



## Weekly Iraq .Xplored report

24 November 2018

Prepared by Risk Analysis Team, Iraq

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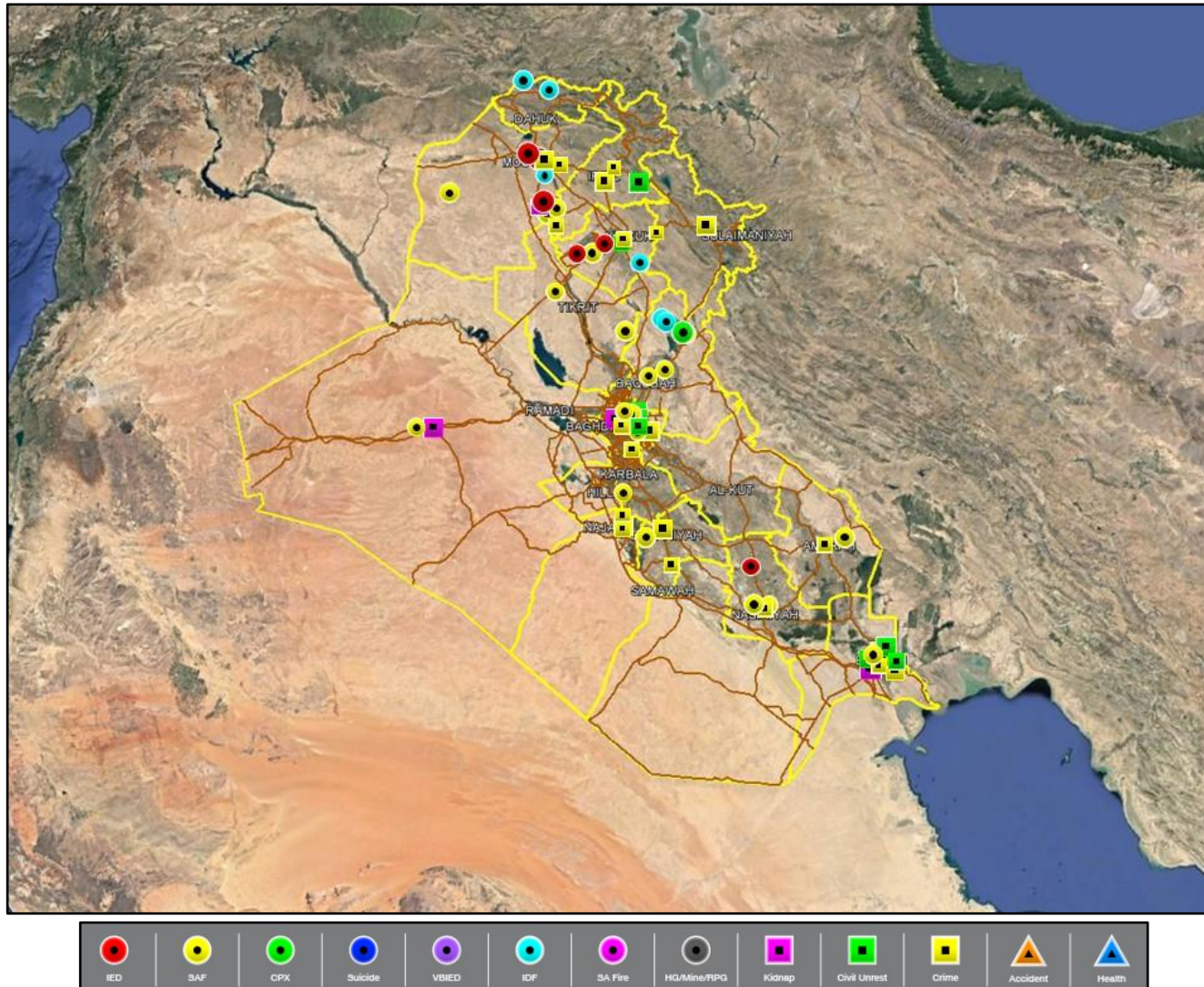
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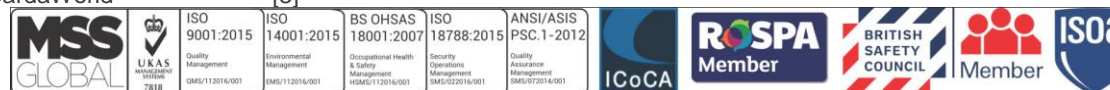


## ACTIVITY MAP



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**OUTLOOK****Short term outlook**

- Islamic State claimed responsibility for a wave of IED attacks across Baghdad city on November 04. The five separate IED detonations claimed the lives of at least seven people and wounded 20 others and took place within two hours of each other suggesting a degree of coordination that only IS could achieve, utilising established networks within the city. However, these attacks utilised low-yield IEDs, and we have not seen large-scale, mass casualty attacks against civilian targets in Baghdad for many months. These latest attacks therefore do not necessarily mark a return to these forms of larger operations by the IS group, although they may represent a statement by IS to try and demonstrate its continued (but declining) relevance, as opposed to the start of a sustained uptick in violence.
- While the situation in Basra has calmed 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.
- 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.
- Following the selection of the new President and Prime Minister focus now remains on the eight Cabinet of Minister positions that remain unresolved, including those of the Defence and Interior Ministers. Opposition from Moqtada Al-Sadr's Sairoun alliance to the selection of non-partisan figures for the remaining posts means that there is an associated risk of demonstrations as tensions remain high, especially in Baghdad. Upcoming 2019 fiscal year budget discussions can also be expected to drive protest activity in Baghdad and the southern provinces.

**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.

## SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

**Al-Hakim elected leader of Al-Islah bloc**

The leader of the Hikma Movement, Ammar al-Hakim, has recently been elected as the head of the Islah Coalition during a meeting in Baghdad, late on Monday (19th November). According to a statement released by the political bloc, the selection comes as part of the coalition's attempt to form a "new comprehensive reform program". The appointment of Hakim as the leader of the bloc is a significant boost for his profile and his newly-formed party, although it is unclear how much authority he will carry as part of the coalition given the fact that both the Sa'eron Alliance and the Nasr Coalition make up a vast majority of the Islah Coalition's seats in the Iraqi Parliament.

**Possible partial reopening of International Zone (IZ)**

Media reports on November 22 reported that PM Abd al-Mahdi is planning to open a transit route through the International Zone (IZ) to civilian traffic. Information has been received that the route will bisect the IZ, from the Rashid Hotel (near ECP3) to 14th July Bridge (ECP5). Unconfirmed reports have claimed that this may come into effect on November 25. The move should be seen against the backdrop of recent statements by PM Abd al-Mahdi of his intention to open up the IZ to through traffic. This would not be the first time this route has been opened. In October 2015, after much speculation, PM Abadi opened the 14th July Street transit route through the IZ to civilian traffic. However, the opening of the route was seen as largely symbolic and the decision was reversed after several weeks. This latest proposal, if it occurs, will likely follow the same procedures as per 2015.

**Sadr: Mosul in danger, IS still active**

Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has warned of a possible repeated fall of the second largest Iraqi city of Mosul as the Islamic State has lately re-emerged in the country. "Mosul is in danger," Sadr said in a statement on his Twitter account, adding that the militant group's sleeper cells have been active again and the security of the province has deteriorated at the hands of corrupt people. The powerful Shi'ite leader has urged the federal government to ensure the security of Mosul.

## 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, Kirkuk & Diyala\*\*\* **South** – Babil, Wasit, Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniyah, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, Maysan & Basra



## OVERVIEW

## Political

**Iraqi PM says to fill eight cabinet posts soon**

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi has stressed his intention to fill the eight vacant cabinet posts soon. "We cannot wait any more to complete the cabinet line-up," Abdul Mahdi said in his weekly news conference carried live by state-run Iraqia News TV on 21 November 21. The premier stated that he will meet Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) President Masoud Barzani in Baghdad on 22 November to discuss the completion of the cabinet line-up. Meanwhile, Abdul Mahdi also said that his cabinet would submit an anti-corruption bill to the parliament within two weeks.

**Al-Hakim elected leader of Al-Islah bloc**

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**Iraq parliament suspends Abadi's decisions as caretaker PM**

Iraq's parliament has suspended all the decisions issued by Haider al-Abadi and his government during his period as caretaker premier. The decision was taken following a vote in a parliament session on November 21. "The Council of Representatives has decided to suspend all the decisions issued between 1 July and 24 October because the former prime minister and his government took a number of decisions that are at odds with the provisions of the constitution," a parliament statement said. The statement ascribed the parliament's move to the fact that these decisions were taken "in the absence of the House of Representative's legislative and monitoring role", as the parliament had not yet convened. Media reports pointed to dissatisfaction with Abadi's decisions in parliament, particularly the appointment of senior employees in various state institutions, which require both governmental and parliamentary approval.

**Iraq president eyes more trade exchange with Iran**

Iraqi President Barham Saleh has commended Iran's role in supporting his country in its war against the Islamic State group (IS), saying that Baghdad eyes more trade exchange with Tehran. Saleh said that Iraq will continue "its pivotal role as an arena for convergence of interests of the peoples of the region, not a battlefield of conflict among different political wills". The president made his remarks during a joint news conference with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani in Tehran following a session of extended talks in the morning of November 17, according to a news release published by the official website of Saleh's media office. "We hold a clear and frank message about the importance of social and economic relations with Iran," Saleh told reporters. He also highlighted Iraq's urgent need for reconstruction and stability, something which "requires internal and external political initiatives as well as a stable regional environment". Saleh also called for the establishment of joint industrial zones on the border with Iran as well as a railway connection between the two neighbouring countries. Talks with Rouhani included a range of environmental topics, Saleh said. Iraq has suffered an unprecedented, severe drought this summer that caused pollution, spread of diseases and water poisoning cases that left dozens dead and sparked protests in the southern provinces. Saleh arrived in Tehran earlier in the day in an official visit at an invitation by Rouhani. He is expected to meet Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

**Iran's leader advises Iraqi president not to ditch the PMF**

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei advised the visiting Iraqi President not to ditch Iranian-backed Shia militia and "correctly identify friends and enemies" of Iraq during a meeting on November 17. Receiving the

Iraqi leader at his office-domicile in Tehran, Khamenei congratulated Salih on his election as the president of Iraq, welcomed the return of political stability to this country following the parliamentary election, and advised Salih to "correctly identify enemies and friends" of Iraq in his foreign policy in order to overcome the future problems and foil the plots of Iraq's ill-wishers. Khamenei also seized the opportunity in this meeting to make his stance clear with regard to Iranian-backed Shia militia, known as Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Forces), and said: "Relying on young people can have wonderful outcomes, a clear example of which was the establishment of Hashd al-Shaabi in the midst of fighting with terrorism. And this [Hashd al-Shaabi] should be preserved." Elsewhere in his remarks, Khamenei repeated that Iraq is under threats of ill-wishers' plots and called for the unity of all Iraqis, regardless of their ethnicity and religion. He also praised the historical ties between the two countries and expressed gratitude for Iraqis' hospitality during Shia ceremony of Arbäeen in October this year, when over two million Iranian pilgrims visited Iraq. In this meeting, at which Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was also present, Salih stressed the expansion of ties between the two countries and said that "the elements that bind the two nations of Iran and Iraq are rooted in history and are unchangeable."

### **Iraqi PM meets Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani**

The head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Masoud Barzani, met with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Adil Abd al-Mahdi, during his first visit to Baghdad since the Kurdistan independence referendum took place in September 2017. The meeting between the two appeared very cordial, with Barzani describing Abd al-Mahdi as his "brother and friend". During the meeting, Abd al-Mahdi referred to Barzani as the President of the Kurdistan Region and described him as a "great leader", adding that "trust was built between us during difficult circumstances" and "that we contributed together, before the fall of the regime, and following the fall of the regime". During the reign of Saddam Hussein, Abd al-Mahdi spent many years in the Kurdistan Region, where he forged strong and long-lasting ties with key Kurdish opposition figures such as Barzani and the founder of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Jalal Talabani. Upon his arrival in Baghdad, Barzani said that his trip is a show of support for Abd al-Mahdi and his government. Following his meeting with Abd al-Mahdi, Barzani met with the leader of the Fatah Coalition, Hadi al-Amiri, where he said that the Peshmerga and the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) are attempting to "forge a strong partnership".

## **Security**

### **Possible partial reopening of International Zone (IZ)**

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If the opening of the route follows the same procedures as seen in 2015, vehicles transiting through the IZ will still be subject to stringent searches at the entry ECPs, as per current search procedures for vehicles entering the IZ. In addition, all access points into the rest of the IZ from the 14th July Street (the through transit route) will (as seen in 2015) be restricted by additional internal CPs, with only IZ permit holders allowed access those areas off 14th July Street. As regards internal IZ security, it could be argued that such a move will almost certainly see a significant increase in security force numbers stationed along the 14th July Street. During the short time the transit route was open in 2015, the volume of through traffic on the route was reported as low; the search procedure to pass through the external ECP's likely led many civilians to conclude that it was actually quicker to drive around the IZ perimeter than pass through it and go through the ECPs. The internal CPs on the 14th July Road will potentially have an impact on internal IZ traffic transiting east to west. Observations from 2015 however reported only minor delays.

As at 1400hrs on November 23, there has been no official statement from either the prime minister's office or Baghdad Operations Command (BOC) to validate the above reports.

### IS highlights use of gun silencers in Iraq attacks

Islamic State (IS) has highlighted the group's use of gun silencers in recent attacks on Iraqi security personnel near the capital Baghdad. This came in the latest edition of IS's weekly newspaper al-Naba on November 22, in an article titled "Sound silencers silence 3 army members". It claimed IS militants used the sound suppressing devices when shooting to death three members of the paramilitary Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) on November 17 in Tarmiyah district north of Baghdad. IS has boasted about using gun silencers, also known as suppressors or moderators, particularly in Iraq for many years. Elsewhere in al-Naba, IS featured an infographic about "Sniper Weapons", detailing their characteristics and uses. It listed American M24, Russian Dragonuv SVD and Austrian Styre HS.50 as examples of sniper rifles.

### IS boasts it globally expanded despite setbacks

Islamic State has said that despite its territorial setbacks, the advent of its "caliphate" project had widened the sphere of the jihadist "conflict" from just Iraq and Syria to include the whole world. The IS argument came in an editorial titled "One Battlefield" in the latest edition of the group's weekly newspaper al-Naba, published on November 22. The editorial sought to justify IS's territorial losses in Iraq and Syria, arguing that in return the group has gained global "appeal" and operational expansion. It also attempted to boost the morale of IS fighters telling them that victory is inevitable. In the past, it said, IS's operations were limited to Iraq and then they expanded to Syria. "As for today", despite losing territory it once held in those two countries, "the battlefield is the whole world and the fight against infidels is active on all levels". "[Today] the lions of the caliphate are in the mountains of Khorasan [the AfPak region] and the jungles of Somalia. Its knights are in the forests of West Africa and the islands of East Asia and the deserts of Sinai and the hills of Yemen", it boasted, in reference to IS branches in the aforementioned countries and regions. "Even the lands of the infidels", it said in reference to the West, "that used to be far away from conflict zones, today live in fear of a vehicle that might run them over, fire that might burn their possessions or a lion of Islam who may chase them with any weapon at his disposal". Elaborating on the title of the editorial, "One Battlefield", IS said the world today is more connected and its fighters and supporters in various parts of the world are in fact fighting in "the same battlefield". As such, it urged fighters and supporters not to underestimate any act they could carry out for the group or battle they can fight for it, saying all acts, no matter where or how small, contribute to the strength of the "Islamic State". Al-Naba was published via IS's channels on the messaging app Telegram. The long-standing Arabic-language publication is a key mouthpiece for IS.

### 550 people killed in tribal fighting in Iraq in 2018 – now classed as 'terrorism'

A total of 544 people have either been killed or wounded in tribal fights in Iraq since the beginning of 2018, an official revealed on November 17. Mohammad Kazim, head of the Iraqi parliament office in the southern province of Basra, said in a statement to reporters that 133 individuals have lost their lives in tribal armed confrontations while 411 others were injured since January. He noted that they had held a congress for discussions on the problem in hopes of finding a resolution for the issue. The bloody, age-old custom used by Iraq's powerful tribes to mete out justice has now come under fire, with authorities classifying it as a "terrorist act" punishable by death. For centuries, Iraqi clans have used their own system to resolve disputes, with tribal dignitaries bringing together opposing sides to mediate in de facto "hearings". If one side failed to attend such a meeting, the rival clan would fire on the absentee's home or that of fellow tribesmen, a practice known as the "degga ashairiya" or "tribal warning". But in an age when Iraq's vast rural areas and built-up cities alike are flooded with weapons outside state control, the "degga" may be deadlier than ever. A recent dispute between two young men in a teashop in the capital's eastern district of Sadr City escalated to near-fatal proportions, leaving a 40-year-old policeman with a broken hip and severely damaged abdomen. His cousin Abu Tayba said the policeman was "wounded in a stray bullet during a 'degga' on a nearby home. Even in Baghdad, disputes often involve machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, the city's military command warned a top Iraqi court recently. That body, the country's Superior Magistrate Council, issued a decision last week classifying "degga"



as "terrorist acts" -- and therefore warranting the death penalty -- because of their impact on public safety. A few days later, it announced it would take legal action against three people accused of targeting a home in Al-Adhamiyah, north of Baghdad, with the deadly custom.

In Iraq, a country of 39 million people, clan origin and family name can carry weight in securing a job, finding romance, and gathering political support. They can also interfere in the work of the state, as tribal structures in some areas can be more powerful than government institutions. Last year, Iraq's tribes and the ministries of interior and justice pledged to work closer together to impose the law, but "deggas" seem to have hindered such cooperation. Raed al-Fraiji, the head of a tribal council in the southern province of Basra said tribal influence and practices were growing because the state was seen as unreliable. "For an Iraqi citizen, the law has become weak. Meanwhile, tribes impose themselves by force," he said. Years of instability have left many of Iraq's communities flush with weapons and largely out of the state's reach, contributing to a preference for tribal mediation methods. "The government is responsible for the increase in tribal conflict and of 'degga' cases," said Adnan al-Khazaali, a tribal leader in Baghdad's Sadr City. "Most of the young men today are armed and even the security forces cannot stand in their way." Tribal leaders and government officials alike are clinging to the hope that the new ruling could change things. "These incidents are continually happening, and are often causing casualties," interior ministry spokesman Saad Maan told AFP. "Court rulings and their implementation," Maan said, could be the only way to secure peace.

#### **Sadr: Mosul in danger, IS still active**

Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has warned of a possible repeated fall of the second largest Iraqi city of Mosul as the Islamic State has lately re-emerged in the country. "Mosul is in danger," Sadr said in a statement on his Twitter account, adding that the militant group's sleeper cells have been active again and the security of the province has deteriorated at the hands of corrupt people. The powerful Shi'ite leader has urged the federal government to ensure the security of Mosul.

#### **Iraq deploys troops near Syria border to curb IS - Kurdish TV**

The Iraqi army has deployed more troops in the country's western areas near the Syrian border to curb the Islamic State group and help battles raging against the jihadist group across the border, according to press reporting on November 20. The Iraqi troops are being deployed in Iraq's western town of Qaim and its surrounding areas to secure the Iraq-Syria border from possible IS attacks, a top Iraqi army official told the Erbil-based Kurdistan24 (K24) TV. "This is the last area where IS exists in Iraq and it is strategically important because it is next to the Syrian border," said the Iraqi army official in Qaim. The Kurdish TV said the Iraqi army's reinforcement is aimed at stopping Syria-based IS militants from infiltrating the Iraqi border, because the jihadist group is "under huge pressure" on the Syrian side, where the US-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are leading fierce onslaughts against the jihadists to capture their last stronghold pockets of territory in the Syrian Deir al-Zour Province. "The Iraqi deployment of troops is also to reassure locals that IS will not return to Qaim, because Iraq fears IS resurgence in this area," the TV reporter said. "But despite the activities of the Iraqi troops, IS last week killed nine members of the security forces in this area," he added. Iraq said on November 20 that its air force carried out several air strikes on IS positions across the border in Syria. The Iraqi army has backed the SDF's ground offensive against IS with sporadic air strikes in Syria and free movement of SDF forces on both sides of the border. But yesterday's Iraqi air strikes were the first since October 31, when the SDF temporarily halted its anti-IS campaign due to Turkish attacks. It resumed operations on 11 November. Iraqi army and US-led coalition troops have periodically carried out artillery attacks from their positions on the Iraqi side of the border to target IS in Syria in support of the SDF in Deir al-Zour, according to pro-SDF Kurdish media, highlighting that the SDF-Iraqi coordination and cooperation had helped prevent fleeing Syria-based IS gunmen from entering Iraq in September and October. Leaders of the Iraqi government's tribal forces have also told Kurdish media that they sometime engage in sporadic clashes with IS members who try to infiltrate the Iraqi border, although they are aware that thousands of Iraqi troops are stationed on border and equipped with advanced surveillance technology.

**Shia Militia prevent US planes from landing in Anbar**

Iraqi Shi'ite militias, who maintain close ties with Iran, have reportedly prevented US aircraft from landing at an airbase in Iraq's western province of Anbar where the Iraqi army and Coalition forces are working to eliminate IS pockets. A commander for Hashd al-Shaabi (PMF) told Iraqi Sky Press on November 19 that their forces cordoned off the runway at the Abu Radha al-Baladawi airbase (around 60 miles north west of Al-Rutbah) where the US planes were expected to land. The anonymous source explained that the Shi'ite militias oppose the presence of US military personnel in the area which, as the source said, contradicts Washington's claim of contributing to the ongoing anti-IS efforts on the ground merely through military advises and training to the Iraqi forces. "Americans are always provoking our troops while in the area and interfering in the security affairs," he said. "The western Anbar region does not need any foreign deployments as the Iraqi forces, whether from the army or the Hashd al-Shaabi, are able to defend it at any time." He also accused the US forces of supporting the revival of terrorism and the remaining IS sleeper cells instead of eliminating them on the border between Iraq and Syria. He claimed that the US troops were planning to establish a military installation at the airbase which is vehemently opposed by the PMF.

**President Salih visits 'No-Go' area**

In a sign of the Iraqi government's growing optimism following the military defeat of IS, President Barham Salih visited a Baghdad neighbourhood on November 19 that was until recently considered a "no go" area for officials. Mr. Salih, a Kurd who has served as prime minister of the autonomous Kurdistan Region and as deputy prime minister in the federal government, visited the Abu Hanifa Mosque in the northern Baghdad neighbourhood of Adhamiyah to commemorate the Prophet Mohammed's birthday on the evening of November 19. Following the toppling of former Saddam Hussein in 2003, Adhamiyah, today a Sunni enclave a short drive from the Shiite slum of Sadr City, became notorious as an insurgent hotbed. Mr. Salih's visit to Adhamiyah, which until recently was considered too dangerous for a senior official to visit, aimed to send a message that Iraq was putting its past behind it after the war against IS, which itself followed a decade of violence on the heels of the US invasion. "The Prophet's birthday coincides with a new start in our country, inspiring us to double down on efforts to unite our ranks and to boost our hard work in reconstruction and rehabilitation," the president wrote on Twitter. Before Adhamiyah gained infamy as one of Baghdad's most dangerous neighbourhoods, the middle-class suburb was an intellectual hub. But following the US invasion, the neighbourhood became a centre of resistance. Like most districts in the capital at that time, it had a mixed Sunni and Shiite population. But starting in 2005, sectarian violence caused the ethnic cleansing of most Baghdad neighbourhoods, which became separated by sect – and by walls erected by the Americans to try and quell the killings. Since the military defeat of IS in Mosul last year, violent deaths in Iraq have declined steeply. But a worrying resurgence of insurgent attacks means there is little room for complacency. The president's gesture was however seen as a positive step by many Iraqis. "Unlike his predecessors, he is not content with just sleeping and receiving his presidential salary," wrote Ilmam Mourtada, a Twitter user in Iraq. "He is trying to use his position to work at a grassroots level to familiarise himself with the different components of society."

**Iran, Iraq sign military agreement over Kurdish border areas**

An Iranian military delegation visited Sulaymaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan on November 21 and signed an agreement with the Iraqi federal border guard force in the autonomous Kurdistan Region to secure both sides of the border. This is the first time an Iranian military delegation has openly visited Iraqi Kurdistan and held a news conference, although Sulaymaniyah Province is the stronghold of Iran's strongest Iraqi Kurdish ally, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The visiting Iranian delegation is in charge of security affairs in Iran's Kurdish city of Sanandaj, the provincial capital of Iran's Kordestan Province. Iraq's border guard force is part of the armed forces of the central Baghdad government, but it is the Kurds who make up most of its ranks in the country's autonomous Kurdistan, local outlets say. The agreement will be valid for six months and both sides have to abide by its clauses during that period, Rudaw TV said. Commanders of Iraq and Iran border forces are obliged to meet every six months based on this Baghdad-Tehran agreement, the commander of the Iraqi border guard force in the Kurdistan Region, Sherko Abdulla, said. He made the comments at a joint news conference with the head of the visiting Iranian military delegation General Kiyumars Sheikhi, who oversees border security in Iran's

Sanandaj area. The Iranian delegation's visit to Sulaymaniyah comes a day after a Tehran trade delegation arrived in the Kurdish city to boost business ties with Iraqi Kurdistan.

## Humanitarian

### Iraq to launch reconstruction agency

Iraq plans to launch a reconstruction agency to attract local and international investments in infrastructure projects, Iraq's President Barham Saleh said on 22 November 22. Speaking at a conference in Rome, Saleh said the projects will include deep water port facilities in Basra and land reclamations in the southern provinces. Railway and highway networks, airports, industrial cities, dams and irrigation projects in the Nineveh plains, Garmiyah and Erbil are also on the agenda. The president said Iraq's main challenges include restoring basic services, reconstructing war-devastated areas, helping more than 1.8 million displaced Iraqis return home and "drying up the swamp of corruption," according to the privately-owned Shafaq news website. Saleh also said that defeating the Islamic State (IS) was an "immense success" for the Iraqi army. The Iraqi president has also met Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte in Rome, where they discussed developments in Syria. They called for more efforts to "eliminate terrorism and dry up its sources". Iraq has made previous calls for reconstruction aid to improve areas destroyed during the battle against IS. The country has also recently endured major environmental challenges, particularly in Basra and the southern provinces, which have been struck by water shortages and subsequent problems in crop production. In some cities, thousands have been poisoned by contaminated water, compounded by fears of a cholera outbreak in the southern provinces.

## Economy

### Iraq to pay salaries of 47,000 Kurdish fighters - official

Kurdish region's Peshmerga armed forces in Iraq's new annual draft budget will pay the monthly salaries of 47,000 Kurdish fighters and the expenses of the autonomous Kurdistan region's Peshmerga Ministry, Kurdish media reported on November 17 and 18. The salaries of Kurdish fighters will be paid from the amount that the 2019 budget will allocate to all the armed forces operating nationwide as part of the Iraqi central government's interior ministry, the secretary general of the Kurdish region's Peshmerga Ministry Jabbar Yawar said in an interview with press on 17 November 17. "The draft budget allocates 400 billion Iraqi dinars for the Peshmerga forces from the [money] allocated for all the infantry forces of [Baghdad's] interior ministry," he added. Speculation had emerged that the central Baghdad government would raise the salaries of Peshmerga fighters and might pay the salaries of 100,000 Peshmerga in 2019, privately owned Kurdish Shar Press reported on November 18. But the Kurdish military official said it was "impossible" for Iraq to pay salaries of so many Kurdish fighters under the current circumstances. He said Kurdish fighters are paid less than federal Iraqi forces are paid, adding that the Baghdad government had not yet taken any steps towards ensuring equal pay for all members of the country's armed forces.

### Kirkuk won't benefit from Erbil-Baghdad oil pipeline deal: councillor

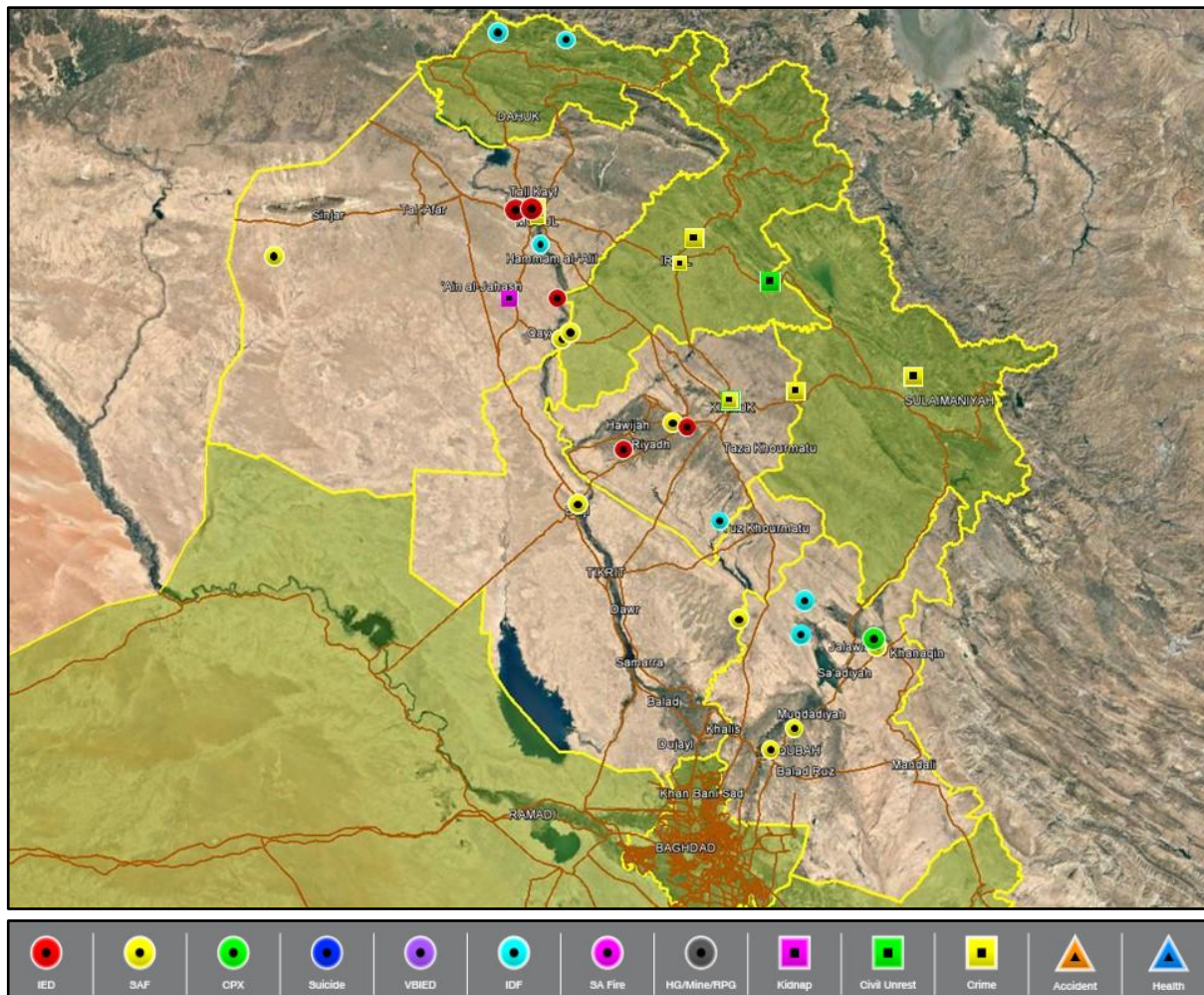
Resuming the export of Kirkuk's oil to the Turkish port of Ceyhan via a pipeline part-managed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is unlikely to benefit the disputed province itself, Kirkuk provincial council's oil and gas committee chief said on November 18. Kirkuk provincial council was not informed of the deal, according to Ahmad Askari, head of the oil and gas committee at Kirkuk provincial council saying that he is skeptical that the resumption of pipeline exports will benefit the city financially or help normalize the situation there. "The deal will improve Iraqi economic conditions, but Kirkuk will only have its smoke and dirty environment," Askari told press. "We are not aware of the agreement and we don't know whether the Iraqi government or KRG will pay the petrodollar," he added. "One of the positive aspects of the deal is that it will improve relations between the Kurdistan Region and Iraqi government. Moreover, they both will benefit from the deal economically. The second advantage of the deal is that it will prevent the smuggling of Kirkuk oil by virtue of having the oil exported by the government," Rebwar Taha, a Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) MP in the Iraqi parliament, told press.



## WEEKLY OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

## Countrywide Military/Security Situation

## Northern Provinces



Turkish military operations against the PKK have continued during the reporting period. A Turkish official speaking before the nation's parliament on November 17 said that security forces had "neutralized" 100 "senior terrorists" of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) so far in 2018. "We carried out 87,838 operations against PKK this year. We have neutralized 1,289 terrorists in these operations," Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, stated. Soylu, who also serves as the deputy chairman of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), added that the Turkish military had increased counterterrorism operations in rural areas 173 percent over last two years.

In Nineveh province this week, a legacy IED killed three students and injured four when it detonated on a dirt road in an unidentified village in the al-Shura area, 45 kilometres south of Mosul city. In addition, two members of the PMF 15th Bde were killed and four others wounded in a landmine explosion IVO Badush Dam, north west of Mosul. ISF also announced that 14 IS militants were killed in the Atashana hills and also the Anthena area of Benin, south west of Mosul during a series of US-led coalition airstrikes that were carried out on November 23. Meanwhile, IS has claimed targeting Iraqi security personnel near an oil field in Nineveh Province. IS issued the claim on November 22 saying its militants destroyed a vehicle of the paramilitary Popular Mobilisation Forces

(PMF) with an IED near Najma oil field in Qayyarah in southern Nineveh. The jihadist group said it also targeted with an IED an oil well in the same area.

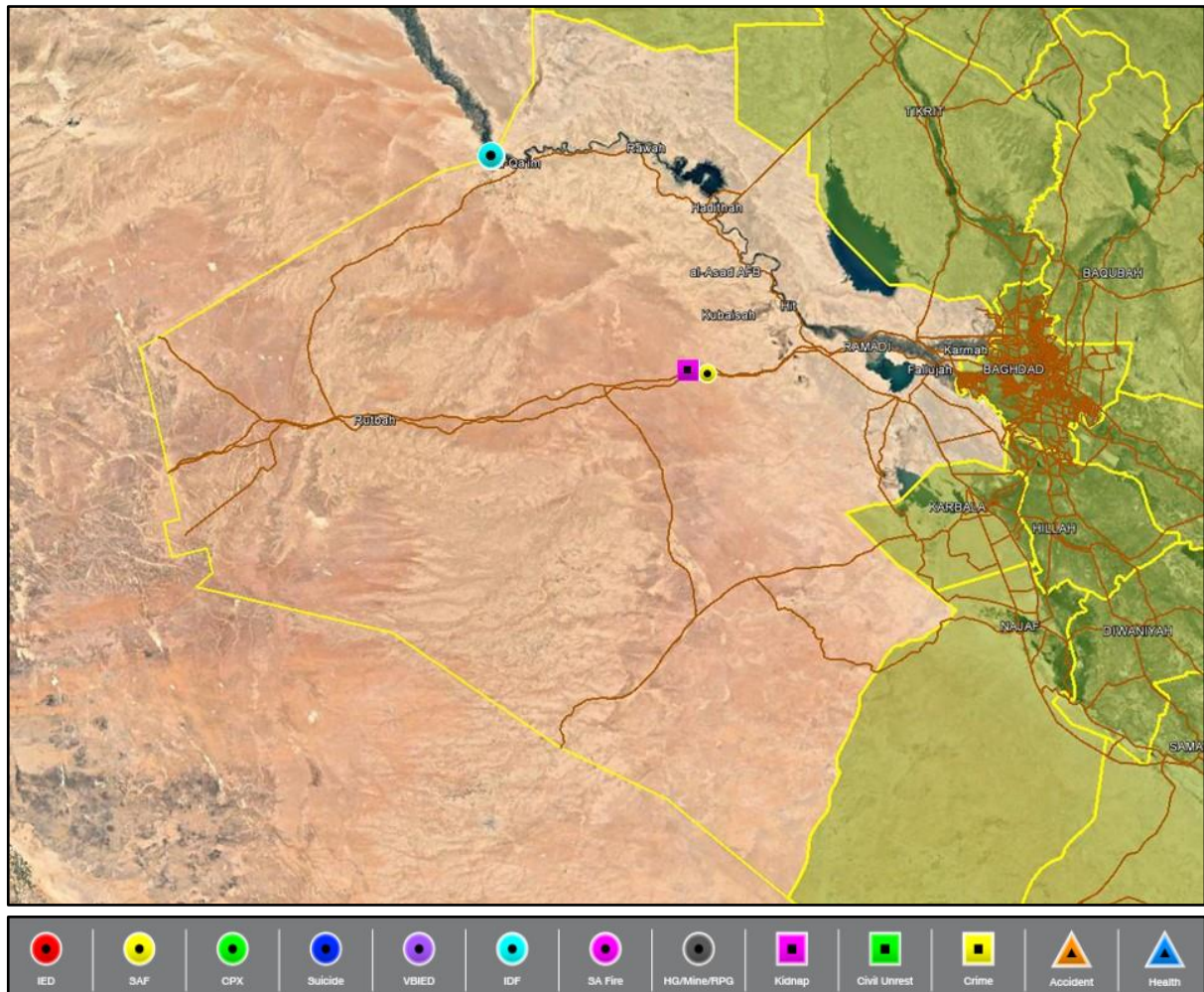
In Salah-al-Din, a car bomb reportedly detonated in Tikrit on the evening of November 18, killing least five people and wounding 16 others. The blast set nearly a dozen vehicles on fire, the police sources said. Security forces have closed most of the city streets and deployed in case of any other incidents. Separately, at least one member of the PMF was wounded in an internal armed conflict in the Tuz Khurmatu on November 17 according to reports. The confrontation occurred between a member of the 'Fursan al-Haq', and another from the 'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq', which are two components of the Hashd al-Shaabi or PMF. Separately, a combined force of ISF and the PMF 31st & 6th Brigades (Kata'ib Jund al-Imam and Al-Tayyar Al-Risali; Resalyoon Brigades) supported by air assets began a large-scale anti-IS security operation in the villages of Kanus, al-Helou and Esdira in eastern Shirqat district. Meanwhile at least ten IS militants were killed by ISF in a number of different areas of the province on November 18. Two IS hideouts and three underground tunnels were also destroyed during the operation near the village of Kanous, Shirqat city.

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In Kirkuk province during the reporting period, a civilian was wounded when a roadside IED exploded on his vehicle IVO al-Aithat Bridge in Hawijah district on November 16. It was also reported that IS released two Kurds two weeks after they were kidnapped in the Iraqi provinces of Diyala and Kirkuk. One of the released captives is a civilian and the other is a Kurdish Peshmerga fighter. It did not mention whether the two Kurds were freed in prisoner swaps or the jihadist group was offered money for their release, as was the case when the group released several abducted Kurdish civilians in Kirkuk last year. On November 19, three ISF members were reportedly killed when several suspected IS militants staged an attack on a security checkpoint in Makhmour district before seizing multiple weapons and escaping. In addition, it was reported that PMF started a six-pronged anti-IS operation in the areas located between Taza, Daquq, Rashad, Raml and Zerka south and southwest of Kirkuk city on November 18.

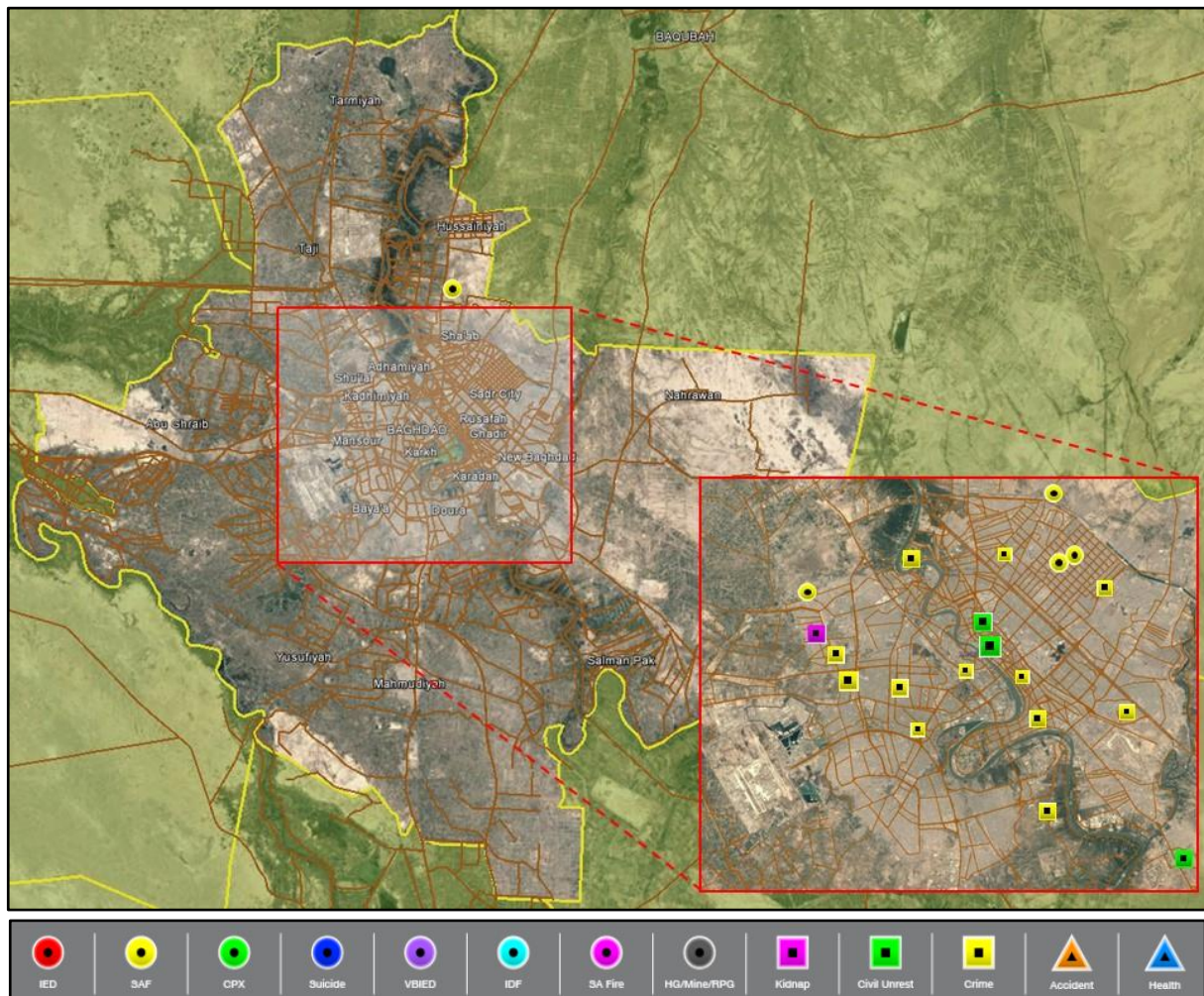
Finally, in Diyala province, several IS militants, including a prominent commander, were killed on November 17 in an airstrike targeting a shelter in Mount Hamrin, between Qara Tepe and al-Adhaim, 80 km north east of Baqubah. In addition, a senior IS leader was reportedly killed by an air strike on a known IS location in the Hamrin mountains and a further five militants were reportedly killed in an airstrike targeted an IS rest house in the village of Albu Slaibi, near the provincial boundaries of Salah-al-Din.



**Anbar Province**

In Anbar province this week, a static security guard of a telecommunications tower was reportedly abducted when suspected IS militants staged an attack on an ISF observation point along the Baghdad-Amman Highway (Route Mobile), in the Kilo 100 region of Ramadi, west of Ramadi city. Two Iraqi airstrikes killed as many as 40 Islamic State militants and destroyed a command-and-control node and a weapons depot in the al-Susa and Baghur regions of Syria close to the border with Iraq on November 20.

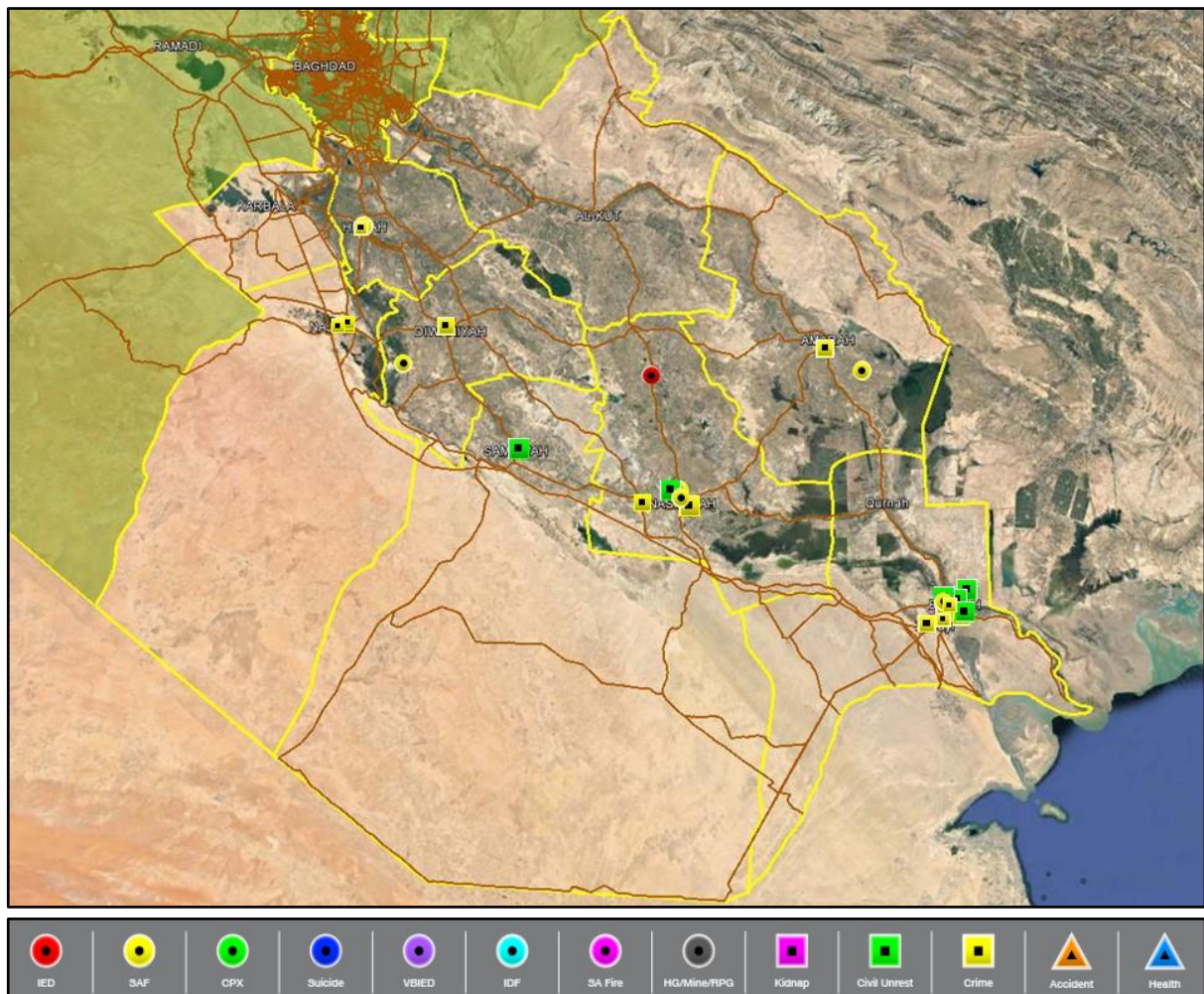


**Capital Region (Including Baghdad City)**

Security incidents in the City this week have conformed to regional norms, typified by tribal / criminal related SAF attacks, and low-yield IED detonations. In the city during the reporting period, unidentified gunmen carrying suppressed weapons shot and killed a civilian in the Mashtal area of New Baghdad district and on the afternoon of November 20, armed assailants shot and killed a civilian in the Saba Qsoor area of Shaab, Adhamiyah District in north-eastern Baghdad. Heavy tribal fighting also reportedly broke out in the 28 Sector area of Sadr City in eastern Baghdad with ISF reinforcements arriving to control the situation; no casualties were reported. Demonstrations have also continued to be evident this week. On the morning of November 16, a number of civilians staged a demonstration outside the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) in Rusafa district, demanding a full investigation into \$6 million worth of local currency stored in public bank coffers that was damaged by heavy rain and a protest was recorded in the Tha'alah area of Adhamiyah district in north-eastern Baghdad, over the provision of poor public services. In addition, dozens of university graduates, including government-funded scholarship candidates demonstrated in front of the new PM's office in the Allawi area of Karkh district, demanding the cancellation of temporary suspension of the service.

In the wider Baghdad Province, a civilian was reported to have been shot and killed in a close-quarter shooting by gunmen carrying suppressed weapons in Nahrawan, and two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle shot and wounded a civilian in Bob al-Sham, north east of Baghdad on November 21.



**Southern Provinces**

In Babel province this week, two persons were reportedly killed when unidentified armed assailants stormed their home in the Mustafa Raghieb area of central Hillah city before setting the house on fire and the bodies of three Shi'ite women (sisters) were found after they were kidnapped during a religious ceremony in Karbala a few weeks ago. The abductees were discovered dead in an agricultural field in Tahmaziyah town, south west of Hillah. In Dhi Qar, hundreds of temporary employees of the Nasiriyah thermal power plant reportedly declared a strike on November 18, protesting an alleged government failure to meet their demands for permanent staffing. Meanwhile, dozens of local residents of al-Al-Fayyad village, south of Nasiriyah blocked MSR Tampa south for a period of time, protesting over poor utilities and calling on local authorities to urgently provide assistance required due to the recent heavy rains. Two persons were wounded in a tribal-related SAF attack in the Sadr area of Nasiriyah city. Security forces subsequently arrested one suspect and seized two vehicles.

In Maysan, the chairman of Kahla Local Council, Maitham al-Ghanimi stated that one person was wounded in an armed tribal dispute that broke out IVO the PetroChina Halfaya Base Camp, Kahla, Maysan province. Al-Ghanimi had called for additional security reinforcements be deployed to control the situation. Five criminal suspects were also reportedly arrested in Najaf.

In Diwaniyah, temporary employees of the Diwaniyah power plant reportedly declared a strike on November 18, to protest an alleged government failure to meet their demands for permanent staffing and in apparent coordination with the Nasiriyah thermal power plant employees. In addition, in Muthanna, dozens of temporary

employees demonstrated outside the electricity distribution directorate in Samawah, demanding permanent employment.

In Basra, a number of protests were noted during the period. Dozens of temporary employees of the Ministry of Electricity demonstrated in front of the parliament office in the Manawi Basha area of central Basra city on November 18, demanding permanent employment. In addition, on the morning of November 19, workers at the PPG compound in Zubayr protested over salaries, during which the camp was locked down. Following a period of negotiation with the contract management the workers returned to work and the camp was reopened. Also on the morning of November 18, a group of protesters initially blocked the entrance gate to the BOC HQ before moving to the exit gate. Protesters were again demanding jobs but remained peaceful and were reported to have dispersed by midday. Press also reported that hundreds of people demonstrated outside the old Basra Governate building on behalf of workers within the electricity sector, demanding that they be instated as permanent employeesangry protestors demanding improved services and job opportunities reportedly set several tyres ablaze near al-Mahakim bride in central Basra on the afternoon of November 16. It was also reported that on November 16, a number of PMF members (affiliated with Kata'ib al-Imam Ali Brigades) staged a demonstration in the al-Abbasiyah area of Basra city denouncing US sanctions imposed by the Trump administration on four operatives linked to the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah over its actions in Iraq. On November 17, a gathering of civilians demanding better utilities and job opportunities set several tyres on fire in Qarmat Ali, north of Basra. ASR Topeka was reportedly blocked for a period of time. It was reported that the incident is likely related to the assassination of Sheikh Wissam al-Gharawi, a religious figure and organizer of recent protests in the province of Basra. Al-Ghrawi was shot and killed in front of his house in the city centre by unknown assailants late on November 17. The incident occurred after al-Ghrawi was filmed at a protest the day before. saying that clerics would issue a fatwa within days on taking up arms in order to force the Government to improve basic services in the province. The video was shared widely on Iraqi social media. Associates and relatives of al-Ghrawi paraded his coffin around parts of the city on November 18, demanding the police identify the killers and bring them to justice. "Why was Sheikh Wissam al-Ghrawi killed? Because he asked for clean water? Because he asked for jobs for the unemployed? Is this the price he paid for defending his country?" said civic activist Mohanad al-Ghrawi, a distant relative of the deceased cleric.



**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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**Middle East**

International Protective Services Headquarters  
Office 2502, Tower 2, Currency House  
DIFC, PO Box 482069  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

**United States**

1101 Wilson Boulevard  
Suite 1725  
Arlington, VA, 22209  
United States

**UK**

5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1, London Bridge  
London  
SE1 9BG

**Europe**

37-39 rue des Deux Eglises  
1000 Brussels  
Belgium

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