OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

JULY 1, 2020–SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

ABOUT THIS REPORT

A 2013 amendment to the Inspector General Act established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations and requires that the Lead IG submit quarterly reports to Congress on each active operation. The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD Inspector General (IG) as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). The DoS IG is the Associate IG for the operation. The USAID IG participates in oversight of the operation.

The Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the DoD, the DoS, and USAID are referred to in this report as the Lead IG agencies. Other partner agencies also contribute to oversight of OIR.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out the Lead IG statutory responsibilities to:

- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.
- Report quarterly to Congress and the public on the operation and on activities of the Lead IG agencies.

METHODOLOGY

To produce this quarterly report, the Lead IG agencies submit requests for information to the DoD, the DoS, USAID, and other Federal agencies about OIR and related programs. The Lead IG agencies also gather data and information from other sources, including official documents, congressional testimony, policy research organizations, press conferences, think tanks, and media reports.

The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, investigations, or evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not audited the data and information cited in this report. The DoD, the DoS, and USAID vet the reports for accuracy prior to publication. For further details on the methodology for this report, see Appendix B.

CLASSIFIED APPENDIX

This report includes an appendix containing classified information about the U.S. mission to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The Lead IG provides the classified appendix separately to relevant agencies and congressional committees. Due to the coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic, the DoS and USAID inspectors general did not provide information for or participate in the preparation of the classified appendix this quarter.

FOREWORD

We are pleased to submit this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report to the U.S. Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This report discharges our individual and collective agency oversight responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978.

The United States launched OIR in 2014 to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and to set the conditions for follow-on operations to increase regional stability. The strategy to defeat ISIS includes military operations, as well as support for local security forces, diplomacy, governance, humanitarian assistance, and stabilization programs.

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OIR, as well as the work of the DoD, the DoS, and USAID to promote the U.S. Government's policy goals in Iraq and Syria, during the period July 1, 2020, through September 30, 2020.

This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies and our partner oversight agencies during the quarter. During the quarter, the Lead IG agencies and our oversight partners issued eight audit, evaluation, and inspection reports related to OIR.

Working in close collaboration, we remain committed to providing comprehensive oversight and timely reporting on Operation Inherent Resolve.

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U.S. Department of Defense

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On the Cover

(Top row): Members of Kurdish-led Hêzên Antî Teror Forces conduct urban operations training in Syria. (U.S. Army photo); Secretary of State Michael Pompeo with Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. (DoS photo); U.S. Army soldiers perform firing drills at a range on al-Asad Air Base, Iraq (U.S. Army photo); U.S. Army convoy in northeastern Syria (U.S. Army photo). (Bottom row): Syrian citizens rebuild a hospital that was held by ISIS in Ash Shaddadi, Syria. (U.S. Army photo).

MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL

Sean W. O'Donnell

I am pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report on the status of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This quarter, OIR transitioned to Phase IV of its campaign to achieve the military defeat of ISIS in designated areas of Iraq and Syria. Under this phase, the Coalition is shifting its focus from training and assisting partner forces in Iraq and Syria to advising and enabling them. In addition, the Coalition is increasing its efforts to build organizational capabilities in the Iraqi security institutions so they can operate independently.

As part of the transition to Phase IV, Coalition forces departed from two more bases in Iraq and announced plans to reduce the number of U.S. troops stationed in Iraq from approximately 5,200 to 3,000. While U.S. forces redeployed from Iraq this quarter, the United States deployed mechanized units into Syria to provide additional force protection to preserve Coaltion forces' freedom of movement to conduct operations against ISIS. The deployment took place as Russia was increasing aggression against U.S. forces in northeastern Syria.

ISIS continues to wage a low-level insurgency. This quarter the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) again provided positive assessments of Iraqi and Syrian partner forces and their increasing ability to conduct tactical operations against ISIS with little Coalition support. However, partner forces continued to rely on the Coalition for assistance with more complex functions such as intelligence, air operations, and sustainment. That support will continue to be necessary to maintain counterterrorism pressure on ISIS and prevent its resurgence, according to CJTF-OIR. USCENTCOM Commander General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr., stated in August that ISIS could regain territory in a short time if there is a decrease in counterterrorism pressure.

Political uncertainty in Iraq and Syria, as well as Iranian, Russian, and Syrian regime activities, could threaten the ability of the Coalition and partner forces to maintain counterterrorism pressure. The United States and Iraq have reaffirmed their commitment to a continuing counterterrorism relationship, but have not reached a formal agreement on a long-term U.S. military presence in Iraq. In Syria, the ongoing civil war, growing tensions between Russian and Coalition and partner forces, and large numbers of ISIS detainees seeking to escape from detention facilities threaten to undermine the fight against ISIS.

In addition, many of the conditions that allowed ISIS to emerge—poor governance, corruption, sectarian divides, lack of economic opportunities—have not improved notably since the United States launched OIR in 2014. The coronavirus–2019 pandemic has added economic and social stress to an already fragile situation.

We will continue to assess the progress of security forces in Iraq and Syria and their efforts to contain ISIS militarily. At the same time, it will be increasingly important for nonmilitary organizations to continue stabilization efforts that address the conditions that allow extremists to recruit and operate in Iraq and Syria. I look forward to working with my Lead IG colleagues to continue to provide oversight of and report on OIR and related U.S. Government activity, as required by the IG Act.

Sean W. O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense

Syrian citizens rebuild a hospital that was held by ISIS in Ash Shaddadi, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

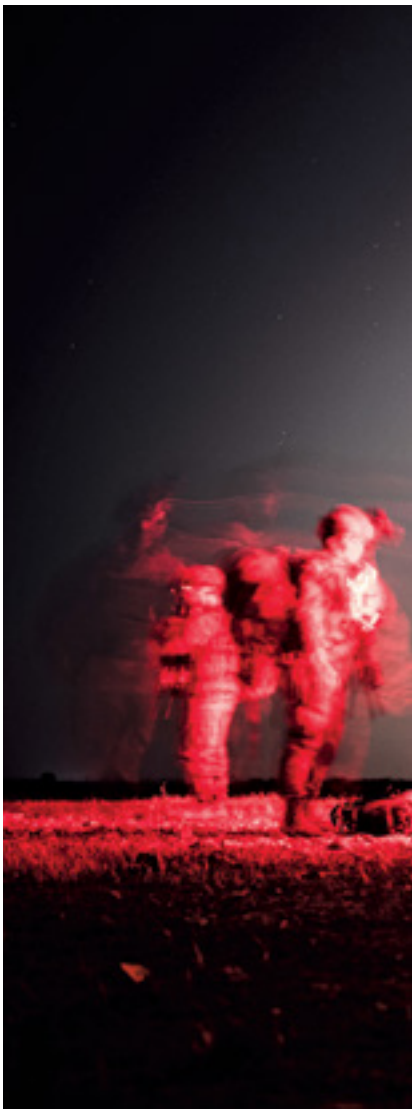
Coalition Ends Training in Iraq, Conducts Fewer Partnered Operations in Syria

Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) transitioned to Phase IV of the campaign against ISIS this quarter.[1] The Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) said that the Coalition shifted from training and assisting to advising and enabling partner forces in both countries.[2]

In Iraq, the Coalition established a new directorate called the Military Advisory Group (MAG) in July to advise and enable the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The MAG, which replaced Task Force–Iraq, provides on-site intelligence, operations, artillery, sustainment, air advice, and specialized planning mentorship to the ISF.[3] Unlike Task Force–Iraq, which was established to train, advise, and assist the ISF throughout Iraq, the MAG maintains a small number of subject-matter experts who advise at the operational level from one central location, CJTF-OIR said.[4]

As part of the transition to Phase IV, Coalition forces departed from the Besmaya Range Complex southeast of Baghdad in July and Camp Taji north of Baghdad in August, according to the DoD Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy–International Security Affairs (OUSD(P) ISA).[5] CJTF-OIR said that the Coalition would continue to relocate and consolidate personnel and equipment from Iraqi bases.[6] In September, the United States announced plans to reduce the number of troops stationed in Iraq from approximately 5,200 to 3,000.[7]

CJTF-OIR reported that in Syria, the Special Operations Joint Task Force–OIR supported partner forces while developing their capabilities to operate without Coalition support.[8] Coalition forces regularly employed remote methods of advising and enabling partner Syrian forces.[9] CJTF-OIR stated that partnered operations typically focused on enhancing partner command and control capabilities, the provision of Coalition intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and medical support.[10]



U.S. soldiers exit a Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

ISIS Still Poses a Threat in Iraq, Syria, and Globally

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS maintained a low-level insurgency in Iraq and Syria and could still pose a terrorist threat in both countries and across the globe.[11] While the organization has been defeated territorially and its leadership degraded, supporters in both countries continue to seek to regain territory and to endorse violence abroad, CJTF-OIR said.[12]

The UN Secretary-General estimated in a report released in August that more than 10,000 ISIS fighters remained active in Iraq and Syria, operating in small cells that move freely across the Iraq-Syria border.[13]

General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr., Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), stated in August that without continued counterterrorism pressure, ISIS could regain control of territory in Syria and Iraq "in a relatively short period of time."[14] General McKenzie said

In Syria, ISIS continued to operate in both Syrian regime-held areas and in SDF-controlled areas of the country.

that the civil war in Syria, the long-term displacement of Iraqis and Syrians, the malign influence of Iran in both countries, and the COVID-19 pandemic had impeded the enduring defeat of ISIS.[15]

In addition, General McKenzie said that without the repatriation of foreign ISIS fighters held in Syrian detention centers and ISIS affiliates residing in Syrian displacement camps, the Coalition's efforts to defeat ISIS "may be for naught."[16]

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that ISIS has publicly encouraged its external branches to carry out attacks in the United States and other western countries, but assessed that ISIS probably remains unable to direct such operations, and instead relies on inspiring small-scale attacks to "demonstrate its reach into the West."[17]

In Syria, ISIS Attacks Pro-Syrian Regime Forces and SDF

In Syria, ISIS continued to operate in both Syrian regime-held areas and in Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-controlled areas of the country. The DIA said that ISIS was most active in Homs and Dayr az Zawr provinces, but also maintained a presence in Aleppo,

Idlib, Raqqah, and Hasakah provinces.[18] USCENTCOM said that ISIS relied mainly on improvised explosive devices (IED) and small-arms fire to conduct attacks and continued to carry out targeted assassinations.[19]

CJTF-OIR said that ISIS carried out a total of 131 attacks in Syria this quarter, a moderate decrease from last quarter, and continued to primarily focus on rural areas.[20] According to USCENTCOM, ISIS claimed 33 attacks in regime-held areas this quarter, including 12 attacks against pro-regime forces from July 21 to July 30.[21]

The DIA reported that in Syria ISIS remains a cohesive organization.[22] The DIA also said that ISIS leadership has found sanctuary in remote areas of Idlib and Aleppo provinces and in the southern Syrian Desert where it conducts attacks against pro-regime forces operating in the area.[23] The DoS reported that ISIS's military, financial, and virtual capabilities remain "severely diminished."[24]

CJTF-OIR said that ISIS conducted attacks against various security forces in reaction to clearance operations against it. Most attacks targeted the SDF or pro-Syrian regime forces, although the SDF and local media also blamed ISIS for a series of attacks against tribal leaders in the lower Middle Euphrates River Valley.[25]

In Iraq, ISIS Employs Same Tactics, but Claims Fewer Attacks

CJTF-OIR reported that in Iraq, ISIS continued to operate primarily in rural areas of Iraq, and to rely mainly on IEDs and small-arms fire in attacks.[26] While there were fewer ISIS-claimed attacks than the previous quarter, ISIS increased its use of snipers and targeted thermal cameras located at ISF barracks and outposts.[27] ISIS attacks against the ISF, Shia gatherings, and religious targets also increased slightly compared to last quarter.[28] ISIS continued to target those it considered "apostates," or "spies" who collaborate with the ISF.[29]

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS carried out a total of 228 attacks in Iraq this quarter, a moderate decrease from last quarter.[30] According to publicly available data compiled by the DoD OIG, ISIS sustained a frequent tempo of small scale attacks against security forces with several high-profile attacks that killed senior ISF and Popular Mobilization Forces officers.[31]

According to publicly available data compiled by the DoD OIG, roughly 34 percent of ISIS attacks this quarter occurred in Diyala, a volatile province near the Iranian border, followed by Salah ad Din at 18 percent, Kirkuk at 16 percent, Anbar at 13 percent, and Ninewa at 11 percent. The data compiled by the DoD OIG also showed that most ISIS attacks were small in scale, often targeted the ISF, and included attacks on infrastructure that resulted in no casualties.[32]

While there were fewer ISIS-claimed attacks than the previous quarter, ISIS increased its use of snipers and targeted thermal cameras located at ISF barracks and outposts.

Iraqi Prime Minister Seeks to Reduce Militia Influence as U.S. Issues Ultimatum

According to press reporting, the Iraqi government's inability to stop the persistent attacks against U.S. facilities in Iraq prompted Secretary of State Michael Pompeo to notify Iraqi officials on September 20 that the United States was preparing to close its embassy in

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo with Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. (DoS photo)

Baghdad over the coming months unless Iraq took action to strengthen security for U.S. personnel and facilities.[33] Iraqi officials publicly expressed concern about the warning, with many, including Iraqi politicians associated with the militias, calling for an immediate end to all attacks on diplomatic personnel and facilities.[34]

The ultimatum came a month after the DoS hosted a meeting on August 19 between Secretary Pompeo and Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs Fuad Hussein.[35] The two officials reaffirmed their long-term commitment to achieving common security objectives through continued cooperation between the ISF and the Coalition.[36] OUSD(P) ISA reported that the United States reiterated its expectation that Iraq will protect U.S. and Coalition forces.[37]

The U.S. ultimatum came as Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi was making incremental efforts to assert authority and reduce the illegal operations of militias associated with the government's Popular Mobilization Committee, according to the DoS.[38] The DoS reported that the prime minister's primary focus has been an anti-corruption campaign to restore Iraqi government control over border crossings where the militias have profited from embezzlement of federal revenue and illegal smuggling.[39]

Oil Agreement with U.S. Company Riles Russia, Syrian Regime

According to media reporting, in late July, a U.S. oil company reached an agreement with the Self-administration of North and East Syria (SNES), which governs the territory in eastern Syria liberated from ISIS, to help modernize oil production and marketing.[40] The agreement drew sharp protest from Russia and the Syrian regime, the latter condemned the agreement and said it had "no legal basis."[41] As recently as December 2019, the Syrian regime had awarded contracts to Russian companies to develop oil infrastructure in areas of northeastern Syria under SDF control.[42]

Lead IG Oversight Activities

This quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed eight reports related to OIR. These reports examined various oversight activities that support OIR, including: Air Force COVID-19 screening and quarantine procedures for personnel entering Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar; the Military Services' management and safeguarding of pharmaceuticals at locations supporting overseas contingency operations; DoS management of awards for humanitarian assistance programs; DoS processes and procedures for staffing at the U.S. Mission to Iraq and construction of overseas facilities; and the Army's procedures to mitigate risks associated with its expeditionary contracting material weakness. As of September 30, 28 projects related to Iraq and Syria were ongoing, and 16 such projects were planned.

During the quarter, the investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 14 investigations, initiated 2 new investigations, and coordinated on 100 open investigations. The investigations involve procurement fraud, corruption, grant fraud, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; and abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the investigator referred 71 cases to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.

The DIA, citing media reports, said that under the deal, the U.S. company will service the oil fields and market crude oil from northeastern Syria.[43] Media reporting identified the company as Delta Crescent Energy, and said it will help the SNES refine more oil and increase exports to external buyers.[44] The contract is expected to produce billions of dollars in revenues for the SDF-run administration of northeastern Syria, according to media reports.[45] The DIA reported that approximately 60 percent of the regional administration's revenue comes from petroleum sales.[46]

The U.S. Deploys Bradley Fighting Vehicles amid Rising Tensions with Russian Forces

The U.S. military deployed Bradley mechanized infantry fighting vehicles to northeast Syria this quarter.[47] The deployment occurred amid an escalation of tensions with Russian forces in August. While it is not entirely clear that the rise in tensions was a consequence of the oil contract, the escalation did occur after the announcement of the agreement.[48]

According to CJTF-OIR, while Russian forces conducted fewer violations of established deconfliction protocols between Russia and the United States, the severity of those violations was "notable."[49] The violations included an August 25 incident in which a Russian military vehicle collided with a U.S. military vehicle, causing injuries to several U.S. soldiers.[50] According to CJTF-OIR, pro-regime forces, likely influenced by the Russian military, also harassed Coalition patrols. In one incident on August 17, Coalition and pro-regime forces exchanged gunfire near a pro-regime forces checkpoint near Qamishli.[51]

On August 19, the U.S. Government announced nearly $204 million in additional humanitarian assistance for Iraq as part of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue.

OUSD(P) ISA reported that Russia has stated publicly its desire for Coalition forces to depart from Syria and appears intent on continuing to violate agreed upon protocols to achive this goal.[52] Coalition, Russian, and Syrian forces have been operating in close proximity in northeastern Syria since Turkish forces moved into northern Syria in October 2019, which precipitated a redistribution of U.S. forces in the region.[53] CJTF-OIR stated that the U.S. military deployed the Bradleys to preserve Coalition freedom of movement and ensure force protection.[54]

United States Announces New Assistance at the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue

On August 19, the U.S. Government announced nearly $204 million in additional humanitarian assistance for Iraq as part of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue.[55] The new humanitarian assistance includes nearly $133 million from the DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and more than $71 million from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.[56] The funding is intended to support IDPs, host communities, and other vulnerable populations in Iraq.[57]

As of October 1, 2020, confirmed cases of COVID-19 rose to 367,474, with 295,882 recoveries and 9,231 COVID-19 related deaths.[58] In support of the COVID-19 response through the UN Development Programme, USAID redirected more than $10 million in cost savings to support the creation of isolation rooms, to supply equipment, and to increase bed capacity in nine provincial healthcare facilities across Iraq.[59] In addition, USAID reported the cost savings will be used to rehabilitate the East Mosul Medical Fluid Factory that was completely destroyed by ISIS.[60]

COVID-19 Exacerbates Economic Crisis and Child Hunger in Syria

USAID reported that the Syrian economy continued to decline.[61] The decline impacted the price of basic food items, the cost of which increased by approximately 240 percent countrywide from June 2019 to June 2020.[62] According to an NGO, in the last 6 months, the total number of children experiencing food-insecurity across the country has risen to more than 4.6 million.[63]

In light of this crisis, the SNES reported a rapidly increasing demand for subsidized bread, with private bread now priced ten times more than subsidized bread, straining the supply chain and logistics of bread delivery and creating bread shortages, and fueling popular unrest in the region, according to USAID.[64]

An Iraqi Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon during a training mission over Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo)

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MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Operation Inherent Resolve Transitions to Phase IV of the Campaign against ISIS

COALITION ENDS TRAINING IN IRAQ, ENCOURAGES FORCES IN IRAQ AND SYRIA TO OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY

Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) transitioned to Phase IV of the campaign plan as the Coalition continued to transfer mission responsibilities to partner forces in Iraq and Syria. Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) reported that the Coalition ended tactical training in Iraq and encouraged Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to become less reliant on Coalition forces in operations against ISIS.[1] CJTF-OIR reported that it would continue to provide support as Iraqi and Syrian partner forces' capabilities increase.[2]

CJTF-OIR said that the primary mission of partner forces in both countries remained the dismantling of ISIS leadership, financing cells, or global networks trying to regain a foothold in either country.[3] CJTF-OIR said it remained "linked in" with key ISF leaders and government officials in Iraq, as well as partner force leaders in Syria, as the Coalition shifted from training to advising and enabling Iraqi and Syrian partner forces.[4] CJTF-OIR said that the transition of the OIR mission to partner forces in both countries was possible due to the increasing ability of the ISF and SDF to assume mission responsibilities.[5]

General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr., Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), announced on September 9 that as part of the transition to Phase IV, the United States would reduce the number of U.S. troops stationed in Iraq from approximately 5,200 to 3,000.[6]

IN IRAQ, THE COALITION ESTABLISHES A NEW MILITARY ADVISORY GROUP

CJTF-OIR reported that the Coalition established a new directorate known as the Military Advisory Group (MAG) to advise and enable the ISF under Phase IV of the campaign plan.[7] Established in July as a successor to the Task Force–Iraq, MAG advisors from 13 Coalition nations began this quarter to provide operational level advice on intelligence, operations, fires, sustainment, and air operations to the ISF.[8] Coalition subject-matter experts advised

Some of the many buildings at Camp Taji that were transferred to Iraqi Security Forces on August 23, 2020. (U.S. Army photo)

A signing ceremony to officially transfer the U.S. facilities at Camp Taji to the Iraqi government. (U.S. Army photo)

the ISF on using organic capabilities, prioritizing resources, and planning for combined joint operations against ISIS, CJTF-OIR said.[9]

The MAG operated from the Enhanced Joint Operations Center, a newly renovated headquarters that is part of the Prime Minister's Joint Operations Command–Iraq (JOC-I) command and control center in Baghdad.[10]

Unlike Task Force–Iraq, which was established to train, advise, and assist the ISF throughout Iraq, the MAG maintains a small number of subject-matter advisors who provide advice at the operational level from one central location, CJTF-OIR said.[11] CJTF-OIR reported that this quarter the MAG provided centralized advising to nine Iraqi operational commands and to the JOC-I primary staff and maintained strong relationships with the operational commands.[12] CJTF-OIR said that the MAG did not maintain advisors at ISF bases during the quarter.[13]

COALITION FORCES DEPART FROM TWO ADDITIONAL BASES IN IRAQ

As part of the transition to Phase IV, Coalition forces departed from the Besmaya Range Complex east of Baghdad in July and Camp Taji north of Baghdad in August, bringing the total number of Iraqi bases from which Coalition forces have departed in 2020 to eight.[14] The DoD Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy-International Security Affairs (OUSD(P) ISA) reported that the base departures were possible because the Coalition had concluded many of its tactical training efforts in support of the ISF and the ISF had demonstrated a sufficient capacity to conduct unilateral operations against ISIS.[15] CJTF-OIR said that the Coalition would continue to relocate and consolidate personnel and equipment from Iraqi bases throughout 2020.[16]

OUSD(P) ISA reported that the Coalition, led by Spanish and Portuguese troops, trained approximately 50,000 ISF personnel at Besmaya since 2015.[17] A CJTF-OIR press release said that the Coalition trained the ISF in a broad range of military tactics and programs

including a "train-the-trainer" approach that allowed Iraqis to deliver their own training programs. The press release stated that before they left, the Spanish contingent transferred $4 million in classrooms, barracks, weapons ranges, mock urban training sites, and other facilities to the Iraqi government, and the United States contributed $1 million in power generation and base force protection materials and equipment.[18]

OUSD(P) ISA reported that at Camp Taji, Coalition forces trained roughly 47,000 ISF personnel in specialties such as tactical maneuver, operational planning, intelligence analysis, and combat medicine.[19] According to OUSD(P) ISA, a Spanish helicopter battalion, as well as military trainers from a dozen countries, supported ISF training at Taji.[20]

According to a CJTF-OIR press release, up to 2,000 Coalition forces were stationed at Camp Taji, the majority of which departed from the camp over the summer. As part of the transition, the Coalition transferred $347 million in equipment and property to the Iraqi government, which CJTF-OIR said was the highest amount of any transfer upon departing a base. The Coalition also transferred approximately 50 ammunition storage bunkers and associated secure facilities to full Iraqi control.[21]

The base departures this year occurred amid the drawdown of forces from several Coalition member countries. OUSD(P) ISA reported that this quarter several Coalition partners either reduced forces or withdrew from Iraq in response to COVID-19 and other force protection concerns. These included forces from Canada, the Czech Republic, France, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. OUSD(P) ISA said that the drawdown of these forces coincided with the end of the Coalition's tactical training mission with the ISF, "making the return of these forces unnecessary," and that any future efforts by these Coalition partners would be "advisory missions at the ministerial level, focused on building the capacity of Iraq's defense institutions."[22]

CJTF-OIR reported that despite these departures, Coalition nations contributing troops to the OIR mission continued this quarter to provide "critical resources to support the defeat of ISIS" and the Coalition continued to work with Unified Action Partners, such as the UN Assistance Mission Iraq (UNAMI), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Food Program (WFP), to support the Iraqi government as it "creates conditions for the enduring defeat of [ISIS]."[23] According to OUSD(P) ISA, "Coalition cohesion remained strong despite both the domestic challenges that each Coalition member faces and the campaign complications posed by COVID-19."[24]

According to OUSD(P) ISA, "Coalition cohesion remained strong despite both the domestic challenges that each Coalition member faces and the campaign complications posed by COVID-19."

CJTF-OIR HAS NOT TRANSITIONED ACTIVITIES TO NATO

Last quarter, OUSD(P) ISA reported that CJTF-OIR planned to transition some OIR mission activities in Iraq to the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI). NMI was in the process of drafting an assessment of the activities, such as training of ISF personnel, that CJTF-OIR would transfer to NMI and that the assessment would be complete by April 2020.[25]

This quarter, OUSD(P) ISA reported that CJTF-OIR "has not and will not" transition OIR mission activities to NMI.[26] OUSD(P) ISA noted that "the two missions and organizations are separate and distinct operating under different authorities and with different missions" and that the change in plans was due to "conditions on the ground, including updated

assessments of the ISF's operational capacity and needs."[27] OUSD(P) ISA said that although CJTF-OIR will continue to coordinate closely with NMI, and NMI's efforts will complement CJTF-OIR's efforts, there are no longer plans for a direct transition of activities from one to the other.[28] CJTF-OIR reported that it is working with USCENTCOM to "evaluate the future" regarding plans with NMI.[29]

U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue Resumes; President Trump and Prime Minister al-Kadhimi Meet in Washington

During August, several high-level meetings took place in Washington,D.C. in connection with the ongoing U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue. President Donald J. Trump received Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in the White House on August 20, in what a former U.S. diplomat called a show of support for him.[30] On August 19, the DoS hosted a meeting of the joint U.S.-Iraqi Higher Coordination Committee led by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs Fuad Hussein.[31] In addition to ongoing engagement on key economic, energy, and political issues, Iraq and the United States reaffirmed their long-term commitment to achieving common security objectives through continued cooperation between the ISF and the U.S.-led Coalition to defeat ISIS.[32]

OUSD(P) ISA reported that the two delegations noted that the growing capabilities of the ISF and its progress in the defeat-ISIS campaign have enabled the Coalition to transition to a new phase of operations focused on defense institution and capacity building for the ISF. OUSD(P) ISA added that during the Strategic Dialogue, the United States reiterated its expectation that Iraq will protect U.S. and Coalition forces.[33] According to OUSD(P) ISA,

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Iraq's Minister of Defense after a bilateral meeting at the Pentagon. (DoD photo)

CJTF-OIR reported this quarter that ISIS maintained a low-level insurgency in Iraq and Syria, and that Iraqi and Syrian partner forces were increasingly capable of applying pressure to keep ISIS contained.

the U.S. and Iraqi delegations also recognized recent progress of the ISF and discussed ways to further cooperation between the Iraqi government's security institutions and the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs in coordinating efforts to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS.[34]

During the Strategic Dialogue, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper hosted a bilateral meeting with the Iraqi Minister of Defense, Jumaah Saadoon, at the Pentagon. According to the DoD, the two leaders discussed the bilateral security partnership and the importance of continuing to build the capabilities of the ISF. The DoD stated that Secretary Esper and Minister Saadoon also reiterated the shared commitment to preventing ISIS from re-emerging to threaten Iraq, the region, and the international community, and their commitment to continued cooperation between the ISF and the United States towards the ultimate objective of a secure, stable, and prosperous Iraq.[35] CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that there were no changes in the U.S.-Iraq security relationship this quarter that affected the OIR mission.[36]

STATUS OF ISIS

ISIS Maintains a Low-level Insurgency

CJTF-OIR reported this quarter that ISIS maintained a low-level insurgency in Iraq and Syria, and that Iraqi and Syrian partner forces were increasingly capable of applying pressure to keep ISIS contained.[37] CJTF-OIR said that while ISIS has been territorially defeated, its leadership degraded, and its ideology "widely condemned," the group could still pose a terrorist threat to Iraqi and Syrian forces and civilian populations as well as to U.S. and Coalition forces within the Coalition joint operating area. It said that some ISIS supporters who remain in Iraq and Syria endorse the spread of violence across the globe and seek to regain territory. CJTF-OIR said that ISIS retains some leadership, finances and global networks, and is still trying to regain a foothold in Iraq and Syria but is "severely diminished."[38] The UN Secretary-General estimated in a report released in August that more than 10,000 ISIS fighters remain active in Iraq and Syria and operate in small cells that can move freely across the Iraq-Syria border.[39]

General McKenzie stated this quarter that "without sustained [counterterrorism] pressure," ISIS could regain control of physical territory in Syria and Iraq "in a relatively short period of time."[40] General McKenzie stated that the physical destruction that was required to dismantle ISIS compounded underlying conditions that allowed for the rise of ISIS in the first place. In addition, he said, the civil war in Syria, the long-term displacement of so many people, the malign influence of Iran in both Iraq and Syria, and the COVID-19 pandemic are all impediments to the enduring defeat of ISIS.[41] In particular, General McKenzie said that if countries fail to repatriate ISIS-affiliated citizens detained in SDF-run facilities and displacement camps in Syria, the Coalition's efforts against ISIS "may be for naught."[42]

The DIA reported that ISIS publicly encouraged its external affiliates to attack the United States or other western countries, but probably remains unable to direct such operations. Instead, ISIS seeks to inspire small-scale, local attacks to "demonstrate its reach into the West." The DIA said that these "lone actors" inspired by ISIS, such as the stabbing of three people in London in February, remain the most likely threat to the West because ISIS

Syrian citizens rebuild a hospital that was held by ISIS in Ash Shaddadi, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

sympathizers are already in the United States and Europe.[43] Based on recent arrests of Europe-based ISIS supporters with contacts in Syria, the group continues efforts to rebuild its capability to conduct external operations in the west, the DIA said.[44]

ISIS Continues Efforts to Recruit New Members

The DIA reported that ISIS's efforts to increase its membership in Iraq and Syria have had mixed results. In Iraq, ISIS continued to be unpopular, according public opinion surveys of Sunnis conducted in May 2020, the DIA said. The surveys indicated that while there is Sunni frustration with the Iraqi government, Sunnis have "overwhelmingly positive" opinions of the Iraqi Army, and "overwhelmingly negative" opinions of ISIS.[45]

In Syria, ISIS targeted disaffected youth and sought to exploit the economic hardships experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic to find new recruits, the DIA said. According to the DIA, ISIS used this approach in the al-Hol displaced persons camp, where the group has been trying to recruit new members from among ISIS-affiliated families.[46]

A UN Secretary-General report released in August found that curfews and travel restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 have had a multifaceted impact on ISIS, making it more difficult for terrorists to move or find potential targets, but also straining government resources and making it more difficult to bring government services to remote areas and border regions.[47] The UN Secretary-General said that concerns over the pandemic are also likely providing further incentive for ISIS detainees in SDF-run detention centers to attempt to escape.[48]

ISIS's recruiting also benefited from what the Secretary-General's report called a "largely captive audience confined at home" due to COVID-19. The report said that ISIS used the pandemic for propaganda, labelling it "divine punishment" for its enemies and rallying supporters to mount attacks while enemy resources were stretched. The report also said

that if propaganda efforts are successful, they could inspire a spate of attacks once public mobility and assembly resume and targets emerge.[49]

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS revenue streams "remain precarious" due to ISIS's lack control of territory in Iraq and Syria.

ISIS Revenue Streams Precarious

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS revenue streams "remain precarious" due to ISIS's lack of control of territory in Iraq and Syria.[50] CJTF-OIR said that ISIS's access to oil revenues and ability to extort populations and businesses have decreased. In the last 3 years, the Coalition froze approximately 30 ISIS banks and financial centers and seized tens of millions of dollars of ISIS's liquid assets.[51] CJTF-OIR stated in a press release that at least 65 countries have prosecuted or arrested ISIS fighters and financial facilitators, reducing ISIS's financial flows "to a trickle."[52]

According to both the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) and CJTF-OIR, the United States has designated multiple ISIS financing networks across the world.[53] Most recently on July 28, in conjunction with the 13th meeting of the Counter ISIS Finance Group, the United States designated two ISIS financial facilitators who had been active in Syria and Turkey, in order to disrupt their ability to raise and move ISIS funds.[54] CJTF-OIR also said that Coalition airstrikes have contributed to the removal of key ISIS financiers across the region.[55]

Treasury reported that ISIS continues to raise funds through extortion and oil smuggling networks in eastern Syria, ransoms from kidnappings, and the operation of front companies. Treasury said that ISIS uses courier networks to smuggle cash across the Iraq-Syria border, and often relies on logistical hubs in Turkey to transfer funds across borders through money services businesses, including cash-fronting businesses known as hawalas.[56] Treasury reported that ISIS increasingly relied on cryptocurrencies, with members transferring funds from Iraq to members in northeastern Syria, including in the al-Hol displacement camp.[57]

While CJTF-OIR reported this quarter that the Coalition has been successful in degrading ISIS funding, the organization still has a reserve of funds, according to the DIA.[58] Treasury reported that ISIS probably has as much as $100 million available in cash reserves, though it did not have a clear picture of how much money ISIS distributed this quarter.[59] According to the UN Secretary-General, which also assesses that ISIS retains financial reserves of about $100 million, ISIS raises funds through private donations, extortion of commercial property, crowd-sourcing, and online appeals about the plight of women in the displacement camps.[60]

Western investigations have also targeted cryptocurrency and legitimate but difficult-to-trace business holdings or investments that ISIS has, according to a media report citing government officials and documents. They are also examining tobacco smuggling as a possible source of revnue.[61]

In mid-August, the Department of Justice (DoJ) shut down a website it said was selling bogus COVID-19 personal protective equipment, including fake N95 masks, to raise money for ISIS. U.S. authorities also seized $2 million and more than 300 cryptocurrency accounts suspected of being used in the financing of ISIS and other terrorist organizations, according to the DoJ and media reports citing U.S. officials.[62] In late September, media reporting said that French authorities detained 29 people in an anti-terrorism operation

to break up a complex ISIS cryptocurrency scheme. French authorities said there was a warrant out for the arrest of two main figures in the scheme, suspected of being in northwestern Syria since 2013.[63]

Treasury Designates ISIS Financial Facilitators

Treasury designated two ISIS financial facilitators for sanctions this quarter related to OIR, one who operated out of al-Hol, the other in Turkey.[64] In general terms, the actions require that the facilitators' property be blocked by U.S. persons and reported to Treasury. U.S. persons may not deal with them; any persons who engage in certain transactions with them are themselves subject to sanctions.[65]

- **Faruq Hamud**–Hamud operated a branch of the Tawasul hawala at the al-Hol camp. According to Treasury, al-Hol contains one of the largest concentrations of current and former ISIS members receiving donations from ISIS supporters internationally. These funds are transferred in several ways through the hawala system in the camp. Treasury noted that it designated a separate branch of the Tawasul hawala located in Harim, Syria, in November 2019.[66]
- **Adnan Muhammad Amin al-Rawi**–The designation of this ISIS facilitator in Turkey is the latest in a series of Treasury actions targeting ISIS financial operatives in the al-Rawi network, stemming from the 2016 designation of ISIS finance "emir" Fawaz Muhammad Jubayr al-Rawi.[67]

In Iraq, ISIS Employs Same Tactics, but Claims Fewer Attacks

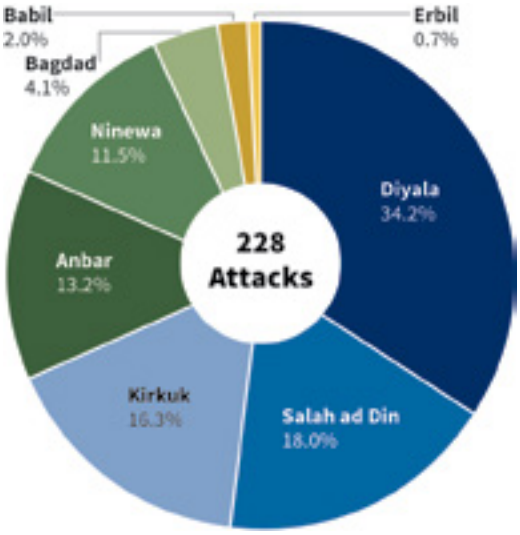
CJTF-OIR reported that in Iraq, ISIS continued to operate primarily in rural areas, including desert and mountainous areas of Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad Din, Kirkuk, Diyala and Baghdad provinces.[68] ISIS tactics, including the use of IEDs, small-arms fire, and, less frequently, indirect fire, also remained the same, CJTF-OIR said.[69]

However, there were fewer ISIS-claimed attacks this quarter than last quarter, according to CJTF-OIR. CJTF-OIR attributed the reduction in attacks to the ISF's Heroes of Iraq campaign, a months-long effort to defeat remnants of the terrorist organization.[70] CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS claimed 79 attacks in July, 101 attacks in August, and 48 attacks in September.[71] The DIA reported that it concurred with CJTF-OIR's assessment that ISIS conducted fewer attacks this quarter, but did not concur with the attack numbers.[72]

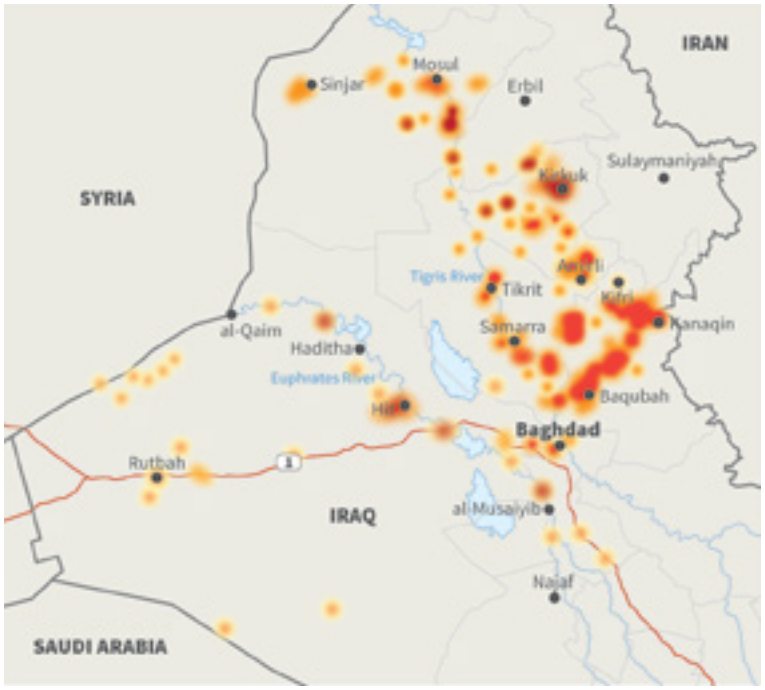
CJTF-OIR reported that the overall number of ISIS attacks in Iraq decreased this quarter. However, in August, ISIS slightly increased the frequency of its attacks against the ISF, Shia gatherings, and religious targets.[73] CJTF-OIR said that more than 80 percent of ISIS attacks in Iraq this quarter targeted the ISF, Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), and Tribal Mobilization Forces.[74] CJTF-OIR said that the attacks against security forces were intended to increase ISIS's freedom of movement, while attacks against Shia gatherings and religious sites sought to foment sectarian unrest. CJTF-OIR characterized the targets as "critical" to ISIS's short- and long-term objectives, but said that the temporary uptick in attacks did not indicate a change in ISIS's overall strategy.[75]

Figure 1.

ISIS Attacks in Iraq this Quarter



Sources: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), Janes Terrorism and Insurgency database (Janes), and the Enabling Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC).



According to CJTF-OIR, the highest-profile ISIS attacks included a July 29 attack on an ISF patrol in Anbar province that killed eight, including a brigade commander, and an August 23 ISIS attack on a religious shrine in Salah ad Din province that killed six members of the PMF. Between August 25 and 27, ISIS claimed 30 attacks against security forces, mostly in Anbar province, that killed or wounded approximately 66 people.[76]

According to data compiled from open sources by the DoD OIG, roughly 34 percent of ISIS attacks occurred in Diyala province this quarter, followed by Salah ad Din at 18 percent, Kirkuk at 16 percent, Anbar at 13 percent, and Ninewa at 11 percent. The data compiled by the DoD OIG also showed that most ISIS attacks were small in scale, but largely directed at the ISF and PMF.[77] For an overview of ISIS attacks in Iraq this quarter, see Figure 1.

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS operated in Iraq "mostly as small cells or groups of 15 or fewer, usually living in austere conditions in outlying desert, mountain, or rural areas." CJTF-OIR said that it was "unaware of any significant internal fractures or power struggles that could threaten [ISIS's] internal cohesion and unity of effort and ISIS appeared to be 'broadly cohesive.'"[78]

ISIS fighters mainly relied on light and medium weapons, IEDs, and less frequently, mortars and rockets to target the ISF and Kurdish and Shia civilians, who ISIS followers consider "apostates" or "spies" who collaborate with security services.[79] CJTF-OIR said that ISIS attack claims this quarter revealed an increased use of snipers and increased targeting of thermal cameras at security force barracks and outposts. CJTF-OIR said that these tactics were consistent with the tactics and targeting methodologies employed by ISIS last quarter.[80]

ISIS Exploits Gaps in Kirkuk Province

Kirkuk province consistently ranks as one of the most violent provinces in Iraq, according to a DoD OIG analysis of ISIS attacks.[81] The northern Iraqi province, parts of which are claimed by both the central Iraqi government and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), remains a focal point of ISIS's rural insurgency in Iraq. Both the territorial dispute and the sectarian divide in Kirkuk aid ISIS's survival in the province's challenging physical terrain. While independent analysts note that security in Kirkuk has improved since 2018, they attribute the decrease in ISIS violence to the temporary deployment of U.S. forces, which were withdrawn in March 2020.[82] Analysts note that without agreements on governance and joint security that address the underlying ethnic distrust, stabilization and rehabilitation cannot occur, enabling ISIS to survive as a lingering insurgency in Kirkuk.[83]

The DIA reported that ISIS remains most prevalent in the rural and mountainous regions of southern Kirkuk, where the group is organized in small insurgent cells. In particular, ISIS exploits the rugged terrain of the Hamrin, Qarachokh, and Makhmour Mountains for safe haven and to evade counterterrorism forces, according to the DIA. Similarly, ISIS uses valleys in the province, such as Wadi al-Shai or Wadi Zaghaytun, to launch mostly small-scale attacks, including ambushes, IED attacks, and small-arms fire that target local security elements, civilians, and infrastructure. The DIA added that ISIS frequently intimidates, coerces, and kidnaps local civilian and tribal leaders for cooperating with the government and to obtain resources. ISIS also assassinates local civic and tribal leaders to pressure communities into supporting ISIS and remove challengers to the group's authority.[84]

According to the DIA, ISIS exploits sectarian tensions in Kirkuk to shape the operating environment in its favor. The potential for sectarian clashes in Kirkuk is high, given the myriad security forces reporting to different authorities in the province. The DIA assessed that mistrust between these forces and the often-marginalized local populace, as well as unaddressed governance grievances, present opportunities for ISIS intimidation tactics, insurgent-style attacks, and kidnappings. [85]

Additionally, ISIS takes advantage of the unresolved territorial dispute between the Iraqi central government and the KRG, according to DIA. [86] While Kirkuk province lies outside the formal boundaries of the Kurdistan region, the province has a high number of ethnic Kurds and parts of it have been administered by the KRG in the past. When ISIS advanced into Kirkuk province in June 2014, the Kurdish Peshmerga, supported by Coalition air support, moved south to defend Kirkuk City and much of the surrounding areas after local ISF units disintegrated. According to open sources, the Peshmerga continued to secure and govern most of Kirkuk province, and its valuable oil fields, until October 2017 when ISF and PMF units forcibly evicted Peshmerga elements from the province.[87]

Despite the Peshmerga's withdrawal, media reporting indicates that disputes continue over governance in Kirkuk. Kurdish officials accuse the Iraqi government of changing the ethnic makeup of the province by preventing the return of displaced Kurds and Turkmen, and of failing to secure gaps between KRG- and ISF-controlled territories.[88] The DIA reported that ISIS successfully operates in these gaps because of the lack of security coordination and intelligence sharing between the Peshmerga and ISF.[89]

MILITIAS MAINTAIN A LIMITED, BUT PROBLEMATIC, PRESENCE IN KIRKUK

The DIA reported that in addition to enduring tension between the KRG and Iraqi central government, the predominately Sunni local populace is particularly concerned about the presence and abusive behavior of the Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC), which oversees the largely Shia PMF.[90] The DIA reported that the PMC and Iranian-backed militias have some control over local security in the Kirkuk region, and

Figure 2.

Kirkuk Province

described their presence in the province as "limited but active." According to the DIA, three brigades aligned with the Iranian-supported Badr Organization are consistently active in the area. The DIA assessed that besides counter-ISIS operations, members of these brigades and other Iran-backed elements are likely extorting and harassing local residents at checkpoints.[91] In December 2019, Iranian-backed militias operating in the province fired rockets at the K1 Air Base in Kirkuk, killing an American contractor and wounding several U.S. and Iraqi troops.[92]

USCENTCOM reported that the PMF and associated Iranian-backed militias likely retain a significant security presence in Kirkuk province to conduct operations against ISIS remnants. However, USCENTCOM assessed that compared to other Shia majority regions of Iraq, the PMF and Iranian-aligned groups likely maintain limited influence over political and economic decision-making in Kirkuk province. USCENTCOM said this is likely due to the increased presence and influence of other ethnic and religious groups in Kirkuk, including Kurds, Turkmen, and Sunni Arabss. USCENTCOM noted that the most recent Iraqi parliamentary election in 2018 resulted in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party winning 6 of the 12 seats in the province, while the Arab Alliance and the Turkman Front parties tied for second with 3 seats each.[93]

THE ISF LACKS FORMAL COORDINATION WITH COALITION FORCES AND THE KURDISH PESHMERGA IN KIRKUK

Despite the high concentration of ISIS attacks in Kirkuk and repeated pledges by both Iraqi and Kurdish officials to increase security cooperation, the ISF operations command responsible for Kirkuk still has limited formal coordination with Kurdish and Coalition forces.[94] CJTF-OIR reported that both the ISF and Peshmerga forces acknowledge that ISIS operates within the "seams," or the security gap between the two forces.[95] Reporting by Iraqi, Kurdish, and DoD sources since early 2018 has indicated that ISIS has been able to exploit the lack of security cooperation in the area. However, no formal mechanism has been implemented to eliminate the security gap.[96]

According to CJTF-OIR, the JOC-I and KRG Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs held a high-level meeting in July 2020 about conducting joint ISF-Peshmerga operations against ISIS in a step towards improving this situation.[97] Specifically, the ISF announced that coordination rooms would be established in Kirkuk, Diyala, and Ninewa provinces, but that Peshmerga forces would not return to Kirkuk province.[98] CJTF-OIR also said that the ISF has not reported any Peshmerga within the ISF operations command for Kirkuk, known as the Joint Forces Command Kirkuk (JFCK), because the Peshmerga operates only within areas under KRG control.[99]

CJTF-OIR reported that discussions continue regarding the specifics of what that coordination will look like, with both sides understanding the importance of defeating ISIS along the disputed boundary that has historically separated the Kurdistan region from the rest of Iraq.[100] As of early October, KRG Prime

(continued on next page)

ISIS Exploits Gaps in Kirkuk Province *(continued from previous page)*

Minister Masrour Barzani said that the central government has yet to issue any decision to initiate the agreed-upon coordination centers.[101]

Meanwhile, CJTF-OIR reported that the JFCK routinely conducts search and clearance operations in the province, typically with Iraqi Federal Police units.[102] CJTF-OIR said that the MAG maintains an advisor relationship with the senior JFCK leadership, but that the JFCK does not currently have a liaison officer present at the Enhanced Joint Operations Center in Baghdad, nor are there any plans to send one for the foreseeable future.[103]

According to CJTF-OIR, the JFCK commander is a staff lieutenant general who delegates engagement with the MAG advisor to his deputy commander and chief of staff, while he coordinates directly with the JOC-I deputy director. Communication between the JOC-I and the JFCK is done remotely because JFCK leadership prefers to maintain their personnel in their province.[104]

Coalition forces withdrew from Kirkuk province in March 2020 when they departed the K1 Air Base, attributing the move to the ISF's success against ISIS.[105] In late September, ISIS targeted homes of ISF personnel near the base, killing one ISF member and kidnapping another.[106]

In Syria, ISIS Attacks Decrease, but the Organization Remains Cohesive

Both CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM reported that the number of ISIS attacks in Syria decreased this quarter.[107] ISIS attacks this quarter were generally small-scale and CJTF-OIR said that ISIS conducted most of its attacks against the SDF and pro-regime forces using small-arms fire from motorcycles and motorcycle borne IEDs.[108] According to CJTF-OIR, ISIS claimed 44 attacks in Syria in July, 44 attacks in August, and 43 attacks in September.[109] CJTF-OIR said that attacks continued to be primarily focused in rural areas.[110]

The DIA reported that it had not observed any large-scale ISIS defections or splintering this quarter, and that ISIS in Syria remains a cohesive organization.[111] Additionally, the DIA said that it did not observe any changes in command and control structure or organization from last quarter.[112]

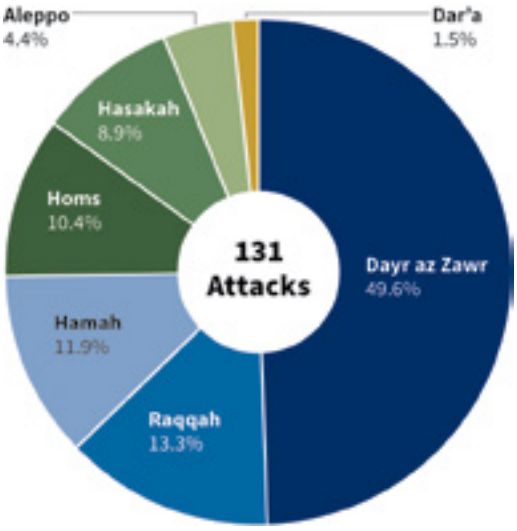
ISIS Conducts Larger Attacks in Regime-controlled Areas of Syria

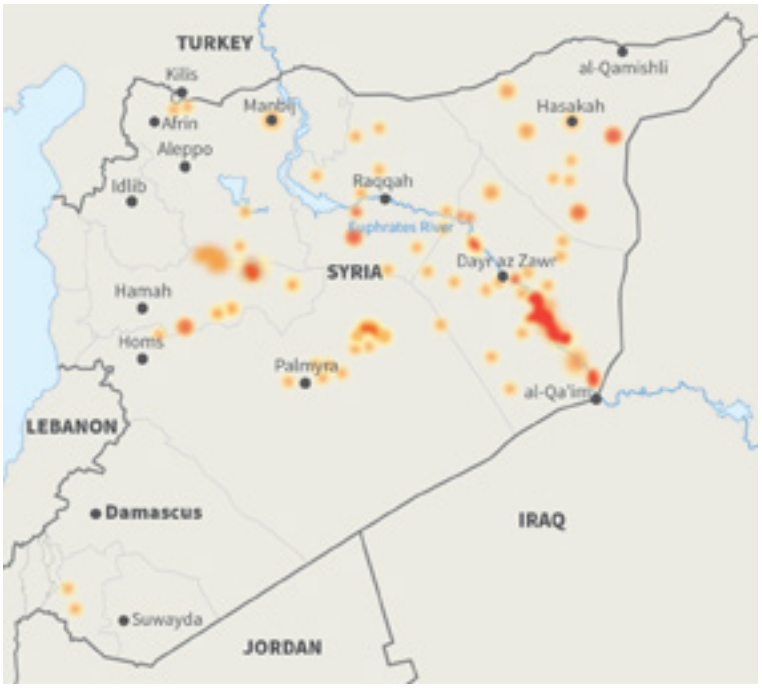
A research analyst who monitors ISIS activities in Syria assessed that ISIS expanded its attacks in central Syria, particularly in areas under regime control. According to the analyst, ISIS also conducted more "high quality attacks," in regime-held areas, including complex ambushes and targeted assassinations.[113]

ISIS conducted attacks against security forces in reaction to clearance operations, CJTF-OIR said. Most attacks targeted the SDF or pro-regime forces, although the SDF and local media also blamed ISIS for a series of attacks against tribal leaders in the lower Middle Euphrates River Valley.[114] CJTF-OIR said that ISIS uses Sunni communities along the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV) and desert terrain in Dayr az Zawr province as a support zone to avoid security operations and to move men, weapons, and equipment between Syria and Iraq.[115]

Figure 3.

ISIS Attacks in Syria this Quarter





Sources: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and Janes Terrorism and Insurgency database (Janes).

According to an independent tally of ISIS attacks by the DoD OIG, nearly 50 percent of claimed ISIS attacks this quarter were conducted in Dayr az Zawr province, where both SDF and regime forces operate. According to the DoD OIG analysis, most attacks in SDF-controlled areas were small scale, while ISIS conducted multiple larger scale, high casualty attacks against regime forces in Homs, Hama, Raqqah and Aleppo provinces. For an overview of ISIS attacks in Syria this quarter, see Figure 3.

The DIA reported that ISIS continued to focus its activity in Dayr az Zawr and Homs provinces, and attacks increased during the summer months.[116] The DIA said that ISIS took advantage of the permissive environment created by sparsely populated desert terrain and lack of an effective counterterrorism campaign by pro-regime forces in eastern Homs and the bordering regions in Dayr az Zawr. ISIS also attacked Arab tribal authorities to intimidate tribes into providing the group safe haven, the DIA said.[117]

In August, ISIS increased attacks in Homs province and conducted multiple attacks a day on several days.[118] The DIA said that pro-regime forces began offensive operations against ISIS in Homs in early September, indicating concern over ISIS's attempts to expand its safe haven in the province.[119] The DIA said that ISIS also operates in areas of Aleppo, Raqqah, and Hasakah provinces where U.S. forces withdrew in October 2019, but that the group was less active there.[120]

USCENTCOM reported that in Syrian regime-held areas, ISIS attacks consisted mainly of IEDs, small-arms fire, assassinations or ambushes against pro-regime forces.[121] It said that according to ISIS official media, ISIS claimed 33 attacks in regime-held areas this quarter, including 12 attacks against pro-regime forces in July. USCENTCOM said that overall there was no significant change to ISIS operations or tactics compared to last quarter.[122]

USCENTCOM said that the largest escalation in ISIS attacks this quarter occurred in Aleppo province, where ISIS conducted six attacks in a single week after conducting only one attack per week in the previous three weeks.[123] The DIA reported that ISIS activated dormant cells in Aleppo to attack pro-regime forces in the southeastern portion of the province. ISIS also renewed attacks against Turkish and its aligned forces after Turkey stepped up counterterrorism operations in the northern portion of the province, the DIA said.[124]

These attacks marked the first month of sustained ISIS activity in regime-held Aleppo province since ISIS was expelled from the province in 2017, according to the Counter Extremism Project.[125] The DIA noted that attacks in Aleppo appeared to have dropped off in September.[126]

The DIA said that even though ISIS continues to focus operations in eastern Syria, the group has not abandoned its attempts to operate in the north. The DIA said that the assassination of four members of the SDF-aligned militia, the Self Defense Forces, in southern Hasakah province in late August was an indication that ISIS is also able to conduct operations in the northeast.[127]

The DIA said that ISIS has created a sanctuary for some of its leadership amid the security vacuum in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, where counterterrorism operations have killed several ISIS leaders. ISIS also exploits the southern Syrian desert to conduct attacks against pro-regime forces operating in the area.[128]

U.S. Army convoy in northeastern Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

ISIS Ambush Causes Dozens of Casualties

According to the DIA, the most substantial attack this quarter was an ambush in Dayr az Zawr province on August 27 that killed at least 30 pro-regime National Defense Forces militiamen.[129] Prior to that incident, attacks in Dayr az Zawr were mostly small-scale gunfire or IED attacks, according to a Lead IG analysis. ISIS also claimed responsibility for an IED attack on a Russian convoy on August 18 in Dayr az Zawr province.[130]

USCENTCOM said that in early July, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on clashes between pro-regime forces and ISIS fighters in the tri-border area of Aleppo, Hamah, and Raqqah provinces, which involved Russian airstrikes.[131] The monitoring group documented the deaths of 11 pro-regime forces and 13 ISIS members in these clashes.[132]

EVENTS IN IRAQ

ACTIONS CONDUCTED AGAINST ISIS IN IRAQ

ISF Carries Out Heroes of Iraq Campaign with Limited Coalition Air Support

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted two operations this quarter as part of the ongoing Heroes of Iraq campaign.[133] The operations occurred from July 11 to 14 and from July 26 to 28 in Kirkuk, Salah ad Din, and Diyala provinces.[134] To conduct the operations, the ISF incorporated units from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), and Popular Mobilization Forces. CJTF-OIR characterized the operations as "effective" and said they "allowed the ISF to generate operational momentum."[135] CJTF-OIR also reported that coordination between units was "deliberate" and that the operations were conducted with limited Coalition air support.[136]

According to a CJTF-OIR press release, from July 11 through July 28, thousands of ISF personnel cleared more than 250 villages and sites across more than 17,000 square kilometers in search of ISIS hideouts in Diyala province as part of the Heroes of Iraq campaign.

According to a CJTF-OIR press release, from July 11 through July 28, thousands of ISF personnel cleared more than 250 villages and sites across more than 17,000 square kilometers (6,560 square miles) in search of ISIS hideouts in Diyala province as part of the Heroes of Iraq campaign.[137] The press release stated that the operations sought to remove ISIS remnants from areas of Diyala province along its provincial borders with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Salah ad Din province, and Iran.[138] The operations, which CJTF-OIR characterized as "very successful" at removing ISIS fighters from the battlefield, killed 8 ISIS fighters and wounded 2; 11 fighters were arrested.[139]

ISF units also conducted operations against ISIS this quarter separate from the Heroes of Iraq campaign.[140] According to CJTF-OIR, the JOC-I reported that the ISF conducted more than 470 operations against ISIS, the vast majority of which were smaller routine "search and clearance" operations.[141] Approximately 50 to 60 percent of these operations yielded "tangible battle damage assessment" results, such as captured explosives, ammunition, and weapons, CJTF-OIR said. CJTF-OIR also said that more than 99 percent of the operations were conducted "independently," which it defined as being executed "without Coalition intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) or strikes," and that 10 ISIS fighters were reported killed or wounded in these operations, and 11 were arrested.[142]

CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi Air Force flew 11 operational F-16 sorties during the Heroes of Iraq campaign.[143] The sorties, conducted between July 11 and 14, were intended as a "show of force" while Iraqi ground troops conducted clearance operations, CJTF-OIR said.[144] Additionally, the Iraqi Air Force employed four F-16s in strikes on ISIS targets in Kirkuk province on September 4, CJTF-OIR said.[145]

CJTF-OIR reported that Iraq's CTS participated in the Heroes of Iraq campaign and that the tempo of its operations against ISIS increased markedly during the quarter.

CTS Increases Operations This Quarter

CJTF-OIR reported that Iraq's CTS participated in the Heroes of Iraq campaign and that the tempo of its operations against ISIS increased markedly during the quarter.[146] CJTF-OIR said that the CTS benefitted during these operations from increased support from both Iraqi Army Aviation, including rotary wing lift and casualty evacuation, and Iraqi Air Force ISR.[147] CJTF-OIR reported three CTS casualties this quarter.[148]

CJTF-OIR said that the CTS relied less on Coalition forces to accompany CTS units "on-target" this quarter. However, the Coalition continued to support the CTS in the production of intelligence and the provision of ISR in its operations against ISIS.[149]

The CTS focused efforts in northern and central Iraq, including executing a number of what CJTF-OIR described as "warrant-based deliberate detention operations in the Baghdad area."[150]

ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga Coordinate Joint Security Operations against ISIS

According to CJTF-OIR, Kurdish Peshmerga forces participated in the Heroes of Iraq operations that sought to remove ISIS from areas of Diyala province claimed by both Iraq's central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.[151] CJTF-OIR stated in a press release that the Iraqi Operations Command in Diyala and the Peshmerga coordinated joint security operations to stabilize the boundaries between these disputed regions.[152] CJTF-OIR said that the coordination prevented ISIS movement and operations in the region and associated border areas.[153]

CJTF-OIR reported in previous quarters that there were ongoing efforts by the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga to coordinate joint security mechanisms in territory claimed by both

SELECTED KEY EVENTS, JULY 1, 2020–SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

JULY 2
Coalition activates the Military Advisory Group, a new directorate in Iraq established to advise the ISF as the Coalition ends training of Iraqi forces

JULY 25
Coalition forces depart from Besmaya Range Complex, a military base 6 miles southeast of Baghdad where Coalition forces trained more than 50,000 ISF personnel since 2015

JUL — AUG

JULY 11–28
ISF conducts phase IV of the Heroes of Iraq Campaign focused on clearing ISIS from locations in Diyala province and along boundaries with neighboring Iraqi provinces and Iran

AUGUST 19
The DoS hosts the second round of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue in Washington, with both sides reaffirming commitment to strengthening the bilateral relationship

sides that runs through Diyala and other northern Iraqi provinces, but no mechanisms were implemented.[154]

Coalition Enables ISF Actions Against ISIS

CJTF-OIR said that the Coalition enabled the Heroes of Iraq operations through the use of MAG advisors who worked with Iraqi operational command liaison officers in a centralized Baghdad location. The Coalition advisors provided "specialized planning mentorship to the ISF directorates that were overseeing operations, logistics, intelligence, aviation, and other military functions," CJTF-OIR said.[155]

CJTF-OIR reported that MAG air advisors encouraged the Iraqi Air Force to gain experience and confidence in their own abilities by conducting ISR sorties with organic Iraqi Air Force assets during operations against ISIS.[156] CJTF-OIR reported that as the ISF became more proficient and capable, it frequently operated without ISR or fire support from the Coalition, and made progress in its use of organic ISR and air assets, such as F-16 and Su-25 aircraft.[157]

On numerous occasions, advisors from the 321st Air Expeditionary Group advised their Iraqi counterparts to undertake some of these sorties themselves, rather than relying on Coalition Forces assets to deliver the effects.[158] CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF still sought "enabling support" from the Coalition when its organic capabilities were insufficient.[159]

PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT IN IRAQ

ISF No Longer Requires Large-scale Training from the Coalition

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF no longer required Coalition-provided large-volume training at ISF training sites, which paved the way for Coalition partners to depart from the Taji and Besmaya bases this quarter.[160] The newly-created MAG provides daily and on-site advice to the ISF rather than training.[161] Instead, CJTF-OIR announced in early September that the ISF have full responsibility for training facilities and training programs.[162]

CJTF-OIR reported that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have any additional impact on the Coalition advising partnership with the ISF this quarter beyond the suspension of face-to-

AUGUST 23
Coalition forces depart from Taji Military Complex, a military base 17 miles north of Baghdad that had been used to train approximately 47,000 ISF personnel

AUGUST 25–27
ISIS claims 30 attacks against the ISF, mostly in Anbar province, that killed or wounded 66 people

SEP

SEPTEMBER 9
General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr., announces United States will reduce troops in Iraq from roughly 5,200 to 3,000

SEPTEMBER 20
United States threatens to close the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad if the Iraqi government fails to protect the embassy compound from attacks by Iranian-backed militias

face training and mentoring that occurred last quarter.[163] COVID-19 also did not impact the ISF's ability to train its forces during fourth quarter FY 2020, CJTF-OIR said.[164]

Iraqi Air Power Demonstrates Limited Ability to Support Counter-ISIS Operations

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF demonstrated an increased ability to conduct operations against ISIS this quarter.[165] In particular, CJTF-OIR highlighted the ISF's increased use of organic ISR air assets and strike aircraft, including its F-16 multirole fighters and Su-25 ground attack aircraft.[166] CJTF-OIR stated that there has been no fundamental change in ISF air capabilities since the previous quarter, noting a similar number of sorties as last quarter.[167]

According to CJTF-OIR, the ISF was "building confidence in their joint fire platforms," citing strikes against ISIS targets by Iraqi F-16 and Su-25 aircraft.

According to CJTF-OIR, the ISF was "building confidence in their joint fire platforms," citing strikes against ISIS targets by Iraqi F-16 and Su-25 aircraft.[168] CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi Air Force conducted a total of 15 operational F-16 sorties this quarter. CJTF-OIR reported that in July and August 2020, the Coalition conducted a total of 20 strikes against ISIS targets in Iraq.[169]

Last quarter, USCENTCOM and CJTF-OIR reported that a combination of threat levels in the region and impacts of COVID-19 prevented contractors from directly supporting Iraq's F-16 program since early 2020.[170] USCENTCOM said that contractors continued to support their Iraqi counterparts to the greatest extent possible virtually and that Iraqi maintenance crews were able to conduct basic and some intermediate maintenance actions on the F-16s without significant assistance from U.S. contractors.[171]

However, USCENTCOM stated that Iraqi F-16 maintenance crews "lacked full proficiency" and require contractor support to perform some intermediate and advance maintenance actions. Additionally, USCENTCOM said that Iraq does not procure its own repair parts and relies on U.S. support to provide requisite repair parts, which is a limiting factor in the ISF ability to maintain F-16s without U.S. support. Nevertheless, USCENTCOM said that the United States continued to coordinate delivery of material in support of the Iraqi F-16 program last quarter.[172]

USCENTCOM reported that as of September 9, 22 U.S. contractors have returned to Iraq to support the contracted logistics and sustainment of the Iraqi Air Force, with 10 additional contractors expected by the end of the quarter. USCENTCOM said that following the return of contractor support, the Iraqi Air Force flew two combat sorties in support of OIR on September 1, 2020. USCENTCOM reported that these were "the first Air Tasking Order-detailed combat missions" flown by the Iraqi Air Force since April 2020.[173]

However, USCENTCOM stated that at no time was the Iraqi Air Force grounded due to low operational readiness rates, or because of untrained pilots. Rather, USCENTCOM stated that operational readiness rate reduction was "modest" during the period of U.S. contractor absence, as Iraqi maintenance personnel were able to address nearly all aircraft maintenance problems when provided with repair parts and supported by U.S. contractor teams remotely. USCENTCOM noted that 31 Iraqi pilots are trained to fly F-16 fighters, and that the Iraqi Air Force averages four training sorties per day.[174]

While CJTF-OIR assessed that Iraqi ISR was "degraded significantly" this quarter, Iraqi forces still made notable gains across a range of air missions and skills.

USCENTCOM cited the lack of Iraqi capacity in its intelligence-driven targeting as the primary reason for Iraqi reticence to use the Iraqi Air Force in combat roles from April to September 2020. Additionally, USCENTCOM said the absence of U.S. contractors meant that Iraqi pilots lacked confidence that they would be adequately supported should maintenance and technical difficulties arise with their aircraft. According to USCENTCOM, the Iraqi Air Force continues to demonstrate its ability to employ its newest platform, the F-16, to conduct both training and combat operations against ISIS.[175]

While CJTF-OIR assessed that Iraqi ISR was "degraded significantly" this quarter, Iraqi forces still made notable gains across a range of air missions and skills.[176] CJTF-OIR did report that the Iraqi Air Force continued to deliver ISR sorties with both its manned King Air 350 and AC/RC-208 aircraft in support of ISF objectives.[177] According to CJTF-OIR, the MAG reported that the ISF is providing more of their own "points of interest" and working to combine Coalition points with theirs. CJTF-OIR said that the ISF is working towards building "robust collection capabilities," and has started to coordinate the collection efforts between Iraqi and Coalition ISR. CJTF-OIR said that ISF analysis abilities are adequate, as they have a database to store their intelligence and use it frequently to conduct analysis. Regarding targeting, the ISF is still developing that capability and relies on Coalition forces for grid coordinates and imagery.[178]

CJTF-OIR said that the Iraqi Air Force also continues to conduct air mobility and VIP transfers, noting that the Iraqi Air Force used its C-130J aircraft to transport humanitarian aid from the Iraqi government to Beirut, Lebanon in the aftermath of the explosion in August.[179] Additionally, the Iraqi Air Force reported to CJTF-OIR that it had conducted more than 600 training sorties across the Iraqi training fleets this quarter, translating to an average of 4 training sorties per aircraft type per flying day.[180] CJTF-OIR and OUSD(P) ISA stated that there are no embedded advisors from the Coalition or the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) currently within the Iraqi Air Academy.[181]

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Army Aviation Command continued to execute operations against ISIS across Iraq's operational commands with "tangible results," according to CJTF-OIR.[182] This included the Iraqi Army's Air Weapons Teams, or attack helicopters, which CJTF-OIR said conducted operations most days and continue to strike targets of opportunity, while also delivering fire support to ground troops. CJTF-OIR added that aircraft from the Iraqi Army Aviation Command also routinely conduct the full spectrum of combat support, from the movement of men and materiel to casualty evacuation.[183] Overall, CJTF-OIR assessed that the ISF improved its ability to plan and execute missions with rotary and fixed wing assets in support of ground operations, and to execute deliberate strikes.[184]

ISF Capable of Conducting Ground Search and Clearance Operations

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the ISF's capability to conduct regular search and clearance operations remained steady. CJTF-OIR said that through routine operations and larger operations such as Heroes of Iraq, the ISF is able to deny ISIS terrain from which it has previously operated. Additionally, CJTF-OIR stated that the ISF also conducted ground clearance operations after kinetic strikes against ISIS for post-strike analysis. Most kinetic

IRAQI AIR POWER

Key Aircraft in Active Service with the Iraqi Air Force and Iraqi Army Aviation Command

F-16 American-made multirole fighter capable of precision-guided strikes; 36 received between 2014 and 2017.

Su-25 Russian-made ground-attack aircraft armed with unguided rockets and bombs; 27 received between 2014 and 2016.

King Air 350 American-made unarmed manned ISR aircraft; 6 received between 2008 and 2016.

AC/RC-208 American-made manned ISR aircraft, some capable of carrying two Hellfire guided missiles; 8 received between 2007 and 2009.

C-130 American-made transport aircraft; 9 received between 2005 and 2013.

SA 342 Gazelle French-made light attack helicopter; 6 received in 2010.

Mi-28 Russian-made attack helicopter; 19 received between 2014 and 2016.

Mi-35 Hind Russian-made attack helicopter with limited lift capability; 24 received between 2013 and 2016.

EC-635 German-made light attack helicopter; 24 received between 2011 and 2012.

IA-407 American-made light attack helicopter; 40 received between 2012 and 2015.

UH-1 American-made light-lift helicopter often armed with crew-operated machine guns; 32 received between 2005 and 2007.

Mi-17 Russian-made armed medium-lift helicopter; 57 received between 2006 and 2016.

CH-4 Chinese-made armed unmanned ISR; 10 received between 2015 and 2016.

ScanEagle American-made tactical unmanned ISR; 10 received in 2014.

Endnotes and Credits: See page 122.

strikes targeted and destroyed ISIS bed-down locations in sparsely populated mountainous terrain, which CJTF-OIR said "negates the requirement to hold that terrain."[185] According to CJTF-OIR, intelligence reports indicated that ISIS was not returning to locations struck by the Iraqi Su-25s or F-16s.[186]

ISF Needs to Improve Integration of Surface Fires, Digital Connectivity, and Command and Control Measures

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF's ability to integrate surface fires, such as artillery, into operations still requires improvement. CJTF-OIR said that while many of the ISF's operations include stability activities in which artillery is not usually employed doctrinally, they assessed that there is still opportunity for the ISF to utilize artillery support against ISIS.[187]

Additionally, CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF has not made improvements in digital connectivity or consistently implementing command and control measures. CJTF-OIR noted that the Deputy Commander of Iraq's Joint Operations Command requested Coalition support to define the requirements for a command, control, communications, computers and intelligence architecture in an effort to make progress in these two areas. CJTF-OIR said that Coalition staff responsible for Coalition command and control interoperability and cyber defense is teaming with the MAG's operational advisors to assist the ISF in outlining an architecture and defining the requirements for the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. Additionally, CJTF-OIR reported that the MAG is working with NMI to describe the request and recommend an Iraqi government-wide approach to digital connectivity to ensure the ISF's approach is nested in the Ministries of Defense and Interior as well as the Prime Minister's National Operations Center command and control structures.[188]

ISR Technical Issues Significantly Degrade Support to CTS Operations

CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS made significant improvements this quarter in the integration of judicial investigation and intelligence collection in support of warrant-based operations. CJTF-OIR said this improvement occurred largely in the policy and process lines of effort and prompted discussions across Iraqi ministries and agencies to improve daily business operations. However, CJTF-OIR said the ISF's ISR capability in support of CTS intelligence gathering and operation planning was "significantly degraded" this quarter.[189]

CJTF-OIR said that to improve CTS intelligence gathering and operational planning abilities at the strategic level, the CTS commander initiated development of a three-year organizational plan. CJTF-OIR said this plan would establish a baseline understanding of CTS's desired intelligence collection, capabilities, and manning nested within the Iraqi government's Counter Terrorism Strategy. Additionally, CJTF-OIR said the 3-year plan will also provide direction on the path from current capability to the desired end state that will enable planning for training, procurement, and staff development over the next 36 months.[190]

At the operational level, CJTF-OIR said the Counter Terrorism Command, partnered with Coalition elements, implemented a program of training and process improvement focused on the integration of intelligence and operations from planning through execution as well as post operational procedures at both the Counter Terrorism Command and CTS brigades. Meanwhile, CJTF-OIR reported that at the institutional level, the CTS Academia, or dedicated training school, along with the Ministry of Defense's other schools, is working to codify a comprehensive series of intelligence analyst and officer training courses, with the intent to professionalize the intelligence workforce.[191]

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN IRAQ

USCENTCOM Commander Says Attacks by Iranian-backed Militias Increased in 2020

The threat from Iranian-backed militias in Iraq continued this quarter with a high tempo of rocket and IED attacks on Coalition facilities and supply lines.

The threat from Iranian-backed militias in Iraq continued this quarter with a high tempo of rocket and IED attacks on Coalition facilities and supply lines. The DIA assessed that since the previous quarter, militia-instigated attacks against U.S. interests probably have increased due to militia opposition to the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue and their perception that the United States is responsible for recent government crackdowns on the militias. The DIA said these militias continue using front groups to claim attacks, probably to provide plausible deniability and disassociate the attacks from militias associated with the PMC, which is part of Iraq's security apparatus. The DIA reported that there have been no notable changes in the militias' tactics, techniques, or procedures.[192]

CJTF-OIR reported that "malign actors" present a security threat to Coalition service members operating in Iraq. According to CJTF-OIR, the Coalition commander has continued to invest in security measures to ensure that Coalition service members can continue to operate safely. CJTF-OIR stated that continued investment in force protection has not interfered with the counter-ISIS mission and that the ISF demonstrated increased ability to execute counter-ISIS operations and degrade ISIS military capabilities in Iraq this quarter.[193]

Figure 4.

Indirect Fire Attacks that Targeted U.S. and Coalition Personnel, July 1, 2020–September 30, 2020

CJTF-OIR says most rounds impacted near, but not within, perimeters

JUL AUG

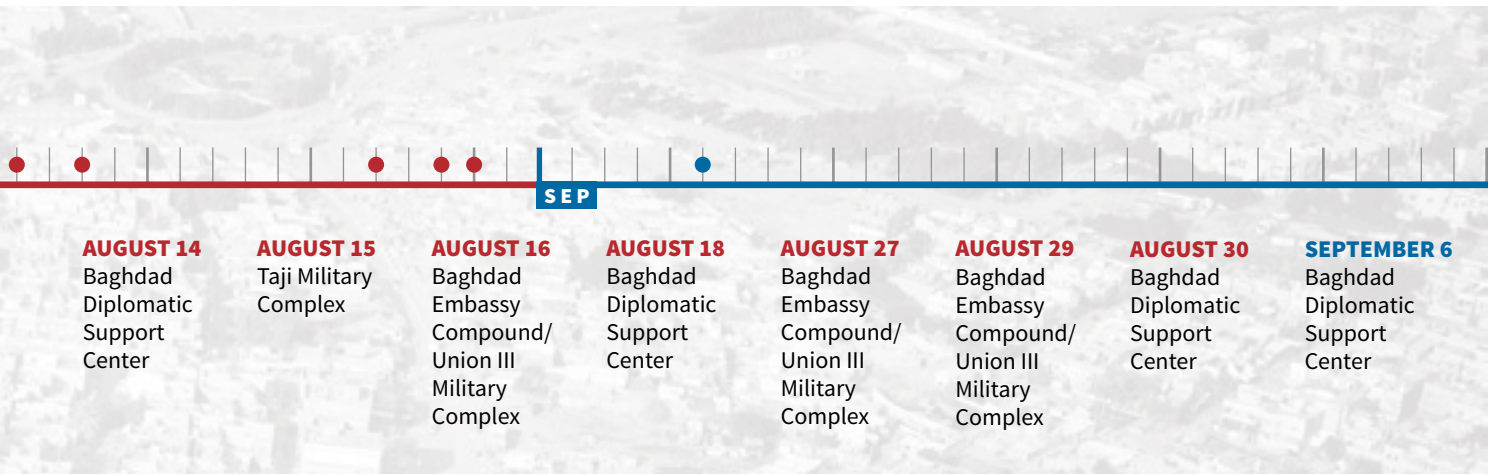
JULY 3	JULY 4	JULY 19	JULY 24	JULY 27	JULY 30	AUGUST 4	AUGUST 11
Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center	Baghdad Embassy Compound/ Union III Military Complex	Baghdad Embassy Compound/ Union III Military Complex	Besmaya Training Base	Taji Military Complex	Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center	Baghdad Embassy Compound/ Union III Military Complex	Baghdad Embassy Compound/ Union III Military Complex

However, USCENTCOM reported that the threat posed by Iran and its proxies to Coalition forces in Iraq continues to result in the reduced availability of ISR capacity to conduct the counter-ISIS campaign. USCENTCOM stated that each airborne asset or ISR sortie that is directed to provide force protection against Iranian threats is a sortie that is not available to support the ISF and counter-ISIS operations.[194]

In a press interview in early September, General McKenzie stated that the rocket and mortar attacks, or indirect fire, by Iranian-backed militias increased in 2020. General McKenzie noted that the attacks "have not been particularly lethal," and he said that Iran and its proxies are not using their more sophisticated weapon systems.[195]

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that as of September 21, there were 17 indirect fire attacks near facilities housing U.S. personnel this quarter, but that none of the attacks managed to impact the facilities.[196] (See Figure 4.) CJTF-OIR reported that indirect fire attacks on July 5, 19, and 27 as well as August 11 were officially claimed by named malign actors, and CJTF-OIR assessed that the malign actors were likely responsible for the remaining attacks during this quarter. CJTF-OIR said that the frequency of attacks increased from 10 last quarter to 17 this quarter.[197]

An independent DoD OIG analysis of indirect fire attacks found that at least 27 rocket and mortar attacks were reported in open sources this quarter. Meanwhile, at least 36 IED attacks by suspected Iranian-backed militias targeted contractor-operated convoys carrying equipment for Coalition forces or diplomatic personnel.[198] This includes media reports that on September 15, an IED targeted a British diplomatic vehicle as it traveled on the main road connecting downtown Baghdad with Baghdad International Airport, resulting in no injuries.[199] As of October 7, at least five rocket attacks have targeted facilities housing U.S. personnel following Secretary Pompeo's September 20 ultimatum to close the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, including an attack that killed five Iraqi civilians near the Baghdad airport.[200]



Secretary Pompeo Issues Ultimatum to Iraq to End Militia Attacks on U.S. Embassy

While no U.S. or Coalition casualties occurred during the quarter as result of Iranian-backed militia attacks, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo issued an ultimatum to Iraqi officials on September 20. According to media reports, Secretary Pompeo threatened to close the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad unless Iraq took action to strengthen security for U.S. personnel and facilities.[201] According to media sources, the decision to announce the possible closure of the embassy was the result, in part, of the U.S. Government's lack of patience with the Iraqi government's inability to prevent the attacks.[202] The DoS reported that rocket and drone attacks in the International Zone increased during the quarter, although the DoS added that the attacks did not affect operations at the embassy.[203] As of publication, additional attacks had occurred with little indication of how a potential embassy closure could impact the OIR mission or deter future attacks on Coalition forces in Iraq.[204]

According to media reporting, U.S. Ambassador Matthew Tueller told the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hussein, that President Trump directed the policy decision and the countries were entering a "new era" of relations.[205] On September 30, Ambassador Tueller joined a group of 25 ambassadors and charges d'affairés who delivered a joint call for action to Prime Minister al-Kadhimi on the urgent need to improve security for diplomatic and international staff and facilities in Iraq.[206] The DoS told Iraqi government officials that the U.S. Government was taking preliminary steps to close the embassy over several months but that the Consulate General in Erbil would remain open.[207] Iraqi officials publicly expressed concern about the warning with many, including Iraqi politicians associated with the militias, calling for an immediate end to all attacks on diplomatic personnel and facilities.[208]

PRIME MINISTER ATTEMPTS TO MINIMIZE MILITIA INFLUENCE, OPENS RISKS OF RETALIATION

According to several Middle East analysts, increased pressure from the United States to stop militia attacks has put Iraq's fragile government, which has already struggled to contain militia violence, in a precarious position.[209] Media sources and independent analysts have reported that the relationship between Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and the Iranian-backed elements of the PMC remains strained.[210] The CTS raid against Kata'ib Hizballah in late June demonstrated the prime minister's willingness to hold militias accountable for illegal activities, such as attacks on Iraqi bases and diplomatic facilities. However, analysts note that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and his advisors have been threatened by the militias and are at risk, as demonstrated by the early July assassination of Hisham al-Hashimi, a close advisor to the prime minister.[211] Independent analysts assess that the ISF cannot provide adequate protection for all those likely at risk of retaliation from the militias if the government were to take additional measures to assert control over militias.[212]

The DoS reported that despite the risks, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi has made incremental efforts to contain Iranian-backed armed groups and reduce the illegal operations that fund militias operating outside of the PMC or exploit their PMC affiliations.[213] According to Iraqi government sources and media reporting, the prime minister's primary focus has been on decreasing illegal activities along the borders with Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria.[214] For example, the DoS said that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi launched an anti-corruption campaign aimed at reasserting Iraqi government control over all border crossings where the militias have embezzled millions in federal customs revenue and profited from illegal smuggling.[215] On July 21, elements of the Iraqi Army's 9th Armored Division arrived at the Zurbatiyah border port of entry in Wasit province to assume responsibility for protecting the crossing.[216] Additionally, media reporting indicated that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi increased the ISF presence at

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. (DoS photo)

other border crossings, including the al-Qaim bordering crossing with Syria as well as the Mandali and Mundhiriyah border crossings with Iran.[217] Independent analysts have cast doubt on what impact these deployments will have on the PMC and associated militias' ability to profit from border corruption or move illicit goods because of the groups' ability to also utilize unofficial border crossings for their illegal activities.[218]

Additionally, the DoS reported that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi authorized raids and took steps to limit the ability of Iranian-backed militias to present themselves as independent actors outside of the ISF chain of command. This included banning the display of their own flag instead of the Iraqi national flag.[219] The Iraqi government's initial efforts to integrate legitimate elements of the PMF affiliated with the Najaf-based Shia clerical leadership directly under the prime minister have stalled.[220] The DoS said the Iraqi delegation to the Strategic Dialogue "candidly acknowledged" challenges and threats posed by Iranian-backed armed groups but stated that an incremental and careful approach is needed to bring all arms under government control.[221]

Past attempts to assert control over the militias by Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's predecessors largely failed, according to independent analysts.[222] Media sources and analysts reported that the majority of militias continue to largely ignore the 2016 PMC Law, which mandated that armed militias must be regulated, similar to Iraq's other security forces, and come under the direct control of the Iraqi government.[223]

Meanwhile, the relationship between the traditional ISF, backed by U.S. and Coalition forces, and the PMC remains contentious. According to independent anaylsts and media reporting, the CTS raid targeting Kata'ib Hizballah— the Iranian-backed militia suspected of carrying out many of the attacks against U.S. interests—in June demonstrated the willingness of both CTS and Iraqi intelligence services to pursue Iranian-backed groups if ordered by the prime minister. However, Kata'ib Hizballah's subsequent show of force in Baghdad's International Zone, which resulted in the release of all but one of those detained in the raid, likely emboldened the militias and will complicate future government operations against militias.[224] Independent analysts assess that members of the ISF are themselves vulnerable to intimidation and attacks by the militias and thus may be hesitant to back aggressive moves against the militias.[225]

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi Receives Some Popular Support for Early Initiatives

Although the initial reaction to the selection of Mustafa al-Kadhimi as prime minister was generally positive according to the DoS, opinions varied among Iraqi activists and protesters regarding how serious his government is about addressing systemic corruption; tackling the role of militias; and creating economic opportunities for the Iraqi people, and how effective any such efforts might be.[226] The prime minister still faces many challenges, as described by a Middle East analyst, including convincing Iraqis who have been protesting since October 2019 that he is sincere in his plans to reform the government. The task became more difficult during the quarter because of the COVID-19 lockdown and the impact of the sharp drop in oil prices on revenues and employment.[227]

The prime minister still faces many challenges, as described by a Middle East analyst, including convincing Iraqis who have been protesting since October 2019 that he is sincere in his plans to reform the government.

On July 15, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi held a meeting of his Council of Ministers in Basrah to address longstanding municipal services problems in the city and province and to inspect border posts as part of his anticorruption initiative. Protesters and other pro-reform activists said the prime minister's initiatives were in the right direction, while expressing concern they could be blocked by the local Basrah power structure—the Iran-aligned Fatah Alliance and its associated militias.[228]

After assigning new police and intelligence leadership in Basrah in response to attacks against civil activists, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi launched "Operation Sincere Promise" aimed at confiscating weapons and tackling tribal violence and organized crime. According to the DoS, he has started an anticorruption campaign aimed at reasserting Iraqi government control over all border crossings, including Basrah province's Shalamcheh border crossing, which connects Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province to Basrah.[229]

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's 2-day mid-September visit to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) sent a positive signal to the KRG leadership and the Kurdish public eager for better relations with Baghdad, according to a DoS cable. The prime minister led the largest Iraqi government delegation to travel to the IKR since 1993, before the IKR broke away from Saddam Hussein's rule. The delegation traveled to all three IKR provinces—Erbil, Dahuk, and Sulaymaniyah—where Prime Minister al-Kadhimi met with KRG leadership, internally displaced persons, and political party, border, and customs officials.[230]

To date, the Iranian-backed Fatah Alliance has avoided precipitating a direct confrontation with Prime Minister al-Kadhimi. On August 31, Fatah leader Hadi al-Amiri expressed public support for the prime minister's efforts to safeguard peaceful protesters. According to the DoS, Amiri stated that "peaceful protest is a right guaranteed by the constitution," but he drew a line between peaceful demonstrators and "vandals" that threaten public security. Fatah-aligned members of parliament were highly critical of the prime minister's failure during the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue to secure a timeline on the withdrawal of U.S. forces in Iraq.[231]

Iraq Still Operating on Equivalent of 2019 Budget

On August 31, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi announced the formation of a new investigative committee to manage major corruption cases and major crimes, according to the DoS.

During the quarter, the Iraqi government continued to operate on the equivalent of its 2019 budget in the absence of a 2020 budget. The government borrowed $12.6 billion internally, which by September had been spent to meet expenditure obligations. Low oil prices and reduced exports dramatically reduced Iraqi government revenues, causing the government to prioritize essential expenditures such as salaries and pensions over longer-term investments.[232]

By the end of the quarter, the Iraqi government had not adopted a 2020 budget and was working on a 2021 budget. On September 13, the Ministry of Finance proposed a 2020 budget; however, according to the DoS, there is little chance the parliament will approve it. Instead, the government will remain focused on approval of a 2021 budget before the end of the year.[233] The DoS stated that due to the urgent fiscal situation resulting in the Iraqi government's inability to pay salaries during October, the government proposed a new borrowing law to authorize an additional $48.9 billion in loans. The government sent the draft to the Council of Representatives in early October, but as of the time of the publication it was uncertain whether the council would approve it, as doing so would lead to a $34.6 billion deficit.[234]

During the Strategic Dialogue discussions in Washington, D.C., Secretary Pompeo congratulated Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein for the interim budget agreement between the Iraqi government and the KRG (announced just days earlier on August 16). The interim budget deal ultimately required the involvement of Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. Both parties have expressed hope that they can codify a longer-term budget deal in the 2021 budget.[235]

At the end of the quarter, the al-Kadhimi government was working on an economic reform plan, according to Iraqi officials quoted in the media, to address the revenue shortfall and meet the need for $3.6 billion per month to pay 6.5 million government employees and retirees. According to media reports, the government is also looking beyond oil revenues to fund the shortfall and is working toward full control of the border crossings, a significant source of revenue and corruption, to gain additional revenues for the federal budget.[236]

Iraqi Prime Minister Launches New Anticorruption Initiatives

On August 31, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi announced the formation of a new investigative committee to manage major corruption cases and major crimes, according to the DoS. The new committee will report directly to him.[237] The new committee, according to media reports, is a response to Iraqi antigovernment protesters who have sought reforms to curb corruption and to ensure accountability for security forces that killed or detained protesters without justification.[238] Additionally, in August, press reports noted that an Iraqi court ordered a travel ban on former Iraqi Electricity Minister Luay Al-Khateeb due to charges of corruption and waste of public funds.[239]

On September 13, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative for the Secretary-General for Iraq, met with Shia cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, she said that al-Sistani called on the Iraqi government to open corruption cases against officials and hold those involved in corruption accountable.[240] According to media reports, the next day the prime minister changed some high-ranking government positions, including appointing former defense minister Khalid al-Ubaydi as head of operations at the Iraqi Intelligence Service, which continues to be headed by the prime minister.[241]

In September, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad reported it nominated Ms. Dhuha A. Mohammed, Director General for Electronic Payments at the Central Bank of Iraq, for the International Anticorruption Champions Award. She was nominated for her work standing up against corrupt and criminal Iraqi elements in order to pioneer an e-payments technology that combats rampant public payroll fraud. Ms. Mohammed's initiative directly supports Mission Iraq's Integrated Country Strategy that calls for "targeted legal, regulatory, and governance reforms [that] will…enhance transparency while reducing opportunities for corruption…"[242]

Public wage fraud is one of the most prevalent forms of corruption, in which salaries and benefits have been paid to an estimated 300,000 nonexistent, or ghost, employees according to the DoS. Ms. Dhuha designed and led a Central Bank of Iraq initiative to establish a country-wide credit card infrastructure that facilitates e-payments. This system established for the first time an auditable trail to enable the Iraqi government to purge ghost workers from its payrolls.[243] As a follow-up to Ms. Dhuha's e-payments systems, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi directed the Minister of Planning to lead a working group for collecting data to count the number of active state employees.[244]

Public wage fraud is one of the most prevalent forms of corruption, in which salaries and benefits have been paid to an estimated 300,000 nonexistent, or ghost, employees, according to the DoS.

Demonstrations Resume on Anniversary; Protesters Concerned About Violence

October 1, 2020, marked the 1-year anniversary of the beginning of the antigovernment protest movement. Media reported that "thousands" of protesters and other civil activists marched in public squares in Baghdad and the central and southern provinces to mark the anniversary. The protesters continued to press their demands for more employment opportunities, adequate public services for all, and transparent elections.[245] Protests had slowed down over the summer due to COVID-19, record high temperatures, and the new government's plan for early elections.[246]

According to the DoS, the renewed protests are focusing on demands for early elections, dismantling the Iraqi government's political system of ethno-sectarian quotas, and providing public sector jobs and improved services to Iraqis impoverished by decades of corruption.[247] However, the DoS reported that Iraqi government efforts to address protester grievances are inhibited by a lack of resources due to low oil prices and COVID-19 restrictions, an entrenched political elite who do not want to change the status quo, and the influence of Iran-backed militias. The Iraqi government has made early national elections and resolving the government's fiscal crisis its highest priorities, which may limit its ability to tackle other critical issues facing the country.[248]

After months of regular electricity outages and the government not paying salaries or providing bailouts to local businesses, citizen protests broke out in Kurdistan in early August, according to media sources.

During the quarter, despite lower numbers, protesters continued to be attacked, kidnapped, or killed. More than 600 have been killed and more than 30,000 injured or wounded since the protests began in 2019. According to media reports, in late July, Minister of Interior Othman al-Ghanimi said that three Iraqi policemen using personally-owned rifles killed two protesters in Baghdad.[249] The DoS reported that on August 14, gunmen assassinated Basrah activist Tahseen Osama, which led to violent protests in the province. Prime Minister al-Kadhimi responded by firing Basrah's police chief and local national security director on August 17; however, 2 days later gunmen killed activist Riham Yaqoub, who was known for her involvement in the Basrah 2018 pro-reform protest movement.[250]

The attacks ignited a new wave of demonstrations as antigovernment protesters blamed the deaths on Iranian-backed militias, who, according to media reports are the same militias that assisted security forces in clamping down on the mass demonstrations that began October 1, 2019.[251] On August 22, 2020, the prime minister traveled to Basrah to meet with Yaqoub's family and to supervise the security forces' efforts to protect demonstrators and end the campaign of targeted killings, according to the DoS.[252] A week later, the prime minister met with the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights to underscore that the Iraqi government was still investigating the October 2019 attacks against protesters. He added that the government had completed a count of all of those killed and injured and would soon release the results of the investigations into protester killings.[253]

The DoS reported that in mid-August the Iraqi Council of Ministers agreed to provide compensation through the Martyrs Foundation to the families of those killed and wounded in pro-reform demonstrations since October 2019. The council also directed the Ministry of Health to prioritize treatment for wounded protesters and facilitate their treatment abroad as needed. According to some press reporting, the foundation is proceeding with payments.[254]

Protests Erupt in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

After months of regular electricity outages and the government not paying salaries or providing bailouts to local businesses, citizen protests broke out in Kurdistan in early August, according to media sources. The failure to reach a comprehensive resolution of the budget dispute between the Iraqi government and the KRG is another cause of the demonstrations.[255]

According to the DoS, most of the protests were peaceful; however, several turned violent with damage to property and arson to public buildings. At first, Kurdish authorities tolerated the demonstrations; however, they reacted strongly when the protesters targeted the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the two governing political parties. The DoS reported that Kurdish security forces closed the Erbil and Dahuk bureaus of the regional television network NRT and arrested its three journalists, claiming its coverage of protests was inciting violence. In Dahuk province, the governor deployed security forces, imposed a curfew, and restricted movement in advance of a demonstration. In Sulaymaniyah province, security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters in Ranya and shot live ammo over the heads of protestors in Garmian to disperse rock-throwing and property-burning crowds.[256]

Turkey Air Strikes in Northern Iraq Stir Discontent

Anger against Turkey and the insurgent Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) grew among protesters when Turkey launched ground and air assaults against PKK militants in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.[257] On August 11, Turkey conducted an unmanned aerial strike in Erbil province that killed two Kurdish Border Guard Force generals, according to the DoS. The strike occurred near the Iran-Iraq border in the sparsely populated Sidakan area near the PKK's Qandil mountains stronghold.[258]

The PKK has engaged in a decades-long insurgency against Turkey, while sheltering in Iraq, and has a cordial relationship with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party, according to media and policy analyst reports.[259] Turkish air strikes continued targeting PKK fighters in more populated areas in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region outside the PKK-dominated border zone. The DoS reported that Turkish air strikes on August 14 killed three PKK fighters near Dahuk province's capital city. A second air strike in Dahuk province hit a vehicle killing two PKK fighters.[260]

The DoS reported that in response to the August 11 air strike, the Iraqi government canceled a planned August 13 visit by the Turkish Minister of National Defense, Hulusi Akar, to Baghdad, and the KRG cancelled Minister Akar's visit to Erbil that same day.[261] In early September IKR President Nechirvan Barzani visited Ankara, after which Turkish authorities announced the end of offensive operations in Iraq on September 5. However, Turkish air and ground operations inside the Iraqi Kurdistan have since resumed on a limited scale, according to the DoS.[262]

STABILIZATION

Despite the territorial defeat of ISIS, underlying security, economic, and political difficulties still pose challenges to stabilization efforts in Iraq.[263] To measure progress towards long-term strategic goals of improving the security, economic, and political conditions in Iraq, DoS and USAID Operating Units implementing foreign assistance programs provide performance information on an annual basis.[264] Since 2017, annual performance plans and reports have included the defeat of ISIS as a strategic objective.[265] DoS and USAID contributions towards this objective have been measured using three key indicators:

- Number of civilian casualties from ISIS-directed or ISIS-inspired terrorist attacks outside of Iraq and Syria;
- Cumulative total number of IDPs who have safely and voluntarily returned to territories liberated from ISIS in Iraq and Raqqa, Syria;
- Number of countries who have joined and are providing military, humanitarian, and stabilization support in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.[266]

According to information found in the annual performance plans and reports, the DoS builds and strengthens partner countries' institutional counterterrorism abilities while reinforcing stabilization goals.[267] The DoS works closely with the DoD to ensure coordinated security cooperation assistance.[268] USAID designs and delivers programs targeting specific regional and local vulnerabilities, with a focus on improving governance and the ability of partners to assume responsibility for their own prevention efforts.[269]

Program Update: UNDP Projects in Western Anbar

According to USAID, stability and recovery of western Anbar through the restoration of essential services is a cornerstone of the U.S. Government's Defeat-ISIS strategy.

Anbar continues to be an area of active ISIS activity and active military operations against ISIS. According to USAID, stability and recovery of western Anbar through the restoration of essential services is a cornerstone of the U.S. Government's Defeat-ISIS strategy.[270] In September 2019, USAID obligated $100 million to the United Nations Development Programme Funding Facility for Stabilization (UNDP FFS) for Anbar.[271] USAID approved funding for education, electricity, health, municipal, road, sewage, and water projects in western Anbar in January 2020.[272] Projects began in early 2020.[273]

As of October 2020, USAID reported that 61 projects were in the pre-procurement planning phase, 90 activities were under procurement, and 73 projects had been awarded or were under implementation.[274] According to USAID, activities have included the rehabilitation and supply of primary and secondary schools; the rehabilitation and supply of primary healthcare centers; rehabilitation of the electricity network and substations throughout western Anbar; rehabilitation of municipal markets in Haditha, Hit, and Rutbah; rehabilitation of roads and bridges in Ramadi and Fallujah; and the rehabilitation of water treatment plants and the restoration of the water network throughout western Anbar.[275]

USAID reported that COVID-19 related curfews carried over from June, posed a challenge to the implementation of UNDP FFS projects in Anbar at the beginning of the quarter.[276] While the full curfew was in place, implementer movement within the province required access letters from the Anbar governor.[277] According to USAID, the situation improved when a partial curfew was introduced on July 16.[278] USAID reported the partial curfew has remained in place since late July, which has had a lesser impact on the implementation of UNDP FFS programming.[279]

At USAID's request, on August 29, 2020, UNDP FFS conducted a training for local Anbari companies on UNDP's e-tendering and e-bidding process at the Ramadi Vocational Training Center.[280] UNDP targeted invitations to Anbar companies who had previously bid on UNDP FFS projects, but that were not successful or were disqualified during the e-bidding process.[281] According to USAID, the training was meant to increase the number of Anbari companies awarded UNDP FFS contracts to increase the economic recovery of Anbar province.[282]

USAID Cost Savings Support COVID-19 Response in Iraq

USAID reported that UNDP has taken a lead role in the coordinated country-wide response to COVID-19.[283] To support efforts under the UNDP COVID-19 proposal, USAID redirected more than $10 million in cost savings from activities under UNDP FFS that were completed under budget.[284] The cost savings were used to support the creation of isolation rooms, to supply equipment, and to increase bed capacity in nine provincial healthcare facilities.[285]

In addition, USAID reported these cost savings will be used to rehabilitate the East Mosul Medical Fluid Factory that was completely destroyed by ISIS.[286] The East Mosul Medical Fluid Factory is one of only two factories in Iraq that supply medical fluids, in particular saline.[287] According to USAID, the facility's destruction has made Iraq dependent on imports to supply its medical fluids, making it difficult to secure needed medical supplies especially during COVID-19.[288]

COVID-19 Restrictions Impede Third-party Monitoring, Limit Importation of Medical Equipment

USAID reported that COVID-19 travel restrictions and curfews impeded third-party monitors from moving between provinces and between IKR and non-IKR areas to monitor UNDP FFS and other projects.[289] According to USAID, third-party monitoring continued as conditions allowed—this included monitoring online training.[290] COVID-related movement restrictions also hampered Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (DoS PRM) third-party monitoring contractors, as well as one DoS PRM local staff member, from carrying out in-person monitoring activities.[291]

Under normal conditions, third-party monitors are able to perform monitoring visits for all DoS PRM programming in Iraq.[292] Since early March 2020, however, third-party monitors countrywide and Erbil-based DoS PRM staff have been unable to follow up on planned monitoring visits due to travel and other COVID-19-related restrictions implemented by the Iraqi government and KRG authorities.[293] Third-party monitors have been able to attend some partners' virtual events and have conducted beneficiary surveys, according to the DoS.[294]

The limited availability of COVID-19-related health equipment globally, in combination with flight restrictions and customs processing, has produced challenges in the import of medical supplies and equipment.[295] USAID reported that the UNDP has been pursuing multiple procurement avenues and mechanisms to expedite the import of health equipment for the COVID-19 response in Iraq.[296] For example, UNDP issued tender processes and directly contracted vendors to deliver medical devices as expeditiously as possible.[297] In addition, USAID reported UNDP has engaged in daily monitoring with Iraqi customs authorities and vendors during delivery periods.[298] According to USAID, UNDP has been able to deliver requested medical items within a reasonable period.[299]

COVID-19 Restrictions Affect U.S. Government Personnel, Staffing Challenges Persist

In September 2020, USAID reported that COVID-19 restrictions affected travel between the U.S. Consulate in Erbil and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, as housing and other considerations had to be accommodated due to COVID-19 mitigation measures and quarantine implementation requirements.[300] COVID-19 restrictions have limited meetings between USAID, DoS, and CJTF-OIR staff to virtual settings.[301] In addition, security and COVID-19-related measures have moved much of the CJTF-OIR that USAID coordinates with to Camp Arifjan in Kuwait.[302]

According to USAID, personnel restrictions and limited bed space because of COVID-19 quarantine requirements for incoming U.S. Government staff have limited temporary duty assignments to Erbil to essential coverage only.[303] Further, the USAID Mission in Iraq will continue to face operational challenges despite the authorized staffing increase approved by Ambassador Matthew Tueller.[304]

USAID reported this is because the positions made available under the authorization will not be filled until at least 1 year from the date of their advertisement, following the usual

bidding cycle for USAID.[305] Meanwhile, DoS PRM's staffing decrease from four to two direct-hire staff members in Baghdad continued to hinder DoS PRM's ability during the quarter to monitor and implement its refugee resettlement program within Iraq.[306]

Arrivals to Sinjar and Al Ba'aj Increase

Between June 8 and August 21, the International Organization of Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix reported nearly 15,500 people returned to Ninewa's Al Ba'aj and Sinjar districts.[307] The rate of arrival to Al Ba'aj and Sinjar declined in August after peaking with more than 700 returns in a single day in mid-July.[308] The recent returns bring the total number of returnees to nearly 3,400 households—more than 18,200 people since June 8.[309] Returnees cited improved security conditions, the clearing of mines, and rehabilitated public infrastructure as common reasons for their return.[310] However, the DoS reported that the cumulative effects of COVID-19—including lack of livelihoods near camps, separation from family due to travel restrictions, and fears of possible spread of the virus within camps—are another driver for the recent returns.[311] According to USAID, approximately 80 percent of IDPs arriving to Al Ba'aj and Sinjar came from camp settings.[312] IOM reported that many individuals have returned to areas with limited access to basic services and humanitarian assistance.[313] Similarly, the DoS indicated that the recent influx of returnees has created a need for critical services in the districts, particularly within Sinjar.[314] (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5.

Populations in Ninewa Before ISIS, Affected by Fighting, and Current Returns

Number of Iraqis living in Ninewa Plains before June 2014:

- **3 million**

Number of individuals displaced or killed between June to August 2014:

- **1.8 million displaced**
- **6,467 wounded**
- **4,692 killed**

Number of returnees as of August 31, 2020:

- **1,834,356 returnees to Ninewa province**

Sources: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, UNAMI/OHCHR, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Iraq Bearing Witness Report; Google Earth.

COVID-19 Impacts Camp Closure Planning, Procedures and Timelines Are Uncertain

Countrywide, the population in formal IDP camps decreased by 31 percent from August 2019 to July 2020.[315] As of July, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster reported nearly 262,000 people remained in 43 IDP camps in Iraq.[316] Despite plans by the Iraqi Government to close nearly all IDP camps in Iraq by the end of 2019, USAID reported that as of July 30, 2020 more than 120,520 people remained displaced across 29 IDP camps within Iraq.[317] The closure of IDP camps is a stated goal of Iraq's new Minister of Migration and Displacement, Evan Faeq Jabro.[318] However, the Iraqi government put plans for additional camp closures by the end of June 2020 and the closures of all camps by the end of 2020 largely on hold through mid-2020 due to the spread of COVID-19.[319] USAID reported, the closure process and frequency for camp closures in the remainder of 2020 and 2021 remain to be seen.[320]

According to USAID, in August to October 2019, a series of uncoordinated camp closures, consolidations, and evictions caused premature and unsafe returns of IDPs, displacement of families re-entering IDP camps, and cases of secondary displacement.[321] To prevent camp closures and consolidation from causing increased humanitarian needs and protection risks among IDPs, USAID and the humanitarian community have maintained advocacy efforts directed at the Iraqi government to act consistently with the Principled Returns Framework.[322] The Principled Returns Framework sets the minimum standards for principled returns in accordance with international and domestic law, and respects the voluntary, safe, and dignified returns of IDPs.[323]

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

DoS Assigns New Refugee Coordinators in Iraq

The DoS PRM is the DoS's lead voice on humanitarian policy and protection of refugees, asylum seekers, conflict victims, stateless person, and vulnerable migrants. During the quarter, the DoS assigned new Refugee Coordinators to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and Consulate General Erbil, who maintain oversight and accountability of all DoS PRM programs, as well as manage DoS PRM's relationship with the Iraq offices of UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the IOM.[324]

IDPs Slowly Returning to Home Areas

According to the DoS PRM-funded IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, nearly 1.4 million Iraqis remained displaced, and approximately 4.7 million IDPs have returned to their areas of origin in Iraq as of August 2020. According to the IOM, reasons for return of IDPs remain consistent. These include improvements in the security situation and the provision of services, including schools, employment opportunities, and the rehabilitation of houses in areas of origin. Moreover, the disruptions caused by ongoing demonstrations in Baghdad and an unwillingness to move to other camps continue to be causes of return, according to the IOM.[325]

Between January and June 2020, 52,962 people (9,021 households), including missing people's families and people affected by quarantine measures, received food parcels, hygiene kits and other household essentials from the ICRC, or cash to buy these items and cover other

expenses. Approximately 126,400 returnees and others in conflict-affected, violence-prone, or underserved areas had access to clean water and enhanced living conditions, with ICRC assistance. The authorities in Mosul installed pipes, donated by the ICRC in 2018, in a water-distribution system (more than 104,000 people benefited); nearly 19,000 people had access to ICRC-renovated water systems during the pandemic, the ICRC distributed jerry cans, masks and hygiene kits and gave water operators food so they could stay indoors during movement restrictions. This aid benefited around 7,600 people, including 5,500 who also benefited from ICRC-backed infrastructure upgrades.[326]

To date, DoS PRM has allocated $95.9 million to UNHCR's regional Iraq response, including $75.1 million to aid displaced Iraqis in Iraq, as well as $20.8 million for UNHCR's work in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria to assist Iraqi refugees. In addition, PRM provided $8.9 million to UNHCR to respond to COVID-19 in Iraq and $17.7 million for the agency's support for Syrian refugees in Iraq.[327]

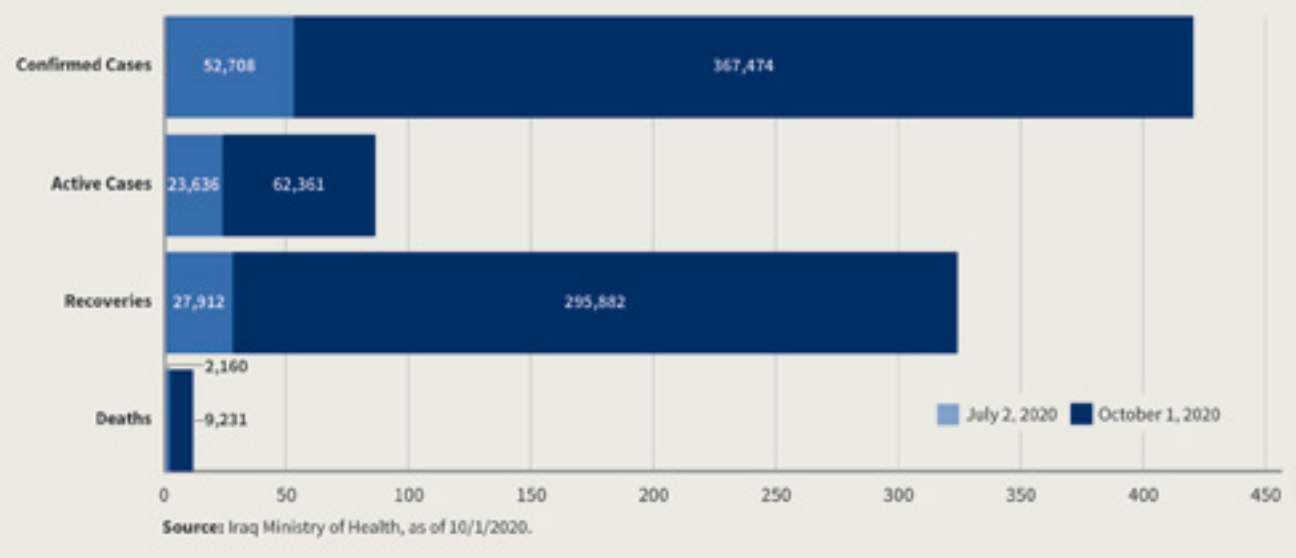
U.S. Government Responds to Exponential Rise in Iraq COVID-19 Cases

According to reports by the Enabling Peace in Iraq Center, as of October 1, 2020, the Iraqi Ministry of Health reported the total number of confirmed cases escalated to 367,474, with 295,882 recoveries and 9,231 COVID-19 related deaths.[328] In total, 62,361 of the cases were reported as currently in Iraqi hospitals, with 537 cases in intensive care units.[329] (See Figure 6.)

According to the DoS, both the Iraqi government and the KRG imposed strict movement restrictions to try to further stem any transmission of the virus.[330] However, the KRG eased its restrictions in July, which contributed to a significant spike in COVID-19 cases and deaths in

Figure 6.

Reported COVID-19 cases in Iraq from July to October 2020



IRAQ: QUARTERLY FOCUS ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

ANBAR, DAHUK, ERBIL, NINEWA, BAGHDAD

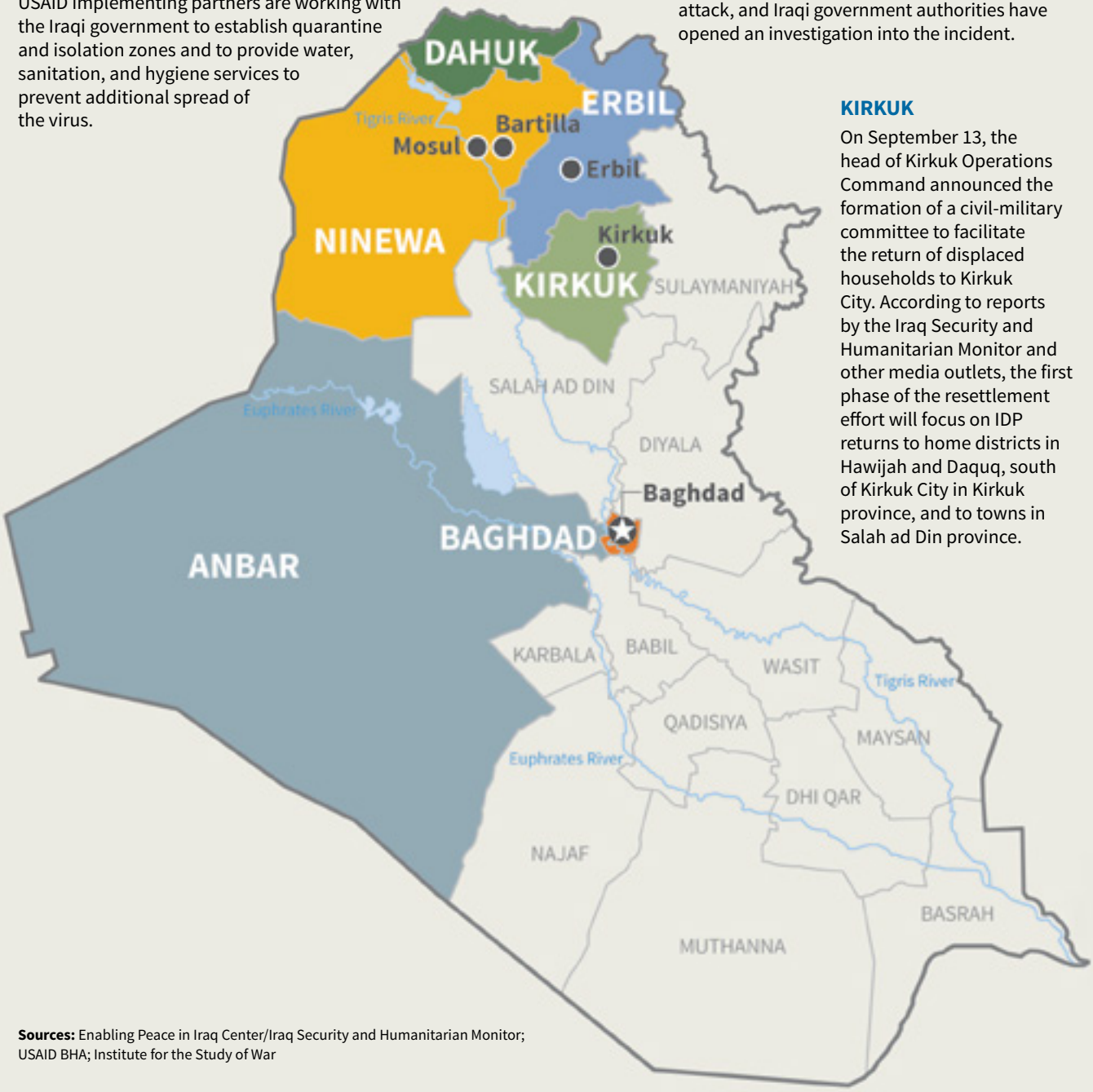
In August and September, health actors confirmed new COVID-19 cases in IDP camps in Anbar, Dahuk, Erbil, and Ninewa provinces and communities in Baghdad and Erbil. As of August 27, the United Nations confirmed a total of 68 COVID-19 cases among IDPs and refugees (55 and 13 cases respectively), including 46 recoveries and 7 fatalities. USAID reported that IDP camp authorities expanded contact tracing and testing and imposed full or partial restrictions to mitigate the risks of transmission. In addition, USAID implementing partners are working with the Iraqi government to establish quarantine and isolation zones and to provide water, sanitation, and hygiene services to prevent additional spread of the virus.

NINEWA

On August 26, USAID reported that a roadside IED near the town of Bartilla detonated, damaging a passing UN World Food Program vehicle. According to the WFP, the attack injured at least one staff member. The United Nations, international relief organizations, and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad have condemned the attack, and Iraqi government authorities have opened an investigation into the incident.

KIRKUK

On September 13, the head of Kirkuk Operations Command announced the formation of a civil-military committee to facilitate the return of displaced households to Kirkuk City. According to reports by the Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor and other media outlets, the first phase of the resettlement effort will focus on IDP returns to home districts in Hawijah and Daquq, south of Kirkuk City in Kirkuk province, and to towns in Salah ad Din province.



Sources: Enabling Peace in Iraq Center/Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor; USAID BHA; Institute for the Study of War

the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.[331] Under the central government's curfew, all government offices were closed, except for security, health, and service departments.[332] UNHCR and other implementing partner activities were affected as they rely on collaboration with government officials to facilitate the issuance of civil documentation to IDPs.[333] Essential services were being delivered by implementing partners when possible, but most nonhealth project activities were suspended and partner staff were working remotely.[334]

According to the DoS, restrictions on gatherings prevented partners from conducting group services, such as awareness raising sessions, informal education, livelihoods trainings, and group therapy.[335] One-on-one medical appointments, counseling, and legal assistance continued to the extent possible.[336] Due to the closure of all schools, all education programming remained on hold.[337] In addition, U.S. Government implementing partners reported that COVID-19 related movement and operating restrictions reduced access to employment and livelihood opportunities, especially among IDPs.[338]

In recognition of the impact that COVID-19 has on the humanitarian situation in Iraq, the U.S. Government provided $63.7 million to support preparedness and response efforts.[339] Response efforts initiated through USAID implementing partners in May to July 2020 included conducting risk communication and community engagement activities; providing support for health services, including through training medical personnel and providing essential medicines and medical supplies; distributing hygiene kits; conducting associated hygiene promotion; and offering psychosocial support services.[340]

According to USAID, its Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID BHA) is supporting protection activities, emergency food assistance, and multipurpose cash assistance to enable individuals to meet basic needs.[341] USAID has also implemented programs to mitigate the underemployment and livelihood impacts of COVID-19.[342] In May, USAID launched a $1.5 million COVID-19 Relief Fund under the MENA Investment Initiative Small and Medium Enterprise Support Program.[343] The program offers easy lending criteria to ensure rapid fund deployment to small and medium enterprises affected by the pandemic in northern Iraq.[344] As of September 2020, $655,000 has been dispersed to support 11 businesses in Ninewa and Erbil, including support for women, minority, and IDP-owned businesses.[345]

New Humanitarian Assistance Announced at the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue

On August 19, the U.S. Government announced nearly $204 million in additional humanitarian assistance for Iraq as part of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue—a bilateral meeting between U.S. Government and Iraqi government officials.[346] The new humanitarian assistance includes nearly $133 million from DoS PRM and more than $71 million from USAID BHA.[347] The funding is intended to support IDPs, host communities, and other vulnerable populations in Iraq.[348] In addition, the funding is intended to support Iraqi refugees in the region, through camp coordination and camp management, livelihoods support, and emergency food, health, protection, shelter, and water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance.[349]

Iraqi Government Makes Slow Progress on Access Letter Authorization Process

Since the Iraqi government canceled the national access letter authorization process in late 2019, humanitarian relief organizations have navigated shifting entry requirements on a province-by-province basis to the detriment of timely humanitarian assistance.[350] Until November 2019, the national access letter authorization process was the Iraqi government mechanism that authorized NGOs conducting humanitarian activities in Iraq to move freely between provinces.[351]

The suspension of the letter authorization process created provincial level administrative restrictions on humanitarian movement and activities.[352] The DoS PRM reported that NGOs struggled during the quarter to secure access letters to implement their projects throughout Iraq, resulting in interruptions of services as supplies and staff were prevented from moving between provinces.[353] The lack of access letters for NGOs continued to delay or prevent delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to IDPs and other vulnerable populations.[354] According to USAID, no stabilization and development NGOs currently have valid access letters.[355]

USAID reported, that on August 24, 10 international NGOs—including several USAID BHA implementing partners—submitted a letter to Ninewa Province Governor, Najim Al-Jubouri, that stated shifting entry requirements at checkpoints in western Ninewa's Al Ba'aj, Sinjar, and Tal Afar districts had prevented access to more than 146,000 vulnerable Iraqis, including at least 26,000 people in need of critical health care services.[356]

The lack of access letters also impacted critical needs assessments and assistance delivery to the influx of more than 18,000 Sinjaris who returned to the Sinjar district between June and September.[357] In addition, USAID reported that UNDP had periodic issues with access through the PMF checkpoint into Al-Qaim.[358] This was as a result of the PMF refusing to recognize access letters regardless of whether they were issued at the provincial level or by the Iraqi government through the National Operations Center (NOC).[359]

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad has raised the issue with the Iraqi government repeatedly.[360] The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq have urged the NOC to instate a new, permanent process for access authorizations in Iraq.[361] On September 4, the NOC authorized the Iraq Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations to begin processing national humanitarian access letters in Iraq.[362] According to USAID and DoS, the development has the potential to improve humanitarian access.[363] To facilitate greater humanitarian access, the new system aims to simplify and modernize the access letter process by establishing a nationally recognized access letter authority.[364]

As of September, NGOs have urged the Prime Minister to designate an authority to process visa requests and to provide clear guidance.

Visa Issuance Suspended for NGO Staff Members

On February 6, the Prime Minister's Office and the Council of Ministers Secretariat withdrew the authority of the Iraq Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations to authorize visas to NGO staff members.[365] As of September, NGOs have urged the Prime Minister to designate an authority to process visa requests and to provide clear guidance.[366]

USAID reported that relief and development organizations expressed concern that the suspension of visas for international staff members would impact their ability to staff and monitor projects.[367] According to USAID, OCHA was engaging with the Iraqi government on the issue.[368]

EVENTS IN SYRIA

ACTIONS CONDUCTED AGAINST ISIS IN SYRIA

SDF Captures High Value ISIS Fighters

The SDF stepped up unilateral and partnered operations against ISIS this quarter after relaxing restrictions on operations that were put in place last quarter to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.[369] CJTF-OIR stated that the SDF restarted operations following a handful of ISIS attacks that indicated a potential localized resurgence of ISIS activity.[370]

The SDF launched Phase II of Operation Deterrence of Terrorism in July, in coordination with Coalition forces, and focused on Dayr az Zawr province.[371] CJTF-OIR said that in this phase, the SDF successfully performed clearance operations, maintained checkpoints on critical routes, and conducted several unilateral high-risk arrests and targeted raids.[372] CJTF-OIR said that these operations demonstrated the SDF's "maturing capability" to maneuver, find targets, and exploit information gained from targets.[373]

U.S. Marines fire at targets on a combat marksmanship range in Syria. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

In total, the SDF conducted 33 operations across northeastern Syria, including Dayr az Zawr province, between July 1 and September 9, according to CJTF-OIR. Of these, 24 were partnered operations with the Coalition, including 11 with U.S. Special Operations Forces, and 9 were unilateral SDF operations, with no assistance from Coalition forces.[374] The operations resulted in the capture of 66 ISIS fighters, including 20 deemed "high value," CJTF-OIR said.[375] The partnered operations captured 50 fighters, including 11 considered high value. SDF unilateral operations resulted in the capture of 16 ISIS fighters, including 9 deemed high value.[376]

CJTF-OIR said that all but four of the operations resulted in captured enemy materials, documents, cell phones, and one raid yielded 3,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate used to make bombs. Six partnered operations were conducted for reconnaissance, tactical ground movement or route security missions, CJTF-OIR said.[377]

In addition, CJTF-OIR said that four operations were conducted against a specific location, compound or targeted persons of interest outside of CJTF-OIR's area of operation.[378] CJTF-OIR said that the SDF has shown an increasing willingness to conduct such "over the horizon" operations.[379]

CJTF-OIR said that the operations removed ISIS leadership, cell members, facilitators, and financiers from the battlefield, inhibiting the group's ability to recover and limiting its activities to that of a low-level insurgency.[380]

Turkish and Pro-Regime Forces Act Against ISIS

Turkish forces also routinely conducted raids and detained ISIS members this quarter, according to U.S. European Command (USEUCOM). USEUCOM said that the Turkey's counter-ISIS activities in Syria, and its improved security presence along Turkey's borders with Syria and Iraq, had reduced ISIS's ability to conduct attacks within and from Turkey.[381]

The DIA, citing open source reporting, said that Turkey has been building task force cells to conduct counterterrorism and special operations against ISIS in Syria. It said that these task force cells are composed of Turkish-trained Syrian police forces, the Turkish National Police, the Turkish military, and the Turkish National Intelligence Organization.[382] In mid-January,

SELECTED KEY EVENTS, JULY 1, 2020–SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

JULY 3–4
Clash between ISIS fighters and regime and pro-regime forces in Homs province kills 51 fighters

JULY 14
Suspected ISIS fighters detonate multiple bombs near hospital, neighborhood in Raqqah city, in coordinated attack

JULY 17
The SDF launches phase II of its Deterrence of Terrorism campaign against ISIS

AUGUST 2
Suspected ISIS gunmen kill sheikh of the Aqidat tribe in Dayr az Zawr; spate of tribal leader assassinations prompts protests against SDF-led administration

AUGUST 11
Aqidat tribe issues demands for the SDF to investigate recent assassinations and transfer administration of Dayr az Zawr to Arab tribes

JUL AUG

Members of Kurdish-led Hêzên Antî Teror Force clear a room during urban operations training in Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

400 newly-recruited Syrian police officers began counterterrorism training to work in the region of the October 2019 Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria.[383]

The DIA, citing media reports, said that the task force cells also conduct intelligence collection, bomb disposal, and special operations in Turkish-controlled areas of Syria to combat not only ISIS but also the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the main fighting force in the SDF.[384] In contrast to the United States, Turkey views the YPG as an extension of the rebel PKK, which has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States and has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish government.[385]

The DIA reported that pro-Syrian regime forces also launched operations against ISIS this quarter, particularly in Homs province. While pro-regime forces continued to prioritize operations against Turkish and Turkish-backed opposition forces Idlib province, the DIA said that the Syrian regime remains capable of responding to threats from ISIS as long as it has significant assistance from pro-regime allies.[386]

AUGUST 27
ISIS ambushes regime-aligned militia near Dayr az Zawr; at least 14 militia fighters and 5 ISIS fighters killed

SEPTEMBER 7
ISIS briefly takes control of Doubayat gas field in Homs province in clashes with regime and Russian forces

SEPTEMBER 18
U.S. military deploys mechanized troops with Bradley armored infantry vehicles to northeastern Syria

SEP

AUGUST 18
ISIS detonates IED, wounding two SDF soldiers in Dayr az Zawr

SEPTEMBER 3
ISIS claims gunfire attack that kills SDF commander in Dayr az Zawr

SEPTEMBER 15
Gunmen kill Syrian Air Force intelligence commander in Dara'a province, the latest in a series of ISIS-suspected assassinations

Coalition Support to SDF Facilities Holding ISIS Detainees is "Temporary Fix"

Since the territorial defeat of ISIS 18 months ago, Coalition and international officials have been calling for a solution to the dangers posed by the estimated 12,000 ISIS detainees being held in mostly ad hoc, overcrowded SDF detention facilities.[387] The number of foreign terrorist fighters (non-Iraqi or non-Syrian detainees) remains approximately 2,000.[388]

Since the territorial defeat of ISIS 18 months ago, Coalition and international officials have been calling for a solution to the dangers posed by the estimated 12,000 ISIS detainees being held in mostly ad hoc, overcrowded SDF detention facilities.

According to CJTF-OIR, within the Coalition operating region of northeastern Syria, there are 14 detention facilities and one youth rehabilitation center housing ISIS detainees. Of these, one facility in Hasakah is built well enough to serve as a long-term detention facility. CJTF- OIR reported this quarter that the Coalition is funding projects to decrease overcrowding in other facilities.[389]

OUSD(P) ISA reported that U.S. investments included shoring up detention facility infrastructure and constructing new purpose-built facilities.[390] It said that infrastructure projects will help ensure detainees are treated humanely, while also improving internal security by enabling greater separation of the detainee population.[391] CJTF-OIR also supplied the SDF with medical supplies, COVID-19 protective gear, uniforms for both guards and detainees, and containerized housing units for guard forces to create detention space.[392]

CJTF-OIR reported that, with these improvements, the SDF's ability to manage its detention facilities improved slightly this quarter.[393]

Ultimately, however, CJTF-OIR said its efforts are temporary fixes to give time for the international community to "develop a diplomatic and humanitarian response to mitigate the risk of detainee breakouts and [ISIS] resurgence."[394] OUSD(P) ISA said that, as long as the detainee population remains large, ISIS will continue to plan and carry out detainee escapes and incite riots in detentions facilities.[395]

This quarter, detainees at the main ISIS detention facility in Hasakah launched two separate riots in September, according to open source reporting. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said riots erupted September 10 after the SDF cracked down on several detainees caught digging tunnels in an attempt to escape, and another riot erupted on September 20.[396] OUSD(P) ISA said that the SDF reported that no ISIS detainees escaped from SDF facilities this quarter, and the SDF remains capable of responding to external attacks and quelling internal rioting.[397]

According to the DoS, the SDF has prioritized the processing of Syrian detainees held for committing nonviolent crimes to alleviate crowded conditions in SDF detention facilities.[398] OUSD(P) ISA said that the United States continues to view repatriation of foreign detainees to their countries of origin as the "best long-term option to decrease overcrowding" in SDF detention facilities.[399] Toward that end, the United States worked with the Iraqi government this quarter to advocate for the repatriation and reintegration of Iraqi detainees, who make up the largest segment of ISIS fighters in SDF detention.[400]

The United States also repatriated four foreign terrorist fighters from SDF custody in Syria to face criminal charges in the United States, and transferred a fifth detainee to Italy—the first DoD-facilitated repatriations since December 2019, OUSD(P) ISA reported.[401]

Tribal Leader Killings Prompt Unrest, "New Opportunities for ISIS" in NE Syria

In early August, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a vehicle carrying a prominent SDF-aligned Aqidat tribal leader in Dayr az Zawr province. His assassination, along with a string of other tribal leader killings, and attacks on SDF-held economic infrastructure, weakened the confidence of some communities in the SDF within Arab-majority areas of northeastern Syria, the DIA reported.[402]

Arab tribes across the Dayr az Zawr province staged protests against the SDF following the assassinations.[403] Some of the protests turned violent when the SDF reportedly opened fire on demonstrators to disperse them.[404] The DIA reported that some of the clashes were provoked by ISIS, in areas east of the Euphrates River near coalition forces.[405] Media reports said that ISIS appeared to be behind the unrest after it released a video in late August claiming hundreds of operations and attacks in Dayr az Zawr.[406]

USCENTCOM reported that local populations in Dayr az Zawr complain of inadequate security while ISIS and other actors assassinate SDF members, tribal leaders, and other influential civilians that Arab communities.[407]

Tribal leaders in August made demands that the SDF investigate the attacks and bring the perpetrators to justice, according to open source reporting. The reporting said that they also called for better security and tribal autonomy from SDF-led rule. In mid-August SDF and Coalition officials held a meeting with thousands of tribal notables to try to ease tensions.[408]

The DoS reported that in response to the unrest in Dayr az Zawr, and their desire to focus on community engagement, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC)—the political counterpart of the SDF—launched a new initiative that included community listening sessions in each major population center and involved tribal and civil society leaders in Raqqah, Tabqa, Manbij, Jazeerah, and Dayr az Zawr. The initiative addressed complaints about governance, transparency, and representation.[409]

In addition, the DoS said that SDF and the SDC continued efforts to engage with Arab-majority communities; SDF Commander General Mazloum met with senior tribal officials in Dayr az Zawr; an anti-corruption campaign investigated officials of the Self-administration of North and East Syria (SNES) in response to community complaints; and the SNES took actions to restructure local administrative councils as part of efforts to improve tribal representation in the provincial administrations.[410]

USCENTCOM said that despite limited efforts by the SDF and SDC to address Arab demands for more equitable power sharing by incorporating Arab military and civilian leaders into administrative and military structures, Arab leaders on military and civilian councils often lack the level of influence of their Kurdish counterparts.[411]

ARAB DISCONTENT IN DAYR AZ ZAWR PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR ISIS, REGIME, IRAN, BUT POPULATION STILL PREFERS SDF

The DIA reported that Arab discontent in eastern Syria provided new opportunities for ISIS, the Syrian regime, and Iran to increase their outreach to sympathetic tribesman, with the aim of destabilizing SDF-held areas.[412] A week after the SDF held a meeting with tribal notables, the Syrian

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Tribal Leader Killings Prompt Unrest, "New Opportunities for ISIS" in NE Syria *(continued from previous page)*

regime hosted a tribal conference in Aleppo with 500 tribal sheikhs, announcing support for the Aqidat tribe in Dayr az Zawr.[413]

The bleak economic situation and concerns about the Coalition's commitment in Syria also negatively impact support for the SDF, USCENTCOM said. Some Arabs accuse the SDF of arbitrary detentions and hold the SDF responsible for displaced persons residing in al-Hol, USCENTCOM said that Arab communities also seek increased influence over SDF military councils and tribal participation in the administration of territory.[414]

Additionally, USCENTCOM said that Russia's efforts to separately recruit tribesmen into Russian-backed militias in Syria have achieved mixed results. And while Iran and its proxies and supporters can lure tribesmen into pro-Iran local militias with financial incentives, other populations are motivated to align with the SDF due to the presence of Shia militias and attempted Iranian influence in the area.[415]

USCENTCOM assessed that despite numerous Arab grievances with the SDF, a majority of Arabs in Dayr az Zawr continue to provide support to the group as their preferred alternative to ISIS or the Syrian regime.[416] According to USCENTCOM, the SDF regularly releases detainees in an attempt to appease Arab tribes and periodically facilitates the relocation of displaced persons from al-Hol.[417]

However, USCENTCOM said that SDF concessions are unlikely to placate all tribal groups—and protests likely will continue for the near-term. At the same time, USCENTCOM reported that despite ongoing regime efforts to antagonize SDF-tribal relations, perceptions of the regime in SDF-controlled territory remain negative. It said that enduring regime corruption, widespread regime abuses against the population, and SDF and the Coalition presence continue to impede regime efforts to sway larger portions of the population.[418]

After the quarter ended, the Department of Justice announced the additional transfer of two detainees, whose British citizenship had been stripped, from Iraq to the United States to face prosecution in connection with a brutal hostage-taking scheme that involved the torture and beheadings of four American citizens, along with the deaths of British and Japanese hostages in Syria. The men, El Shafee Elsheikh and Alexanda Kotey, were part of a four-member cell known as "the Beatles" because of their British accents. They were transferred to the United States after Britain agreed to share evidence with U.S. prosecutors subject to the United States' assurance that it would not seek the death penalty. The two had been held since October 2019 by U.S. forces in Iraq, after being captured in Syria.[419]

SDF Faces Challenges in Guarding Displacement Camps

According to the DIA, several dozen women and children with suspected links to ISIS were smuggled out of the sprawling al-Hol displacement camp in Syria, where conditions are difficult and concerns over the spread of COVID-19 have increased.[420] The DIA said that those who left the camp often bribed low-level security guards. It said smugglers who reside in nearby villages regularly loiter around al-Hol and facilitate the movement of people and goods out of the camp.[421]

According to the DoS, the IDP camps in northeastern Syria house more than 65,000 displaced persons, including 10,000 family members of foreign ISIS fighters.

The DoS reported that these individuals departed from the camp outside the formal reintegration system. It added that several hundred additional residents of al-Hol departed through formal reintegration agreements with community leaders in Dayr az Zawr.[422]

The DIA said that women in the foreigner annex suspected of ISIS affiliation also stepped up a social media campaign this quarter aimed at radicalizing children and teenagers. According to the DIA, the women increased their participation on social media platforms and forums promoting ISIS ideology in exchange for financial support from ISIS members abroad. The women posted videos of children imitating ISIS fighter behavior, chanting Islamic State slogans, and praising the Islamic State flag.[423] According to the DIA, ISIS members exploit the absence of formal education within al-Hol to indoctrinate children and teenagers to become the next generation of ISIS fighters.[424]

According to the DoS, the IDP camps in northeastern Syria house more than 65,000 displaced persons, including 10,000 family members of foreign ISIS fighters.[425] The DoS reported that the number of individuals residing in al-Hol (Syrian, Iraqi, and foreign) who still identify with ISIS is unknown, and that two-thirds of the population in the camp is under the age of 12 and more than a quarter is under the age of five. The DoS said that with a lack of formal schooling in the camps, some of these children may be susceptible to being exploited and radicalized by individuals affiliated with ISIS.[426]

According to the DoS, Russia worked with the SDF to repatriate 26 Russian children from al-Hol and is preparing documents for an additional 80 child repatriations.[427] France and the United Kingdom also sought to repatriate their citizens.[428]

However, most countries, particularly in Europe, have rejected repatriation of their nationals who joined ISIS and many have stripped them of their citizenship. This quarter, a British court ruled that Shamima Begum, an ISIS member being housed in al-Hol, will be allowed to return to the United Kingdom so that she can challenge the stripping of her citizenship in person. An official with the International Crisis Group called this an opportunity to "chip away" at the resistance to repatriation efforts.[429]

Reintegration Begins for Syrian Women and Children, Iraqi Women and Children Must Wait

The DoS reported that local SNES authorities restarted the process of returning Syrian women and children to their communities this quarter, though continuing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions slowed the process.[430] The DoS said that the local authorities coordinate directly with communities. Since June 2019, about 5,000 Syrians have returned to their communities from al-Hol.[431] More than 2,100 displaced Syrians have left al-Hol since the beginning of 2020, of those 220 departed from al-Hol this quarter.[432]

The DoS said that COVID-19 restrictions added to the "challenging political dynamics" that have prevented progress in repatriating some 30,000 Iraqis, including women, children, and elderly, who are residing in Syrian camps.[433] The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and UNAMI continued regular engagements with the Iraqi government to advocate for and facilitate the return of Iraqi ISIS fighters from SDF detention facilities and of Iraqi citizens in displacement camps in northeast Syria.[434]

The DoS reported that the DoS and the DoD coordinated on monitoring ISIS fighters in SDF detention and their family members residing in IDP camps such as al-Hol and Roj.[435]

PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT IN SYRIA

Coalition Resumes Advising of Syrian Partner Forces

Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that all formal training of the SDF had been paused due to COVID-19, but that it would resume when safe to do so.[436] CJTF-OIR stated this quarter that "formal advising and over the horizon partner operations resumed."[437] CJTF-OIR stated that Coalition advising happened ahead of and during almost every counter-ISIS operation that the SDF undertook. CJTF-OIR stated that SDF operations often involved input from Coalition advisors during the planning of operations and coordination of resources and ISR support.[438]

CJTF-OIR said Coalition advisors trained and developed the SDF on counter-IED tactics for force protection and noted improved capability in that area.

CJTF-OIR stated that the Coalition conducted some advising through partnered patrols and Coalition combined exercises. Specifically, CJTF-OIR said Coalition advisors trained and developed the SDF on counter-IED tactics for force protection and noted improved capability in that area.[439] However, CJTF-OIR stated that the SDF is not being trained to provide freedom of movement to the local populace or security for essential community services, which CJTF-OIR noted were among the SDF's greatest weaknesses last quarter.[440] CJTF-OIR added that it is training the SDF and other forces currently partnered with Coalition forces in Syria in counterterrorism measures.[441]

SDF Demonstrates Improved Capability to Conduct Counter-ISIS Operations

Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that COVID-19 had also briefly paused the Coalition's ability to assess SDF capabilities.[442] CJTF-OIR stated that through multiple accompanied missions this quarter, Coalition forces were able to continue assessing Syrian partner forces. For example, CJTF-OIR said that Coalition advisors accompanied an SDF reconnaissance team on a patrol and assessed their ability to adjust their security postures as required, shift between movement formations and techniques, and to recover a vehicle. CJTF-OIR conducted additional assessments during a live fire exercise that integrated SDF elements and Coalition advisors from planning to execution. CJTF-OIR also reported that Coalition advisors visited SDF border guards and assessed their level of equipment and the security of their checkpoints. Lastly, CJTF-OIR said that advisors were able observe SDF counterterrorism, or "finish," teams in action, on unilateral operations and in training exercises, and assessed their ability to maneuver and adjust security postures to support capturing a target.[443]

CJTF-OIR assessed that the SDF has demonstrated continued improvement in several key capabilities. For example, CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF's ability to conduct targeted counterterrorism raids improved this quarter. CJTF-OIR said that the SDF conducted several unilateral high-risk arrests and "finish" operations. CJTF-OIR assessed that these operations demonstrated the SDF's maturing capability to maneuver, find targets, and exploit information gained from targets. [444]

CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF has shown an increasing willingness to conduct unilateral operations outside of the Eastern Syria Security Area, where Coalition forces operate.

According to CJTF-OIR, Coalition advisors observed that the SDF conduced structured targeting cycles, demonstrating that SDF intelligence collection, analysis, and targeting capabilities also improved this quarter.[445] Additionally, CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF improved training for missions by instituting rehearsals as part of their planning process for operations.[446]

CJTF-OIR reported that recent SDF operations and training have emphasized coordination with adjacent units, and Coalition forces have designed missions that employ multiple teams from the SDF. CJTF-OIR stated that the emphasis on coordination has helped mitigate competition and rivalry between SDF units, but noted that continued partnering and advising will ensure Coalition forces are able to monitor and help improve coordination in the SDF.[447]

SDF Demonstrates Increased Ability to Conduct Unilateral Operations Outside of the ESSA

CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF has shown an increasing willingness to conduct unilateral operations outside of the Eastern Syria Security Area, (ESSA), where Coalition forces operate. According to CJTF-OIR, operations outside the ESSA, or what is referred to as over the horizon operations, are infrequent and are typically targeted point raids against a specific location or are deliberate detention operations launched against a specific, targeted person of interest.[448]

CJTF-OIR said that by their very nature, over the horizon operations are deployed at range and require the SDF to utilize its own vehicles, which in turn require all unilateral SDF over the horizon operations to involve infiltration by a ground assault force. CJTF-OIR stated that as of September 9, the SDF conducted a total of nine unilateral operations, of which four were over the horizon operations. All were deliberate detention operations conducted outside of the ESSA and all were planned using SDF-derived intelligence products.[449]

Despite New Guard Force, SDF Reliant on Coalition to Guard Petroleum Assets

CJTF-OIR reported last quarter that it was training a critical petroleum infrastructure (CPI) force to guard the oilfields and assets in northeastern Syria.[450] That force is still being developed.[451] CJTF-OIR reported that it does not currently maintain a day-to-day working partnership with the CPI guard forces, but it has observed continued SDF training of CPI forces at three training academies in the ESSA. Approximately 2,000 new CPI forces graduated training classes this quarter.[452]

CJTF-OIR said that while U.S. forces operating in the ESSA have little direct contact with the CPI force, this quarter, U.S. forces observed less than 5 percent of the CPI guard force at petroleum infrastructure sites in the ESSA. CJTF-OIR explained that because CPI guards are more broadly part of the Provincial Internal Security Forces, some are being redirected to guard detention facilities and borders.[453]

The DIA reported that despite forming these dedicated units to protect key energy infrastructure, the SDF relies principally on Coalition forces and its partnership with the United States to protect critical petroleum infrastructure.[454]

According to the DIA, the SDF lacks an organic air defense capability and therefore relies on U.S. forces and Coalition air power to defend important oil and gas fields. The DIA said that without the U.S. presence, the SDF would likely seek protection from the Syrian regime to protect it from a possible Turkish-backed offensive and would likely cede energy reserves to the regime as a bargaining chip.[455]

In addition, the DIA reported that although SDF CPI units are equipped to keep ISIS from seizing and holding major oil and gas fields in Syria, SDF units would also struggle without Coalition support to prevent future ISIS infiltration attempts at smaller, more remote locations in the desert areas of Dayr az Zawr and Hasakah provinces, where SDF manpower is stretched.[456] CJTF-OIR reported that while ISIS did not attempt to infiltrate any of the critical petroleum sites in Coalition operating areas this quarter, the organization previously funded its operations through oil revenues and therefore has incentive to seek to regain access.[457]

A U.S. Marine speaks with a member of the Syrian Democratic Forces through a local translator during a joint security patrol in Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

SDF Oil Deal with U.S. Company Riles Russia, Syrian Regime

In late July, a U.S. company signed an agreement with the SDF-backed SNES to help modernize its oil production.[458] The DIA, citing media reports, said that the U.S. company will service the oil fields and market crude oil from northeastern Syria.[459] Media reports identified the company as Delta Crescent Energy, LLC, and said that it intends to provide the SDF help with its energy exploration, development, refining and transportation in order to increase sales to external buyers.[460] One media agency reported that the contract is expected to produce billions of dollars in revenues for SNES authorities.[461]

The agreement drew protest from other parties in Syria. The Syrian regime said in a statement that the deal was an attempt "to steal Syria's oil under the sponsorship and support of the American administration."[462] A Russian Foreign Ministry statement accused the United States of violating international legal standards and "robbing and illegally trading in the country's natural resources."[463] Russia also joined with Turkey and Iran to issue a joint statement objecting to the deal.[464]

Last quarter, the DIA reported that the SDF had been increasingly subjected to attempts by Russian and Syrian regime patrols to gain more access to the ESSA near major northeastern oilfields, and as recently as December 2019, the regime had awarded anticipatory contracts to Russian companies to develop oil infrastructure in areas of eastern Syria under SDF control.[465] This quarter, the DIA said Russian forces did not make overt efforts to forcibly gain access to the SDF-held oil fields, but rather increased outreach to the SDF, while putting pressure on U.S. forces with the ultimate goal of compelling a U.S. withdrawal from northeastern Syria."[466]

The DIA reported that, according to press reporting, SDF-aligned Arab tribal leaders also voiced concern over the oil agreement, having long sought autonomous control of oil and natural gas reserves in Arab-majority areas.[467]

The DoS reported that the oil deal has "powerful" potential to help the region and that the U.S. Government does not own, control, or manage the oil resources in Syria.[468] The DoS stated that the U.S. Government "does not direct the financial decisions of local partners." It said that part of the U.S. mission in Syria is assisting the SDF in securing the oil fields from ISIS, and populations in areas liberated from ISIS "make their own decisions on local governance" and operate the oil fields to generate revenue for people living in northeast Syria.[469] The Syrian regime aims to recapture control over northeastern Syria and the oilfields.[470]

The DIA reported that, according to an SNES annual report, approximately 60 percent of its revenue comes from petroleum sales.[471] According to research analysts and experts cited in media reports, the SNES controls the majority of Syria's oil wealth, including the country's largest oil field, Suwaydiyah, in Hasakah province.[472]

The SDF produced at least 60,000 barrels per day of oil this quarter from the fields under its control, selling a large portion to the Syrian regime and smaller amounts to the Iraqi KRG, the DIA reported.[473] While low global oil prices and the Syrian economic crisis have led to declining revenues, the DIA said it has not observed reductions in SNES civil services this quarter as a direct

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SDF Oil Deal with U.S. Company Riles Russia, Syrian Regime *(continued from previous page)*

result of the reduced oil revenues.[474] However, it said that based on the SNES annual report, it assessed the losses probably have contributed to difficulties paying SNES administrative salaries.[475]

The Lead IG observed that one outstanding question regarding the oil deal is whether it will benefit the Syrian regime in the long run. According to media reports, the contract between the SNES and Delta Crescent spans 25 years.[476] The SNES is a nonstate entity, and it is unclear how long the SNES and SDF will continue to exist when the U.S. military draws down its presence in Syria. The Syrian regime has slowly retaken territory that it lost over the course of the Syrian civil war, and the regime has been making attempts to pull the SDF away from its relationship with the United States.[477]

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN SYRIA

Russian Forces Increasingly Provocative; United States Deploys Unit with Bradley Vehicles into Eastern Syria

Tensions escalated between Russian and Coalition forces in August. While it's not entirely clear that this occurred in response to the oil contract signed between a U.S. company and the SDF, the Russian military carried out dangerous breaches of deconfliction protocols with the Coalition in the weeks following the announcement of the deal.[478] CJTF-OIR said that although there were fewer violations of established deconfliction protocols by Russian forces this quarter compared with last quarter, "the severity of the violations is notable."[479]

Coalition and SDF partner forces have been operating in close proximity to Russian, Syrian regime and pro-regime forces in what CJTF-OIR has described as a "complex operating environment," since the October 2019 Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria, which prompted U.S. forces to redeploy east.[480] Russian forces deployed to areas from which U.S. forces withdrew and developed a base at Qamishli Airport, in the far northeast corner of Syria. The DIA said this quarter that Russian forces use their proximity to Coalition and partner forces to encroach on and pressure U.S. and SDF forces.[481]

OUSD(P) ISA reported that Russia has stated publicly its desire for Coalition forces to depart from Syria and "appears intent on continuing to violate the agreed upon protocols to achieve this goal."[482] OUSD(P) ISA stated that it was not clear whether Russian military leaders had given explicit direction to instigate these risky incidents, or whether inexperienced and undertrained Russian forces were acting on general direction to pressure U.S. forces.[483]

The majority of "close interactions" between the Russian military and Coalition forces occurred in or around the northeastern Qamishli deconfliction zone. CJTF-OIR said that Russian forces routinely enter Coalition areas south of the deconfliction zone by ground or by rotary wing flights, and have taken a "more aggressive approach" since June, conducting operations and then broadcasting interdictions of Coalition patrols to gain support of local populations.[484] CJTF-OIR said that the Russian military increasingly requested access to Hasakah province on humanitarian grounds. However, CJTF-OIR said that it could not verify any humanitarian activity and that the Russian military wanted to create "an illusion" of assistance.[485]

In addition, CJTF-OIR reported that pro-regime forces in Hasakah province—likely influenced by the Russian military—steadily sought to expand their presence, and to cut off major routes connecting Coalition forces with supply bases or set up checkpoints to force Coalition patrols to take longer routes.[486]

For example, pro-regime forces attacked Coalition forces at a pro-regime forces checkpoint on August 17. Accouding to OUSD(P) ISA, the forces exchanged fire, resulting in the destruction of the checkpoint.[487] CJTF-OIR said that following the incident, pro-regime forces further restricted Coalition freedom of maneuver.[488] A Syria monitoring group reported that one Syrian was killed in the incident.[489]

An August 25 confrontation between Russian and U.S. patrols culminated in a collision which caused injuries to several U.S. soldiers, CJTF-OIR reported.[490] Video of the incident posted on Twitter appeared to show Russian helicopters flying low as a Russian vehicle rammed into an American vehicle after a high speed chase.[491]

The incident prompted rebuke from U.S. military officials and a DoD statement called the Russian behavior "dangerous and unacceptable.[492] Russian officials blamed the U.S.

U.S. Army convoy in northeastern Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

forces for blocking their patrol.[493] CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that because of this "aggressive behavior and disregard for protocols," Coalition forces have allocated additional resources for force protection.[494]

On September 18, CJTF-OIR deployed Bradley armored vehicles into eastern Syria. USCENTCOM reported that the presence of mechanized infantry assets "preserves Coalition forces' freedom of movement to continue defeat-ISIS operations," including the protection of oil infrastructure.[495] Multiple media reports stated that the deployment was a direct result of the Russian military harassment of U.S. and Coalition forces.[496] USCENTCOM stated that the Bradleys enable the continued focus on the mission in "an ever-changing complex operating environment in which the United States expects all parties to abide by deconfliction protocols."[497]

USCENTCOM reported that the presence of mechanized infantry assets "preserves Coalition forces' freedom of movement to continue defeat-ISIS operations," including the protection of oil infrastructure.

A CJTF-OIR spokesperson stated that the deployment of Bradleys "will help ensure the force protection of Coalition forces."[498] Media reports cited a USCENTCOM spokesperson as saying that the deployment also included U.S. Sentinel radar, used to track Russian helicopters, and the United States beefed up fighter jet and Apache helicopter patrols over northeastern Syria. The spokesman said that the deployment demonstrated U.S. resolve to defend Coalition forces to ensure they can continue their mission to defeat ISIS.[499]

The deployment marked the first time Bradleys were sent to Syria since October 2019, when a mechanized unit briefly deployed to the region following the Turkish incursion into northern Syria and the redeployment of U.S. forces to eastern Syria.[500] USCENTCOM removed those Bradleys from Syria within weeks.[501]

CJTF-OIR said that Russian forces tend to comply more often with deconfliction protocols in the MERV. CJTF-OIR said that there have been two indirect fire incidents in the MERV since the protocols were established, but no Coalition casualties.[502] CJTF-OIR said that although there was no Russian ground activity in the deconfliction area around Tanf Garrison, the Russians conduct military and transport aircraft and UAV flights in the area without properly deconflicting their movements.[503]

Tensions Persist Between Turkey and the SDF in Area of NE Syria Where Turkish Forces are Present

Tensions persisted this quarter in areas of the October 2019 Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria, with skirmishes involving gunfire and shelling erupting between SDF and Turkish-backed Syrian National Army forces in areas such as Tal Tamr and Ras al Ayn.[504]

The DIA, citing Turkish press reporting, said Turkey blames the YPG for routinely conducting attacks in northeastern Syria using explosive-laden vehicles and other explosive devices, which caused dozens of civilian casualties. In late June, Turkey killed three YPG members in a drone strike, according to Turkish press reporting, the DIA said.[505] In the cities of Ras al Ayn, dozens of people were killed or wounded by vehicle-borne blasts in July, according to Syrian monitors and Turkish media.[506] The DoS released statements condemning these attacks as "acts of terrorism."[507]

Violence also erupted between Turkey and its militias and the SDF, with exchanges of small arms and artillery fire on multiple occasions during the quarter.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported a buildup of Turkish-aligned forces in the area in July, as Syrian regime and aligned SDF forces deployed reinforcements along the boundary between them. Turkey later withdrew part of those reinforcements, the monitoring group said.[508] Violence also erupted between Turkey and its militias and the SDF, with exchanges of small arms and artillery fire on multiple occasions during the quarter.[509]

REGIME AND TURKISH-BACKED FORCES ALSO CLASH

According to the DIA, tensions also flared between Syrian regime and Turkish-backed opposition forces this quarter along the Syrian-Turkish border in the region of the 2019 Turkish incursion.[510] The DIA said that an estimated 4,000 to 10,000 regime forces in northeastern Syria remain deployed between the cities of Manbij and Tal Tamr.[511]

According to the DIA, the Syrian regime has increased its local recruitment efforts to supplement existing units in northeastern Syria. As recently as June, Syrian army units and regime-aligned Sunni tribal militias in Hasakah Province continued to harass U.S. patrols transiting the area.[512]

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Senior Level Coordinator Named, NSC Approval Pending

In August, Secretary Pompeo approved Ambassador Nathan Sales to be the ISIS Detainee Coordinator for the U.S. Government. The DoS submitted his name to the NSC for further approval. This position was mandated by section 1224 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020.[513]

The law also requires the coordinator to submit a first annual report to Congress on matters concerning ISIS members in SDF custody, and on related issues, within 180 days of the date of enactment of the law. Among the matters to be covered in the report are efforts to arrange for the prosecution of ISIS members. According to the DoS, the Secretary of State approved the initial report and transmitted it to the NSC for "further approval."[514] The first annual report was transmitted to Congress on July 30.[515]

U.S. Presses Turkey and Syrian Opposition Coalition to Investigate Alleged Crimes

This quarter, the DoS reported that it was deeply concerned by reports that Turkish-supported opposition (TSO) groups engaged in "gross violations of human rights and violations of the law of armed conflict" in northeast Syria.[516] The DoS said it pressed the government of Turkey, the Syrian Opposition Coalition, the official Syrian political opposition representative body, and the TSOs to investigate these allegations and hold those found responsible to account.[517]

Some of these abuses occurred in areas the SDF-liberated from ISIS with Coalition assistance and which Turkey and the TSOs have since seized from the SDF, displacing more than 200,000 civilians. More than 70,000 civilians are displaced and unable to return home due to these TSO abuses. This situation places additional strain on authorities and NGOs in

SDF-aligned northeast Syria. According to the DoS, the abuses and competing TSO factions in northern Syria continued to generate grievances and security gaps this quarter, which observers claimed ISIS could exploit to build support.[518]

The DoS said it received multiple reports by the UN Commission of Inquiry for Syria and various human rights and media organizations of TSO abuses in Afrin and the Turkish incursion areas in northeast Syria. These allegations included murder, torture (including the torture of children), extortion, rape, kidnapping, abduction, looting, property appropriation, and the forced displacement of residents to facilitate the resettlement of new populations, and the repeated shutting off of water access to more than 500,000 civilians.[519]

The DoS said it received multiple reports by the UN Commission of Inquiry for Syria and various human rights and media organizations of Turkish-supported opposition abuses in Afrin and the Turkish incursion areas in northeast Syria.

The reports also included accusations of abuses against religious and ethnic minorities, particularly Kurds and Yazidis; pressure while in detention to convert to Islam; the desecration of religious shrines; and the looting of archaeological sites and homes.[520] The UN Commission of Inquiry for Syria reported this quarter that TSO groups pressured a Yazidi woman they kidnapped to convert to Islam, and vandalized and looted Yazidi shrines in Afrin, "further challenging the precarious existence of the Yazidi community as a religious minority in [TSO]-controlled regions."[521]

According to the DoS, the Syrian Opposition Coalition requested information from the U.S. Government to investigate the abuses, but opposition military or police entities made no arrests or prosecutions this quarter.[522] According to the DoS, the United States has not sanctioned any TSOs in response to these reports.[523]

The DoS also said it noted reports of terrorist attacks in areas of northern Syria where the Turkish military is present, including multiple detonations of vehicle-borne explosive devices and intra-TSO fighting, which caused the deaths of dozens of civilians. The DoS reported that although there was no attribution or claims for these attacks, Turkish officials claimed most were carried out by the YPG and other groups they claim are affiliated with the PKK, and regularly raised these allegations with U.S. officials.[524]

The DoS reported that it raised the issue of alleged human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law with officials in Turkey and the Syrian Opposition Coalition. The DoS reiterated their expectation that Turkey and the Syrian opposition will take credible action to investigate alleged violations and abuses, promote accountability, and pursue steps to stop the behavior.[525]

The DoS reported that this quarter the Syrian Opposition Coalition issued a statement confirming its commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of all civilians and announced that the Syrian National Army had ordered two TSOs to move their headquarters from the cities of Afrin and Ras al-Ain to camps away from civilian centers. The DoS said that it had not verified whether the TSOs moved their headquarters, and reports of TSO abuses and infighting in the cities continued. Additionally, the newly elected President of the Syrian Opposition Coalition indicated interest in a fact-finding committee to help investigate recent allegations.[526]

Syrian Democratic Forces Comply with UN Request to Demobilize Child Soldiers, NGOs Gain Access to Minors in Detention

The SDF has a history of recruiting child soldiers, which the international community has condemned. In August, the United Nations released a plan calling for the immediate demobilization of child soldiers.[527] The DoS reported that it urged the SDF to implement the UN-SDF child soldier demobilization plan, and that the DoS was "encouraged by the SDF's progress."[528]

The United Nations confirmed that the SDF demobilized 35 minors (30 boys, 5 girls) this quarter and that the SNES returned these minors to their families for community-based reintegration, the DoS reported.[529] Additionally, the SDF and SNES announced the establishment of the Civil Complaints Mechanism, a key component of the UN-SDF child-soldier demobilization initiative, which provided parents with SNES and SDF contacts who helped to identify and demobilize minors from the SDF. According to the DoS, in most cases minors returned to their homes when parents engaged the SNES and SDF for help in removing their children from the SDF.[530]

In July, the United Nations confirmed that the SDF left 12 of the 28 schools it was using for military purposes in northeast Syria. According to the DoS, these actions were a result of the UN-SDF child soldier demobilization initiative. Another 2 of the 28 schools are in the Turkish incursion area and no longer under SDF control. In September, the SDF unilaterally identified two additional schools it was using for military purposes and said it vacated them and turned the schools over to the Dayr az Zawr Civil Council. The DoS reported the United Nations verified these withdrawals.[531]

The DoS reported that in addition to ending its use of child soldiers, the SDF was working with NGOs to facilitate access to ISIS-linked minors in SDF detention.[532] This quarter, the SDF facilitated three NGO visits to the prisons for humanitarian assessments, and continued conversations with the NGOs on "durable solutions."[533] The NGOs reported a range of needs in the prisons and are creating plans to provide aid; the NGOs also said that "durable solutions for non-Syrians should include repatriation by and to their countries of origin."[534] The DoS also reported that the SDF had agreed to investigate and address incidents of "cruel treatment and ill-treatment" of individuals held in military intelligence facilities.[535]

STABILIZATION

DoS Reduces Stabilization Programming Due to Limited Funding

The DoS reported that the President's FY 2021 budget request did not include stabilization funding for Syria. In addition, the DoS said it was awaiting a decision from the President on the allocation of FY 2020 funding for Syria stabilization. The DoS's Near Eastern Affairs Assistance Coordination (NEA AC) office reduced program activities in Syria this quarter, due to funding constraints. These ongoing efforts include support to education, independent media, vocational training, and essential services provided by local councils, support for civil society, the Syrian political process, local security actors, and emergency first responders.[536]

The DoS said that NEA AC-managed stabilization programming would need to be readjusted due to reduced funding in the next quarter. Despite the delay in FY 2020 funding being released, the Department and USAID are notifying $5 million in COVID-19 supplemental funding for the Syria response. Programs supported by the DoS's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and Office of Global Criminal Justice could increase during the next quarter, as those bureaus will begin programming their allocation of FY 2019 funding. The programming is intended to support transitional justice, reconciliation, civil society, and accountability efforts, including accountability for ISIS crimes.[537]

Some Stabilization Activities Resumed After COVID-19 Pandemic Restrictions Eased

The DoS said it paused some stabilization activities during the initial weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic and restructured activities to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection. According to the DoS, it resumed some activities this quarter and modified others.

Community Security: In-person training for internal security forces along with other community security projects in Raqqa and Dayr az Zawr resumed this quarter.[538]

Education: The NEA AC's education project briefly paused operations in northeast Syria due to COVID-19 pandemic-related concerns. During that time, the program implemented distance learning activities to deliver psychosocial support, remedial education, and vocational training; however, limited internet access hindered the delivery of training.[539]

Independent Media: The NEA AC's project supporting independent media in Syria provided operational and production support to Syrian media partners this quarter. Most Syrian stations based in Turkey started transitioning key staff back into the office. Most capacity building and training activities were suspended during the quarter due to COVID-19 restrictions and funding constraints.[540]

Local Governance: The NEA AC's project supporting essential service provision and emergency first responders continued throughout the quarter. In-person capacity-building training and mentoring activities resumed.[541]

The DoS reported that it continued to support other stabilization activities intended to broaden civil society in northeastern Syria. To avoid putting those working on these activities at risk, they will not be described in this report. In general, the DoS supported civil society programs, including capacity building, local reconciliation efforts that focused on dispute resolution, and efforts to reintegrate polarized returnee communities.[542]

USAID Adapts Stabilization Awards to Respond to COVID-19

As of the end of the quarter, the Syrian government had confirmed more than 3,700 cases of COVID-19, and 170 deaths, in areas held by the regime. The United Nations reported approximately 1,100 cases in northeast Syria, including 52 deaths, and 75 COVID-19 cases in northwest Syria, including 1 death. The rise in confirmed COVID-19 cases across Syria, notably the increase in cases with untraced origins, likely indicates widespread community

The Deputy Prime Minister of Syria (on screens), addresses the general debate of the UN General Assembly's 75th session. (UN photo)

transmission, according to the United Nations.[543] As of mid-August, approximately 80 percent of COVID-19 cases in regime-held areas were not linked to any known source, which is evidence of community transmission, and demonstrates that actual case counts are likely much higher.[544]

The United Nations reported that after more than 9 years of conflict, Syria's health system and water and sanitation infrastructure are insufficient to respond to the pandemic. In northwest Syria, densely populated areas, particularly overcrowded camps and informal settlements with limited access to running water or adequate health facilities, are particularly exposed to an outbreak. In addition, testing capacities are extremely low, and medical equipment is difficult to procure amidst a challenging humanitarian access environment.[545]

In northeastern Syria, USAID is supporting the SNES's COVID Task Force with short-term technical assistance. Programming funded by USAID is intended to better coordinate the response to the pandemic, develop policies and a strategy for controlling the spread of the virus, and to develop a strategy for reopening parts of the economy as the situation allows.[546] The Syria Southern Assistance Platform, which now focuses entirely on northeast Syria, adapted part of existing USAID programming to respond to COVID-19 by:

- Deploying a Health Systems Expert to help build the capacity of the SNES's Health Commission and regional Health Committees to respond to COVID-19; areas of capacity include the development of policy on tracing, isolation, and treatment;
- Providing the SNES a grant in support of its COVID-19 monitoring and tracing teams;
- Rehabilitating Abu Hamam Hospital in the Lower MERV with attention paid to COVID-19 treatment and isolation facilities; and
- Establishing a medicinal oxygen plant to supply MERV medical infrastructure with oxygen for treatment of various respiratory issues, including COVID-19.[547]

USAID reported that it is also funding the Dayr az Zawr Civil Council Health Committee to develop, produce, and disseminate public health messages on how citizens can protect

themselves against COVID-19.[548] USAID-funded implementing partners will provide emergency COVID-19 medical assistance in Raqqa Province including establishing two community isolation centers with a 50 bed capacity; providing triage facilities to a hospital; creating isolation areas within a hospital; procurement of personal protective equipment for one hospital, seven medical facilities, and two isolation centers; and providing technical assistance and case management assistance to the medical system. According to USAID, a similar program is being developed for Dayr az Zawr.[549]

Economic Collapse and COVID-19 Results in Widespread Hunger; USAID Implementing Partners Adapt Awards in Response

USAID reported that the rapid currency inflation Syria was experiencing before the COVID-19 pandemic intensified this quarter. The value of the Syrian pound fell to less than half of its pre-COVID-19 value, due to regime mismanagement and economic disruptions associated with the ongoing conflict and the capital controls in Lebanon which have limited Syrians' access to foreign currency.[550] Food prices, already rising before the pandemic, spiked, compounded by the Syrian government's moves to limit subsidized food due to shortages. Prices for medicines also rose—as much as 30 percent in less than a week—as the rapidly depreciating Syrian pound led to higher import prices and forced the Syrian government to raise prices on domestically produced medicines to reflect rising costs of production.[551]

The United Nations estimated that due to the economic crisis and the global pandemic, more than 9.3 million Syrians are now food insecure, the highest figure at any point during the civil war. The United Nations stated that another 2.2 million Syrians are at risk of becoming food insecure in the near future. The SNES reported that in northeastern Syria there was a rapidly increasing demand for subsidized bread, with private bread priced ten times more than subsidized bread, straining the supply chain and logistics of bread delivery and creating bread shortages, and fueling popular unrest in the region, according to USAID.[552]

USAID reported that implementing partners are having difficulty maintaining vendor contracts, as price volatility is leading vendors to exit contracts early to renegotiate rates, which has delayed implementation of some humanitarian programming.[553] While the depreciation of the Syrian Pound has severely impacted the economic prospects of the Syrian regime, it also negatively impacts the SNES, which also relies on the Syrian Pound.[554]

4.6 million
The total number of food-insecure children across the country

240%
Increase in the cost of basic food items in Syria in the past year

$60
Cost of COVID-19 tests at private clinics

$100
Average monthly salary of Syrians

Sources: USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/11/2020; Save the Children, "Hundreds of Thousands More Children in Syria Face Hunger," 9/29/2020.

Rising costs also resulted in cutbacks in assistance provided by relief operations.[555] According to USAID, implementing partners adjusted programs to be more responsive to the most pressing food security constraints. For example, with the worsening bread shortages and declining access to the staple foods, one USAID food security program administered by the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team (START) cancelled an activity to provide livestock and fodder later in the year and applied those resources to make emergency repairs to 16 additional public bakeries to partially ease bread supply shortages.[556]

However, USAID reported that the agency has not received any additional stabilization funding to address the increasing food insecurity in the northeast. Due the to the President's freeze on Syria funding for stabilization programming, USAID's Middle East Bureau reported having to creatively design effective programming amidst funding limitations.[557]

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Failure to Reauthorize Border Crossing Complicates Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies

On July 11, the UNSC partially renewed the cross-border authorization that enables UN agencies to deliver aid into Syria from neighboring countries, after Russia and China repeatedly vetoed attempts to renew both border crossings into northwest Syria, and to restore access to the Yaroubia crossing into northeast Syria.[558] UNSC Resolution 2533 allows UN agencies to continue operating through Turkey's Bab al-Hawa crossing to Idlib Province for one year, while not renewing the UN authorization for Turkey's Bab al-Salama crossing into Aleppo Province.[559]

The lack of UN authorization for Bab al-Hawa complicates humanitarian access to northern Aleppo by requiring UN agencies to transport commodities from Bab al-Hawa to Aleppo, which necessitates crossing multiple lines of control, negotiating access with various armed opposition groups, driving a significantly longer distance, and dealing with additional shipping costs and delays.[560]

DoS PRM partners reported that accessing Northern Aleppo from Bab al-Hawa is more expensive and time consuming, taking an estimated 8 to 12 hours each way, compared to one hour each way from Bab al-Salama.[561] According to USAID, NGOs do not require UNSC authorization and are able to continue utilizing both crossings to transport cross-border assistance. Additionally, the resolution did not include authorization of UN humanitarian use of the northeast Yaroubia border crossing, which was previously authorized, but had been removed in the last UNSC vote in January 2020, requiring continued reliance on NGOs to transport all items through the Fishkhabour crossing.[562]

According to the DoS, the COVID-19 pandemic response was exacerbated by the January closure of the Yaroubia border crossing between Iraq and Syria. Losing this border crossing, primarily used by the WHO, has become even more critical due to the increased need for specialized medical equipment to combat the pandemic.[563] The DoS said that NGOs cannot "procure and transport the amount and types of medical supplies" that the WHO could transport into northeast Syria through Yaroubia.[564]

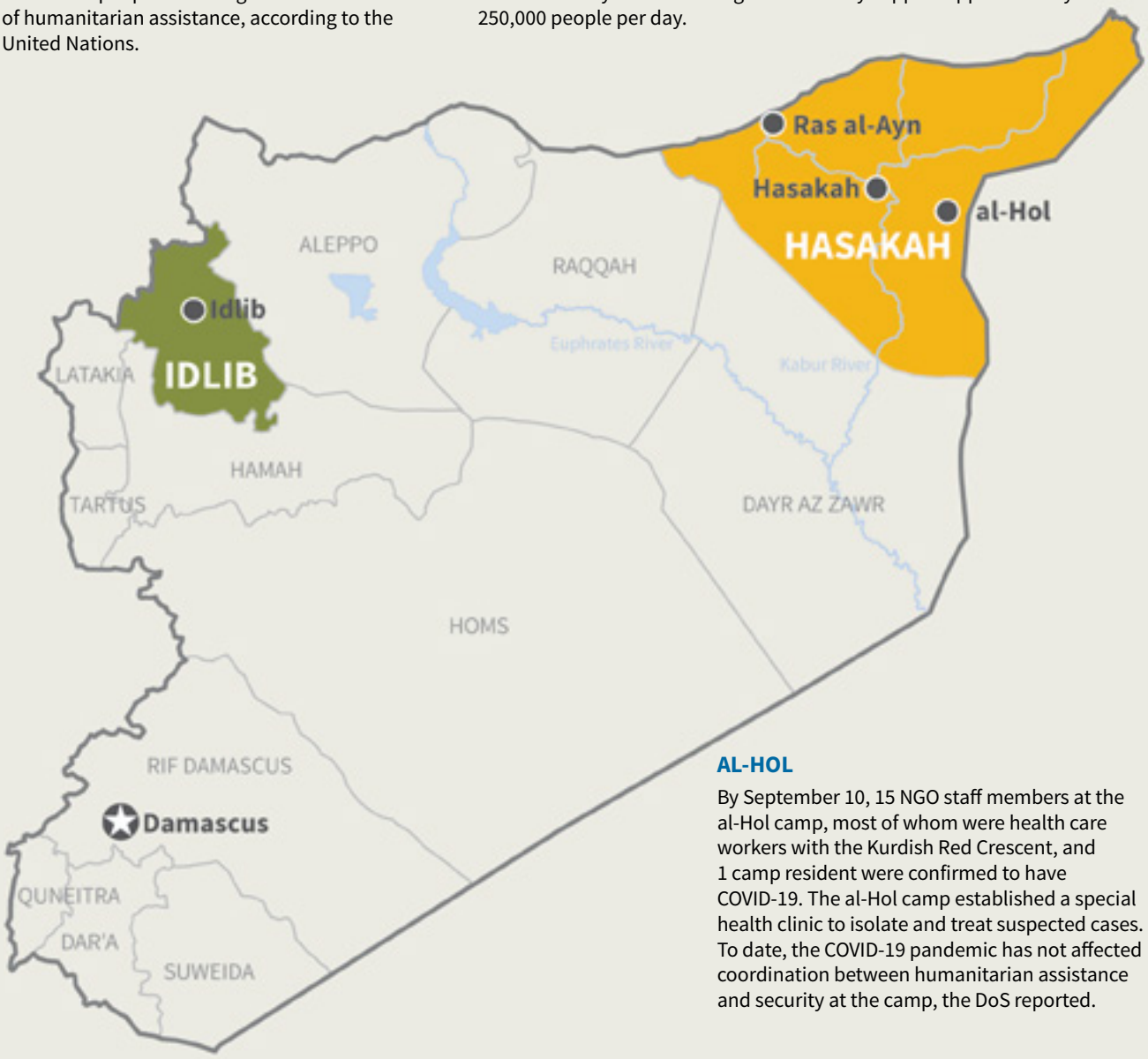
SYRIA: QUARTERLY FOCUS ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

IDLIB

From March to July, an estimated 220,000 IDPs—or 23 percent—of the 961,000 people displaced since December 2019 had returned to their areas of origin in northwest Syria following the relative improvement in security conditions since the March 6 ceasefire began. Despite the relative improvement in security, approximately 2.8 million people in the region remain in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the United Nations.

HASAKAH

Populations in northeast Syria continue to face the risk of water shortages due to frequent service disruptions at the Alouk water station, located near Ras al-Ayn city. The water station supports an estimated 470,000 people in the Hasakah and Tel Tamer cities and surrounding areas. Local water authorities and humanitarian actors continue trucking water to vulnerable populations to mitigate the effect of the Alouk station closures while negotiations continue. According to the United Nations, relief actors have increased daily water trucking and currently support approximately 250,000 people per day.



AL-HOL

By September 10, 15 NGO staff members at the al-Hol camp, most of whom were health care workers with the Kurdish Red Crescent, and 1 camp resident were confirmed to have COVID-19. The al-Hol camp established a special health clinic to isolate and treat suspected cases. To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected coordination between humanitarian assistance and security at the camp, the DoS reported.

Sources: USAID Fact Sheet; USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information; 9/11/2020; DoS PRM, response to DoS OIG request for information, 9/22/2020.

DoS Continues to Pressure Turkey to Ease Restrictions on NGOs

This quarter, DoS reported that it continued pressing Turkey to reduce restrictions on the operations of international NGOs and humanitarian organizations to allow more effective aid delivery into Syria.[565] In general, Turkey has been cooperative in facilitating the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance into Turkish controlled areas of Syria, but less so into the northeast, which is of added importance now that only one crossing point remains operational for use by the United Nations. According to the DoS, an immediate humanitarian concern in the northeast remains the functioning of the Allouk Water Station, which is located in the area of the Turkish incursion, and which provides water to nearly half a million residents of Hasakah. The TSO groups continue to regularly shut off the Water Station to push the SDF to increase electricity provision from SDF-controlled areas to the Turkish incursion area.[566]

According to the DoS, humanitarian partners have to truck water into the affected communities due to the frequent shut-down of the Allouk water station. Beyond the increased need for drinking water in summer, which resulted in a state of water emergency, these communities also needed water for hygiene purposes as a COVID-19 prevention measure. The DoS said that several displaced persons camps and SDF-run detention facilities which hold ISIS detainees, depend at least in part on water from Allouk.[567]

COVID-19 Pandemic Harms IDPs in Camps

This quarter, USAID BHA and DoS PRM's humanitarian partners continued life-saving services, including food, water, sanitation, and health services, but suspended almost all other activities in al-Hol camp, and locked down the camp.[568]

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased IDP and refugee needs for access to clean water, soap, and health facilities. There have been several confirmed COVID-19 cases among medical staff in al-Hol camp, which hosted approximately 64,700 people as of early August. According to USAID, COVID-19 mitigation measures have significantly disrupted health care capacity in al-Hol, resulting in personnel and supply shortages and the temporary suspension of key medical services in the camp. During August, 12 health facilities had to suspend operations in al-Hol due to staff COVID-19 cases, quarantine procedures, or lack of personal protective equipment, the UN reported.[569] In addition, due to the worsened economic situation in northeast Syria, partly due to the pandemic, access to employment for IDPs has decreased and food insecurity has increased.[570]

Beginning on July 19, the SNES started to move third-country national family members to a new expanded area of Roj camp, with approximately 300 third-country nationals arriving at the camp by mid-September. While the households were transferred during the quarter from prisons in the area, most of those households had previously resided in al-Hol. Some families were also reunited in Roj with children who had stayed in al-Hol. According to the DoS, the SNES did not coordinate these transfers in advance with humanitarian partners, leaving humanitarian partners struggling to provide services to the new arrivals and ensure humanitarian protection concerns were addressed.[571]

SUPPORT TO MISSION

FY 2021 Begins with Continuing Resolution

On October 1, 2020, the President signed into law a continuing resolution that funds the DoD, the DoS, and USAID at their FY 2020 funding levels through December 11, 2020.[572] As FY 2021 began, Congress was still deliberating on appropriations to fund the federal government for the new fiscal year. For FY 2021, the DoD has requested a total of $705.4 billion, including $636.4 billion in base funding and $69 billion in OCO funding. This request is slightly less than the $712.6 billion that the DoD was appropriated in FY 2020.[573]

On October 1, 2020, the President signed into law a continuing resolution that funds the DoD, the DoS, and USAID at their FY 2020 funding levels through December 11, 2020.

Within the $69 billion requested for OCO funding, $20.5 billion is for costs directly related to combat and combat support activities under OIR and Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan, including the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund, which is the primary funding stream for partner forces in Iraq and Syria. $32.5 billion of the OCO budget request is for enduring OCO requirements, which reflect ongoing costs in theater and at home that are expected to remain after combat operations end, such as basing, ship operations, weapons systems sustainment, and security cooperation. $16 billion of the OCO budget request is for base expenditures unrelated to overseas contingency operations but labeled as OCO funding in order to comply with the statutory budget caps established in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019.[574]

In Iraq and Syria, the DoD's FY 2021 budget request anticipates a shift in focus from the liberation of territory from ISIS to ensuring that regional partner forces can prevent the reemergence of ISIS. Funding priorities are directed to supporting Iraqi and Syrian partner forces to provide security in liberated areas, address the ongoing ISIS threat, prevent ISIS reemergence, and set conditions for long-term stability. The request includes $845 million for the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund, a decrease from the $1.2 billion enacted in FY 2020 and $1.4 billion enacted in FY 2019.[575]

Table 1.

Department of Defense Budget, in $ Billions

	FY 2018 Actuals	FY 2019 Actuals	FY 2020 Enacted	FY 2021 Request
Base	599.6	616.4	633.3	636.4
Overseas Contingency Operations	65.2	68.6	66.4	53.0
OCO for Base	—	—	4.9	16.0
Emergency	5.8	2.8	8.0	—
TOTAL	**670.6**	**687.8**	**712.6**	**705.4**

Source: DoD Comptroller.

The DoS also reported that rocket attacks have not significantly impacted operations at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad or the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center.

DoS in Iraq Operates Under Ordered Departure

Mission Iraq was placed on ordered departure on March 25, due to security conditions and health precautions related to COVID-19. The current ordered departure expires on November 19; however, the DoS reported it terminated ordered departure early for the Consulate General in Erbil on July 22. The DoS also reported that rocket attacks have not significantly impacted operations at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad or the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center. Both locations have implemented curfews after designated hours limiting outdoor movements to mission-critical trips and requiring personnel to wear personal protective gear. The DoS also reported that implementation of the Zero-Based Staffing exercise and the on-the-ground cap of 300 direct-hire staff has had a minimal impact on the embassy and Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center.[576]

In response to COVID-19, the DoS reported that many embassy personnel are teleworking including some locally employed staff. During the quarter, COVID-19 mitigation measures included limiting dining to take-out meals, closing the gyms and pools, and restricting team sports and group gatherings.[577]

End-Use Monitoring

During the quarter, the DoS reported that the OSC-I at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad continued end-use monitoring activities, although security-related movement restrictions and COVID-19 lockdown measures made it more difficult to ensure Iraqi government accountability for major U.S.-origin defense articles. As travel became more restricted, OSC-I could only conduct inspections through written correspondence and virtual interaction. The DoS has reported it saw no evidence that U.S. defense systems were improperly transferred or misused during the quarter.[578]

From July 9 through July 11, OSC-I inventoried 32 F-16 fighter jets at Balad Air Base. According to the DoS, this was the first inventory and security inspection undertaken since the ordered departure of Lockheed Martin and Sallyport in January 2020. The inspection team noted that the base commander did an "exceptional job" maintaining security for equipment and facilities after the evacuation. According to the DoS, from July 26 through 29, OSC-I inventoried 71 of 135 M1A1 tanks and 66 of 126 Stinger Missile systems at Camp Taji. This was the first inventory and inspection in 18 months and was deemed critical before U.S. forces relinquished control of U.S. facilities at Camp Taji to Iraqi Security Forces. The items not inventoried were not available because they were deployed to border operations. As travel became more restrictive, OSC-I could only conduct night vision device inspections through written correspondence and virtual connection to ensure Iraqi government accountability for major U.S.-origin articles. Iraq's CTS submitted their internal quarterly inventory of 995 night vision devices. OSC-I was still awaiting internal inventories from the Iraqi ministries of Defense and Interior for all remaining transferred devices.[579]

Erbil New Consulate Compound

The New Consulate Compound in Erbil continued to operate under a partial work suspension, in compliance with Mission Iraq restrictions on local staff and contract personnel. During August, several engineers and architects who were stuck out of the country during the pandemic-related airport closures were able to return to Erbil.

At the end of the quarter, the DoS reported that COVID-19 had sidelined approximately one-fifth of the general contractor's workforce as they are local workers who are not allowed to enter the construction site. Additionally, the contractor had 154 workers currently in quarantine in their living quarters. The cumulative reduction in available workers led to an estimated 20 percent decrease in productivity for the project. However, the project work was progressing well with the available work force, according to the DoS.[580]

The original construction contract amount to build the consulate was $422.5 million. There have been 19 contract modifications adding $23.0 million in contract costs. The current contract completion date is July 30, 2022, and the certificate of occupancy date is October 6, 2022.[581]

DoS and USAID Funding for Iraq

The Congress did not complete action on the FY 2021 appropriations bills by September 30. Consequently, Congress approved a continuing resolution, which the President signed into law on October 1. The law allows the DoS and USAID to continue operating at FY 2020 enacted levels until December 11, or the earlier enactment of a full-year appropriations bill.

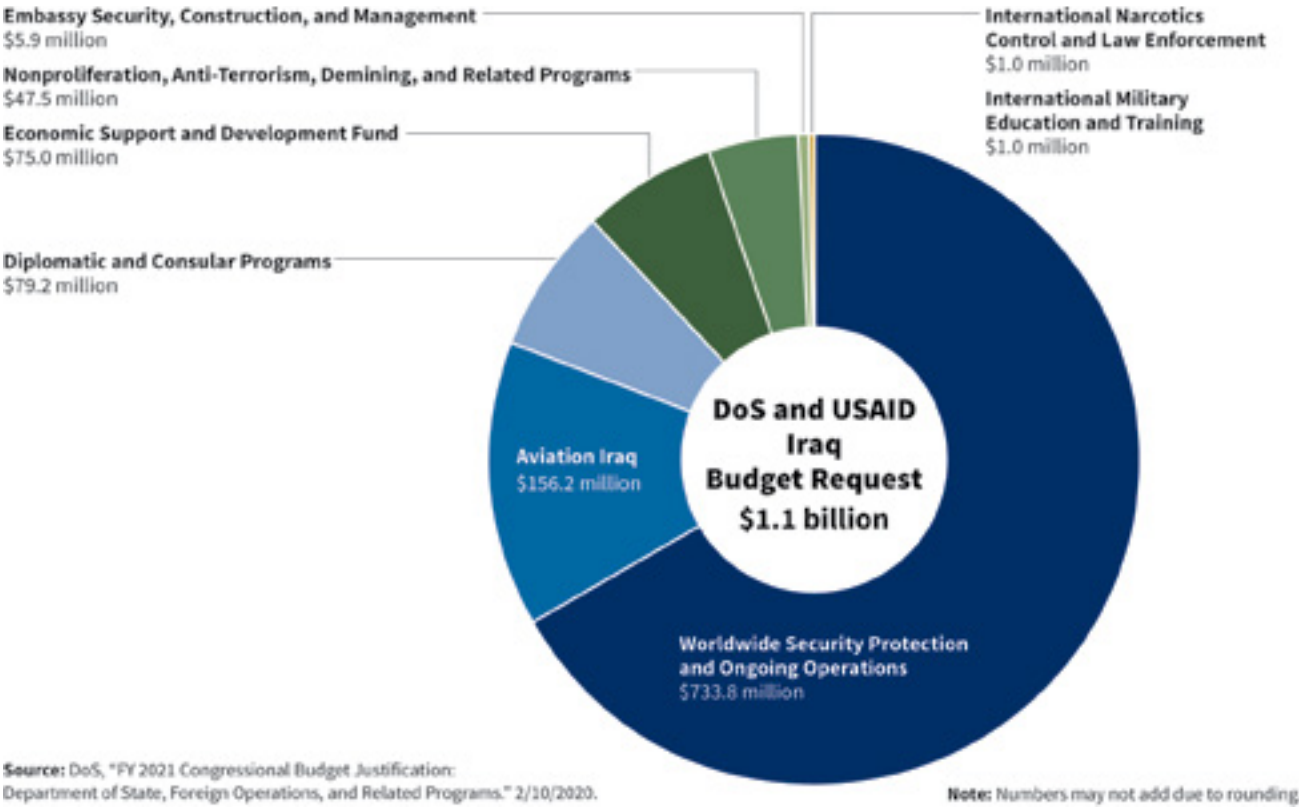
The FY 2021 DoS budget request, which includes funding for USAID, contains $1.1 billion for Iraq. Figure 7 provides a breakdown of the request by activity.[582]

The DoS did not request funds for the U.S. share of the costs of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, which uses financial contributions and the expertise of member nations to combat violent extremism; promote human rights; and forge solutions to the global threats of armed conflict, hunger, poverty, and disease. According to the DoS, there is no current plan to fund the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq with FY 2021 funds; however, the United States has previously contributed roughly 22 percent to the mission's annual budget through assessed contributions, and the United States announced $10 million in FY 2020 funds to support UNAMI election programming via USAID.[583] Although the FY 2021 budget request for international organizations is 34 percent less than what Congress appropriated in FY 2020, historically Congress has restored these reductions before finalizing the appropriations bill.[584]

In addition, the DoS did not request funding for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) in Iraq. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad stated that FMF and International Military Education and Training programs are part of a considerable U.S. strategic effort to build an effective, civilian-controlled, and self-sustaining ISF.[585] Although it did not specifically request funds for FMF in FY 2021, the DoS still expects to receive funds from a congressional appropriations and maintains that FMF is important for the professionalization of Iraq's security sector. The DoS said that with FY 2019 funds FMF will be directed at Iraq reducing dependence on contracted logistics services; filling critical capability gaps; providing professional military education; upgrading and modernizing select combat systems; replacing limited major combat systems after combat loss; and building defense institutions and reforming the security sector.[586]

Figure 7.

FY 2021 DoS, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Budget Request-Iraq (includes USAID)



Source: DoS, "FY 2021 Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs," 2/10/2020.

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding

DoS and USAID Funding for Syria

The DoS NEA AC and the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement are now programming their portions of the $50 million in FY 2019 stabilization funding that was announced by the President in fall 2019. The DoS Bureaus of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and Global Criminal Justice also received a portion of this $50 million and are now rolling out new awards with the funding. The grand total notified for the DoS programs from this funding was $33.5 million, with the remainder of the money used to support USAID Syria programs.[587]

While the DoS and USAID FY 2021 budget did not request specific program funding for Syria, it did include significant funding for international programs that can be made available for use in Syria. For example, the DoS and USAID budget request includes $6.0 billion in International Humanitarian Assistance. These funds are available for worldwide use in crises that intersect with U.S. national security interests, including in Syria. Funds from this proposed account—which combines past years' International Disaster Assistance, Food for Peace, and Migration and Refugee Assistance accounts—are to be administered by the DoS and USAID.[588]

The DoS and USAID budget request also includes $145.0 million for the Relief and Recovery Fund, which is intended to provide the DoS and USAID with the flexibility to respond to unanticipated contingencies arising from terrorism and conflict worldwide. A subset of these funds would be available in Syria to promote stability and recovery and help deny ISIS and other violent extremist organizations the ability to regroup and reemerge. These funds also support efforts to clear explosive remnants of war in Syria.[589]

The DoS and USAID budget request further includes $72.0 million for the Global Threat Reduction program worldwide. This program seeks to counter the Syrian regime's development of chemical weapons by training partner governments and chemical industry stakeholders to identify and eliminate the transfer of dual-use material and technology to entities involved in the Syrian regime's chemical weapons program.[590]

The DoS and USAID budget request includes $5.0 million for the Nonproliferation and Disarmament Fund to focus on high-priority projects, including those in Syria. These funds will continue to support the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to detect and investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It also provides additional chemical weapons detection and mitigation equipment and personal protective gear.[591]

INSPECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. AGENCY for INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Members of Kurdish-led Hêzên Antî Teror Forces conduct urban operations training in Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

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OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies' strategic planning efforts; completed, ongoing, and planned Lead IG and partner agencies' oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; Lead IG investigations; and hotline activities from July 1 through September 30, 2020.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Pursuant to Section 8L of the Inspector General Act, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. This effort includes reviewing and analyzing completed oversight, management, and other relevant reports to identify systemic problems, trends, lessons learned, and best practices to inform future oversight projects. The Lead IG agencies issue an annual joint strategic oversight plan for each operation.

FY 2021 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan Activities

In 2014, upon designation of the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the three Lead IG agencies developed and implemented a joint strategic oversight plan for comprehensive oversight of OIR. That oversight plan is updated each year.

The FY 2021 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR, effective October 1, 2020, organized OIR-related oversight projects into three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations and Security Cooperation; 2) Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development; and 3) Support to Mission. The Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR was included in the FY 2021 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations.

The Joint Planning Group for overseas contingency operations serves as a primary venue to coordinate audits, inspections, and evaluations of U.S. Government-funded activities supporting overseas contingency operations, including those relating to the Middle East. The Joint Planning Group meets quarterly to provide a forum for coordination of the broader Federal oversight community, including the military service IGs and audit agencies, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and the OIGs from the Departments of Justice, the Treasury, Energy, and Homeland Security.

In August 2020, the Joint Planning Group held its 51st meeting, carried out virtually to accommodate participants because of coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) precautions. The participants discussed OCO-related audits, inspections, and other oversight projects they planned to conduct during FY 2021.

FY 2021 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations

Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Military Operations and Security Cooperation focuses on determining the degree to which the contingency operation is accomplishing its security mission. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Conducting unilateral and partnered counterterrorism operations
- Providing security assistance
- Training and equipping partner security forces
- Advising, assisting, and enabling partner security forces
- Advising and assisting ministry-level security officials

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development focuses on some of the root causes of violent extremism. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Countering and reducing corruption, social inequality, and extremism
- Promoting inclusive and effective democracy, civil participation, and empowerment of women
- Promoting reconciliation, peaceful conflict resolution, demobilization and reintegration of armed forces, and other rule of law efforts
- Providing food, water, medical care, emergency relief, and shelter to people affected by crisis
- Assisting and protecting internally displaced persons and refugees
- Building or enhancing host-nation governance capacity
- Supporting sustainable and appropriate recovery and reconstruction activities, repairing infrastructure, removing explosive remnants of war, and reestablishing utilities and other public services
- Countering trafficking in persons and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse

SUPPORT TO MISSION

Support to Mission focuses on U.S. administrative, logistical, and management efforts that enable military operations and nonmilitary programs. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Ensuring the security of U.S. personnel and property
- Providing for the occupational health and safety of personnel
- Administering U.S. Government programs
- Managing U.S. Government grants and contracts
- Inventorying and accounting for equipment

AUDIT, INSPECTION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Lead IG agencies use dedicated, rotational, and temporary employees, as well as contractors, to conduct oversight projects, investigate fraud and corruption, and provide consolidated planning and reporting on the status of overseas contingency operations.

The COVID-19 global pandemic continued to affect the Lead IG agencies' ability to conduct oversight on projects related to overseas contingency operations. Due to the evacuation of deployed staff from OCO locations and country-imposed travel restrictions, the Lead IG agencies continued to conduct oversight work while teleworking and practicing social distancing. Some oversight projects were either delayed or deferred, or the scope of the work was revised or narrowed.

Based on DoD force health protection guidance, the DoD OIG made decisions on when to return personnel to overseas locations on a case-by-case basis. The DoS OIG and USAID OIG also monitored local conditions to determine when to resume overseas oversight operations. Prior to the pandemic, some oversight staff from the Lead IG agencies were stationed in Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, and Germany. Oversight teams from these offices and from offices in the United States would travel to locations in the region to conduct fieldwork for their projects.

Despite these constraints, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed eight reports related to OIR during the quarter. These reports examined various oversight activities that support OIR, including: Air Force COVID-19 screening and quarantine procedures for personnel entering Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar; the Military Services' management and safeguarding of pharmaceuticals at locations supporting overseas contingency operations; DoS processes and procedures for staffing at the U.S Mission to Iraq, and construction of overseas facilities; and the Army's procedures to mitigate risks associated with its expeditionary contracting material weakness.

As of September 30, 2020, 28 projects related to OIR were ongoing and 16 projects related to OIR were planned.

Final Reports by Lead IG Agencies

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Screening and Quarantine Procedures for Personnel Entering Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar

DODIG-2020-128; September 24, 2020

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the Air Force, specifically the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing, implemented effective screening and quarantine procedures for personnel entering Al Udeid Air Base (AUAB), Qatar, in accordance with applicable guidance in response to COVD-19.

The 379th Air Expeditionary Wing supports a wide range of missions, including humanitarian airlift activity in Iraq and Afghanistan; bomber operations; refueling; aeromedical evacuation; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Following the

In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the 379th Expeditionary Medical Group stood up an unprecedented mass medical site known as Quarantine Town at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. (U.S. Air Force photo)

World Health Organization declaration of the COVID-19 global pandemic in mid-March 2020, the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing commander declared a public health emergency at AUAB. As a result of the commander's declaration, the security squadron, support squadron, and medical group at AUAB implemented COVID-19 screening and response procedures for personnel entering the installation in motor vehicles and arriving via aircraft. In addition, the medical group initiated training on COVID-19 screening procedures for all U.S.-operated entry points to AUAB.

The DoD OIG determined that the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing developed screening and quarantine procedures for personnel entering AUAB in accordance with COVID-19 response criteria, but improvements to the implementation of those procedures are needed. The lack of consistent implementation of screening procedures for personnel entering AUAB occurred because the procedures and the requirement to conduct training, developed by the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing in March 2020, were still evolving and had not been formally documented. As a result of inconsistent screening, there is a risk that U.S. military, civilian, and contractor personnel may contract and spread COVID-19, which could negatively affect ongoing operations and exercises in Qatar and the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility.

The initial training for personnel performing screenings did not include all the required procedures. Furthermore, squadron commanders did not require personnel to take refresher training when COVID-19 screening procedures changed or when personnel returned to screening duties after an extended period. In addition, because no one entering AUAB failed initial COVID-19 screening during the audit, the DoD OIG could not verify if the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing effectively implemented quarantine procedures.

Based on the audit findings, the DoD OIG recommended that the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing commander formalize the training, screening, and quarantine procedures via the issuance of official documentation. In response, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing leadership formally documented the screening and quarantine procedures, as well as training requirements, and oversaw the establishment of a refresher training program.

Management agreed with the recommendation, and the DoD OIG verified that corrective actions were implemented.

Audit of Management of Pharmaceuticals in Support of the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility

DODIG-2020-120; August 28, 2020

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the military departments properly accounted for and safeguarded pharmaceuticals at locations supporting overseas contingency operations in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility.

The DoD operates a large network of medical treatment facilities (MTFs) to provide routine medical care to maintain healthy forces in the field and specialized care for treating traumatic injuries and exotic diseases in combat. Within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility, there are medical logistic facilities to provide medical materiel management and MTFs to assist with the procurement, storage, and distribution of pharmaceuticals. During this audit, the audit team visited eight MTFs, four MTF medical logistics facilities, one U.S. Army Medical Materiel Center-Southwest Asia, and three U.S. Army Medical Materiel Center-Southwest Asia Forward Logistics Elements located in Qatar and Kuwait, which support the OIR mission.

The DoD OIG determined that the Military Services did not fully account for or safeguard pharmaceuticals at seven MTFs, four MTF medical logistics facilities, at the U.S. Army Medical Materiel Center-Southwest Asia warehouse, and at two the U.S. Army Medical Materiel Center-Southwest Asia Forward Logistics Elements in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility. These deficiencies in accounting for and safeguarding pharmaceuticals occurred because USCENTCOM's existing guidance did not provide a unifying method to account for and safeguard pharmaceuticals in accordance with theater, service, and unit-level specific processes. In addition, USCENTCOM did not provide sufficient oversight of accountability and safeguarding of pharmaceuticals. Even though USCENTCOM personnel conducted site visits to MTFs to determine compliance with USCENTCOM's standard operating procedures, the review checklist used was generic and did not include steps to verify that the required inventories of noncontrolled and controlled pharmaceuticals occurred.

The DoD OIG recommended that the USCENTCOM Theater Pharmacist coordinate with the USCENTCOM surgeon to establish or update policies and procedures to clarify the requirements for conducting inventories, and include in the policy requirements the minimum level of security required for controlled and noncontrolled pharmaceuticals. The DoD OIG also recommended that the USCENTCOM Theater Pharmacist develop a tracking mechanism and follow up on any deficiencies identified during the theater pharmacist review, verify that proper forms are completed and updated, and that inventories are completed monthly. The DoD OIG further recommended that the USCENTCOM Theater Pharmacist update the site visit review checklist to include requirements to verify that the proper forms are completed and updated, noncontrolled pharmaceutical inventories are completed, security procedures are followed, and security deficiencies are addressed.

Management agreed with the recommendations and the DoD OIG verified that USCENTCOM implemented corrective actions.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations Process to Identify and Apply Best Practices and Lessons Learned to Future Construction Projects

AUD-MERO-20-39; September 2, 2020

The DoS OIG conducted this audit to determine the extent to which the DoS Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (the Bureau) was evaluating completed construction projects to identify and communicate best practices and lessons learned that can be applied to future construction projects. For this audit, the DoS OIG reviewed and considered the practices employed for several construction projects, including Amman, Jordan; Kabul, Afghanistan; Ashgabat, Turkmenistan; and Islamabad, Pakistan.

The DoS OIG found that the Bureau had a process to identify, disseminate, and apply lessons learned that are associated with technical design standards and criteria. However, the DoS OIG found that the process did not capture broader best practices or lessons learned that are critical to the Bureau's construction work, including strengthening collaboration among stakeholders, facilitating building maintenance, and improving program and construction management. The DoS OIG determined that these activities had been overlooked in the lessons learned process because the Bureau had devoted attention and resources solely to collecting and addressing technical design challenges encountered in its construction projects.

The DoS OIG made four recommendations in this report, three to the Bureau and one to the DoS Office of Acquisitions Management. These offices concurred with all four recommendations, and the DoS OIG considered one recommendation closed and three recommendations resolved pending further action at the time the report was issued.

Audit of the Department of State's Approach to Adjust the Size and Composition of U.S. Missions Afghanistan and Iraq

AUD-MERO-20-38; August 4, 2020

The DoS OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoS used established procedures, guidance, and best practices in its approach to adjust the size and composition of Missions Afghanistan and Iraq; and aligned the resources invested at these missions with established U.S. Government foreign policy priorities.

The DoS OIG found that the DoS approach to adjusting the number and composition of the staff at Missions Afghanistan and Iraq did not fully use existing procedures, guidance, or best practices from previous efforts. Specifically, the DoS OIG found that each mission conducted staffing reviews in an expedited manner because both the Office of the Secretary of State verbally directed both missions to immediately reduce staff despite foreign policy priorities and strategic diplomatic objectives for each mission, including preventing and countering malign threats, remaining unchanged.

The DoS OIG made three recommendations to ensure that staffing levels at Missions Afghanistan and Iraq align with U.S. foreign policy priorities and that these missions have the appropriate resources to achieve strategic diplomatic objectives. The Office of the Under

Secretary of State for Management concurred with all three recommendations and the DoS OIG considered all three recommendations resolved pending further action at the time the report was issued.

Classified Inspection of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland

ISP-S-20-16; July 7, 2020

The DoS OIG issued this classified report based on its inspection of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland. An unclassified report was published last quarter, and a summary of that report was included in the previous OIR quarterly report. This classified report was provided to authorized recipients.

Final Reports by Partner Agencies

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Army Prepositioned Stocks-5 Issue and Return

A-2020-0087-AXZ; September 28, 2020

The Army Audit Agency (AAA) conducted this audit to determine if processes to issue and return Army prepositioned stocks equipment met mission needs. The audit focused on prepositioned equipment issued in support of operational needs statements. Army Contracting Command–Rock Island provides contracting support to soldiers, civilians, and contractors in locations such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait. It is responsible for awarding and administering contracts for managing prepositioned equipment in Kuwait and Qatar.

AAA determined that the issue and return of prepositioned equipment did not meet mission requirements. The audit determined that the prepositioned equipment was not validated and approved for issue and exceeded the required delivery date requested by units.

AAA reviewed 37 operational needs statements in which the Army issued 2,350 prepositioned equipment items, valued at about $300.3 million. During its review, AAA determined that the Army issued 1,378 of the 2,350 prepositioned equipment items without validating the requirement or approving the release of the equipment. The Army issued 1,638 of 2,153 prepositioned equipment items later than the requested and approved delivery date established by Army units. For the remaining 197 pieces of equipment, AAA could not determine the required delivery date because either the date was not indicated on the statement or the documentation was not readily available.

AAA made seven recommendations, including that the Army streamline the operational needs statements validation and approval process by requiring stakeholders to refine sub-processes and develop metrics to improve processing and delivery time of critical equipment; and to formalize an approval process to expedite urgent and time-sensitive operational needs statements that helps meet emergent unit commander needs within 30 days. The deputy chief of staff for Army logistics disagreed with the recommendation to formalize an approval process, but acknowledged that actions to address other recommendations would meet the intent of this recommendation.

Maintenance of Theater Provided Equipment

A-2020-0084-AXZ; September 15, 2020

AAA conducted this audit to review maintenance for theater-provided equipment and determined that Army units did not perform scheduled maintenance on theater provided equipment to meet readiness and potential contingencies. AAA analyzed maintenance data from the Global Combat Support System-Army for equipment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait. Findings in the audit were unclassified but considered "for official use only," and the full report was provided to authorized recipients. AAA made three recommendations to the Commanding General of U.S. Army Central Command: to require Army units to review and correct maintenance plans in Global Combat Support System-Army upon receiving theater provided equipment; to perform systems reviews of theater provided equipment and identify missing maintenance plans; and to assign a representative to oversee the technical inspection of theater provided equipment during each relief in place and transfer of authority process.

The Commanding General of U.S. Army Central Command did not concur with the third recommendation, but did offer an alternative solution that was acceptable to AAA.

Expeditionary Contracting Material Weakness

A-2020-0059-BOZ; July 9, 2020

AAA conducted this audit at the request of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology to determine whether the Army has taken necessary actions to mitigate risks associated with the expeditionary contracting material weakness.

AAA determined that the Army took actions to address the material weakness. However, AAA also determined that the Army needed to take additional steps before downgrading or removing the weakness from annual statements of assurance. AAA found that the Army deferred a decision on recommended solutions from the capabilities-based assessment—a key part of the current corrective action plan for the material weakness—and some elements from previous corrective action plans were never implemented. In addition, since the Army first reported the weakness in 2008, AAA found that expeditionary contracting has taken personnel cuts, the Army has absorbed the mission of the Contingency Contracting Administration Service from the Defense Contract Management Agency, and the Army stood down U.S. Army Expeditionary Contracting Command.

As a result, numerous audits continue to highlight similar findings as those identified when the Army originally reported the weakness in 2008. In addition, AAA found that the current capabilities-based assessment determined that gaps continue to exist in mission command, expeditionary contract administration, and prolonged endurance. AAA recommended that the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology should redefine the expeditionary contracting material weakness based on current conditions, and update the corrective action plan and associated milestones.

In this report, AAA made several recommendations to address material weaknesses found in the audit. These recommendations included that the Army determine functional solutions from the capabilities-based assessment to help mitigate the expeditionary contracting

material weakness, and to develop an implementation schedule for these solutions and mandate training courses for all contracting personnel.

Management agreed with all the recommendations.

ONGOING OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of September 30, 2020, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 28 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 8 describes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 2 and 3, contained in Appendix E, list the title and objective for each of these projects. Appendix E also identifies ongoing projects that the DoD OIG suspended due to COVID-19. Those projects will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Figure 8.

Ongoing Projects by Strategic Oversight Area

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

- The **DoD OIG** is evaluating USCENTCOM's target development and prosecution processes, as well as post-strike collateral damage and civilian casualty assessment activities.
- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the military services conducted pre-deployment training to counter an adversary's use of unmanned aerial systems in accordance with the operational requirements of the geographic combatant commands.
- The **DoD OIG** is evaluating whether USCENTCOM properly screened, documented, and tracked DoD service members suspected of sustaining a traumatic brain injury to determine whether a return to duty status for current operations was acceptable or evacuation and additional care was required.
- The **GAO** is determining what are the DoD's requirements for friendly force identification associated with close air support; to what extent has the DoD identified initiatives to enhance friendly force identification capabilities for close air support missions and ensured the capabilities are interoperable; and to what extent has the DoD evaluated the training for forces integrating and delivering close air support.

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- The **DoS OIG** is evaluating the U.S. Agency for Global Media's journalistic standards and principles.
- The **DoS OIG** is evaluating processes and procedures for tracking and reporting on foreign assistance awards.
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine what corrective actions a Syria response implementer has taken to remedy internal control weaknesses and known gaps identified by USAID OIG investigations.

- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to assess USAID's management of its transition strategy for humanitarian assistance in Iraq and oversight of its humanitarian assistance and stabilization activities.

SUPPORT TO MISSION

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the deployment process resulted in accurate and timely entitlements and allowances for deployed members of the military service Reserves.
- The **DoD OIG** is evaluating how USCENTCOM executed pandemic response plans; and to identify the challenges encountered in implementing the response plans and the impact to operations resulting from COVID-19.
- The **DoS OIG** is evaluating whether the DoS Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, Office of Safety, Health, and Environmental Management effectively manages overseas posts' compliance with DoS safety, occupational health, and environmental management requirements; and reviews its workplace, residential, and motor vehicle safety programs.

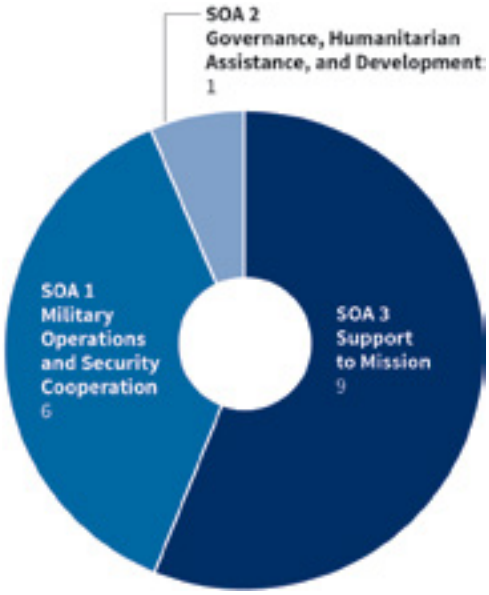
PLANNED OVERSIGHT PROJECTS

As of September 30, 2020, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 16 planned projects related to OIR. Figure 9 describes the planned projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 4 and 5, contained in Appendix E, list the title and objective for each of these projects. Appendix E also identifies ongoing projects that the DoD OIG suspended due to COVID-19; those projects will restart when force health protection conditions permit. The following sections highlight some of these planned projects by strategic oversight area.

Figure 9.

Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

- The **DoD OIG** intends to determine whether Theater Support Activity's tactical signals intelligence processing is sufficient to satisfy priority intelligence requirements.
- The **DoD OIG** intends to determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems.

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- **USAID OIG** intends to determine whether USAID is managing risks inherent to providing humanitarian and stabilization assistance and determine the extent to which USAID support to IDP activities support the joint DoS/USAID strategic plan objectives.

SUPPORT TO MISSION

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems
- The **DoS OIG** intends to determine whether the DoS considered existing and future electrical power needs and infrastructure of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad when designing the new power plant, conducted oversight of the construction and commissioning of the new power plant, and took measures to mitigate design or construction deficiencies, if any.

INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

Investigations

The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OIR during the quarter. However, COVID-19 continued to affect the Lead IG agencies' ability to conduct OIR-related investigations. The Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS, the DoD OIG's criminal investigative component) removed investigative personnel from Iraq, Qatar, and Djibouti, where investigators were handling some OIR-related cases because of COVID-19 related staff rotations. Some DCIS personnel were able to return to Qatar in September. DoS OIG and USAID OIG investigators based in Frankfurt have been teleworking from their residences.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO OIR

During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in three criminal debarments. Those actions are discussed below.

The investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 14 investigations, initiated 2 new investigations, and coordinated on 100 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations.

The Lead IG agencies and partners continue to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from DCIS, the DoS OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. This quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 25 fraud awareness briefings for 290 participants.

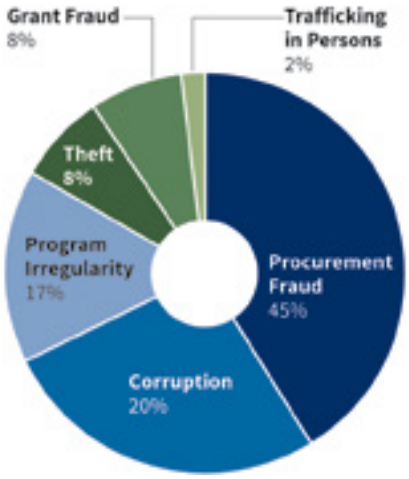
THREE DEBARRED FOR BRIBERY INSIDER INFORMATION INVESTIGATION

On August 13, 2020, the Department of the Army, Office of the Judge Advocate General, Procurement Fraud Division, Suspension and Debarment Office debarred two men and one company from conducting business with the U.S. Government following an investigation into bribery and other allegations.

ACTIVITY BY FRAUD AND CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIVE WORKING GROUP

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

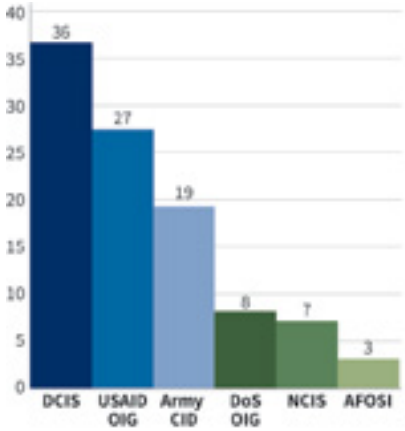
As of September 30, 2020



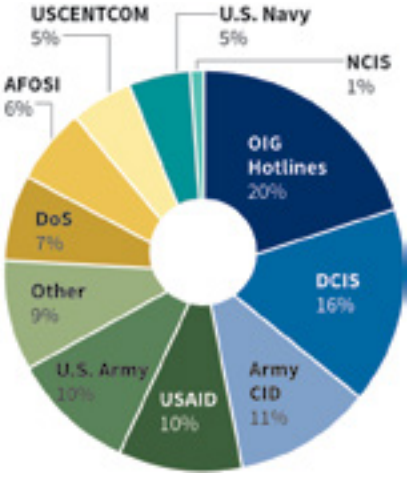
OPEN INVESTIGATIONS*

100

OPEN INVESTIGATIONS BY WORKING GROUP MEMBER*



SOURCES OF ALLEGATIONS



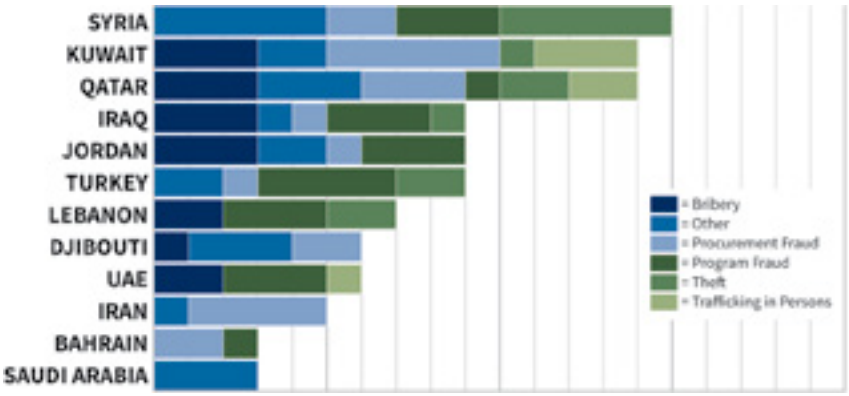
Q4 FY 2020 BRIEFINGS

Briefings Held	**25**
Briefings Attendees	**290**

Q4 FY 2020 RESULTS

Arrests	**—**
Criminal Charges	**—**
Criminal Convictions	**—**
Fines/Recoveries	**—**
Suspensions	**—**
Debarments	**3**
Contract Terminations	**—**
Personnel Actions	**—**
Administrative Actions	**—**

PRIMARY OFFENSE LOCATIONS



*Some investigations are joint with more than one agency and some not joint with any other agency. Therefore, the total number of Joint Open Cases may not equal the total number of Open Cases. Open Cases as of 9/30/2020.

During the course of this investigation, DCIS, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Division, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations received allegations concerning Army Office of the Program Manager–Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG) Telecom Specialist Alex Apilado. The information received alleged that Apilado committed fraud and possibly took bribes in relation to a fiber optic cable upgrade project for $1.1 million. OPM-SANG supports the OIR mission. The OPM-SANG mission is to develop the capability to unilaterally initiate, sustain, and operate modern military organizations and systems in conjunction with other Kingdom of Saudi Arabia defense forces, including those against ISIS.

The investigations disclosed that from 2015 through 2016, Amjad Mohammad Abumustafa and Western Experts of Saudi Arabia (WESA), a company based in Saudi Arabia, allegedly bribed Apilado for selective bid information regarding the fiber optic cable upgrade project. In March 2019, OPM-SANG fired Apilado and he forfeited his rights to all retirement benefits, including a one-time lump sum severance payment of $219,000.00. After the Department of Justice declined to prosecute, the case was presented for administrative action.

The debarment prohibits Apilado, Abumustafa, and WESA from participating in any procurement and/or contractual related activities with any agency in the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government until May 2025.

The Dashboard on the previous page depicts activities of the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group.

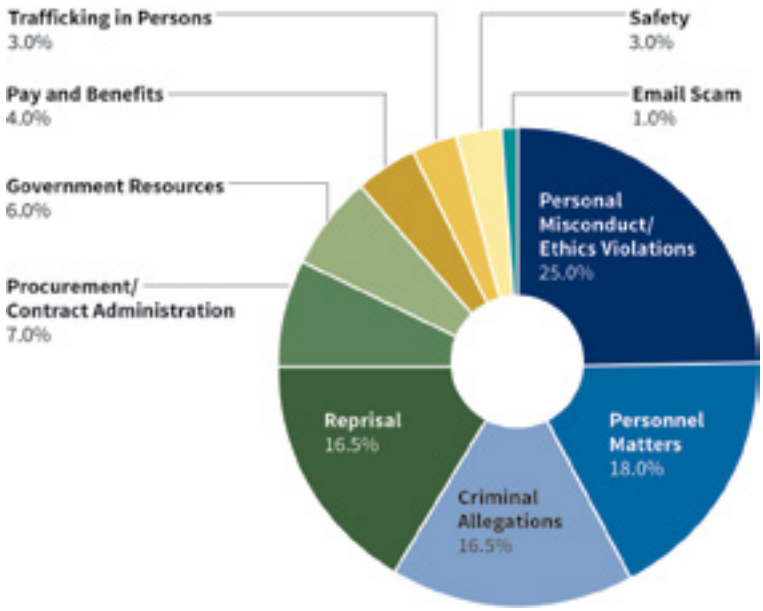
Hotline

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the DoD OIG investigator referred 71 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations.

As noted in Figure 10, the majority of the cases opened during the reporting period were related to personal misconduct, personnel matters, reprisal, and criminal allegations.

Figure 10.

Hotline Activities



INSPECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. AGENCY for INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

U.S. Army convoy in northeastern Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A
Classified Appendix to this Report

A classified appendix to this report provides additional information on Operation Inherent Resolve, as noted in several sections of this report. The appendix will be delivered to relevant agencies and congressional committees. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DoS and USAID inspectors general did not provide information for or participate in preparation of the classified appendix this quarter.

APPENDIX B
Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Report

This report complies with section 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, which requires that the designated Lead IG provide a quarterly report, available to the public, on each overseas contingency operation, and is consistent with the requirement that a biannual report be published by the Lead IG on the activities of the Inspectors General with respect to that overseas contingency operation. The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve. The DoS IG is the Associate Lead IG for the operation.

This report's content was contributed by the three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG—and by partner oversight agencies. This report covers the period from July 1, 2020, through September 30, 2020.

To fulfill the congressional mandate to report on OIR, the Lead IG agencies gather data and information from Federal agencies and open sources. The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or from Federal agencies, and the information provided represents the view of the source cited in each instance.

INFORMATION COLLECTION FROM AGENCIES AND OPEN SOURCES

Each quarter, the Lead IG agencies gather information from the DoD, DoS, USAID, and other Federal agencies about their programs and operations related to OIR. The Lead IG agencies use the information provided by their respective agencies for quarterly reporting and oversight planning.

This report also draws on current, publicly available information from reputable sources. Sources used in this report may include the following:

- U.S. Government statements, press conferences, and reports
- Reports issued by international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and think tanks
- Media reports

The Lead IG agencies use open-source information to assess information obtained through their agency information collection process and provide additional detail about the operation.

REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD OIG, as the Lead IG for this operation, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, the DoS OIG, and the USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies and then participate in the editing of the entire report. Once the report is assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process within its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask relevant offices within their agencies to comment, correct inaccuracies, and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review prior to publication. The final report reflects the editorial view of the DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.

APPENDIX C
Department of Justice Prosecutions

Since 2014, the Department has charged more than 180 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS. From those cases charged since 2014, the Department has obtained more than 140 convictions; the remaining cases remain open. These numbers include individuals who could be described as foreign terrorist fighters or homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS, as well as those who may have assisted their conduct, obstructed investigations, or otherwise involved an identified link to ISIS.

The following example includes details on indictments, convictions, or sentences related to foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists related to ISIS activity from July 1 through September 30, 2020:

- **On July 29, 2020, in the Western District of North Carolina, Alexander Samuel Smith** was sentenced to 60 months in prison for making a false statement to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). According to court records, in February 2016, Smith lied during an interview with the FBI about his plans to travel to Syria to join ISIS, and about providing assistance to other individuals to do the same. Specifically, as trial evidence established, Smith denied purchasing a "buddy pass," which is a discounted airfare offered to airline employees, for an individual he believed wanted to exit the United States and ultimately join ISIS in Syria.
- **On August 10, 2020, in the Southern District of New York, Zachary Clark** pled guilty to attempting to provide material support or resources to ISIS. According to court records, Clark pledged allegiance to ISIS twice, first in July 2019, to ISIS's then-leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and then in October 2019, to ISIS's new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Sashemi al-Qurayshi. Beginning in at least March 2019, Clark disseminated ISIS propaganda through, among other avenues, encrypted chatrooms intended for members, associates, supporters, and potential recruits of ISIS. Clark's propaganda included, among other things, calls for ISIS supporters to commit lone wolf attacks in New York City. Clark urged the participants in encrypted chatrooms to attack specific targets, posting maps and images of the New York City subway system and encouraging ISIS supporters to attack those locations. Clark's guidance also included posting a manual entitled "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your Mom," which was issued by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and included detailed instructions about constructing bombs using readily available materials.
- **On August 24, 2020, in the Eastern District of Wisconsin, Waheba Dais** was sentenced to 90 months in prison and three years of supervised release following her conviction on one count of attempting to provide material support to ISIS. According to court records, Dais provided support to ISIS in 2018 in the form of expert advice and assistance. According to admissions made in connection with her plea, Dais used hacked Facebook accounts in order to support ISIS.

Using these accounts, she pledged her allegiance to ISIS on numerous occasions, communicated with and encouraged other ISIS supporters who described their plans to conduct attacks, disseminated information about explosives and biological weapons, and attempted to recruit new members to ISIS's cause. Dais also maintained encrypted social-media channels, where she posted messages encouraging ISIS supporters who could not travel to ISIS-controlled lands to conduct terrorist attacks in their home countries. Through those encrypted channels, she also provided detailed information about explosives, guns, attack planning, and target selection.

- **On September 2, 2020, in the Northern District of Texas, Omer Kuzu** pled guilty to conspiring to provide material support to ISIS. In plea papers, Kuzu admitted that he and his brother, Yusuf, departed Texas for Istanbul, Turkey in October 2014. They then traveled to Orfa, Turkey, where an "ISIS taxi" picked them up and smuggled them across the border into Syria. They stayed in a series of "waiting houses" before ending up in Mosul, Iraq. In Mosul, the brothers underwent 5 days of physical and weapons training led by ISIS instructors. They were then sent to Raqqa, Syria, where Kuzu started work at the ISIS telecommunications directorate. Shortly thereafter, Kuzu admits, he pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic Caliphate. He was given a monthly stipend, a Chinese-made AK 47, and an ISIS bride. Subsequently, Kuzu was sent to the second lines in Kobani, Syria and Hama, Syria, to provide communications support for ISIS fighters on the front lines. In March 2019, Kuzu was captured by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). He was returned to the United States and charged.
- **In September 2020**, four U.S. citizens who were detained by the SDF were turned over to the FBI. All four are charged with material support offenses relating to their support for ISIS and have made their initial appearances in U.S. district court in the districts in which they are charged.

In addition, 10 people have been transferred to the United States from Iraq and Syria to face federal criminal charges related to terrorism since 2014, including 4 people that were transferred during the quarter.

The Department of Justice's (DoJ) International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) operations were suspended due to the coronavirus–2019 pandemic. However, during the quarter, the DoJ conducted other activities to strengthen the rule of law overseas to help counter ISIS. The DoJ's Office of the Deputy Attorney General through its Rule of Law Office is reopening the Office of the Department of Justice Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad after a hiatus. The Department of Justice Attaché, a senior federal prosecutor, works directly with investigating judges and law enforcement counterparts on operational matters, and also provides capacity building on a range of criminal matters, including counterterrorism.

DOJ/Office of International Affairs (OIA) is assisting partner nations in developing institutions and best practices needed for effective mutual legal assistance and extradition cooperation. Through OIA's Global Central Authorities Initiative, in coordination with the DoS, experts from OIA work with international counterparts, particularly throughout Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, to help partner countries build effective central authorities. These institutions support effective international cooperation in criminal matters and enable the legal processes necessary to bring terrorists and other criminals to justice under the rule of law.

APPENDIX D
Department of the Treasury and Department of State Actions Against Terrorist Financing

Under Executive Order 13224, as amended, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of State have global terrorism authorities to target activities of extremist groups, including ISIS. The Department of the Treasury's (Treasury) Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence and its Office of Foreign Assets Control work to disrupt the ability of terrorist organizations to fund their operations. The DoS's Bureau of Counterterrorism leads DoS activities to counter terrorist finance and to designate Specially Designated Global Terrorists and Foreign Terrorist Organizations. This quarter, the Secretary of State made no new designations.

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY DESIGNATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Since 2014, the Secretary of the Treasury has designated a total of 92 individuals and entities providing support to ISIS pursuant to Executive Order 13224.

This quarter, the Secretary of the Treasury made two new designations. Treasury designations during the quarter were:

- Faruq Hamud operated a branch of the Tawasul hawala in the al-Hol IDP camp. This hawala served ISIS members and transferred payments for ISIS from outside Syria. Housing upwards of 70,000 refugees, al-Hol holds one of the largest concentrations of current and former ISIS members who continue to receive donations from ISIS supporters internationally. ISIS members receive these donations through multiple mechanisms that payout through the hawala system in the camp. A separate branch of the Tawasul hawala, located in Harim, Syria, was designated by Treasury in November 2019, coinciding with the last meeting of the Counter ISIS Finance Group (CIFG).
- Adnan Muhammad Amin al-Rawi was an ISIS facilitator in Turkey. This designation builds on a series of Treasury actions dating to 2016 with the designation of ISIS finance emir Fawaz Muhammad Jubayr al-Rawi. Since then, Treasury continued targeting other al-Rawi network members and their associated entities for providing critical financial and logistical support to ISIS.

No individuals or organizations sanctioned for providing support to ISIS were removed from the sanctions list during this reporting period.

In addition to designations, the Department of the Treasury leverages its participation and influence to develop a shared understanding of the threat posed by ISIS, as well as to encourage countries to take action within their jurisdictions and in coordination with others to disrupt ISIS financing and facilitation.

Treasury worked with interagency and Coalition partners, including the Government of Iraq, to prioritize identifying ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders, disrupting its financial facilitation networks in Iraq, and designating ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and elsewhere. Treasury also takes a leadership role in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and serves as a co-lead of the CIFG along with its counterparts from Italy and Saudi Arabia. On July 29, 2020, Treasury and its co leads convened a virtual CIFG meeting via conference call for participants to discuss ongoing global efforts to counter ISIS financing. During the meeting, CIFG members shared information about ISIS's financial activities, recent actions taken by authorities in their respective jurisdictions to disrupt ISIS financial operations, and improvements in their anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorist regimes. Subsequently, Treasury and its CIFG co-leads released a joint statement about the coalition's counter-ISIS efforts, the ongoing threat posed by ISIS, and the terrorist group's efforts to adapt its fundraising and financial facilitation activities.

APPENDIX E
Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 2 and 3 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 2.

Ongoing Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Agency, as of September 30, 2020

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Evaluation of U.S. Central Command's Kinetic Targeting Processes and Reporting Procedures To evaluate USCENTCOM's target development and prosecution processes, as well as post-strike collateral damage and civilian casualty assessment activities.
Audit of Pre-Deployment Training on Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems To determine whether the Military Services conducted pre-deployment training to counter an adversary's use of Unmanned Aerial Systems in accordance with the operational requirements of the geographic combatant commands. *Suspended due to COVID-19. The project will restart when force health protection conditions permit.
Audit of the Cybersecurity of DoD Additive Manufacturing Systems To determine whether DoD Components are securing additive manufacturing systems and data to prevent unauthorized changes and ensure integrity of design data.
Audit of Entitlements and Allowances for Processing for Military Service Reserve Deployments To determine whether the deployment process resulted in accurate and timely entitlements and allowances for deployed members of the Military Service Reserves.
Follow Up Audit of the U.S. Army's Management of the Heavy Lift VIII Contract to Meet Changing Middle East Mission To determine whether the Army implemented corrective actions in response to six open recommendations in Report No. DODIG-2017-095, "U.S. Army's Management of the Heavy Lift 7 Commercial Transportation Contract Requirements in the Middle East," June 26, 2017. In addition, to determine whether the Army implemented the corrective actions before issuing the Heavy Lift VIII contract.
Evaluation of Combatant Command Counter Threat Finance Activities in Support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. European Command Priorities To determine whether U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command are planning and executing counter threat finance activities to impact adversaries' ability to use financial networks to negatively affect U.S. interests.
Evaluation of Traumatic Brain Injury Screening in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility To determine whether U.S. Central Command properly screened, documented, and tracked DoD service members suspected of sustaining a traumatic brain injury to determine whether a return to duty status for current operations was acceptable or evacuation and additional care was required.
Evaluation of the U.S. Combatant Commands' Responses to the Coronavirus Disease–2019 To determine how U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Southern Command, and their component commands executed pandemic response plans; and to identify the challenges encountered in implementing the response plans and the impact to operations resulting from the coronavirus disease–2019.
Follow-Up Evaluation of Report No. DoDIG-2019-088, "Evaluation of DoD Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons in Kuwait," June 11, 2019 To determine whether the DoD implemented corrective actions for report recommendations in DODIG-2019-088, "Evaluation of DoD Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons in Kuwait," June 11, 2019.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Department of State's Risk Assessments and Monitoring of Voluntary Contributions to International Organizations
To determine whether the DoS policies, processes, and guidance for voluntary contributions ensure that risks are identified, assessed, and responded to before providing funds to public international organizations and funds are monitored to achieve award objectives.

Inspection of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security Special Program for Embassy Augmentation Response
To evaluate the Special Program for Embassy Augmentation Response.

Audit of Department of State's Post Security Program Review Process
To determine whether the DoS' Post Security Program Review process is sufficient to identify and resolve deficiencies in the management of selected posts' life safety, emergency preparedness, and information security programs.

Audit of the Use of Non-Competitive Contracts in Support of Overseas Contingency Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq
To determine 1) whether acquisition policy was followed in awarding non-competitive contracts in support of overseas contingency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq; and 2) whether, in awarding the non-competitive contracts, the justifications for doing so met the criteria specified in the Federal Acquisition Regulation and the Competition in Contracting Act.

Inspection of U.S. Agency for Global Media Journalistic Standards and Principles
To evaluate the U.S. Agency for Global Media's journalistic standards and principles.

Review of the Department of State's Foreign Assistance Tracking and Reporting
To evaluate DoS processes and procedures for tracking and reporting on foreign assistance awards.

Compliance Follow-up Review on Audit of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Selection and Management of Contract Oversight Personnel in Iraq
To determine the extent to which the DoS has taken action to close the four open recommendations that are considered resolved pending further action that the DoS OIG made in an earlier audit report (AUD-MERO-19-10) to improve the process to identify and nominate qualified contract oversight personnel in Iraq.

Review of Department of State Preparations to Return Employees and Contractors to Federal Offices during the Global Coronavirus Pandemic
To describe 1) DoS plans and procedures for returning employees to offices during the coronavirus pandemic and 2) the methods outlined in those plans and procedures to ensure suitable safety and welfare considerations and precautions have been undertaken on behalf of employees and contractors.

Audit of the Department of State's Use of Undefinitized Contract Actions
To determine whether the DoS Office of Acquisitions Management met Federal Acquisition Regulation requirements and DoS guidelines for issuing contract actions for which performance begins before the contract terms and conditions are finalized, and whether fees or profits were paid to contractors during the period after performance began but before the contract terms and conditions were finalized.

Inspection of the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, Directorate of Operations, Office of Safety, Health, and Environmental Management
To 1) evaluate whether the Office of Safety, Health, and Environmental Management effectively manages overseas posts' compliance with DoS safety, occupational health, and environmental management requirements; and 2) review the Office of Safety, Health, and Environmental Management's workplace, residential, and motor vehicle safety programs.

Inspection of the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, Directorate of Operations, Office of Fire Protection
To 1) evaluate whether the Office of Fire Protection effectively directs and monitors overseas posts' compliance with the DoS fire protection program; and 2) review the Office of Fire Protection's inspection, safety, and prevention programs.

Inspection of the Bureau of Administration, Office of the Procurement Executive, Office of Acquisitions Management, Diplomatic Security Contracts Division
To 1) evaluate how the Office of Acquisitions Management, Diplomatic Security Contracts Division uses funds received through a security contract surcharge to provide overall support to the Diplomatic Security program office for the administration of overseas local guard force contracts; and 2) assess the Office of Acquisitions Management, Diplomatic Security Contracts Division's timeliness in executing contract awards and modifications.

Review of the Public Diplomacy Locally Employed Staff Initiative
To assess program leadership; survey public diplomacy officers to assess the clarity, progress, and results of the program in the field; and to review coordination and communication among stakeholders.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of USAID's Oversight of Selected Implementer Delivering Humanitarian Assistance in Response to the Syrian Crisis
To determine what corrective actions the selected Syria-response implementer has taken to remedy internal control weaknesses identified by investigations; and if USAID eliminated oversight gaps identified by investigations of the selected Syria-response implementer.

Audit of USAID/Iraq Activities
To assess USAID's management of its transition strategy for humanitarian assistance in Iraq; and USAID's oversight of its humanitarian assistance and stabilization activities.

Audit of USAID's Initiative Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
To determine to what extent USAID has taken action to prevent and detect sexual exploitation and abuse; and to assess USAID's process for responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Audit of USAID's Self-Reliance Initiative
To determine to what extent are USAID's self-reliance metrics incorporated into its development programming strategy and identify the challenges USAID faces in implementing development activities as envisioned under the Journey to Self-Reliance Initiative.

Audit of USAID's Contract Termination Practices
To assess USAID's procedures guiding acquisition award terminations.

Table 3.

Ongoing Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agency, as of September 30, 2020

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Close Air Support to Friendly Forces
To determine what are the DoD's requirements for friendly force identification associated with close air support; to what extent has the DoD identified initiatives to enhance friendly force identification capabilities for close air support missions and ensured the capabilities are interoperable; and to what extent has the DoD has evaluated the training for forces integrating and delivering close air support.

APPENDIX F
Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 4 and 5 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects.

Table 4.

Planned Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Agency, as of September 30, 2020

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Evaluation of Tactical Signals Intelligence Processing To determine whether Theater Support Activity's tactical signals intelligence processing is sufficient to satisfy priority intelligence requirements. *Suspended due to coronavirus disease–2019. The project will restart when force health protection conditions permit.
Audit of Unmanned Systems Cybersecurity Controls To determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems.
Audit of the U.S. Army Central Command's Modernized Enduring Equipment Set in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility To determine whether the Army's implementation of the modernized enduring equipment sets in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility is meeting mission goals.
Evaluation of U.S. Special Operations Command Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center To determine whether U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center provides U.S. combatant commanders the increased capability to conduct Internet-based information operations globally. *Suspended due to coronavirus disease–2019. The project will restart when force health protection conditions permit.
Evaluation of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in Support of Combatant Commands Overseas Contingency Operations' Intelligence Requirements To determine whether U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center provides U.S. combatant commanders the increased capability to conduct Internet-based information operations globally. *Suspended due to coronavirus disease–2019. The project will restart when force health protection conditions permit.
Follow up Audit of Management of Army Prepositioned Equipment To determine whether the Army implemented the recommendations identified in DODIG-2018-132, "Management of Army Equipment in Kuwait and Qatar," June 29, 2018, to improve Army Prepositioned Stock–Southwest Asia inventory accountability and equipment maintenance.
Audit of Oversight of the Department of Defense Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II Contract In Afghanistan To determine whether the Army provided oversight of DoD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II Contractors in Afghanistan to ensure the contractors fulfilled requirements.
Audit of the DoD's Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund Stipends to the Vetted Syrian Opposition To determine whether the DoD properly evaluated if vetted Syrian opposition participants met DoD requirements to receive stipends from the Counter Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund for Syria, and if the stipends were properly paid to vetted Syrian opposition participants.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Audit of Personal Property Accountability of U.S. Mission Iraq To determine whether the DoS 1) accounted for and maintained personal property at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, and 2) transferred personal property from the Consulate General in Basrah to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in accordance with Federal requirements and DoS regulations.
Audit of the Transition of Iraq Support Services to the Diplomatic Platform Support Services Contract To determine how the DoS controlled costs for the Iraq Support Services bridge contracts and the status of efforts to award replacement life support contracts in Iraq.
Audit of the Performance of the New Embassy Baghdad Power Plant To determine whether the DoS 1) assessed the existing and future electrical power needs and infrastructure of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad when designing the new power plant, 2) conducted oversight of the construction and commissioning of the new power plant, and 3) took measures to mitigate design or construction deficiencies, if any.
Audit of the PAE Operations and Maintenance Contract at Embassy Baghdad, Iraq To determine whether the DoS is administering the PAE operations and maintenance contract in accordance with Federal and DoS requirements and whether PAE is operating in accordance with the contract terms and conditions.
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Audit of USAID's Internally Displaced Person's Activities in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen To determine if USAID is managing risks inherent to providing humanitarian and stabilization assistance and determine the extent to which USAID internally displaced person's activities support the objectives of the joint DoS/USAID strategic plan.

Table 5.

Planned Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agency, as of September 30, 2020

AIR FOCE AUDIT AGENCY
Redeployed Unit Equipment Account Closure To determine procedures to ensure equipment accounts of redeployed units are closed.
Electronic Countermeasure Pod Centralized Repair Facility To determine the efficiency of electronic countermeasure repair facility in the area of responsibility.
Personal Wireless Communication System Accountability To determine if area of responsibility personnel account for assets and established personal wireless communication system contracted requirements to meet the mission.

ACRONYMS

Acronym	
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force-OIR
CPI	critical petroleum infrastructure
CTS	Counter Terrorism Service
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
DoS	Department of State
Dos NEA	DoS Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
DoS NEA AC	DoS NEA Office of Assistance Coordination
DoS PM	DoS Bureau of Political-Military Affairs
DoS PRM	DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
ESSA	Eastern Syria Security Area
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FY	fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
InSF	Internal Security Forces
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JFCK	Joint Forces Command Kirkuk
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iraqi Kurdish)
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	Refers to DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG

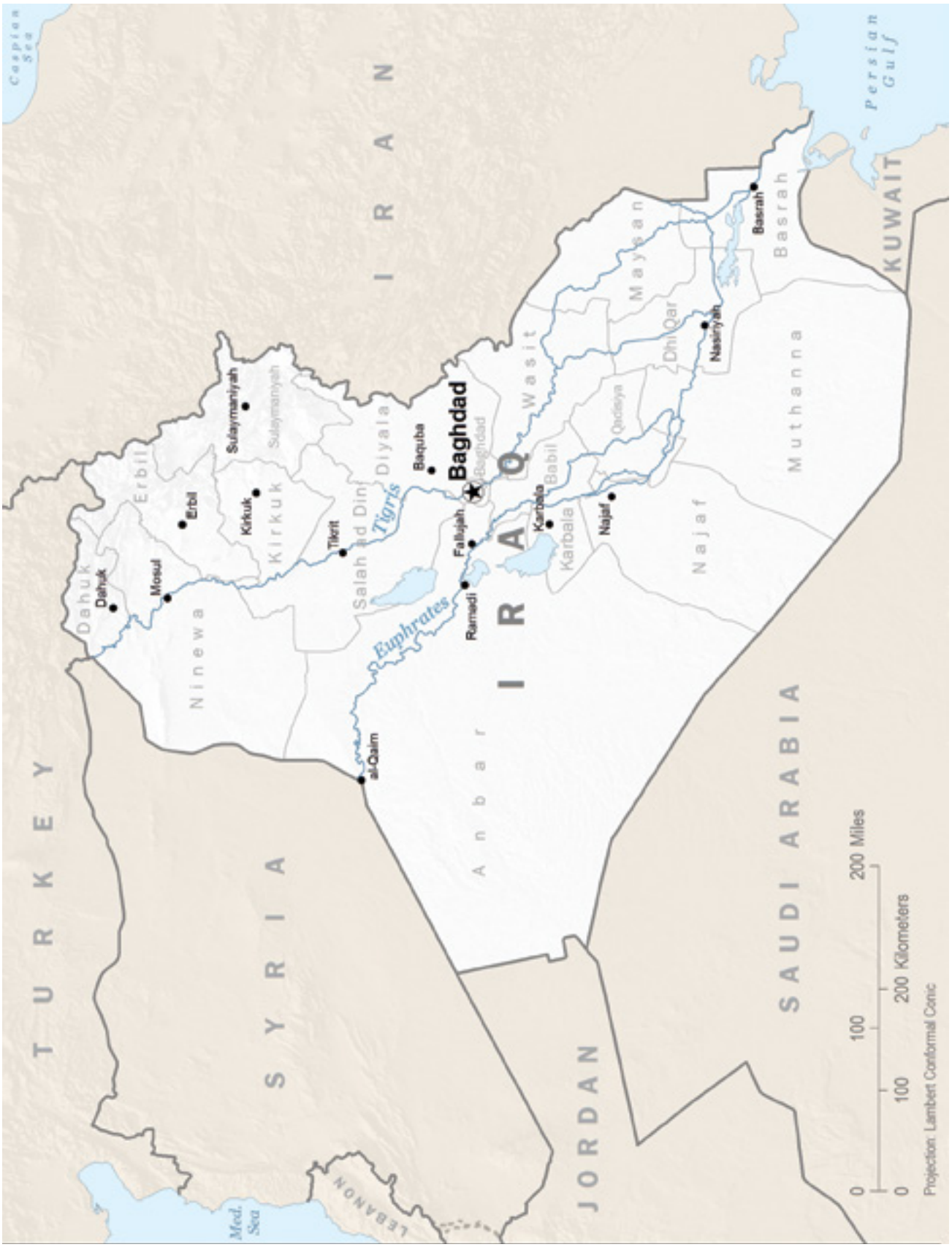
Acronym	
MAG	Military Advisory Group
MERV	Middle Euphrates River Valley
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NMI	NATO Mission–Iraq
NOC	National Operations Center
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OCO	Overseas Contingency Operation
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OSC-I	Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq
OUSD(P) ISA	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy/Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Turkish)
PMC	Popular Mobilization Committee
PMF	Popular Mobilization Force
PRISF	Provincial Internal Security Forces
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)
QDZ	Qamishli Deconflcition Zone
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNES	Self-Administration of North and East Syria
START	Syria Transition Assistance Response Team
Treasury	Department of the Treasury
TSO	Turkish-supported Opposition Groups
UNAMI	UN Assistance Mission in Iraq
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNDP FFS	UN Development Programme Funding Facility for Stabilization
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees

(continued on next page)

Acronym	
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAID BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command
USUN	U.S. Mission to the United Nations
WFP	UN World Food Programme

Acronym	
WHO	World Health Organization
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units

U.S. Army soldiers perform firing drills at a range on al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)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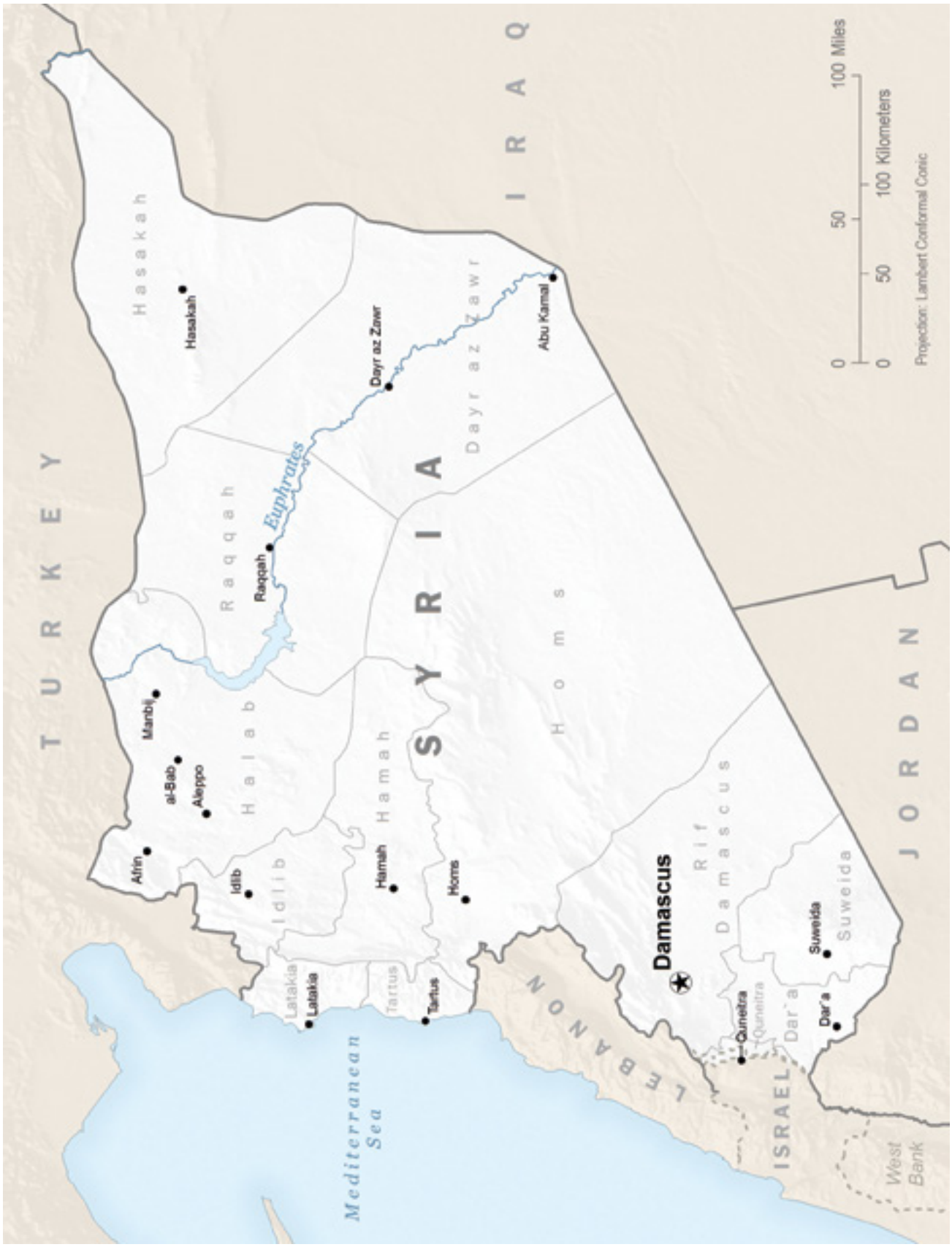
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