



Weekly Iraq .Xplored report

07 December 2019

Prepared by Risk Analysis Team, Iraq

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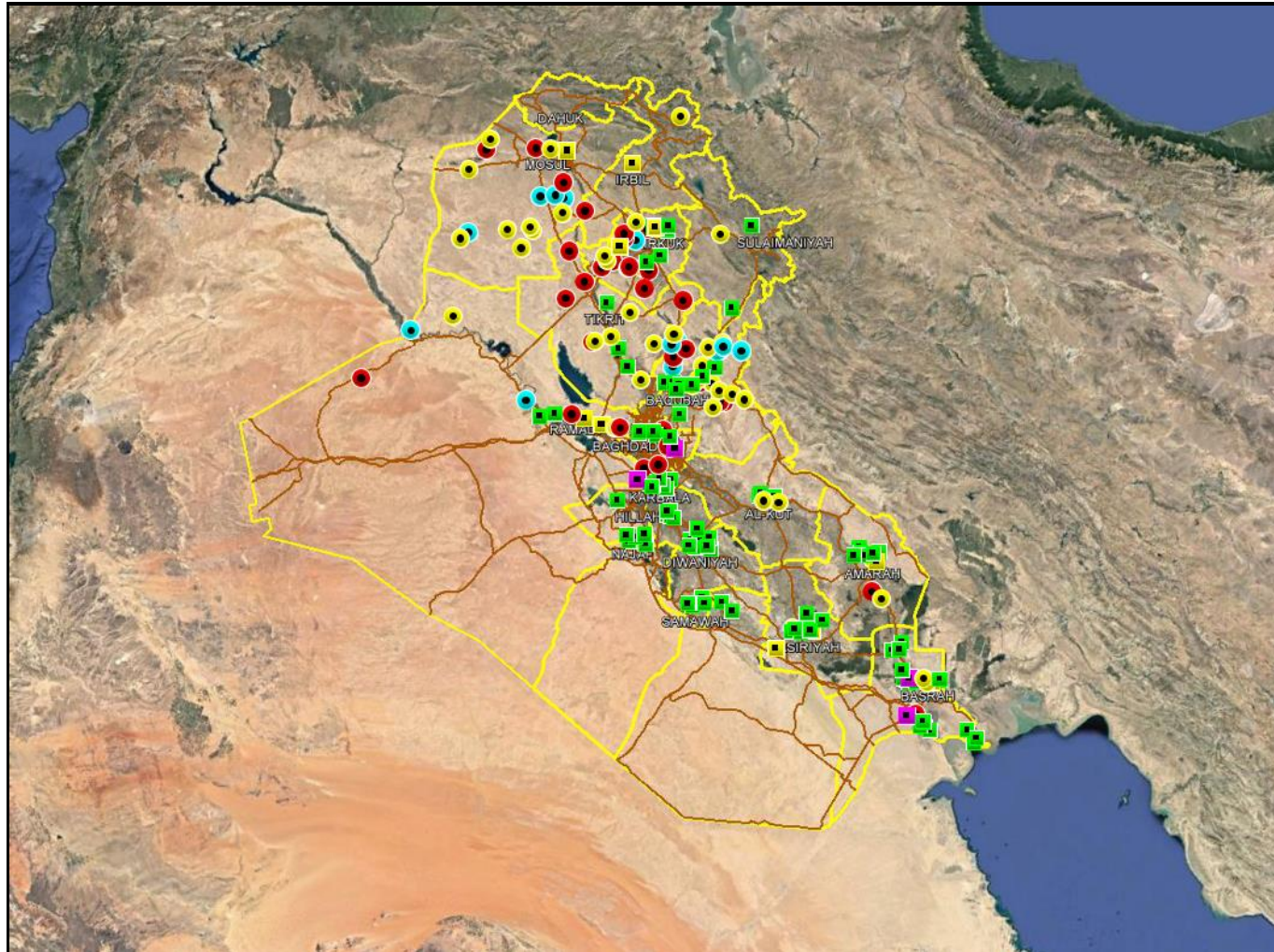
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
ACTIVITY MAP	3
OUTLOOK	4
Short term outlook	4
Medium to long term outlook	4
SIGNIFICANT EVENTS	5
Protests Update	5
THREAT MATRIX	5
OVERVIEW	6
Civil unrest update	6
Political	6
Security	7
WEEKLY OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT	9
Countrywide Military/Security Situation	9
ACRONYM LIST	15
GARDAWORLD INFORMATION SERVICES	16
GARDAWORLD	16

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ACTIVITY MAP



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OUTLOOK**Short term outlook**

- Fatal demonstrations that occurred throughout the country since they started on 1 October 2019 have to date left over 445 people dead and nearly 18,000 injured according to the Iraqi Human Rights Commission. The southern provinces saw the worst of the violence and this was a factor in the Prime Minister submitting his resignation to Parliament, however this is unlikely to result in the protestors limiting their actions. The burning down of the Iranian Consulate resulted in a severe crackdown by security forces and led to violence spreading across the southern provinces. Iraq had previously descended into violence on 25 October as protesters called for an end to rampant corruption and chronic unemployment which escalated into calls for a complete overhaul of the political system. As the protests peaked, it was clear that the demonstrator's anger was focused not only on the government, both national and provincial, but also the various Shia militias or the Popular Mobilisation Units as they are known. Several PMU headquarters were attacked and set on fire, with protestors accusing them of being aligned to Iran and of firing on the crowds during the previous round of protests which began on October 01. At the time of this report, protestors have attempted to enter the International Zone (IZ) on a daily basis, in order to carry out a long-term sit-in protest outside the Parliament building in the IZ, although so far, they have not succeeded in breaching ISF defences. In the south, the Iraqi security authorities have imposed a curfew in six provinces, (Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan, Wasit, Babil, and Muthanna) after clashes between protestors and security forces overnight on Oct 25, including some PMU factions, resulted in a high number of fatalities and injuries on both sides. In Nasiriyah (Dhi Qar province), Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous) members fired on protestors attempting to set fire to their offices, killing six. Protest-related deaths were also recorded in Amarah (Maysan province), Basra (Basra province), and Samawah (Al-Muthanna province). Related protests have been reported in Najaf and Wasit provinces and a number of government buildings, political party offices, and PMU headquarters have been set on fire. Meanwhile, the government has proposed reform packages, however the protestors appear unimpressed and the likelihood of the reforms being successfully implemented looks slim. In the short term, violent demonstrations in Baghdad and the south will continue with more loss of life expected, even with the announcement that the Prime Minister will be replaced.
- Although defeated militarily, IS continues to pose a serious and long-term security challenge, especially in the northern provinces and Anbar, where high levels of asymmetric activity continues. The suicide vest (SVEST) attack in Sadr City on May 09, 2019 and the low-yield multi-IED attack in eastern Baghdad on November 27 underlines the continuing threat posed by IS cells in Baghdad City who retain intent to escalate operations. Absent a significant escalation in IS activity, the attacks are not assessed to change the security situation in the capital which has been relatively stable in 2019, however, the attacks demonstrate that IS continues to have the capability to launch operations of this nature within the city.

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.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Protests Update

Social media posts indicate that there is to be a 'Million Man March' or 'Great Gathering' on Tuesday, December 10. It is believed that protestors will travel from several cities in the southern regions to Baghdad, and the security forces have been put on alert in readiness for the potential disruption. As with previous protests, the situation remains fluid and there is limited information at present.

US blacklists three leaders of PMUs

On December 07, the United States placed sanctions on three pro-Iranian PMU faction leaders in response to their alleged role in the killing of protestors, according to the Treasury Department. Qais al-Khazali, head of Asaib Ahl al-Haq and his brother, Laith, who is a senior member of the group along with Hussein al-Lami, security chief for the PMU, are all on the sanctions list.

THREAT MATRIX

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

The trajectory of the protests appeared to be heading towards a steady state, however the past 48 hours have resulted in a resumption of violence in Baghdad. On December 05, hundreds of suspected PMU members (believed to belong to Kata'ib Hezbollah & Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq) staged a protest march from the Palestine Street area to the main sit-in site in Tahrir Square, demanding the expulsion of saboteurs from demonstrations. Several people were stabbed in the square approximately one hour after the pro-PMU protest ended. This was followed by further violence the next day, when on December 06 reports emerged of protestors being shot at by unknown armed men in the areas of Khellani Square, and Al-Sinak bridge, resulting in the killing of between 25 and 50 people, whilst leaving 130 people injured. Molotov cocktails were also thrown at protestors and a building was reportedly set alight. Reports also indicated that the electricity went down around Tahrir Square for an unspecified period of time, the cause of which is currently unknown. Unconfirmed posts on social media showed what was alleged to have been unidentified armed men in pick-up trucks targeting protestors, and some reports indicated that snipers had also targeted civilians. The ISF subsequently released information stating that two of its soldiers were killed during the incident. Social media also indicated that the Peace Brigades and tribal members went to the scene of the violence to protect the protestors, as some posts are claiming that both the ISF and demonstrators were targeted by the unknown armed men. Further details on the incident are likely to come out throughout the course of the day.

Political**US blacklists three leaders of PMUs**

On December 07, the United States placed sanctions on three pro-Iranian PMU faction leaders in response to their alleged role in the killing of protestors, according to the Treasury Department. Qais al-Khazali, head of Asaib Ahl al-Haq and his brother, Laith, who is a senior member of the group along with Hussein al-Lami, security chief for the PMU, are all on the sanctions list. The US had previously warned that government officials and others who are found to be directing violence towards protestors would be hit with sanctions. Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, said "The Iraqi people want their country back. They are calling for genuine reform and accountability and for trustworthy leaders who will put Iraq's national interests first." Despite this, several PMUs deny involvement in killing the protestors. The protests began on October 01 and it is believed that in excess of 420 people have been killed since the beginning of the protests.

Sistani's weekly sermon: PM's position must be chosen without foreign interference

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's weekly sermon took place on December 06, where he stated that the process for choosing the next prime minister for Iraq must be done so without any involvement of external parties. He said that he hoped the government would elect a new head of state within the 15 day timeframe, as specified in the constitution. This comes as Adel Abdul Mahdi declared his intention to submit his resignation to parliament, which was subsequently accepted and thus began a process to nominate a new prime minister. This comes after protests, which began on October 01, have continued into their ninth week and there appears to be no sign that they will end anytime soon. The US and Iran have a vested interest in seeing a prime minister nominated that is – in the eyes of Iran at least – aligned to their vision of Iraq and the wider region. The Iranian IRGC commander, General Qassim Suleimani, was reportedly in Baghdad back in October to prevent Abdul Mahdi from resigning and was reportedly back in Baghdad again during recent days.

Parliament stalling on draft electoral law amendments

Parliament has again failed to arrange a session to discuss and subsequently pass the electoral law; which will likely result in adding to the protestors lack of confidence in ability of its government. Whilst the various parties continue to debate the amendments of the law, there is little indicator that progress can be made as the changes have not yet gained the approval of a number of sections within parliament. Disagreements on the issue stems

from several parties wishing to change the process in which the officials for the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) are nominated. The draft amendment as it stands states that the five members are to be drawn from a list of independent judges and a further two from the Consultative Council; however media sources indicate that several personnel have rejected this approach as they do not believe that all of Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities will be adequately represented. It has been reported that parliament's Legal Committee has scheduled a meeting with party leaders in order to finalise the amended draft, however this is looking unlikely to happen and there is the chance that it will be delayed.

Al-Sadr: Abdul Mahdi's resignations will not result in the end of Iraq's corruption issues

The head of the Sadrist has stated that despite the announcement by the Prime Minister that he is to resign, the issues of corruption will still afflict the country. Abdul Mahdi's decision to resign came after security forces killed over 45 protestors across the country on November 28, as the total death toll is reported to be over 400 people since the start of the protests since October 01. The continuity of the protests has been driven by a lack of employment opportunities, basic services and endemic corruption within the government. Protestors have been calling for an overhaul of the political system in order to bring about change. In a statement, al-Sadr has said that the PM's departure is "the first fruits of the revolution, and not the last" and suggested that there should be a list of candidates to choose from via a referendum. Al-Sadr also says that the next prime minister should promote people into cabinet positions on merit, and not from the usual parties, blocs and militias that currently occupies numerous government posts.

Security

Authorities issues arrest warrant for former Dhi Qar commander

Iraq's judiciary has reportedly issued a warrant for the arrest of the former military commander of Dhi Qar province, Jameel al-Shammari, for allegedly ordering his soldiers to kill protestors in the region, resulting in a wave of intense violence. The issuing of the warrant comes after the Prime Minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi, sent instructions for the commander to reinstate security in Nasiriyah city, only for the general to be sacked from his position after it emerged that dozens of protestors had been shot dead by the military, with thousands more injured.

Authorities order execution of a police officer involved in protestors' deaths

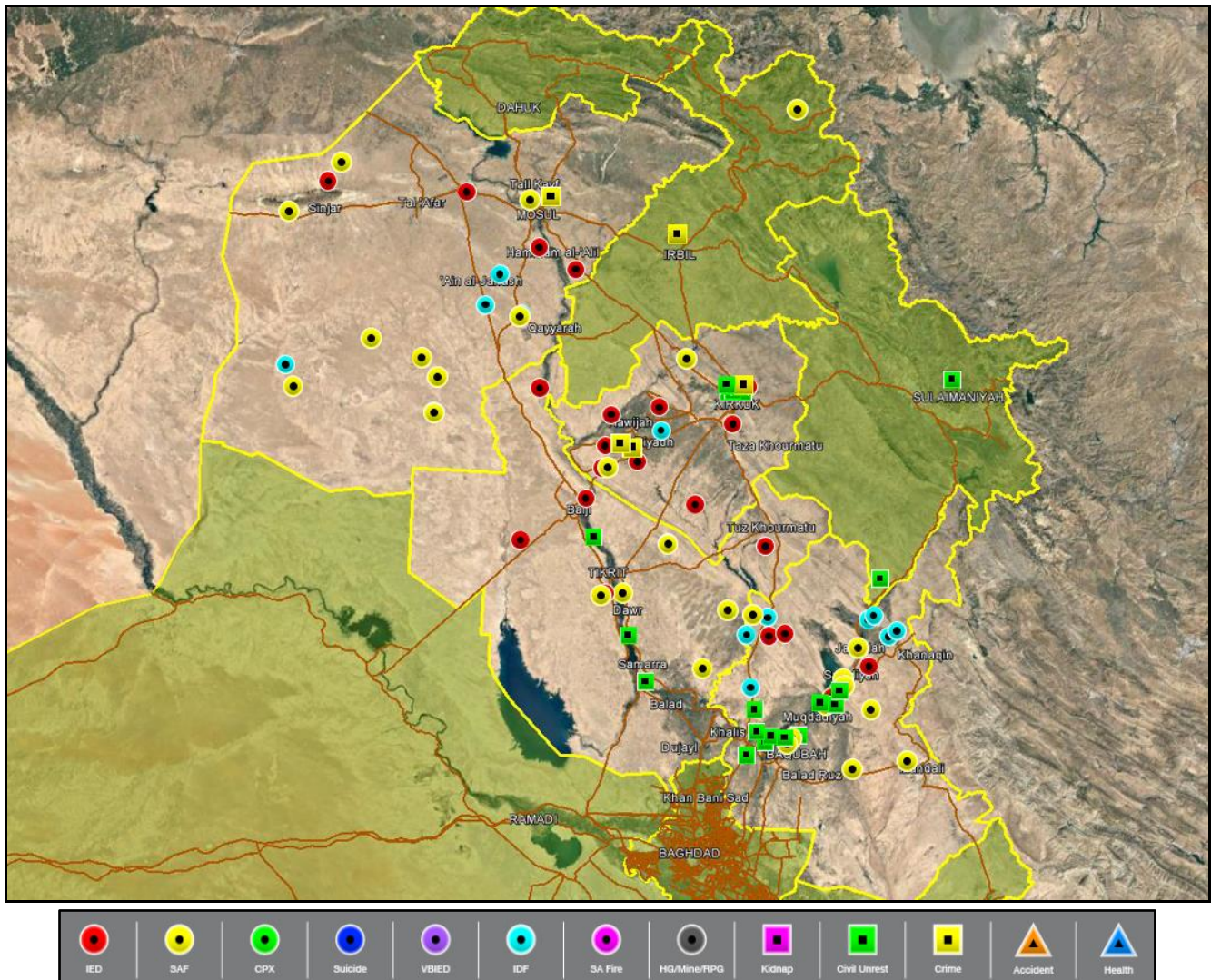
A criminal court in Wasit province has sentenced a police officer to death for his role in the killing of protestors. The officer, Tariq Malik, will undergo death by hanging in what is the first sentencing of its kind since protests first began on October 01. Another officer, Omar Amer, was convicted over charges of neglect and a seven year prison sentence was handed down to him. A lawyer who is representing families of several protestors killed by security forces has stated that the death sentence was a result of the criminal court basing their ruling on the 'premeditated homicide' clause found in the penal code. It was reported that the families had collected video evidence of Malik's alleged actions against protestors and this was ultimately used by the courts to assist in their decision to sentence him to death. Amer's sentence was somewhat lighter, given that there was no evidence that he himself had deliberately killed or directed his subordinates to kill protestors, however he was charged as a result of neglecting to properly monitor and instruct the officers operating under his command. The court noted that there are a further three outstanding cases yet to be heard.

HRW: Spate of abductions linked to the protests

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said that the government bears responsibility for the recent abductions of civilians who are believed to be linked to the protests that started on October 01. There are currently believed to be at least seven people who have been reported missing since October 07. Leah Whitson, the Middle East Director at HRW, said "Whether the government or armed groups are behind the abductions in Baghdad, the government bears the responsibility for keeping people safe from such targeting," whilst reiterating the fact that by allowing armed non-state actors to abduct civilians, the Iraqi government was failing its citizens. The Iraqi High Commission for Human

Rights has been keeping a record concerning the number of people who have been kidnapped by either the security forces or unknown groups since the beginning of the protests up until October 31, and then appeared to release figures stating that the ISF had arrested 93 demonstrators in Baghdad between November 21 and 24, as well as recording several reports of people, including lawyers, activists and journalists. The organisation has subsequently called upon the government to investigate these claims and bring people to justice. Whilst the Prime Minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi, had stated that the government has subsequently released thousands of protestors that had been arrested during the protests, several people who had been kidnapped appeared too afraid to be willing to speak out about their ordeals.



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

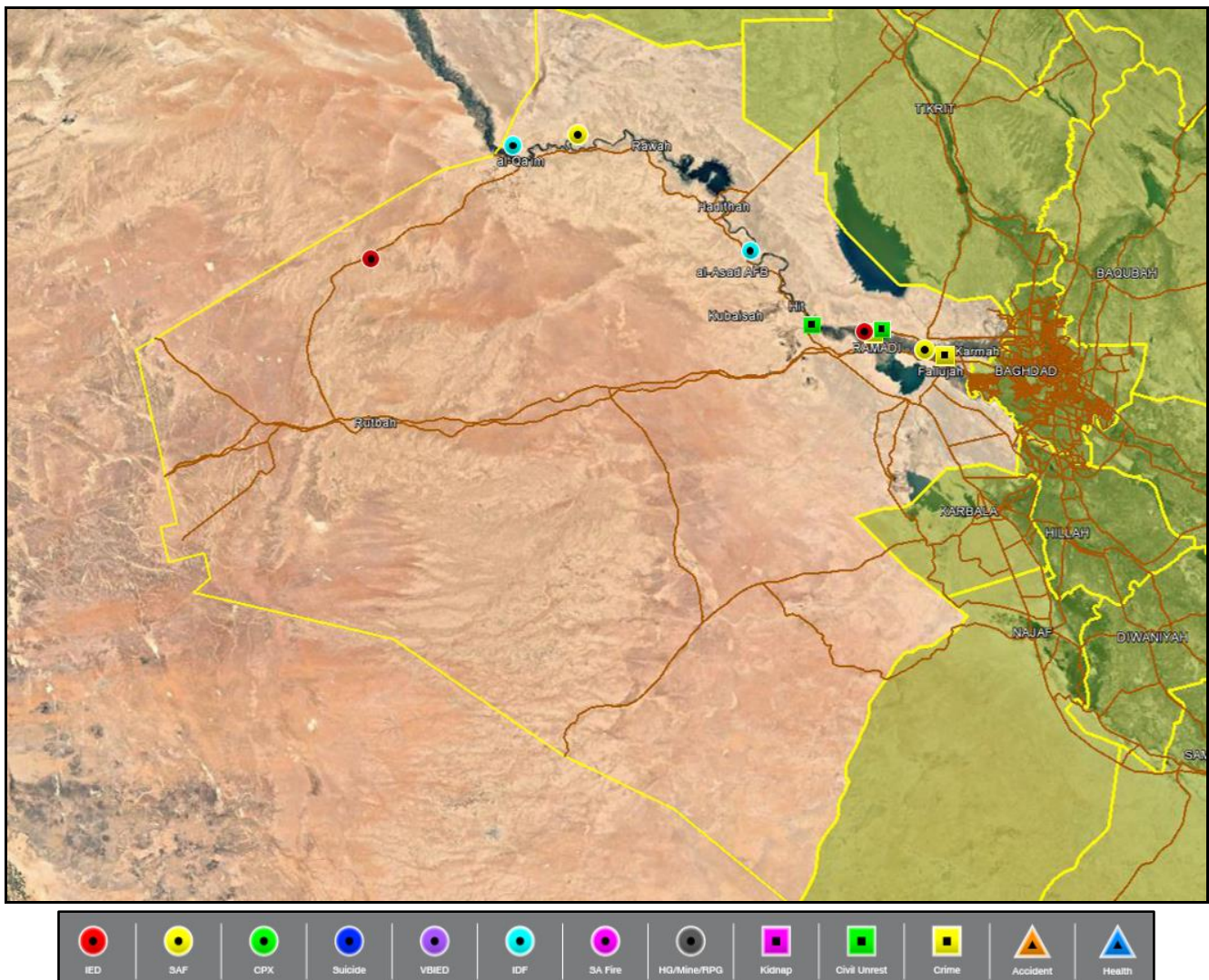
In Kurdistan over the reporting period, the Turkish military announced that one of its soldiers was killed in the region. In Sulaymaniyah, a 66-year-old woman was stabbed to death in Tasluja district of Sulaymaniyah city. In Sulaymaniyah on December 03 in Kalar, south of Sulaymaniyah, groups of people demonstrated in front of the Kalar General Hospital protesting the current state of the healthcare system. Finally, Kurdish security arrested four drug traffickers in Erbil Plains, as they were found with quantities of heroin and crystal meth on them.

Across the northern provinces, IS activity continued to affect Nineveh as there were numerous reports of ISF and PMU casualties as a result of clashes with the terrorist organisation. In response, US-led Coalition aircraft targeted several hideouts and tunnel systems using by IS, as well as IED and weapons caches. ISF operations also cleared a number of IEDs that were reportedly laid by IS alongside roads and in towns and villages. Meanwhile, reporting of generic crime was on a lower scale than terrorist-related activity, with the most notable incident involving the owner of a currency exchange being rescued by the ISF after being kidnapped.

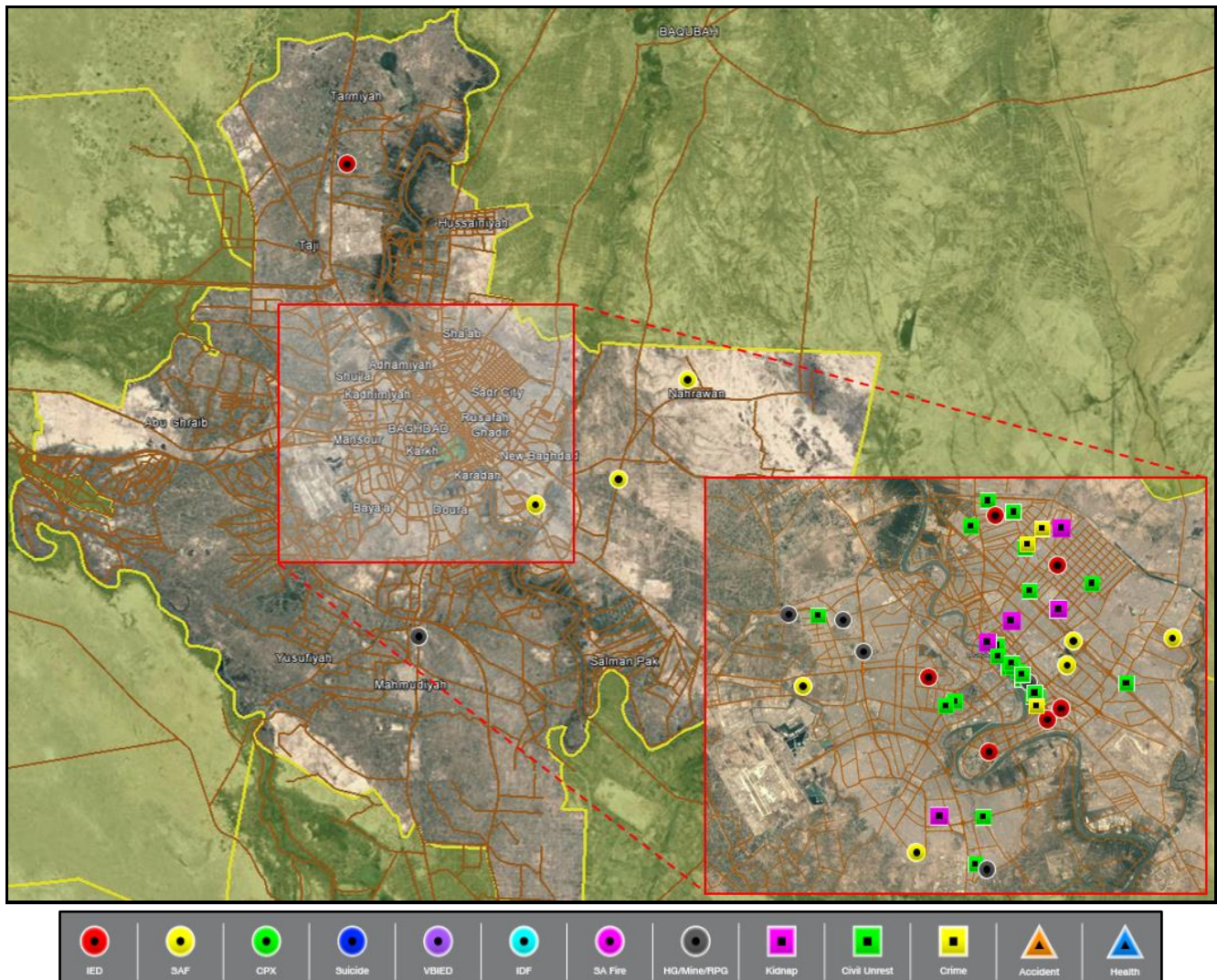
In Kirkuk province, a cluster of incidents in the Hawijah and Riyadh district areas took place involving IS throughout the week. Low-yield IEDs detonated across Kirkuk city, whilst other attacks took place in Makhmour. ISF members were targeted, at both checkpoints and their homes, resulting in several being assassinated. A series of weapons caches were found across the province as part of ongoing ISF clearance operations. Finally, the National Security Service (NSS) arrested a gang that specialized in kidnapping in an operation at an unspecified location in Kirkuk province.

In Salah-al-Din province, terrorist attacks continued to make up the vast majority of incidents recorded during the reporting period. IED detonations hit ISF and PMU patrols, as well as passing civilians. Pro-government Sunni tribesmen were also the focus of targeted attacks, whilst a large number of weapons caches were found and subsequently destroyed by the ISF and accompanying EOD units.

Diyala province arguably saw some of the most intense IS and anti-IS activity during the reporting period, with the terrorist group carrying out a complex attacks in Jalawla. The ISF were also targeted through the use of SAF and IEDs whilst the security forces carried out patrols of the province. Baqubah, Muqdadiyah and Khanaqin saw extensive activity, resulting in the deaths of ISF and PMU members. IS-related activity has also migrated to Mandali, where a tribal leader was assassinated – reportedly by IS militants – during the last month. Finally, anti-government protests took place across the province in support of the ongoing protests in Baghdad and the southern region.

Anbar Province

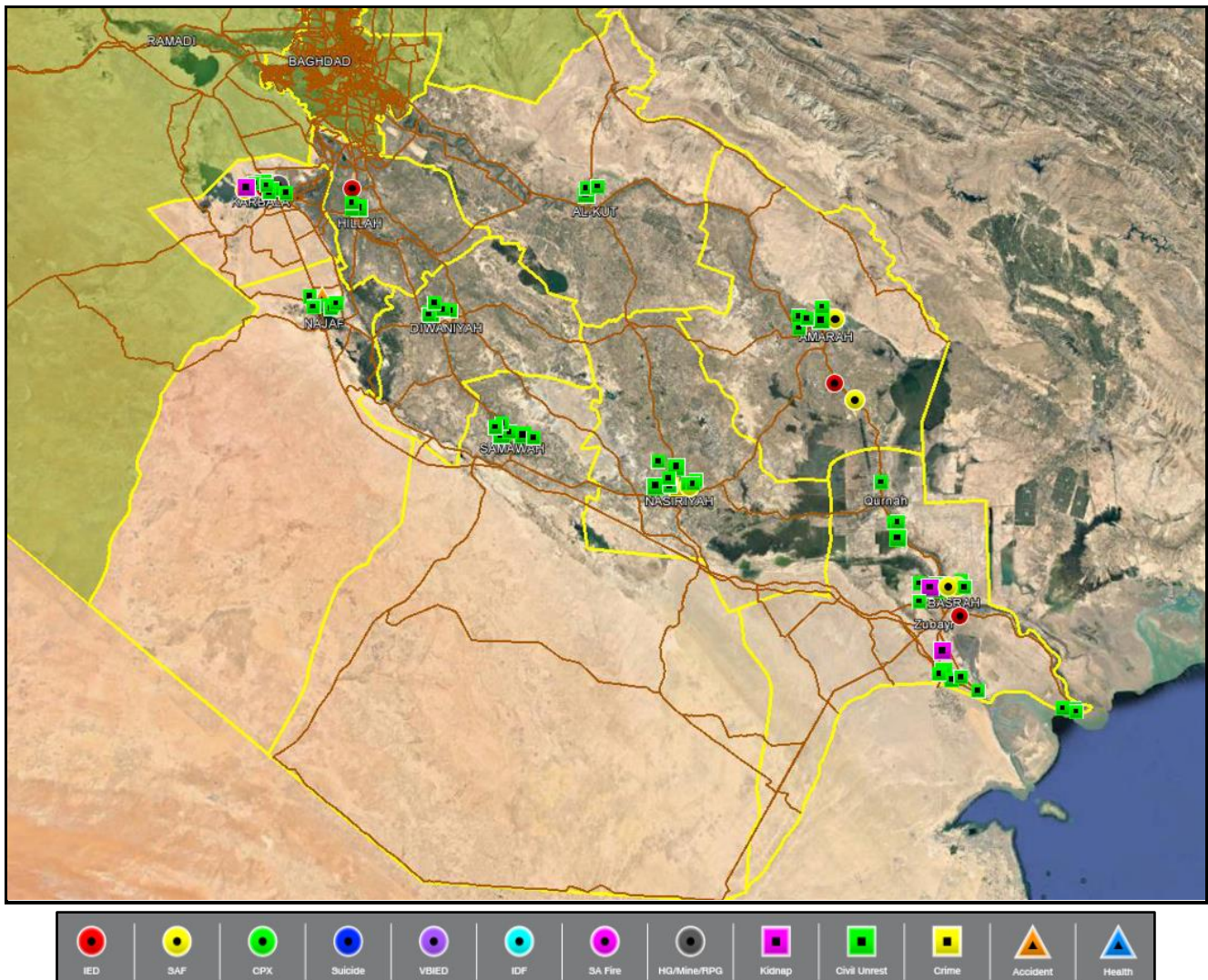
In Anbar province, the Military Intelligence Directorate announced the dismantling of a terrorist group comprising of four members. The group was arrested in an operation in the Zankoura area of Ramadi district. A combined force of the ISF and Sunni tribesmen carried out an anti-IS security operation in the desert area between Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces, in which several underground tunnels were destroyed. A similar pattern was witnessed in the rest of the region, with the security force, in conjunction with PMU factions, carrying out operations to find and clear weapons caches and IEDs. In one operation alone, forty-four IEDs were cleared in the Baghdadi subdistrict. In the west of Al-Assad airbase, the US military carried out a clearance operation. This occurred after several rockets were fired at the airbase the previous day, however there was no casualties as a result of the IDF.

Capital Region (Including Baghdad City)

In Baghdad city over the reporting period, several kidnappings took place. Some of these were related to the ongoing demonstrations, such as the disappearance of the poet Ahmed al-Samarrai, who was kidnapped on route to Tahrir Square. Other kidnappings have taken place across the city that are unrelated to the protests and have a purely criminal motive behind them. An alcohol store and a beauty parlour were both targeted with low-yield IEDs, whilst protests continued across the city.

The main focus has been on Tahrir Square, al-Ahrar, al-Jumhuriyah and al-Sinak bridges and Khellani Square. The demonstrations had seen a sizeable reduction in the number of clashes up until December 05, hundreds of suspected PMU members (believed to belong to Kata'ib Hezbollah & Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq) staged a protest march from the Palestine Street area to the main sit-in site in Tahrir Square, demanding the expulsion of saboteurs from demonstrations. Several people were stabbed in the square shortly after the march ended.

Anti-IS operations continued as a joint ISF-US military unit cleared two IEDs in a truck near the Taji Military Complex. Further search and clearance operations took place in the area, as well as arrest of suspected militants and the destruction of weapons and IED caches. As with other areas, militants targeted ISF members with SAF and hand grenades, leaving several dead and wounded.

Southern Provinces

Across Babel province, fewer incidents were recorded, whilst protestors marched through the region to protest against the government as part of ongoing demonstrations. Meanwhile an IED detonated in Jurf al-Sakhar, killed three PMU members and wounding three others.

In Wasit, protestors marched as part of ongoing anti-government demonstrations.

In Karbala, people joined mass demonstrations as part of the ongoing anti-government protests. Several ISF members were targeted by unknown assailants, with one being targeted by an IED and another being wounded by SAF. Finally, an operation by the Mol Hawks Intelligence Cell was carried out, resulting in the arrest of a group of kidnappers. The cell also successfully rescued the victim.

Across Najaf province, higher levels of activity was experienced in comparison to neighbouring provinces. Clashes broke out involving protestors and security forces in the vicinity of the Mohammed al-Hakim mosque in Najaf city. The office of MP Khaled al-Jashaami from al-Hikma Front, in Najaf city was torched and sabotaged by protestors. Local media reports indicated that gunmen affiliated with the PMU faction Saraya Ashura (Ashura Brigades) which is linked to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) opened fire on protestors yesterday IVO Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim Shrine in Najaf city, causing multiple casualties, Najaf Governor Luay al-Yasiri officially accused the same militia with opening fire on protestors on November 28, causing mass casualties. Protests took place across

the province as part of the ongoing anti-government protests. Meanwhile, unidentified men set alight the power plant in Abu Sakhair subdistrict, Najaf city.

In Diwaniya, protestors torched a house belonging to the head of military-led crisis cell in Dhi Qar province, Lt. Gen. Jamil Al-Shammari in Diwaniyah city. The Education Directorate in Diwaniyah city was also set alight by protestors, and a house belong to police chief General Farqad Al-Essawi, although only material damage was reported as the house empty at the time.

Across Dhi Qar province, elements of the SWAT police force and Rapid Response Division forcibly dispersed a gathering of protesters outside the Dhi Qar police command in Nasiriyah city. The ISF also recaptured the Zeitoun bridge, however the sit-in at the al-Haboubi Square in central Nasiriyah city is still on going. An ISF colonel and two of his bodyguards were wounded when unidentified armed men opened fire on his personal vehicle in Nasiriyah city. The ISF arrested 25 suspected members of a Shia cult, Jund al-Samaa (Soldiers of Heaven), as they were reportedly planning to stage an attack on the main sit-in site in Dhi Qar province. ISF EOD unit was deployed to the new unfinished site of the Dhi Qar Police Directorate, near the amusement park in Nasiriyah city, to dismantle multiple explosive devices found inside the building. Al-Bedour tribesmen arrested four men from Diyala province and a fifth from Baghdad, who were in possession of 13 hand grenades as they attempted to enter Nasiriyah. On November 30, security forces closed all four main entry checkpoints into the province until further notice as a precautionary measure, following reports of unknown groups attempting to enter Nasiriyah city. Subsequent reports indicated that tribesmen blocked most of the main roads linking Dhi Qar with neighbouring provinces to prevent hostile groups from entering the province. Bani Assad tribesmen in Chibayish district prevented several vehicles - apparently originating from Basra province - from entering the province. On November 29, approximately 25,000 civilians demonstrated throughout the province, demanding government reform, anti-corruption, jobs, and services. Twenty four civilians were killed, and 220 others wounded as a result of the protest. On December 01, protestors closed the governorate building as local officials were told to stay away from the facility. The Iraqi judiciary issued an arrest warrant and travel ban on December 01 against Jamel al-Shammari for allegedly ordering the killing of demonstrators in the Dhi Qar province.

In Maysan province, a civil activist was killed shortly after leaving a sit-in at Amarah city. Protests took place across the province as part of the ongoing anti-government demonstrations.

In Muthanna, protests took place across the province as part of the ongoing anti-government demonstrations.

Low-key demonstrations were recorded throughout Basra. Demonstrations took place at the Navy Roundabout in Maq'il - which is currently ongoing, WQ 1, al-Faw storage facility, Jubaila, al-Fursi and Burjesia. Two short lived events were also recorded to the west of Zubayr on 1 and 2 December. In Basra, non-protest related incident numbers as a whole increased this week, with tribal feuding, IEDs, drug trafficking and two reported abductions were recorded. The abductions, occurring on the same evening may possibly be linked – both assessed to have been committed by criminal elements as one is a dual National Iraqi doctor over from London and the other is an engineer who works in the oil and gas industry. Despite their dual nationality, none of them had put in place additional security measures and were living in the local community. Ransom payments are likely to be demanded. Meanwhile, it was announced that the Ministry of Interior (MoI) had sent 150 members of the Federal Police to the province to backfill security at the central prison in Basra, Hamdan Prison. The escalation was said to have been done to facilitate an increase in the holding power of the prison, this in light of the number of individuals currently being held in the facility.

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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