



Weekly Iraq .Xplored report

21 July 2018

Prepared by Risk Analysis Team, Iraq

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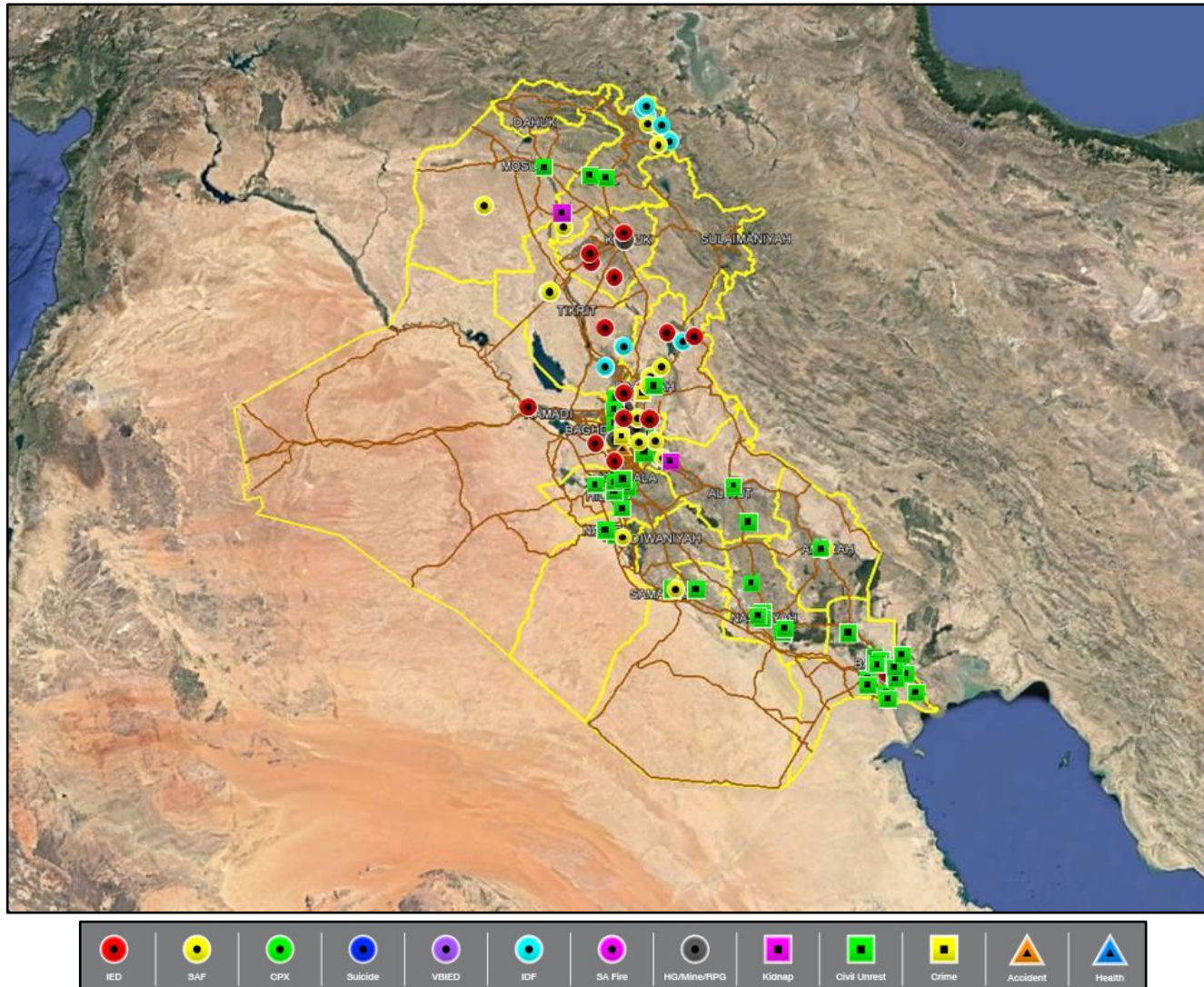
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ACTIVITY MAP



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OUTLOOK**Short term outlook**

- Protest activity remains the central theme of reporting from southern Iraq. Recent demonstrations were seen in Basra, Maysan, Muthanna, Najaf, Babil, Dhi Qar, Karbala, and Diwaniyah. It is advised that all non-essential movement to locations affected by large-scale demonstrations is suspended due to the high risk of unrest and violence. Iraqi Security Forces remain on 'high alert' as the protests continue.
- The protests remain driven by shortages of water and electricity. Demonstrations can be expected to continue in the next few weeks as demand for both commodities increases during the hot summer months. Demands for employment opportunities were also emphasized. Such events can be expected to continue, with the likelihood of them becoming more violent dependent on the security forces' initial reactions.
- The fall-out of the May 12 parliamentary elections remains the focus of political reporting. The manual recount of votes is expected to take a few weeks more to complete, with the government formation process to start officially after the results are confirmed by the Federal Supreme Court. Political negotiations over the government composition are likely to be complicated by the current protest activity in southern Iraq, with the PM Haider al-Abadi's security leadership and popularity tested by violent demonstrations.
- Controversial results of the parliamentary elections and the ongoing disputes resulting from the Kurdish independence referendum mean that the general threat from political instability in northern Iraq could manifest itself to varying degrees of unrest and violence at the local level. On July 01, a suicide VBIED targeted a warehouse housing ballot boxes in Kirkuk; one security element was killed and 20 others were injured. On July 18, multiple explosive devices detonated in the city centre injuring at least a dozen civilians.

Medium to long term outlook

- A protracted period of coalition building is expected follow the elections. The official government formation process will be initiated once the Federal Court confirms the parliamentary election results. A period of transition will follow in which bureaucracy will increase as incumbents and policy changes.
- The election results and government composition will have a significant impact on the security environment in northern Iraq. In the absence of a concerted effort to engage the disenfranchised Sunni population of the country, these areas will remain at risk of sectarian violence from radical Sunni elements, especially in Nineveh, Salah al-Din and western Kirkuk.
- Islamic State activity will continue to dominate security reporting with focus on the potential resurgence of an insurgent campaign in northern and western Iraq. Despite ongoing ISF efforts to clear remaining IS pockets, the group retains a degree of freedom of movement in the desert regions of Anbar, near the Syrian border, and along the Hamrin Mountains.
- Low-level incidents related to criminality, personal disputes and tribal tensions are likely to continue in Basra and the southern region. Long-term tensions are also expected to be driven by the return of militia factions expecting material and social rewards for their contribution in the campaign against IS.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Angry protests in southern Iraq continued for another week

Protest action driven by a lack of basic services, high levels of unemployment and government corruption entered its third week, with some registering fatalities and a high number of injuries. Over the past week, demonstrations were seen in all the provinces of southern Iraq. Further casualties occurred as ISF attempted to contain the protests. Friday evening saw large demonstrations in major cities of central and southern Iraq, including Baghdad, Basra, Nasiriyah, Amarah, Diwaniyah, Karbala and Najaf.

Government formation to be delayed by recount and protests

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has reportedly finished the manual recount of questioned election ballots in Nineveh, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Irbil, Dahuk, Basra, Maysan, Wasit, Dhi Qar, Muthanna and Qadisiyah provinces. However, the recount is estimated to take a few weeks more to complete, with the government formation process to start officially after the results are confirmed by the Federal Supreme Court. Political negotiations over the government composition are expected to be complicated further by the political fall-out of the protest activity in southern Iraq, with the current Prime Minister's security leadership and popularity tested by violent demonstrations. A prominent Shia cleric and leader of the winning Sa'eron coalition, Muqtada al-Sadr, urged the main political blocs to suspend all coalition talks until the protesters' demands are met.

THREAT MATRIX

Region	Political	Terrorism	Militancy	Crime	K&R
KRG*	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Low
North**	Moderate	High-Extreme	High	High	High
Baghdad	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Anbar	Moderate	High	High	High	High
South***	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Threat Scale	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme
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* **KRG** – Dohuk, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah

** **North** – Nineveh, Salah ad-Din & Diyala

*** **South** – Babil, Wasit, Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniyah, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, Maysan & Basra

OVERVIEW

Civil unrest

Angry protests in southern Iraq continued for another week; further casualties reported

Protest activity remains the central theme of reporting from southern Iraq. Over the past week, demonstrations were seen in all the provinces of southern Iraq. Protesters voiced numerous demands related to the provision of services and unemployment, in addition to political issues. Further casualties occurred as ISF attempted to contain the protests. On July 18, the Ministry of Health stated that at least eight Iraqis were killed and 56 were injured during protests over the past weeks. It added that the wounded were still in hospitals and seven of them were in critical condition. Later on July 20, the Ministry confirmed that two other people were killed and 47 were injured in Diwaniyah, Najaf, Baghdad, and Dhi Qar. Separately, the Joint Operations Command claimed that 260 ISF members were injured during the protests. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi urged security forces to protect public property but called them to refrain from using live fire on demonstrators.

An Iraqi Human Rights Commission (IHRC) member, Fadil al-Gharawi, said on July 19 that according to the commission records 336 people, arrested in the course of the recent protests, had been released. 86 detainees were released in Najaf Province; 70 people were freed in Muthanna. 180 detainees were reportedly released in Maysan province. Further 203 protesters were reportedly released on July 20, including 176 from Wasit province and 27 from Babil, according to another IHRC statement. The commission added that the 203 freed detainees represent all protesters who had been detained in Wasit and Babil until July 20.

Government continues efforts to quell protest activity in the South

The Iraqi government announced a number of decisions in response to the demands of protesters during the week. IQD 3.5 trillion (USD 2.9 billion) was allocated to the southern provinces towards desalinating water and improving electricity networks. PM al-Abadi also ordered for increasing the water share of the provinces of Basra, Dhi Qar, Muthanna and Diwaniyah. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Electricity has reportedly reduced the electricity share of Mosul, the country's second largest city, to meet the electricity demands of central and southern provinces. Towards the end of the week, PM al-Abadi announced that the petro-dollar share would be released for Dhi Qar province after a meeting was held with members of the newly formed crisis committee, members of the Dhi Qar council and tribal elders; a similar announcement was made for Basra on July 17. The allocation is to be spent on short-term projects to immediately improve the supply of electricity and water and then longer-term contracts focussing on health and development. Iraq's services and security crisis cell convened under the leadership of PM al-Abadi on July 18. Abadi called for cooperation among different ministries and institutions to offer solutions to the services crisis. PM also ordered the formation of crisis cells within each ministry and in each province to address the protesters' demands, urging the Finance Ministry to fund the process of meeting such demands.

Iraq seeks electricity improvement to quell unrest

The Iranian Minister of Energy reiterated this week that cutting the electricity export to Iraq was based on a bilateral agreement which gives priority to fulfilling Iran's domestic demands. He also mentioned that Iraq has one billion USD payment arrears. Meanwhile, PM Abadi has reportedly cancelled the visit by the Minister of Electricity to Saudi Arabia, announced earlier to seek an alternative source of support for strained Iraqi energy network. Meanwhile, the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity announced that Kuwait has approved to supply Iraq with gasoline to overcome the current power crisis.

Political**Political parties refrain from direct involvement in protests**

On July 16, PM al-Abadi appealed to political parties and the Popular Mobilisation to support the government in bringing protests under control. Leaders of Iraq's political blocs publically supported the right to peaceful demonstrations while condemning "the violations that targeted public and private property and security forces." A statement issued after Abadi conferred with representatives of political blocs added that they had agreed to form a committee to follow up on the government's measures to accelerate reforms. "Our people have the right to demand their rights and improve services, and it is our duty to respond to the demands that are made peacefully, and to isolate violators," it continued. PM al-Abadi also visited the headquarters of the Popular Mobilisation Forces on July 16. As politicians continue to seek a solution to the crisis, the Iraqi cabinet stressed the need to accelerate the formation of a new government who could respond to demands. However, prominent Shia cleric and leader of the Sa'eroun coalition, Muqtada al-Sadr, urged the main Iraqi political blocs to "suspend all talks on forming coalitions until the protesters' justified demands are met".

KDP and PUK meet in Irbil to discuss relations with Baghdad

Senior officials from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) met in Irbil on July 16 to discuss the future relations with Baghdad, in the context of a new government formation. This follows several earlier meetings, and the formation of a committee to create a draft roadmap for negotiations with other political factions. A KDP spokesman subsequently stated that the discussions were productive, and that they gained ground towards agreement on key issues. They also indicated that both parties are ready to work with other Kurdish factions in the common interest of the Kurds.

IHEC completes recount of parliamentary votes in Nineveh

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) reportedly finished the manual recount of parliamentary votes in the northern Nineveh province this week. In a statement, the IHEC spokesman Laith Jabar confirmed that "recount procedures at Nineveh's polling stations, where irregularities were reported, have been finalised". Commission officials have already conducted recounts in the provinces of Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Irbil, Dahuk, Basra, Maysan, Wasit, Dhi Qar, Muthanna and Qadisiyah.

Security**Multiple explosions reported on July 18 in Kirkuk**

Multiple explosions were reported in Kirkuk city of late on July 18, with one person dead and between 13 and 18 others reported injured. The bombs reportedly targeted a commercial district of Kirkuk. Three devices detonated on the Kirkuk-Baghdad road near an ice cream parlour, a restaurant, and the Ghandoura market area. The Kurdish Rudaw website claimed that bombs and grenades were thrown from a car, quoting a member of the local security committee. Three concussion devices detonated on the Rahimawa-Shorja road, the security media centre stated. Indirect fire was reported near a local hospital.

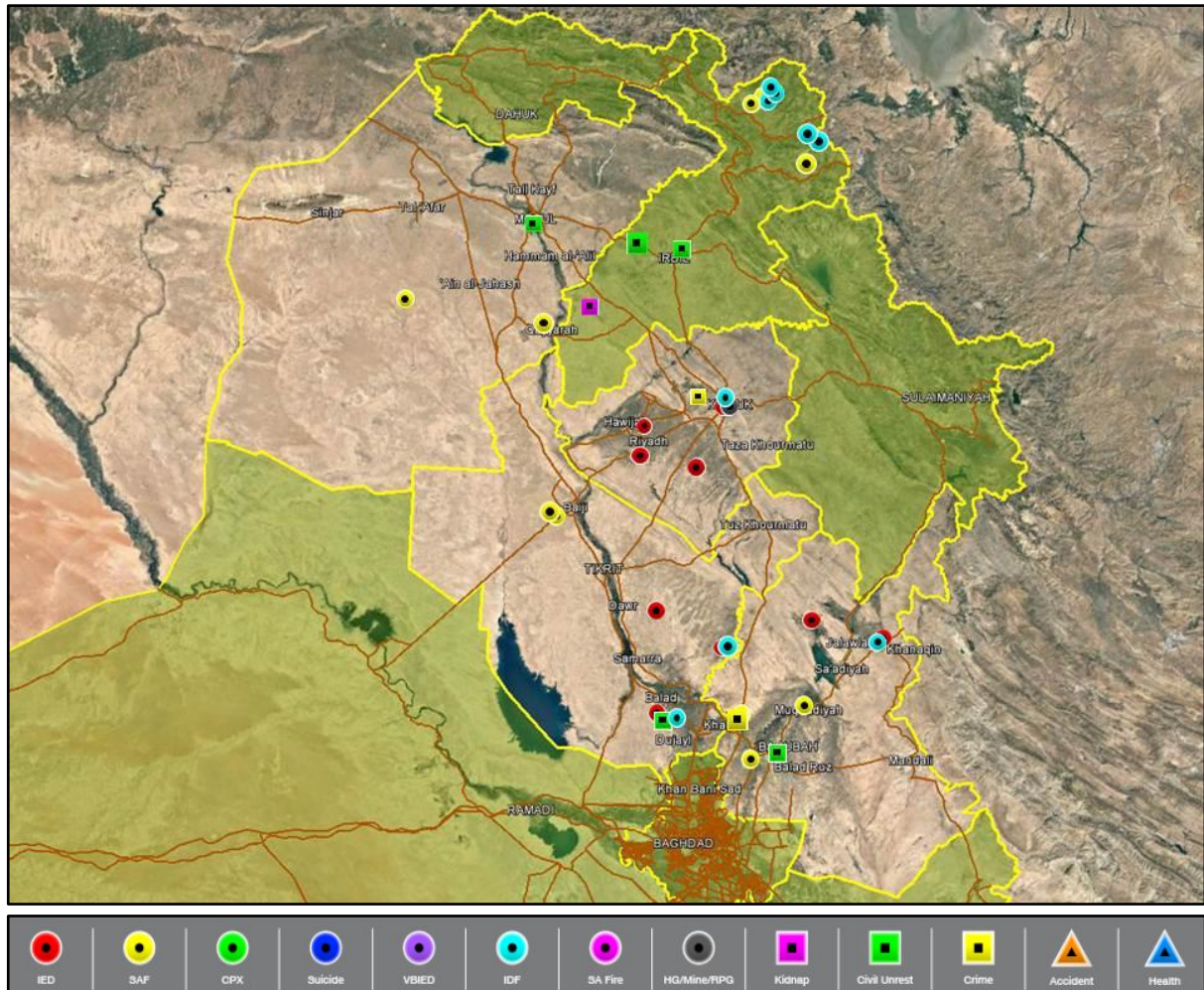
Humanitarian**WHO warns over shortage of health funding in Iraq**

World Health Organisation warned on July 17 that a lack of funding is threatening to close critical health facilities in Iraq, leaving almost one million people without access to basic medicines and health care. According to the statement, the support for health services in Iraq has drastically declined since the end of the Mosul campaign with numerous facilities shut down in 2018 due to a shortage of funds. This has left critical gaps in the provision of health care for Internally Displaced and those in areas with heavily damaged infrastructure. The organisation warned that 38% of health facilities supported by international actors are at risk of closure by the end of July, resulting in an increased risk of communicable diseases outbreaks and damage to recovery efforts in areas affected by conflict.

WEEKLY OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Countrywide Military/Security Situation

Northern Provinces



Military activity by the Turkish and Iranian forces was reported on the outskirts of the Kurdish Region. Turkish military sources confirmed that airstrikes targeted Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants around Hakurk, Zap, Avasin and Qandil during the week. Skirmishing between the Turkish Army and PKK-affiliated fighters were reported on several occasions around Bradost and Barzan. Meanwhile, media also reported Iranian artillery shelling in the border areas of Erbil province, near Omaran and Sidikan, on July 17. The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan claimed that two of its members had been killed by Iranian cross-border artillery fire; the shelling also resulted in material damage around their encampments. On the border with Nineveh, Peshmerga forces, with the support of the US-led coalition, launched an operation, targeting remnants of Islamic State in the Qarachokh area, Makhmour district. The Iraqi Army was reportedly involved along with the Peshmerga in the offensive.

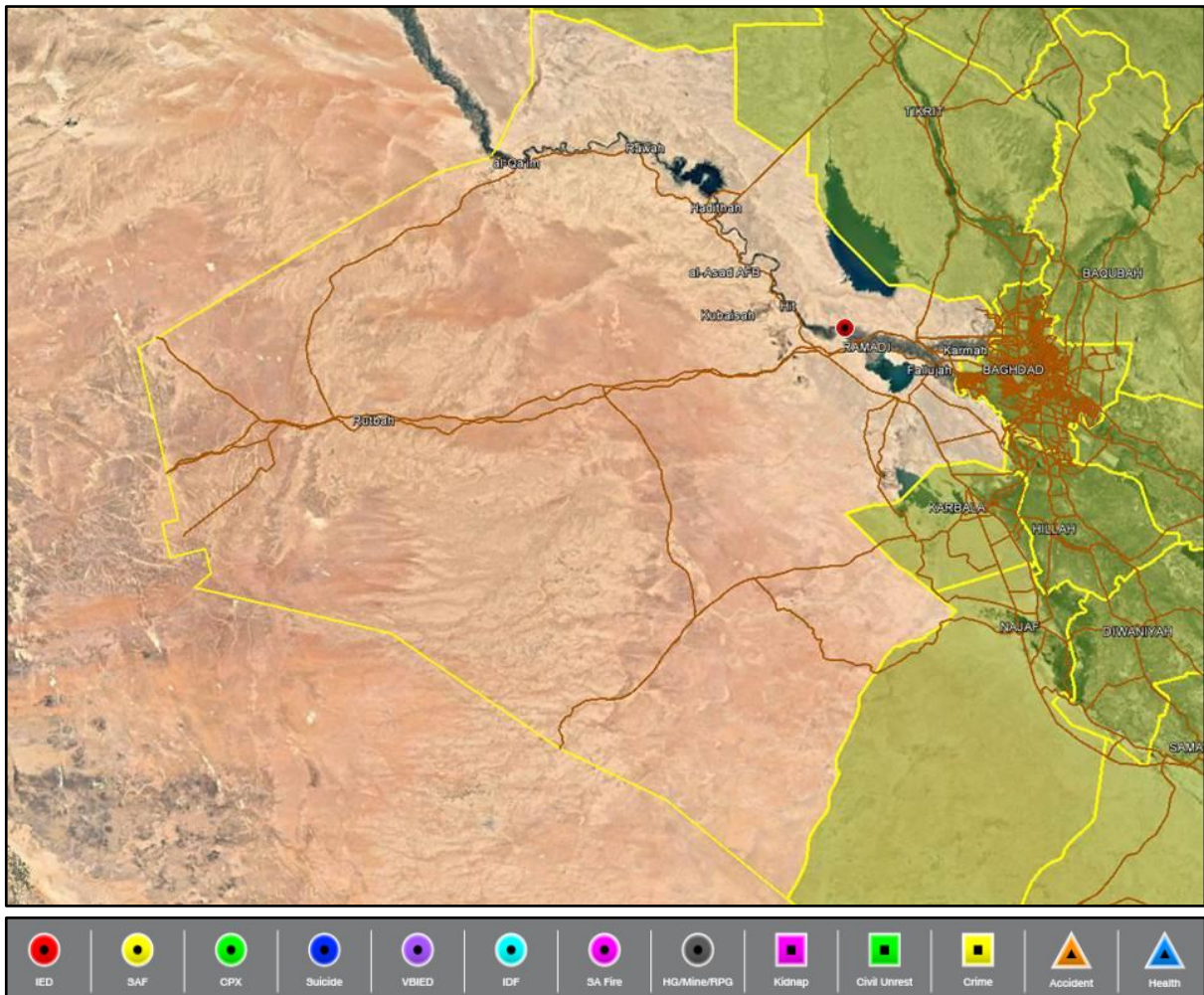
Clearance operations continue in Nineveh province. ISF reported this week that 412 civilian properties have been cleared of UXO and ERW in the Yezidi town of Sinjar to date. Clearing operations and cache finds were also recorded around Mosul and Tal Kaif. PMF and pro-government Sunni tribal militia killed three militants as they reportedly planned to attack a village south of Tal Abtah. Local media claimed that unidentified gunmen looted two Sunni mosques in Tal Afar, but ISF denied the reports.

Kirkuk province continues to witness regular insurgent attacks and security operations. Multiple explosions were reported in Kirkuk city of late on July 18, with one person dead and between at least 13 wounded. The bombs reportedly targeted a commercial district of Kirkuk (see *Security overview* section). In a continuation of attacks against ISF to the south and west of Kirkuk, two electricity pylons were damaged by IED detonations on the Mala Abdulla-Samarra and Hawijah-Dawr lines, causing power outages in Hawijah district. A Federal Police 16th Bde regiment commander was killed and three of his bodyguards were wounded when an IED exploded during an operation in Daquq district.

Activity levels in Salah al-Din were relatively low this week. On July 19, six insurgents reportedly attacked a crude oil pumping station in Siniyah, Bayji district; according to media reports, a number of attackers detonated their explosive vest against elements of the Oil Police Force (OPF) and PMF, causing an unspecified number of casualties. On July 15, ISF claimed to have found and defused a VBIED in the centre of Tikrit. Whilst viable, the device was said to have been reasonably small in composition. To the south-east, ISF began a joint clearance operation in the Mutaibijah region near the provincial boundaries of Diyala and Salah al-Din.

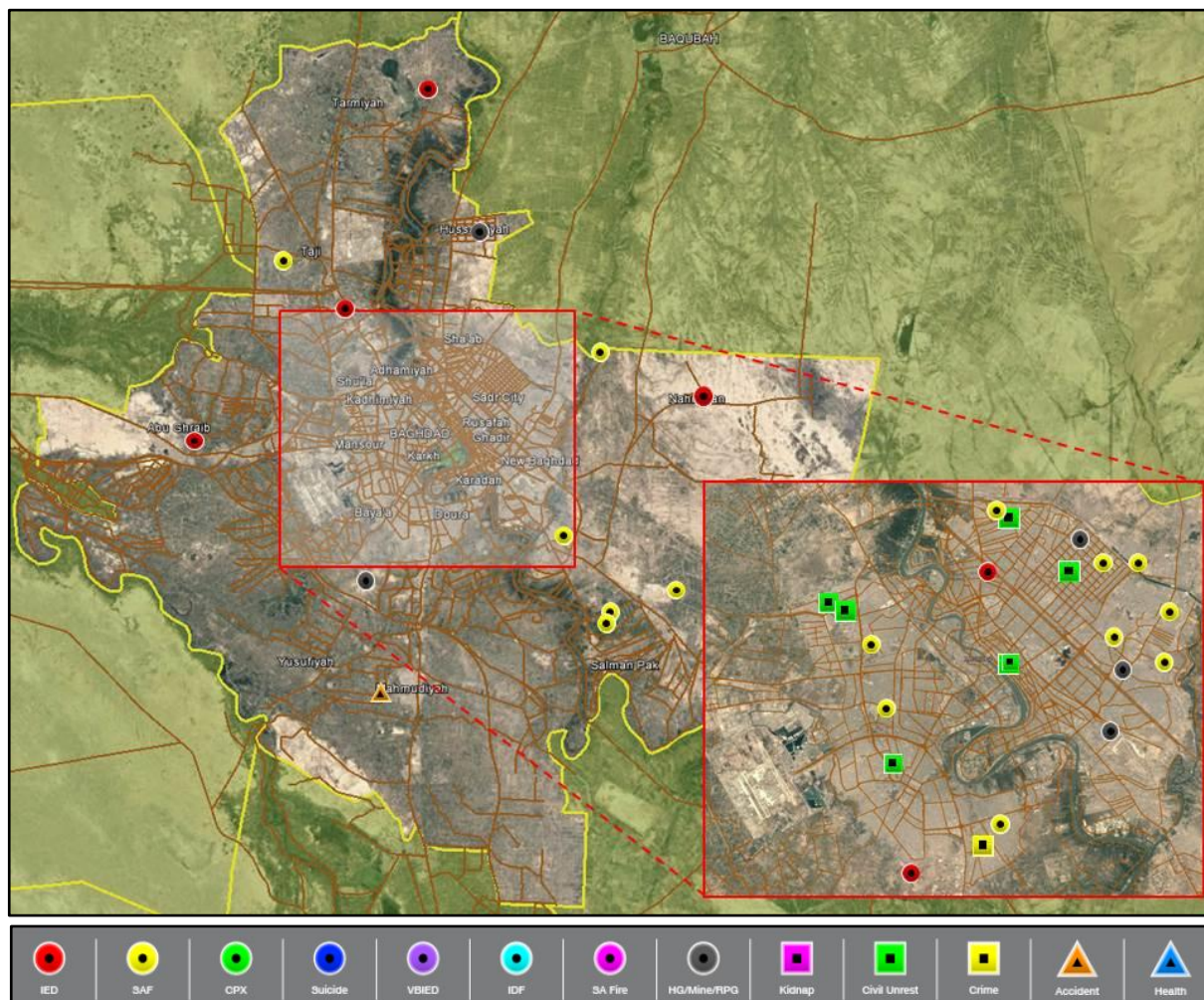
The majority of incidents in Diyala occurred again in the eastern parts of the province. In Khanaqin district, an IDF attack and IED explosion occurred in the vicinity of the Gilabat village on July 17; three more devices were found. Two ISF members were injured by an IED detonation near Qara Tepe. On July 16, ISF claimed that a female wearing an explosives-rigged vest was arrested in a raid on a house. Nevertheless, the western and southern districts have recently seen an uptick in activity prompting further ISF operations around Baquba. Near Buhriz, IA claim to have discovered an underground shelter used for preparing IEDs. Three IEDs were found in the Katun area, west Baqubah city. On July 19, ISF announced a security operation supported by helicopters in the areas to the east and south of Balad Ruz, along the provincial boundaries of Wasit.

Protest activity in the northern region was subdued, with low-level, local demonstrations occurring.

Anbar Province

Reporting from Anbar province was again limited. It is assessed that this was likely due to the media focus on the South and not to any significant changes to the security environment. ISF announced a security operation in the desert areas of the province, between Hadithah, Baiji and the Syrian border. Another operation was launched around Qaim, Rutbah and Waleed, near the Syrian border. One civilian was killed and another was injured by an IED detonation in Ramadi district on July 17.

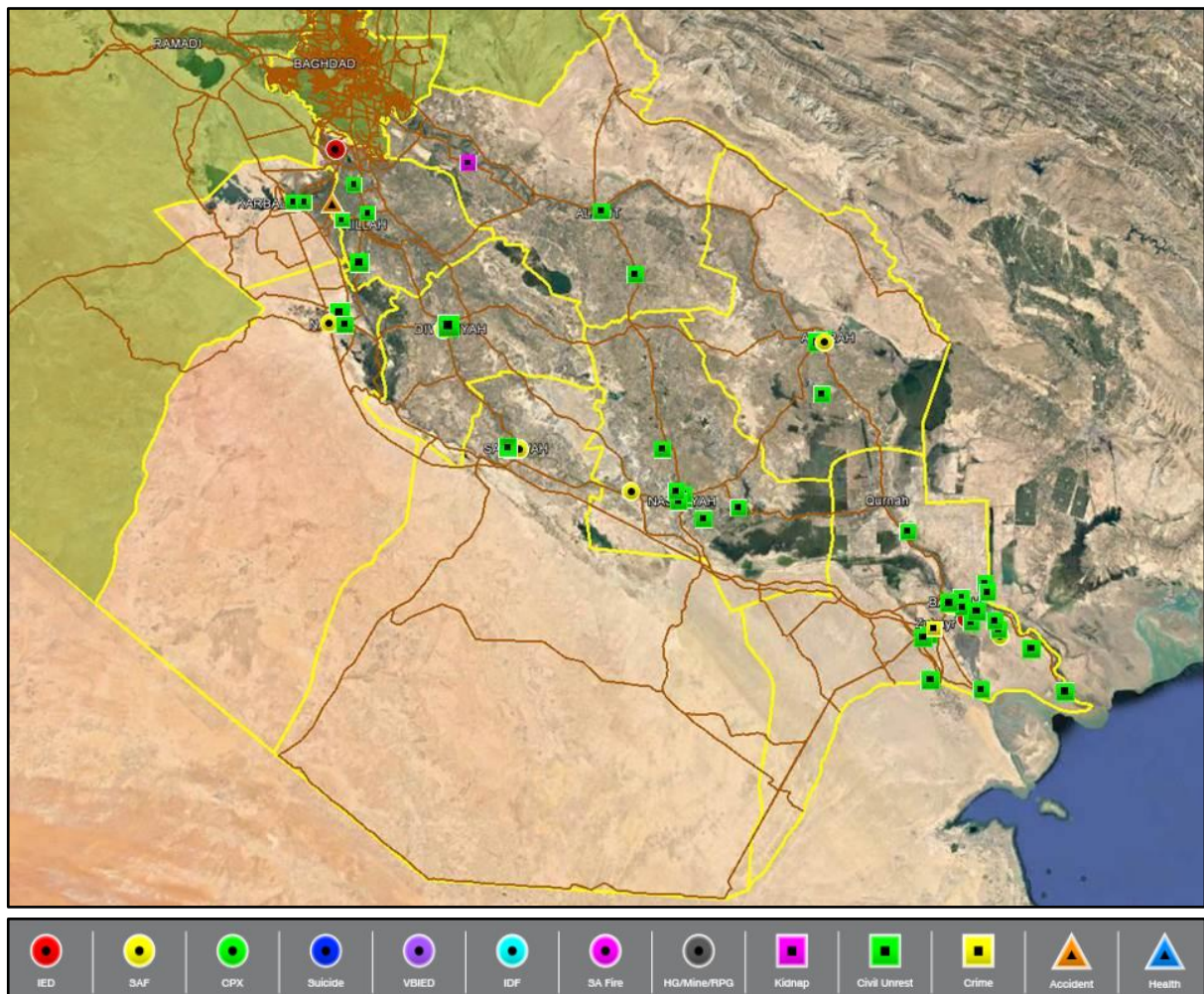
On July 20, the tribal council of Anbar announced its support for the ongoing protests in southern Iraq, criticising the government's poor response to protesters' demands. Local activists declared their intent to launch demonstrations in Anbar province next week, to demand improvements to public services, the release of detainees and return of displaced families.

Capital Region (Including Baghdad City)

The protests in Baghdad remained limited in scale, with no fatalities or attacks on property confirmed. There were several angry protests held in the Shula neighbourhood during the week. Fifteen people were reportedly arrested, and security forces used tear gas and fired warning shots to disperse the crowds on July 16. ISF confirmed that five security members were injured during the event. On July 15, five individuals were reportedly arrested in possession of several blades during the protest in the Ur neighbourhood. Riot police were also deployed to the al-Amil neighbourhood, where protesters threatened to block the Baghdad Airport Road. Another minor protest was seen in Sadr City on July 14; one civilian was reportedly wounded. Two demonstrations in Tahrir Square on July 14 and 15 dispersed without incidents. Although mass-demonstrations in Baghdad had been rumoured throughout the week, the only major protest was held in Tahrir Square on July 20, with an estimate of 2,500 people in attendance. The protesters reportedly attempted to cross the Jumhuriyah Bridge towards the International Zone (IZ) but were stopped by ISF. The Ministry of Health confirmed up to 30 people were hospitalised following the incident, mostly as a result of tear gas used against protesters.

In the background, routine incidents outwardly related to local disputes and criminality continue to be seen. Isolated shooting incidents were seen both in east (Sadr City, Shaab, New Baghdad) and west Baghdad (Hurriyah, Doura, Mansour). In line with pre-existing patterns, there were also low-yield detonations against static targets in Sadr City, New Baghdad, Zafraniyah, and Adhamiyah, causing material damages only. All IED and grenade incidents were consistent with intimidation attacks and did not result in any casualties.

Outside Baghdad city, reporting reflected primarily criminal incidents and local disputes. However, the threat of terrorist activity remains elevated north of Baghdad. One shelter was destroyed and a quantity of explosives was found during an ISF operation in Tarmiyah district. An IED detonated near Tarmiyah on July 19, injuring an ISF member. There were also two UVIED detonations during the week, in Taji and Nahrawan, but such targeted attacks are more likely to have been linked to personal disputes. Shooting incidents targeting civilians were recorded in Taji, Mada'in, Jisr Diyala and Yusufiyah.

Southern Provinces

Protest action driven by a lack of basic services - water and electricity – high levels of unemployment and government corruption entered its third week, with some protests registering fatalities and a high number of injuries. Iraqi Security Forces have been rebuked for their heavy-handedness by the Iraqi PM; however, he also acknowledged that there were some elements using the protests for their own gains. Notably, in Basra province, action targeting oil and gas facilities diminished mid-week with focus shifting back to government figures and agencies. Demonstrations in Zubayr on most mornings this week have focused firmly on the management of the Basra Oil Company (BOC), the protracted action a result of no representative meeting with the group. In Dhi Qar, protesters reportedly blocked the bridge leading the Gharraf oilfield on two occasions, demanding employment opportunities.

Friday evening saw large demonstrations in major cities of central and southern Iraq, including Basra, Nasiriyah, Amarah, Diwaniyah, Karbala and Najaf. Protesters voiced numerous demands related to the provision of services and unemployment, in addition to political issues. Further casualties occurred as ISF attempted to contain the protests. The Ministry of Health confirmed that two people were killed and 47 were injured in Diwaniyah, Najaf, Baghdad, and Dhi Qar. One person died and 16 were injured (including 15 ISF) in Diwaniyah. Injuries were reported in the course of ISF interventions in Nasiriyah and Najaf. Hundreds gathered outside the Basra Provincial Council, demanding employment and improvement of services.

There were further casualties and attacks on property reported in the course of protests during the week. Offices belonging to the Dawa, Sa'eroun and Fadhila parties were reportedly attacked by protestors in Qassim, Babil province. In Muthanna, casualties occurred in a confrontation between protesters and security forces in Samawah on July 15, after demonstrators attacked and set fire to the offices of Dawa, Fadhila and Hikma, and tried to attack the Provincial Council building. Four people were arrested as they attempted to set fire to the local council building in Suq al-Shuyukh, south of Nasiriyah, during an otherwise peaceful demonstration.

Aside from the protest action, criminal activity continues in the background. Official sources reported that a Chinese national was kidnapped on July 18 in Suwayra district, Wasit province. Subsequently, the Governor of Wasit announced that the hostage was released two days after the incident. ISF made the discovery when they arrested the gang – it is unclear if this was as a result of information or chance.

ACRONYM LIST

All - Area of Intelligence Interest	MoO - Ministry of Oil
AKA - Also Known As	MoT - Ministry of Transportation
AO - Area of Operations	MSR - Main Supply Route
APC - Armored Personnel Carrier	NFDK - No Further Details Known
APIED - Anti-Personnel IED	NGO - Non-Governmental Organization (aid/charity)
AQ - Al-Qaeda	NSTR - Nothing Significant To Report
AT - Anti-Tank	OCG - Organized Crime Group
ATGW - Anti Tank Guided Weapon	OPF - Oil Protection Force
AVIED - Anti-Vehicle IED	PAX - Person, Persons or Passenger
BBIED - Body Borne IED	PBIED - Person-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (UN Term)
Bde - Brigade	Pol - Point of Impact (for IDF)
Bn - Battalion	PoO - Point of Origin (for IDF)
BXP - Border Crossing Point	PSAF - Precision Small Arms Fire
CET - Convoy Escort Team	PSC - Private Security Company
CLC - Concerned Local Citizens	PSD - Private Security Detail
CoP - Chief of Police	RCIED - Remote-Controlled IED
CP - Check Point	RPG - Rocket Propelled Grenade
C-PERS - Captured Personnel	RTA - Road Traffic Accident
CPX - Complex Attack (attack using multiple weapon systems)	SAF - Small Arms Fire
CQA - Close Quarter Assassination/Attack	SAFIRE - Surface to Air FIRE
DBS - Drive by Shooting	SF - Special Forces
Div - Division	SVBIED - Suicide Vehicle Borne IED
DoD - Department of Defense	SVEST - Suicide Explosive Worn Vest
DoS - Department of State	TCN - Third Country National
DoS - US Department of State	TCP - Traffic Control Point
ECP - Entry Control Point	Technical - An improvised weapon-mounted pick-up truck
EFP - Explosively Formed Projectile	TTP - Tactics, Techniques and Practices
EOD - Explosive Ordnance Disposal (Bomb Squad)	UVIED - Under Vehicle IED
ERW - Explosive Remnants of War	UXO - Unexploded Ordnance
FoM - Freedom of Movement	VBIED - Vehicle Borne IED
Gol - Government of Iraq	VCP - Vehicle Checkpoint
HCN - Host Country National	WIA - Wounded in Action
HG - Hand Grenade	
HME - Home Made Explosive	
HMG - Heavy Machine Gun	
HVT - High Value Target	
IC - International Community	
IDF - Indirect Fire (i.e.: rockets, mortars)	
IDP - Internally Displaced Persons	
IEC - Independent Electoral Commission	
IED - Improvised Explosive Device	
IM - International Military	
IOC - International Oil Company	
IRAM - Improvised Rocket Assisted Mortar	
IRL - Improvised Rocket Launcher	
IS - Islamic State	
IVCP - Illegal Vehicle Check Point	
IVO - In Vicinity Of	
IZ - International Zone	
KIA - Killed in Action	
LN - Local National/Iraqi Civilian	
MAIED - Magnetically attached IED (aka UVIED)	
MIA - Missing in Action	
MoD - Ministry of Defense	
MoF - Ministry of Finance	
MoFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
MoHE - Ministry of Higher Education	
Mol - Ministry of Interior	
MoJ - Ministry of Justice	

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