



Weekly Iraq .Xplored report

22 September 2018

Prepared by Risk Analysis Team, Iraq

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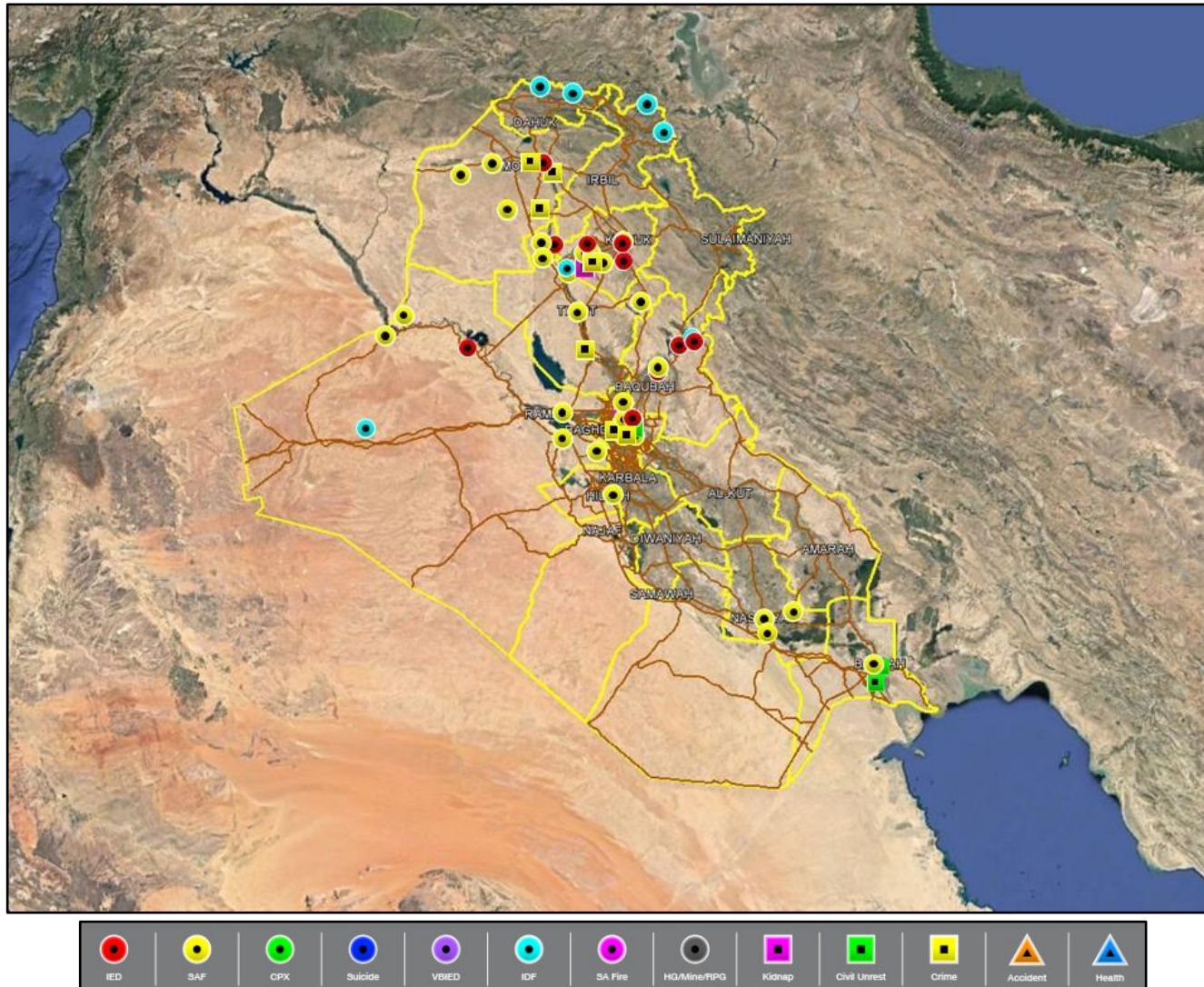
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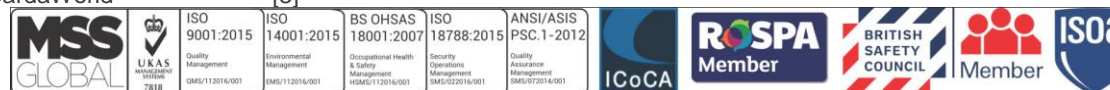
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ACTIVITY MAP



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OUTLOOK**Short term outlook**

- The Ashoura commemoration passed without major incidents in the southern region and Baghdad amidst extensive security measures. A heightened insurgent intent to stage signature attacks is assessed to remain throughout the remainder of Muharram. As underlined by the suicide VBIED attack between Baiji and Tikrit on 12 September, terrorist attacks are more likely in mixed areas of the north, including Salah al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk which remain more permissive to IS operations.
- While the situation in Basra has calmed down since the violent unrest earlier in the month, political tensions are assessed to remain high with an associated risk of spontaneous gatherings. An increased security posture for preventive reasons can be expected to remain in the city with additional security deployments and increased checkpoint scrutiny. A large-scale demonstration is also planned for 23 September, raising the outlook for further tensions.
- IDF attacks on the International Zone, Baghdad and the US consulate near Basra International Airport suggests heightened intent to target US interests in the country. While no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, it is likely that Iranian-backed elements are behind these incidents in an effort to harass and intimidate for political purposes. As such, the outlook for further attacks targeting US interests is assessed as increased in the coming weeks.
- Political focus over the next week will revolve around the election of key positions including Speaker, President and Prime Minister. Political negotiations to decide the composition of the new government can also be expected to dominate parliamentary sessions, with associated risks of demonstrations as tensions remain high.

Medium to long term outlook

- Sectarian violence can be expected to continue in areas of Northern Iraq which remain permissive to IS operations, including Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Diyala and southwestern Kirkuk. Attacks will continue to target security checkpoints and outpost, especially in Sunni dominated areas controlled by Shia dominated security forces.
- 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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wrangling over Prime Minister position continues

Following PM Abadi's apparent admission of defeat in last week's press conference, much political reporting this week has focused on potential successors with former VP, Finance and Oil Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi emerging as the most likely candidate for succession. Possible alliance between Sairun and Fatah blocs to form next government.

Mohammed Halbusi elected as new Parliamentary Speaker

Parliament voted to elect former Anbar Governor Mohammed Rikan al-Halbusi as the new Parliamentary Speaker, defeating Khaled Obeidi, Usama Nujafi and Mohammed al-Khalidi for the position. The election has been portrayed, with some justification, as a victory for Iran given Halbusi's support amongst pro-Iranian elements when defeating Abadi-aligned Khaled al-Obeidi.

Barham Salih nominated by PUK as Presidential candidate

Following weeks of contradictory rumours, the PUK announced this week the nomination of Barham Salih as their sole candidate for the Presidency position following a meeting in the leadership council. While Salih is considered the favorite for the position, the KDP also said they will nominate their own candidate ahead of the vote which will take place in Parliament in the coming weeks.

PMU establish mobilization reserve force in Basra

The PMU office in Basra announced the formation of a voluntary 'reserve mobilization force' tasked with the "protection of public and private property" in the province but also with providing a number of non-security related services for the people of Basra.

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

* KRG – Dohuk, Erbil & Sulaymaniyah

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

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

OVERVIEW**Wrangling over Prime Minister position continues**

Following PM Abadi's apparent admission of defeat in last week's press conference, much political reporting this week has focused on potential successors with former VP, Finance and Oil Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi emerging as the most likely candidate for succession. Reports early in the week suggested that the Fatah and Sairun Alliance had agreed to nominate Mahdi however in a 'letter to the public' Mahdi said he would reject the position, citing fears that any reforms proposed would be blocked by opposition groups and that he would soon lose his current popularity. Despite this, media outlets and observers continue to portray him as the most likely candidate to succeed PM Abadi. In an apparent tactical move to encourage his candidacy, Muqtada al-Sadr publicly expressed his support for Mahdi in a statement on Twitter on 17 September, calling for 'brother Mahdi, to join the fight against corruption and sectarianism'. On 18 September Mahdi also appeared in an interview with Rudaw TV channel to discuss political developments and Baghdad-Erbil relations. In a likely effort to appeal to the Kurdish parties, Mahdi discussed his history of cooperation with the Kurdish opposition during the Saddam regime and said the Kurdish vote will be key in determining the next prime minister. Meanwhile, after Sadr's endorsement of Mahdi, Badr-leader Hadi al-Ameri announced in a press conference that he was officially withdrawing his candidacy for the Prime Minister position. Ameri called instead for a candidate who enjoys support from the all the main parliamentary blocs and who complies with the recommendations issued by Ayatollah Ali Sistani.

Mohammed Halbusi elected as new Parliamentary Speaker

On 15 September, Parliament voted to elect former Anbar Governor Mohammed Rikan al-Halbusi as the new Parliamentary Speaker, defeating Khaled Obeidi, Usama Nujafi and Mohammed al-Khalidi for the position. Halbousi received 169 votes out of 298 while Obeidi, the only serious contender according to most analysts, received 89 votes. A day after the election, Halbusi spoke with his Iranian counterpart Ali Larijani who congratulated him on winning the position and discussed political developments in the region. Notably, Halbusi reportedly expressed his opposition to US sanctions on Iran and said "Iraqi MPs oppose any pressures and economic embargoes on the Islamic Republic of Iran, and regard them unjust." According to the Nujabah-aligned al-Etejah TV, Halbousi further said the people of Iraq "appreciate Iran's open support for the country", and specifically its military assistance during the IS campaign. Later in the week, Halbusi also spoke with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who also congratulated him on the election and praised Halbusi as part of a new generation of leaders for the future. For his part, Halbusi praised the US support during the IS campaign and stressed the need for continued international engagement.

Barham Salih nominated by PUK as Presidential candidate

Following weeks of contradictory rumours, the PUK announced this week the nomination of Barham Salih as their sole candidate for the Presidency position following a meeting in the leadership council on 19 September. PUK spokesperson Saadi Ahmed Pira told Kurdish media that Salih would also return to the party as deputy secretary-general after leaving the PUK in 2017 to form the Coalition for Justice and Democracy (CDJ). In a separate statement, the CDJ claimed it would continue to work as an independent party despite Salih's departure. Separately, the Head of KDP's National Relations committee, Ali Hussein, told the party website on 17 September that they will also name a candidate for the post of Iraqi President 'in the coming days.' Hussein further stressed that the KDP, not the PUK, deserves the position based on the election results where the KDP won 25 seats over the PUK's 18 while denying that any agreements existed with the PUK regarding the post or any other positions within the next Iraqi government. These sentiments were echoed by other members of the KDP, including MP Bashar Kiki, who told Kurdish media outlets that the KDP would nominate three candidates for the Presidency position, including Political Bureau members Rozh Nouri Shaways and Hoshiyar Zebari, and Political Bureau Secretary Fadhil Mirani.

Later in the week, Misaq Hamidi, a spokesperson for the al-Bina Coalition (the electoral coalition formed between al-Fatah and State of Law) said the coalition will support PUK nominee Barham Salih for the Presidency position. In the statement, Hamidi called the nomination of Salih “the correct one” and one “accepted by most political parties.” Separate reports claim Latif Rashid, another prominent member of the PUK, is still in the race for the Presidency position despite the unilateral decision by the PUK leadership to nominate Salih. Commenting on the report, a PUK spokesperson was quoted saying that while there is nothing to constitutionally prevent Rashid from nominating himself, he does not enjoy the support by the PUK leadership council.

PMU establish mobilization reserve force in Basra

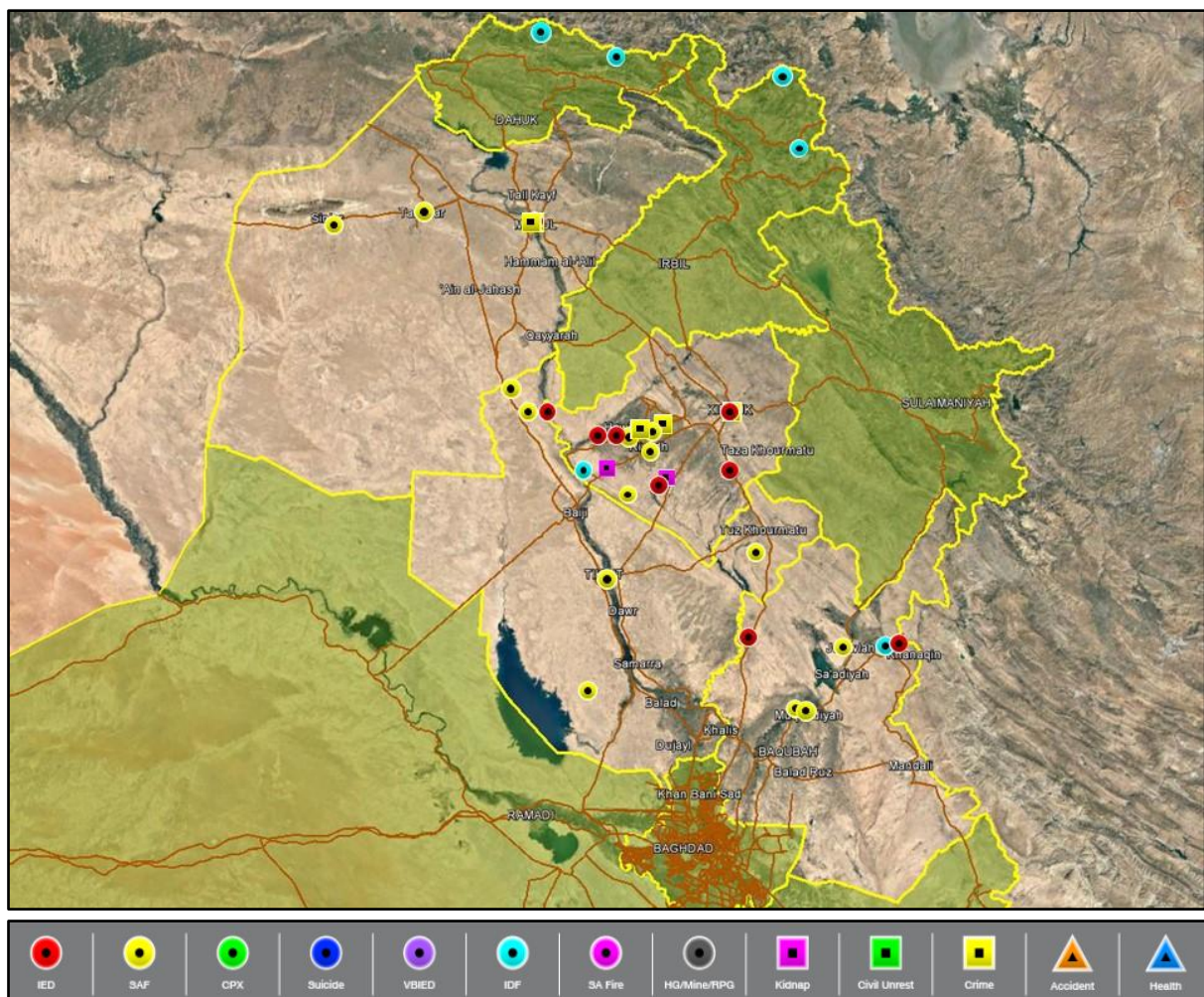
The PMU office in Basra announced the formation of a voluntary ‘reserve mobilization force’ tasked with the “protection of public and private property” in the province. The force will initially consist of 30 thousand volunteers in 10 new brigades and the statement said the decision comes in response to ‘recent events in the city’ when ‘external parties’ sought to destabilize security in the province and ‘exploit the legitimate demands of the protesters’. The PMU Directorate issued another statement later in the week further clarifying the purpose of the force which said it will comprise solely of volunteers and be tasked with carrying out work in a number of fields beyond security to serve the community including education, medical support and assistance to families of ‘martyrs’ who died in the IS campaign. The Head of the PMU recruitment office in Basra Province, Abdul Rahman Abdul Hamid, was quoted in the statement saying the force has been established to accommodate the growing numbers who have joined the PMUs since the start of the IS campaign and to mobilize their efforts for the good of the community.

US reiterates warning about Iranian activities in Iraq

Addressing the UN Security Council on 20 September, US’ Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said “Iranian aggression has escalated” in recent months and said the country is “developing the capability for its proxy militias to produce their own missiles inside of Iraq.” Haley also reiterated a previous warning by the White House that it would hold Iran fully accountable for any attacks by “it’s proxies” on US personnel and facilities in Iraq, and that they will “not hesitate to vigorously defend American lives.”

Iraq recalls Ambassador to Iran

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided this week to recall Ambassador to Iran Rajeh al-Mousavi citing ‘irresponsible behaviour’ days after a video appeared in which al-Mousavi was seen shouting at Iraqi expats at a Mosque in Tehran. According to media reports, the Ambassador’s strong reaction came in response to a question about the conditions in southern Iraq but the MoFA statement did not elaborate on any further details. The statement said appropriate and possibly legal action will be taken in response to the Ambassador while calling on all missions to be ‘in the service of their citizens.’ The next day, MoFA announced that Saad Jawad Kandil has been appointed for the position in Tehran. Kandil is the former Ambassador to Finland and South Africa and a member of the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, a party with historically close ties to Tehran. According to diplomatic procedures, Kandil will need to present his credentials in Tehran before formally assuming the position.

WEEKLY OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT**Countrywide Military/Security Situation****Northern Provinces**

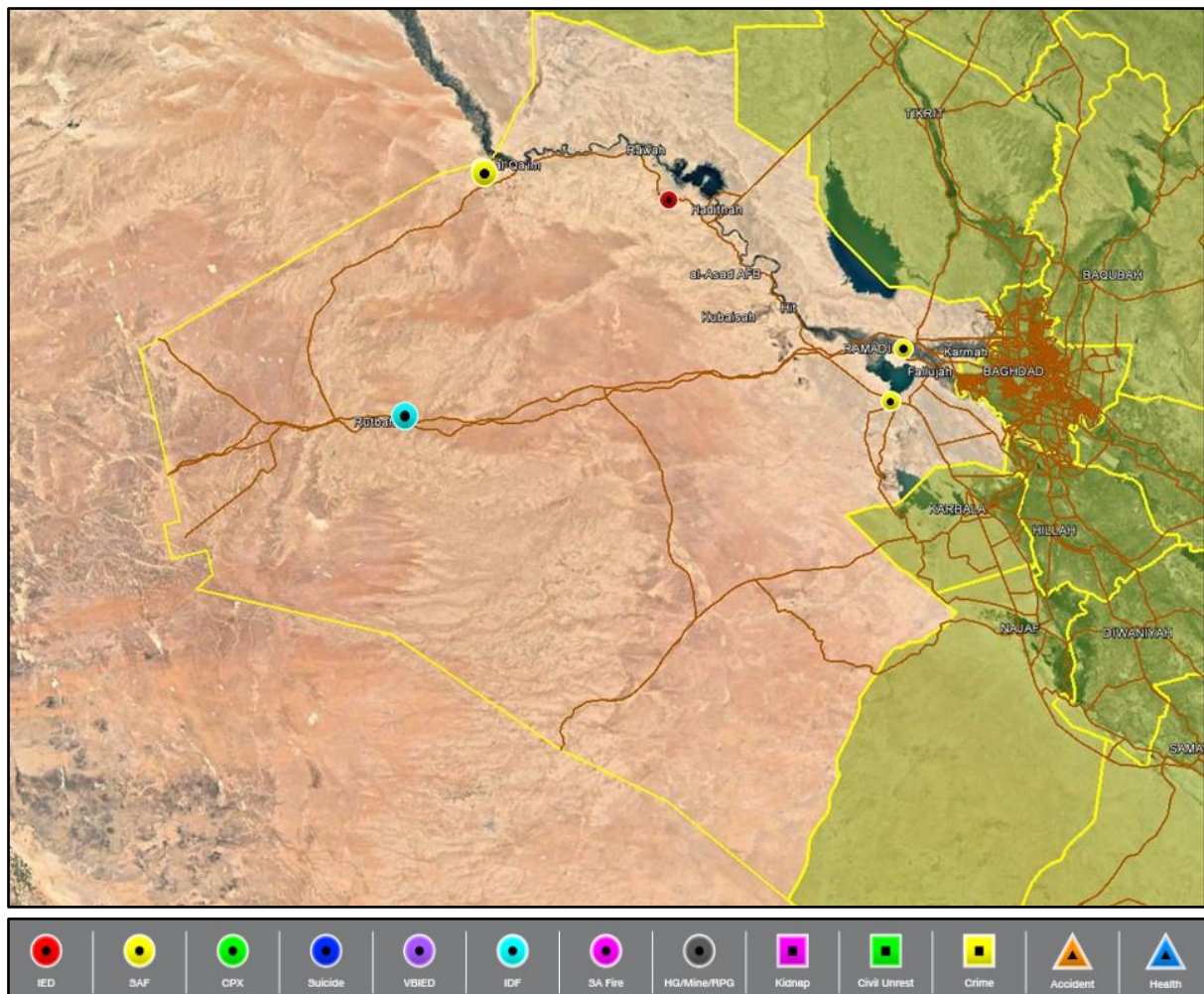
No major changes in the overall security situation were noted in Nineveh province where hostile activity remains relatively subdued despite the continuing presence of IS cells operating in rural areas. Reporting continues to be dominated by ISF-led operations targeting these cells predominantly in the southern areas of the province. The situation in Mosul city remains relatively stable with ISF reporting a number of arrest of suspected IS members in the city, highlighting that insurgents retain a presence in Mosul.

Higher levels of activity were noted in Salah al-Din province, most of which was concentrated in the northern areas around al-Sharqat. In response to continuing hostilities in the area, where IS appear to retain relatively high freedom of movement, ISF initiated separate security operations this week, subsequently arresting a number of militants and seizing insurgent equipment. IS activity in the Sharqat district resembles that of southwestern Kirkuk with hit and run attacks targeting the local population and ISF patrols. In a typical incident, a member of a pro-government Sunni tribal militia was killed when a roadside IED detonated on 18 September. Further south, no large-scale attacks were reported this week but sporadic violence, driven by low-level

insurgents, took place in the outskirts of Tikrit, Samarra and Balad. ISF were also reported to have carried out security operations in south-eastern Salah al-Din towards the provincial boundary with Diyala.

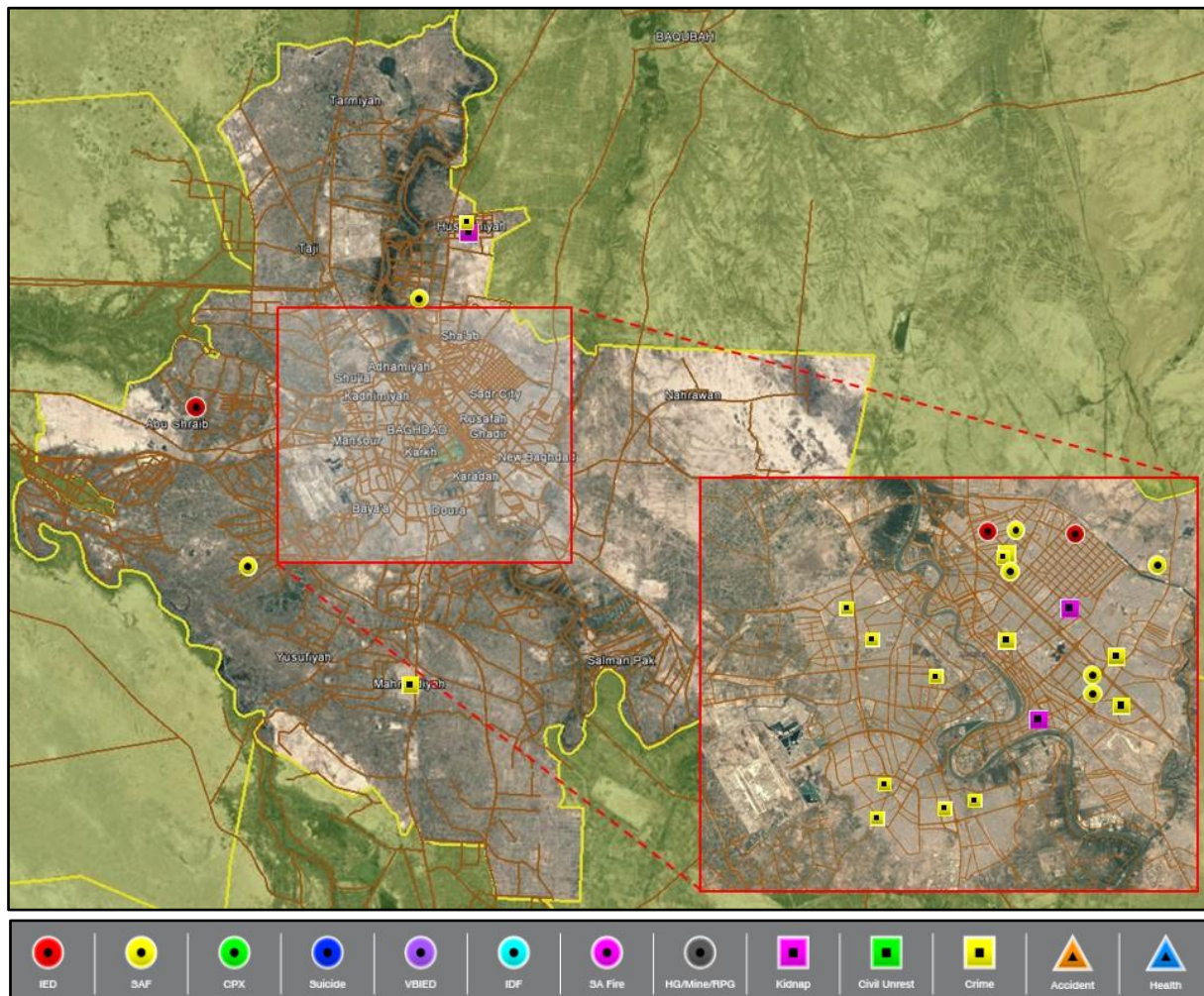
Kirkuk province remains the most eventful of the northern provinces and relatively high levels of hostilities were reported again this week in the south-western areas around Hawijah district. Low-level attacks were recorded on a daily basis in and around the district, including roadside IEDs, kidnappings and SAF targeting the local population and security forces. On 18 September, ISF announced that multiple security operations had been launched in response to these activities in five separate villages, with a number of suspected IS members arrested as a consequence. Airstrikes were also reported in the Hamrin Mountain areas further south; likely targeting IS hideouts. Further east in the province, two notable incidents were reported which underline that IS retains relatively high capability south of Kirkuk. In Rashad sub-district, IS staged an ambush involving at least ten militants on a security checkpoint on 16 September, killing one ISF member and injuring three others. Two days later, a roadside IED targeted a federal police convoy on Highway 2 between Kirkuk and Daquq, killing one and injuring 16 ISF members. In Kirkuk City, an IED possibly emplaced inside a car detonated outside the Dawa Party HQ, injuring three civilians, while a Shia congregation was taking place. IS subsequently claimed responsibility for the incident and said 20 people were killed in typical exaggeration of casualty figures.

Activity patterns in Diyala province were generally consistent with those seen in recent weeks, with hostile activity concentrated in the Diyala River Valley and Khanaqin. In Muqadiyah, ISF launched a series of security operations to clear IS cells in the outskirts of the district while low-level SAF and IED attacks continued further south towards Baqubah. Relatively high levels of hostile activity were also noted in Khanaqin where low-level IED attacks continued in the surrounding rural areas. At least five civilians were also wounded when mortar shells impacted inside a residential area of Qaya village. Local security officials attributed the incident to IS cells active in the surrounding country-side.

Anbar Province

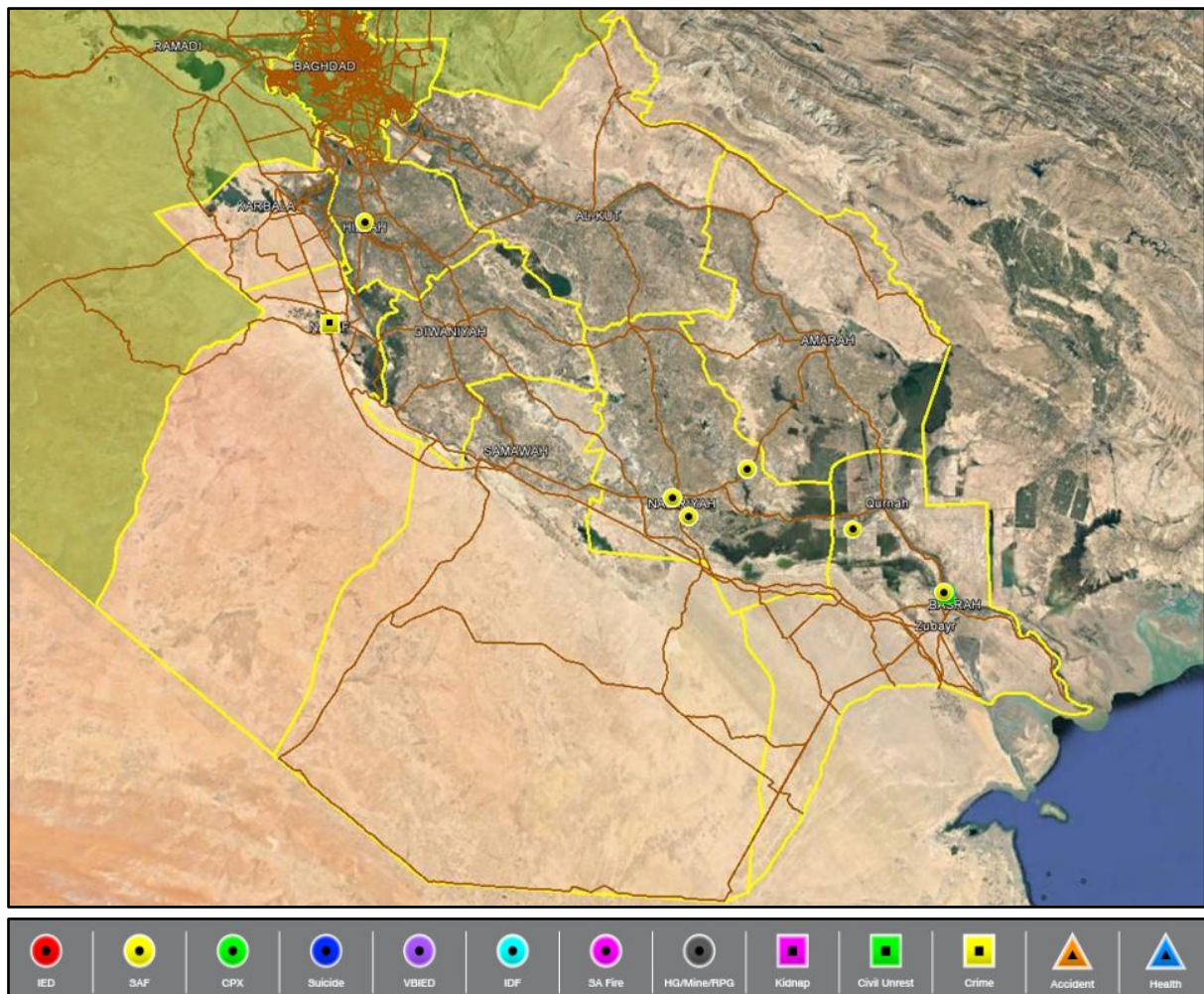
No large-scale incidents took place in Anbar province this week however a number of roadside IED attacks were recorded in Hadithah and Rutbah district, targeting ISF. ISF also carried out several security operations including in al-Qaim, near the Syrian border, and Habbaniyah in the east. The security operation near al-Qaim is led by the PMU 13th brigade, affiliated with the pro-Sistani al-Tufuf brigades, as part of a wider effort to secure the border areas from IS presence.

In Fallujah, one civilian was injured on 14 September when an IED detonated in the central districts of the city; the next day, a grenade was tossed near a civilian home, causing material damage. Both incidents are most likely not terrorism related; the first attack was likely attributed to a legacy IED and the second typical of an intimidation attack, usually related to a local dispute.

Capital Region (Including Baghdad City)

No large-scale incidents took place in Baghdad city over the week with hostilities again characterised by low-level violence in line with typical reporting trends. The vast majority of recorded incidents took place in eastern Baghdad, including the districts of Adhamiyah, Sadr City and New Baghdad, whereas central and eastern Baghdad remains relatively calm. In Sadr City, a low-yield IED detonated near a Shia procession on 19 September without causing any casualties. The circumstances of the incident are not clear and while an attack near a Shia procession suggests the involvement of Sunni inspired terrorism, the proximity to procession may also have been coincidental and the attack related to a local dispute. Hostilities in eastern Baghdad were otherwise consistent with long-standing trends of minor IED attacks, SAF and kidnappings targeting the local population. Reporting from western Baghdad was dominated by ISF-led arrest operations targeting criminality. Baghdad Operations Command also announced that the security plan implemented during the Ashoura ceremony was successful, with large numbers of people attending the Imam Kadhim shrine in Kadhimiyyah without incident.

A relatively calm reporting period was noted in the provincial districts with no significant incidents reported. Low-level IED and SAF attacks were recorded in the districts of Hussainiyah, Abu Ghraib and Abu Disheer, all claiming low numbers of casualties and likely related to local disputes.

Southern Provinces

The Ashoura procession in Karbala concluded without incident and the Euphrates Operations Command announced the successful implementation of the security plan put in place. A number of preventive arrests were reported in the lead up to the events and al-Abbas Brigades claimed to have foiled an IS infiltration attempt in the western desert areas of Karbala province bordering with Anbar. No further details about the attempt were reported however. Elsewhere in the southern region, low-level activity continued which was largely consistent with long-standing trends of tribal disputes, local violence and criminality.

In Basra, the security situation has returned to a more stable level and only small, short and peaceful demonstrations - escorted by ISF - have been conducted, this activity halted for the period of Ashura, but likely to continue at the start of the new week. A reduction in tribal and intimidatory violence was recorded throughout the province this week – this likely given the number of security force elements deployed as protection for the Ashura pilgrimage – two incidents of fatal shooting (Five Mile area and Qarmat Ali) were recorded and two of intimidation (using hand grenades). Politically the province has remained the main topic with further cases of serious illness as a result of unsafe drinking water being recorded – a top Iraqi football team raising the issue further after falling ill whilst visiting Basra for a premier league match. More than 80,000 people have been hospitalised since mid-August and the failure to address the issue is fuelling anxiety and is driving public discontent.

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	PMF – Popular Mobilisation Forces
Bn - Battalion	Pol - Point of Impact (for IDF)
BXP - Border Crossing Point	PoO - Point of Origin (for IDF)
CET - Convoy Escort Team	PSAF - Precision Small Arms Fire
CLC - Concerned Local Citizens	PSC - Private Security Company
CoP - Chief of Police	PSD - Private Security Detail
CP - Check Point	RCIED - Remote-Controlled IED
C-PERS - Captured Personnel	RPG - Rocket Propelled Grenade
CPX - Complex Attack (attack using multiple weapon systems)	RTA - Road Traffic Accident
CQA - Close Quarter Assassination/Attack	SAF - Small Arms Fire
DBS - Drive by Shooting	SAFIRE - Surface to Air FIRE
Div - Division	SF - Special Forces
DoD - Department of Defense	SVBIED - Suicide Vehicle Borne IED
DoS - Department of State	SVEST - Suicide Explosive Worn Vest
DoS - US Department of State	TCN - Third Country National
ECP - Entry Control Point	TCP - Traffic Control Point
EFP - Explosively Formed Projectile	Technical - An improvised weapon-mounted pick-up truck
EOD - Explosive Ordnance Disposal (Bomb Squad)	TTP - Tactics, Techniques and Practices
ERW - Explosive Remnants of War	UVIED - Under Vehicle IED
FoM - Freedom of Movement	UXO - Unexploded Ordnance
Gol - Government of Iraq	VBIED - Vehicle Borne IED
HCN - Host Country National	VCP - Vehicle Checkpoint
HG - Hand Grenade	WIA - Wounded in Action
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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