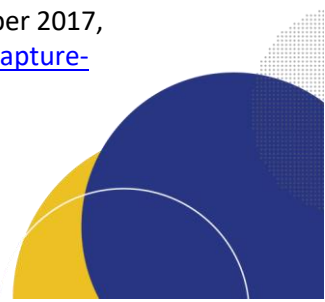
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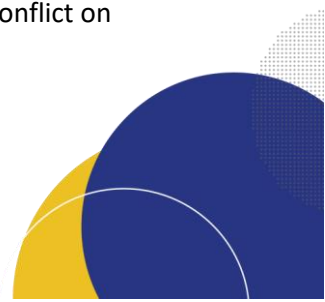
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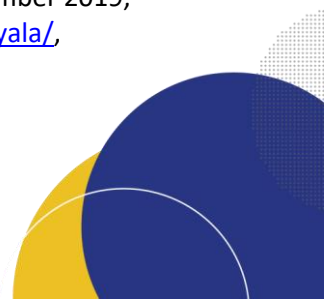
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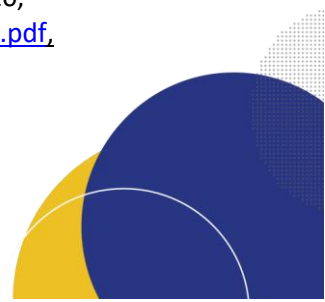
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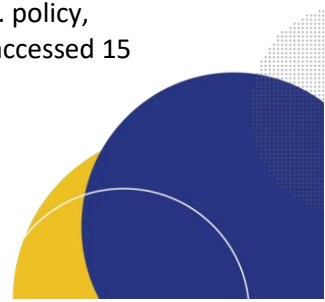
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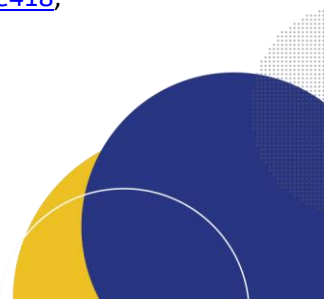
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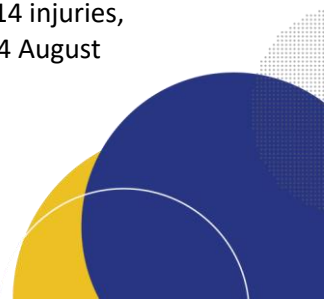
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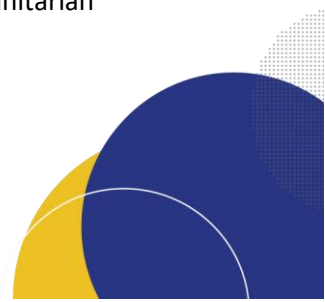
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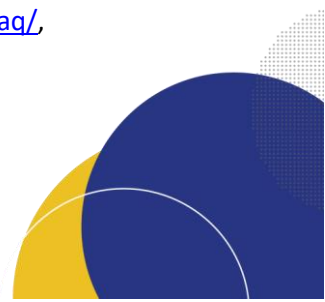
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## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

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 examine the following indicators of indiscriminate violence:

- Is an armed conflict taking place?
  - Who are the armed groups?
  - Are there confrontations?
  - What are their areas of control?
  - What are the areas where confrontations take place? Have there been offensives taking place?
  
- What is the nature/extent of the violence?
  - Where? Geographical scope / intensity of armed conflict in different areas
  - Presence of actors / conflict in different areas of the territory
  - Number of incidents over a specified reference period? Frequency of security incidents / trends?
  - Nature and methods/tactics used – are they likely to cause (intended and/or unintended) civilian casualties? What are the main causes of civilian casualties?
  - Are civilian targets attacked? (hospitals, schools, etc.) ☐ Number of civilian casualties? Patterns over time?
  
- What is the impact of the violence? Displacement:
  - How many civilians have been displaced by the conflict?
  - Is there secondary displacement? (forced return, evictions, etc.)

### Research should aim to cover:

1. General description of the security situation
  - a. Short overview of main conflict context (2019-2020)
  - b. Overview of current conflict actors, key conflict dynamics/trends, and political context (2019-2020)
2. Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by region
  - a. Northwestern and central governorates (with separate chapters for governorates: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din)
  - b. Kurdistan Region of Iraq
  - c. Southern governorates





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