



OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



APRIL 1, 2020–JUNE 30, 2020

ABOUT THIS REPORT

A 2013 amendment to the Inspector General Act established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. This legislation requires the Inspectors General of the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (DoS), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide quarterly reports to the U.S. Congress on active overseas contingency operations.

The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD Inspector General (IG) as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). The DoS IG is the Associate IG. The USAID IG participates in oversight of the operation.

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

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out their statutory missions to:

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

METHODOLOGY

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

The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of formal audits, inspections, or evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the data and information provided by the agencies. For further details on the methodology for this report, see Appendix B.

CLASSIFIED APPENDIX

This report normally includes an appendix containing classified information about the U.S. mission to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

FOREWORD

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

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

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OIR, as well as the work of the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to promote the U.S. Government's policy goals in Iraq and Syria, during the period April 1 through June 30, 2020.

This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies and our partner oversight agencies during the quarter. During the quarter, the Lead IG agencies and our oversight partners issued 12 audit, evaluation, and inspection reports related to OIR.

This report usually includes an appendix containing classified information about OIR. This quarter, due to the coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic and related workforce health protection requirements, the Lead IG agencies did not produce the classified appendix.

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



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



Handwritten signature of Stephen Akard in black ink.

Stephen Akard
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of State



Handwritten signature of Ann Calvaresi Barr in black ink.

Ann Calvaresi Barr
Inspector General
U.S. Agency for International
Development



On the Cover

(Top row): Volunteers in the United States made about 2,000 cloth masks and sent them to al-Asad Air Base, Iraq (DoD photo); a U.S. military working dog at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq (U.S. Army photo); Iraqi Staff Maj. Gen. Mohammed al-Shimary signs documents at Camp Manion in Taqaddum, Iraq (U.S. Marine Corps photo); U.S. Army soldiers during a night live-fire exercise (U.S. Army photo). (Bottom row): U.S. soldiers use Joint Light Tactical Vehicles to provide 360-degree security (U.S. Army photo).

MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL



Sean W. O'Donnell

I am pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report on the status of OIR. This quarter, U.S. and Coalition forces had to contend with the complications and restrictions of the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic while continuing efforts to combat ISIS and develop Iraqi and Syrian partner forces. These efforts were taking place against a backdrop of continued uncertainty about how many U.S. forces will remain in Iraq and Syria, and for how long.

Iraq's parliament ended 5 months of political deadlock and approved a new government led by Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Iraqi intelligence chief since 2016. That approval allowed the U.S. and Iraqi governments to initiate talks in June to determine the future of their bilateral relationship. While the DoS said that the United States and Iraq made no firm commitments on the size of the U.S.-led Coalition force in Iraq, both sides agreed that ISIS remains a threat and that the Coalition continues to play an important role in addressing that threat.

According to the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), ISIS conducted its annual surge of attacks during Ramadan and exploited restrictions on security force operations due to COVID-19 in order to conduct more attacks. However, CJTF-OIR said that ISIS did not maintain its surge and assessed that ISIS is not resurging. Some researchers and analysts raised concerns that ISIS could exploit any reduction in pressure on the group, and they assessed that if underlying conditions such as ineffective governance, lack of economic opportunities, and sectarian tensions are not addressed, ISIS could make gains.

Due to COVID-19, the Coalition provided much of its support and training to Iraqi and Syrian partner forces virtually. CJTF-OIR stated that partner forces in both Iraq and Syria continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations and those forces were more capable and better able to prevent ISIS from resurging than previously reported.

Of growing concern in Syria is the increasing pressure from Russia and the Syrian regime on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to break from the United States. Since the October 2019 Turkish incursion into northeast Syria, the SDF has turned to Russia and the Syrian regime for protection against Turkish and Turkish-aligned forces.

Also of concern are the large numbers of ISIS prisoners in ad hoc detention centers in Syria. Most remain there because their countries of origin are unwilling to repatriate them or bring them to justice. Riots erupted at one detention facility, and the SDF renewed calls for an international solution to the detainee crisis. CJTF-OIR described ISIS detainees across northeast Syria as "an enduring and ever-increasing risk to mission."

Similarly, the international community is struggling to provide services and security at IDP camps, and to make progress on repatriating the tens of thousands of Syrians, Iraqis, and other nationals. The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed the delivery of services, according to the DoS and USAID, and there are ongoing concerns about the potential spread of COVID-19 in the camps.

I look forward to working with my Lead IG colleagues to continue to report and provide oversight on OIR and related U.S. Government activity, as required by the IG Act, and in light of the limitations imposed by COVID-19.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean W. O'Donnell".

Sean W. O'Donnell

Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense





U.S. soldiers use Joint Light Tactical Vehicles to provide 360-degree security at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

CONTENTS

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** 2
- THE QUARTER IN REVIEW**..... 9
 - Major Developments 11
 - Status of ISIS 18
 - Status of ISIS in Iraq..... 22
 - Status of ISIS in Syria 26
 - Events in Iraq..... 29
 - Actions Against ISIS in Iraq 29
 - Partner Force Development 33
 - Role of Third Parties in Iraq 37
 - Diplomacy and Political Developments..... 39
 - Stabilization 44
 - Humanitarian Assistance 46
 - Events in Syria 50
 - Status of OIR in Syria 50
 - Actions Against ISIS in Syria 56
 - ISIS in Camps and Detention Facilities..... 60
 - Partner Force Development 63
 - Role of Third Parties in Syria 66
 - Diplomacy and Political Developments..... 68
 - Stabilization 70
 - Humanitarian Assistance 73
 - Support to Mission 78
- OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES** 83
 - Strategic Planning..... 84
 - Audit, Inspection, and Evaluation Activity 86
 - Investigations and Hotline Activity 97
- APPENDICES** 101
 - Acronyms..... 110
 - Map of Iraq..... 111
 - Map of Syria 112
 - Endnotes..... 113

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U.S.-Iraq Strategic Talks Launch as New Iraqi Government Finds Its Footing

On June 11, the United States and Iraq initiated a Strategic Dialogue to determine the future of bilateral ties as the OIR mission faced emerging challenges from the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Iraq’s economic strain, and evolving tension with Iranian-backed militias. The DoS reported that the discussion covered a range of key political, economic, cultural, and security topics, allowing both sides to present their vision of the future of the relationship. While the DoS said that no firm commitments on the size of the U.S.-led Coalition force in Iraq were made, both sides assessed that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) remained a threat and that “the Global Coalition continued to play an important role in addressing that threat.”¹

The Strategic Dialogue began a month after Iraq’s parliament approved a new government led by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, who had served as Iraq’s intelligence chief since 2016 and holds no formal affiliation to Iraq’s political blocs.² The DoS reported that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi seeks to enact several major reforms to Iraq’s election laws, budget, and public sector workforce.³ Additionally, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi pledged to investigate widespread violence against Iraqi demonstrators who forced the resignation of his predecessor, former Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi, last November.⁴

According to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Prime Minister al-Kadhimi also ordered the first substantive effort by Iraq’s government to address attacks against Coalition forces and diplomatic facilities. The DIA reported that following rocket attacks by suspected Iranian-backed militias in early June, the prime minister chaired an emergency meeting of Iraq’s National Security Council where he called for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to increase its intelligence efforts and to hold perpetrators accountable.⁵ The DIA reported that while the Iraqi government stated it plans to take “firm action to assert authority,” the al-Kadhimi government faces increased pressure from Iranian-backed actors who oppose any continued U.S. military presence in the country.⁶

ISIS Increases Attacks in Iraq and Syria During Ramadan

This quarter, ISIS increased the pace of its attacks in both Iraq and Syria.⁷ U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) attributed the surge in Syria to the group’s usual escalation during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which, according to USCENTCOM, ISIS was unable to sustain.⁸ CJTF-OIR said that in Iraq, ISIS sought to exploit opportunities, including those created by ISF measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ CJTF-OIR stated that a year-to-year comparison of attack numbers, and the complexity and consequences of those attacks, “indicate that ISIS is not resurging.”¹⁰

At the same time, a number of researchers and experts assessed that the increase in ISIS activity signified a strengthening of the group.¹¹ One research institute analyst expressed concerns that ISIS is seizing on the recent reduction of Coalition troops in Iraq to reestablish



Iraqi Staff Maj. Gen. Mohammed al-Shimary signs documents during a transfer ceremony held at Camp Manion in Taqaddum, Iraq. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

itself. Other analysts noted that unless the root causes of ISIS's proliferation are addressed, the group would continue to regenerate.¹²

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS relied mainly on small arms (including sniper fire), improvised explosive devices, and mortars in Iraq to target the ISF and civilians belonging to groups it considers apostate or that it suspects of collaborating with security forces.¹³ ISIS in Iraq also attacked electrical infrastructure, burned fields, and extorted and kidnapped people for ransom.¹⁴

However, CJTF-OIR also reported that ISIS carried out a small number of complex attacks this quarter in addition to the group's more typical "hit-and-run small arms or improvised explosive device attacks."¹⁵ CJTF-OIR described one spate of attacks in Diyala and Salah ad Din provinces that killed more than 20 people as "more audacious and larger-scale" than those carried out last quarter, and as evidence of "extensive pre-operational planning and preparation."¹⁶

CJTF-OIR said that in Syria, ISIS also relied mainly on small arms and improvised explosive devices to attack the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Syrian regime and pro-regime forces. ISIS also claimed to assassinate civilians and security forces it believed to be "spies."¹⁷ The DIA said that ISIS remains capable only of operating in small cells and conducting asymmetric attacks, and does not have the capability it once had to "target Sunni tribes writ-large."¹⁸

The DoD OIG saw no evidence this quarter that ISIS had the ability to retake or hold territory in areas where the Coalition operates, but ISIS did briefly occupy Syrian regime

positions during one offensive in an area outside Coalition control.¹⁹ The DoD OIG observed that this underscores the challenge of defeating ISIS when it operates throughout Syria, where Coalition and partner forces have limited territorial reach.

The DIA reported that ISIS “most likely” remains unable to direct external operations outside of Iraq and Syria and instead relies on inspiring small-scale local attacks.²⁰

Coalition Transfers More Bases, Begins Advising Iraqis Virtually

On April 4, the Coalition transitioned its facilities at Taqaddum Air Base, west of Baghdad, to the ISF.²¹ The handover was the sixth in a series of bases transitioned to the ISF this year as part of a planned restructuring of the Coalition presence in Iraq.²² The transition occurred against a backdrop of U.S. planning for future troop requirements to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as well as Coalition troop departures due to concerns over COVID-19.²³ CJTF-OIR reported that some of the troops who remained began to advise and assist Iraqi commands virtually from remote locations due to COVID-19 concerns.²⁴ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs (OUSD(P) ISA) reported that some countries intend to return forces to Iraq once COVID-19 has subsided.²⁵

SDF Launches Counter-ISIS Campaign; Syrian Regime, Turkey Conduct Counter-ISIS Operations

In June, the SDF launched a 6-day counter-ISIS campaign in the eastern Jazirah desert with support from the Coalition.²⁶ CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF swept 150 farms and villages, capturing 110 ISIS terrorists.²⁷ CJTF-OIR also reported that Coalition forces killed three regional ISIS leaders during raids conducted in May.²⁸

According to the DIA, Syrian regime and pro-regime forces conducted several counter-ISIS operations in the Badiyah region as well, following increased ISIS attacks.²⁹ The DIA further reported that both the Russian Air Force and Iranian-affiliated fighters supported regime fighters in some operations against ISIS in the Badiyah.³⁰

U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) reported that while Turkey remains a “major facilitation hub” for ISIS, Turkish security forces increased their counter-ISIS activities in Turkey this quarter while improving their security presence along the border with Syria and Iraq. USEUCOM said that the Turkish action “impacted ISIS’s ability to smuggle fighters, funds and supplies,” but it noted that the difficulty of securing Turkey’s border with Syria and Iraq “likely ensures” that ISIS will continue to move supporters and family members across the borders.³¹

CJTF-OIR: ISIS Detainees Pose Growing Risk to Mission

CJTF-OIR reported a deterioration of the situation in SDF-run detention facilities holding some 10,000 ISIS fighters, including approximately 2,000 foreign fighters from countries other than Iraq and Syria, despite an infusion of more than \$2 million from the Coalition in recent months.³² ISIS detainees rioted in one facility to protest their conditions and an uprising in another facility, where some detainees demanded trials and family visitations,

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Syrian prison guards in northeastern Syria stand at position with new riot gear from the Coalition. (DoD photo)

lasted 2 days.³³ While no escapes were reported during these riots, CJTF-OIR said that “the risk of a mass breakout cannot be discounted.”³⁴ CJTF-OIR further described ISIS populations in SDF detention facilities, along with ISIS-affiliated residents at the al-Hol displacement camp in northeastern Syria, as “an enduring and ever-increasing risk to mission.”³⁵

This quarter, the SDF launched a 3-day biometric registration at the al-Hol displacement camp to create an electronic database of suspected ISIS-linked individuals living at the camp.³⁶ USAID reported concern among humanitarian agencies that the registrations included anyone over the age of 10 and thus could unfairly stigmatize children.³⁷

U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Syrian Leader and Supporters

On June 17, the DoS and the U.S. Department of the Treasury released 39 designations sanctioning Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and members of his family and associates using a new law called the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act, which was enacted in December 2019. The Act, implemented in June, allows the U.S. Government to target individuals and businesses who support al-Assad and his regime. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said that he anticipates sanctions to continue until the Assad regime agrees to a political resolution to the Syrian Civil War in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.³⁸ The DoS also reported that U.S. economic sanctions against Russian and Iranian entities severed their access to the financial system and served as a warning to those who may consider supporting the regime’s war effort.³⁹

DoS Concerned Over Actions of Turkish-supported Opposition Groups

This quarter, the DoS said it remained concerned by reports that Turkish-supported opposition groups may have committed human rights abuses and violated the law of armed conflict in northeast Syria.⁴⁰ The DoS said it received multiple reports of abuses committed by Turkish-supported forces in the zone of the October 2019 incursion in northeastern Syria, including “arbitrary detentions, extra-judicial killings, seizure of and resettlement of new populations in private properties, the repeated and deliberate shutting off of water access to

Lead IG Oversight Activities

This quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed 12 reports related to OIR. These reports examined various activities that support OIR, including the DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism's oversight and management of its foreign assistance programs, the DoS Global Engagement Center's management and monitoring of its Federal assistance awards, and financial accountability in humanitarian assistance programs. Lead IG partner agencies also issued reports related to internal controls and accounting for transportation of personnel and cash disbursements at U.S. Air Force installations supporting the OIR mission, and the U.S. Army's management of contracting support during contingency and expeditionary operations. As of June 30, 26 projects were ongoing, and 13 projects were planned.

During the quarter, the investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 13 investigations, initiated 2 new investigations, and coordinated on 112 open investigations. The investigations involve procurement fraud, corruption, grant fraud, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; and abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the investigator referred 84 cases to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.

half a million civilians, and transfer of arbitrarily-detained Syrians across an international border into Turkey.⁴¹ The DoS continued to raise these alleged violations and abuses with Turkey and to press for credible and transparent investigation of the allegations and holding those responsible accountable.⁴²

DoS Stabilization Programs Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic; USAID Restores Staffing in Iraq

The DoS said that many stabilization activities were either paused or conducted remotely this quarter due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19.⁴³ Implementers used distance-learning platforms instead of physical classrooms, but were hampered by limited Internet access.⁴⁴ Humanitarian partners suspended most group activities, including education and protection activities, in displaced persons camps, but continued to distribute food and water.⁴⁵ Additionally, the majority of critical health programming activities in Iraq continued unimpeded despite rising cases of COVID-19.⁴⁶ Humanitarian partners also reduced the number of staff in camps, allowing them instead to work remotely, and began programming on hygiene awareness to reduce spread of the virus.⁴⁷

After more than a year of staffing challenges, Ambassador Matthew Tueller restored USAID staff in Iraq approving an increase from 8 to 13 expatriate staff. These positions will be filled next year. However, USAID staffing increased from 8 to 13 expatriate personnel.⁴⁸





A U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jet conducts a simulated attack run near the Tanf Garrison, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

Major Developments	11
Status of ISIS.....	18
Status of ISIS in Iraq	22
Status of ISIS in Syria.....	26
Events in Iraq	29
Actions Against ISIS in Iraq	29
Partner Force Development	33
Role of Third Parties in Iraq	37
Diplomacy and Political Developments	39
Stabilization	44
Humanitarian Assistance	46
Events in Syria	50
Status of OIR in Syria.....	50
Actions Against ISIS in Syria.....	56
ISIS in Camps and Detention Facilities	60
Partner Force Development	63
Role of Third Parties in Syria.....	66
Diplomacy and Political Developments	68
Stabilization	70
Humanitarian Assistance	73
Support to Mission	78



The sun sets at K1 Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

U.S. and Iraq Initiate Strategic Talks to Define Future of Bilateral Ties

Following months of domestic political turmoil and violent exchanges with malign actors that have strained bilateral ties, the United States and Iraq initiated a Strategic Dialogue to address the future course of their relationship, including the future of U.S. forces in the country. On June 11, representatives of the U.S. Government, led by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale, and the Iraqi government, led by Senior Under Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Abdul-Karim Hashim Mostafa, met via video teleconference.¹ The DoS reported that during the meeting both sides presented their vision for the future of the relationship and agreed to work on areas of mutual concern. The DoS added that while there were no firm commitments on the size of the U.S.-led Coalition force, both sides agreed that ISIS remained a threat and that “the Global Coalition continued to play an important role in addressing that threat.”²

However, according to an official joint statement released after the talks, the United States and Iraq “recognized that in the light of significant progress towards eliminating the ISIS threat, over the coming months the United States would continue reducing forces from Iraq.”³ The DoD Office of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy–International Security Affairs (OUSD(P) ISA) told the DoD OIG that through the talks, both governments aim to reach a mutual understanding regarding the U.S. military presence, security cooperation, and the long-term strategic bilateral relationship.⁴ OUSD(P) ISA added that U.S. force level specifics and adjustment timelines were not discussed during the June 11 meeting, and that the United States continues to adapt its force presence to the situation on the ground.⁵ OUSD(P) ISA stated that although most training and equipping programs paused this quarter due to the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) continued to conduct successful counter-ISIS operations with the assistance of Coalition advisors and air support.⁶

According to the DoS, both sides agreed to further discussions, including an in-person meeting later in the summer if health conditions permit, and the resumption of Joint Coordination Committee meetings to work on specific areas of mutual interest. Among these mutual interests, the DoS said the enduring defeat of ISIS, as well as protection of U.S. interests from security threats, will be major topics of discussion. The DoS reported that it is too soon to tell if the June 11 Strategic Dialogue will affect the U.S.-Iraq security relationship and that further security-specific discussions will take place in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020. Additionally, the DoS said that the Strategic Dialogue also seeks to expand and strengthen cooperation with Iraq on a range of political, economic, and cultural issues.⁷

Iraq Forms New Government Under Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, But Political Hurdles Remain

On May 6, after more than 5 months of political deadlock and two failed candidates for Prime Minister, Iraq's parliament approved a sufficient number of ministers proposed by Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi to permit the formation of a new government.⁸ Since December 2019, Iraq was led by a caretaker government under former Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi, who stepped down after nationwide anti-government protests erupted a month earlier.⁹

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, who was nominated by Iraqi President Barham Salih on April 9, previously served as a journalist, human rights activist, and director of Iraq's National Intelligence Service, and is not publicly affiliated with any of Iraq's political blocs. According to analysts, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi is assessed to be a pragmatic Iraqi nationalist with strong relations with Iraq's foreign partners, including the United States.¹⁰ OUSD(P) ISA reported that the confirmation of al-Kadhimi as prime minister and his appointment of "qualified and capable leadership" to the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) will enable follow-on strategic discussions between the United States and Iraq to move forward as scheduled this summer.¹¹

According to media reports, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi pledged to hold early elections, tackle corruption within state institutions, initiate economic reforms, and check foreign interference in Iraq's political and security decisions.¹² In an effort to address the demands of anti-government demonstrators, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi also ordered the immediate release of protesters detained since October 1, 2019, and announced the creation of a committee to investigate protester deaths and disappearances.¹³

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi Directs ISF to Thwart Attacks on U.S. and Coalition Forces, Sparking New Internal Tension

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that the frequency of attacks on Coalition forces and diplomatic facilities may have decreased this quarter because Iranian-backed actors focused on the Iraqi government formation under Prime Minister al-Kadhimi.¹⁴ The DIA noted that while hardline Iranian-backed groups such as Kata'ib Hezbollah and Harakat al-Nujaba continue to publicly call for the violent removal of U.S. forces from Iraq, the militias likely seek to pressure Prime Minister al-Kadhimi to commit to the reduction or complete removal of U.S. forces during the Strategic Dialogue.¹⁵

The DIA and DoD OIG assess that the frequency of attacks by malign groups increased in June around the time of the Strategic Dialogue. According to the DIA, eight rocket attacks occurred between June 3 and 22. Additionally, the DIA reported that three convoys supporting U.S. and Coalition forces were attacked between June 8 and 28, one of which was claimed by an Iranian-aligned "front-group."¹⁶ According to media sources and statements by the Prime Minister's military spokesperson, the government responded to the renewed attacks by ordering the ISF to increase intelligence efforts to thwart future attacks on Coalition facilities.¹⁷ On June 14, as a result of these efforts, the ISF seized several rockets aimed at Camp Taji, the ISF base north of Baghdad where three Coalition troops were killed by rocket fire in March.¹⁸

The Defense Intelligence Agency reported that the frequency of attacks on Coalition forces and diplomatic facilities may have decreased this quarter because Iranian-backed actors focused on the Iraqi government formation under Prime Minister al-Kadhimi.

On June 25, the CTS conducted a raid in Baghdad and arrested 14 members of Kata'ib Hezbollah who are suspected of being involved with recent rocket attacks on the International Zone and the international airport in Baghdad, according to media and think tank reporting.¹⁹ Iranian-aligned members of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—which includes Kata'ib Hezbollah—have condemned the raid, with open source reporting indicating that more than 100 armed militiamen entered the International Zone to demand the release of those detained.²⁰ The DIA reported that 13 of the 14 detainees were released to the Popular Mobilization Committee's (PMC) Security Directorate while the last individual, who is allegedly connected with previous rocket attacks, was handed to the Iraqi judiciary.²¹

While there have been increased tensions between the new Iraqi government and Iranian-aligned militias, the DIA reported that the ISF remains loyal to Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, as the commander in chief, and obeys orders to target and execute judicial warrants against elements suspected of violating Iraq's counterterrorism laws. The DIA stated that ISF reluctance to unilaterally target or pursue militia elements outside the judicially approved process likely will continue unless explicitly approved by the commander in chief. The DIA said that the al-Kadhimi government has instructed the ISF to identify and hold accountable any perpetrators who seek to target Iraqi sites and foreign diplomatic missions, but has issued no specific instructions to confront the PMC, which oversees the PMF. Additionally, the DIA reported that the Iraqi government announced on July 1 that it planned to “soon take firm action to assert authority” over Iraq's border crossings, which the DIA assessed has the potential to foment tensions between the ISF and Kata'ib Hezbollah at the Iraq-Syria border—a key hub of Kata'ib Hezbollah activity.²²



U.S. Army soldiers wearing improvised face masks at Erbil Air Base in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

COVID-19 Impacts OIR Mission

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MOBILIZES AS COVID-19 INFECTIONS RISE IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

As of early May, a DoS press release stated that since the outbreak of COVID-19, the U.S. Government committed more than \$775 million to assist governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGO) fight the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding includes nearly \$30 million in assistance for Iraq and more than \$31 million for Syria.²³

According to media reporting citing Iraqi health officials, in the first half of this quarter the number of COVID-19 cases rose steadily and then accelerated in May and June.²⁴ The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that by the end of the quarter, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed 6,439 COVID-19 cases and 205 fatalities in Iraq.²⁵ The number of confirmed infections in Syria rose slowly in the first half of the quarter. However, in late April, a senior UN official told the UN Security Council (UNSC) that the rising rate of COVID-19 infections in Syria signaled that “tragedy beckons” for the country.²⁶ The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that the WHO confirmed 279 COVID-19 cases and 9 fatalities in Syria by the end of the quarter.²⁷

COALITION PRIORITIZES FORCE PROTECTION, CONTINUES FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

CJTF-OIR initially assessed that COVID-19 would likely negatively affect the ability of Coalition members to fill personnel requirements in Iraq and Syria.²⁸ However, CJTF-OIR reported that the pandemic did not have a significant impact on the health of Coalition forces in either country this quarter.²⁹ This appears to be due to a number of steps that DoD leaders took to ensure the safety of Coalition forces.

For example, on March 24, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper instituted a 60-day ban on all non-essential travel for DoD personnel. In late April, Secretary Esper extended the travel ban until June 30.³⁰ He also exempted certain types of travel, including travel by patients for medical purposes, travel associated with select deployments and redeployments, and travel by those returning from temporary duty assignments.³¹ DoD leaders reviewed this decision every 15 days to determine whether or not it would be prudent to discontinue the travel ban before June 30.³²

On May 22, Secretary Esper directed the DoD to take a “conditions-based, phased approach” to travel.³³ Under this approach, conditions to resume unrestricted travel rest on criteria based on White House guidelines and on the conditions in and around DoD installations.³⁴ CJTF-OIR reported that the travel restrictions Secretary Esper implemented generally helped protect Coalition forces.³⁵

CJTF-OIR reported that military commanders in Iraq and Syria reinforced to their subordinates the importance of universal health precautions, including proper hygiene and social distancing.³⁶ Leaders mandated the use of protective masks when physical distancing became difficult or impractical. Leaders also directed personnel not to attend work if they experienced any concerning symptoms; they were encouraged to seek immediate medical care, according to CJTF-OIR.³⁷

In late April, a CJTF-OIR press release stated that all CJTF-OIR installations and medical providers adopted procedures in the event a service member tested positive for COVID-19.³⁸ CJTF-OIR reported that medical personnel evaluated anyone identified as potentially infected, conducted contact tracing, and implemented isolation and quarantine measures. Medical personnel tracked individuals using a centralized database that informed COVID-19 reporting requirements, according to CJTF-OIR.³⁹

CJTF-OIR requested additional medical personnel in order to handle increased demands on the medical system. The personnel arrived in early May.⁴⁰ CJTF-OIR also received point-of-care laboratory testing assets, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other critical supplies, which personnel distributed across sites in Iraq and Syria.⁴¹ CJTF-OIR reported that it has no registered shortfalls in personnel or material due to COVID-19.⁴² In early June, the Commander of USCENTCOM, General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., stated publicly that he is “well-stocked” with the materials necessary to protect Coalition forces from COVID-19.⁴³

General McKenzie also stated that COVID-19 has “not had a significant impact on our ability to conduct operations.”⁴⁴ CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF and Coalition forces implemented mitigation measures to continue operations in support of the OIR mission with minimal disruptions.⁴⁵ CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF’s response to COVID-19 was “beneficial to the Coalition mission by mitigating risk of COVID-19 spread in the Joint Operations Command–Iraq (JOC-I).”⁴⁶

According to CJTF-OIR, ISF leaders implemented heavy restrictions on staff that work with Coalition partners; isolated persons exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms; sanitized workspaces; and tested and traced personnel. These actions “ensured Coalition operations were able to continue,” according to CJTF-OIR, which noted that some ISF personnel who fell ill or were suspected of contracting COVID-19 were absent from work.⁴⁷

In April, a CJTF-OIR press release stated, “Leveraging technology has helped us continue our mission to defeat [ISIS], while allowing the Coalition and partner forces [to] stay healthy during this pandemic.”⁴⁸ CJTF-OIR reported that it leveraged video conferencing and other technological solutions in order to minimize individual contact.⁴⁹ For example, the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force and the Special Operations Advisory Group conducted virtual advise and assist activities from remote locations for operational planning and execution with the ISF.⁵⁰ These activities included the use of dual operations rooms with mirrored capabilities, maintained at different levels of classification. CJTF-OIR also engaged with key ISF leaders, including partners at JOC-I.⁵¹

IRAQI GOVERNMENT IMPOSES RESTRICTIONS TO CONTAIN COVID-19

The Iraqi government took a range of steps to prevent persons infected with COVID-19 from entering the country, and to contain the disease within its borders. However, economic factors constrained the government’s response options. In early April, the media reported that the Iraqi government was “nearly bankrupt” due to “a precipitous decline in the price of oil.”⁵² The Iraqi government derives more than 90 percent of its revenue from oil sales; many private sector firms rely on government contracts; and COVID-19 restrictions in Iraq slowed commerce considerably, according to media reporting.⁵³

The Iraqi government suspended most air travel and closed border crossings.⁵⁴ In late April, an Iraqi health official stated that several factors made closing the Iraq-Iran border difficult, including Iraq’s large Shia population and a high bilateral trade volume.⁵⁵ News reports from early May said that the Iraqi government officially reopened some border crossings to alleviate financial hardship.⁵⁶

The Iraqi government ran a media campaign notifying the public about the importance of social distancing, proper hygiene, and using PPE.⁵⁷ Not all Iraqis followed this guidance. Media reporting from April stated that government officials prosecuted organizers of prohibited funeral services, noting that COVID-19 carriers at these gatherings infected large numbers of people.⁵⁸ In mid-April, the Supreme Judicial Council announced that the government had released over 16,000 jailed persons in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Iraqi prisons.⁵⁹

(continued on next page)

COVID-19 Impacts OIR Mission *(continued from previous page)*

Iraqi officials imposed curfews, restricted the movement of vehicles, closed schools and universities, and suspended work in government institutions.⁶⁰ They reassigned some ISF units from security missions to support the government response. CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF's primary role in relation to these measures was to enforce curfews.⁶¹ The assignments of ISF units to enforce curfews reduced the number of personnel available to conduct clearance operations in support of the OIR mission, according to CJTF-OIR.⁶²

According to media reporting, most of the Iraqi government's restrictions remained in place throughout the quarter. However, some restrictions were relaxed in select areas because of perceived reductions in COVID-19 infection rates, the holy month of Ramadan, and public protests over the restrictions.⁶³ CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi government lifted and then re-imposed restrictions after an increase in reported cases during Ramadan.⁶⁴ According to CJTF-OIR, the ISF continued conducting operations against ISIS during this period, preventing the group from gaining significant momentum during its Ramadan offensive.⁶⁵ CJTF-OIR said that COVID-19 restrictions limited its ability to advise the CTS; therefore, the majority of CTS operations were conducted independent of Coalition forces.⁶⁶

SYRIAN REGIME COMBATS COVID-19, SEEKS TERRITORIAL CONTROL

The Syrian regime attempted to prevent COVID-19 infected persons from entering areas under its control by halting most commercial flights and closing border crossings, according to press reporting.⁶⁷ In early April, Shia pilgrims mainly from Iran continued traveling to Syria by land to visit religious sites, particularly in Damascus.⁶⁸ The Syrian regime closed a major Shia shrine in Damascus that, according to the press, was "a magnet for tens of thousands of Iranian pilgrims."⁶⁹ The DIA reported that Iran generally seeks to adhere to the Syrian regime's COVID-19 restrictions to avoid the perception that Iranian forces have exacerbated the spread of the virus inside Syria. This perception may cause modest challenges to the freedom of movement Iran enjoyed prior to the pandemic, according to the DIA.⁷⁰ The Syrian regime also took steps to contain COVID-19 by postponing parliamentary elections, instituting curfews, forcing the closure of select businesses, and limiting travel routes, though it loosened some of these restrictions, particularly during Ramadan (April 24 through May 23).⁷¹

Meanwhile, according to media reports, the Syrian regime struggled to overcome long-term financial woes and an economic downturn worsened by COVID-19.⁷² The regime's economic prospects declined further when the United States levied additional sanctions aimed at forcing it back to UN-led negotiations on ending the civil war.⁷³ In June, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported it observed anti-government protests—a rare occurrence—over economic and living conditions in areas under Syrian regime control.⁷⁴ According to state media reports, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad dismissed Prime Minister Imad Khamis following weeks of deepening economic hardship and a rare outbreak of public protests against the Syrian regime.⁷⁵

In late May, one researcher claimed that the Syrian regime was seeking to "weaponize" COVID-19 to harm its opponents, namely by obstructing humanitarian efforts to combat the pandemic in opposition-held areas.⁷⁶ The same researcher, whose work USAID sponsored, asserted that the Syrian regime, supported by Russia, was attempting to restrict humanitarian access to northeastern Syria in order to regain control of the region.⁷⁷ He said that Turkey was likely pressing Russia not to veto all access from its territory to Syria, seeking to prevent a further influx of refugees, possibly carrying COVID-19, to Turkey if some aid was not provided in Syria.⁷⁸

COVID-19 MAKES THE CRISIS IN NORTHEASTERN SYRIA MORE ACUTE

On March 18, a senior Self-Administration of Northeast Syria (SNES) health official discussed with the press ongoing efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 in northeastern Syria.⁷⁹ He reported that the SNES did not have enough medical materials and personnel to combat a COVID-19 outbreak effectively.⁸⁰

According to a DoS cable, the WHO deployed COVID-19 tests in northeastern Syria, but SNES personnel had little capacity to test people in the region.⁸¹ The SNES health official stated that the only laboratory that could diagnose COVID-19 was located in Damascus, under the control of the Syrian regime. To screen suspicious cases, WHO personnel had to transport samples to this laboratory.⁸² The SNES also had limited medical facilities in which to isolate patients, and a lack of ventilators and personal protective equipment, according to the official.⁸³

The SNES official described “an active fight against [COVID-19] in an area it seems much of the world has now forgotten.”⁸⁴ He claimed that the SNES closed border crossings, with limited exceptions, to travelers in response to COVID-19. The SNES also launched a public health awareness campaign, including the distribution of written, audio, and video materials.⁸⁵

CJTF-OIR reported that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) took a “responsible approach” in its response to COVID-19.⁸⁶ Mitigation measures within the Eastern Syria Security Area (ESSA) included implementation of local curfews, border closings, and travel restrictions.⁸⁷ According to CJTF-OIR, implementation of these measures generally slowed the pace of SDF operations against ISIS and precluded Coalition forces and their partners from working in close proximity to each other.⁸⁸ The SDF continued conducting counter-ISIS operations, including a large operation to clear an area along the Iraqi border following the end of Ramadan.⁸⁹ After 2 to 3 weeks of reduced interaction among Coalition forces and the SDF, with no evidence of an increase of COVID-19 infections for either party, the SDF communicated a desire to recommence counter-ISIS operations, which occurred at the end of May, according to CJTF-OIR.⁹⁰

COVID-19 had a minimal impact on SDF detention facilities, according to CJTF-OIR, which noted that CJTF-OIR provided hygiene supplies and training to minimize the negative effects of COVID-19 at these facilities.⁹¹ The DIA noted that the prisoner riots in response to COVID-19 had a negative impact on these detention facilities.⁹² USCENTCOM reported that while COVID-19 hindered coordination with the SDF, it completed initial site surveys at a majority of the SDF detention centers within the ESSA and near Tanf Garrison.⁹³

Media reports from early April claimed that the SNES continued to lack the organic capabilities, equipment, and personnel necessary to test for COVID-19.⁹⁴ On April 2, the WHO confirmed the first case of COVID-19 discovered in northeastern Syria after medical officials in Damascus tested samples collected in the region.⁹⁵ Health officials in the region subsequently conducted “active surveillance” to probe for other potential cases, according to a WHO spokesperson.⁹⁶ In late April, the press reported that the Kurdish Red Crescent claimed to have constructed a hospital for COVID-19 patients on the outskirts of Hasakah City.⁹⁷ Medecins Sans Frontieres trained hospital staff on how to treat COVID-19 patients. The Kurdish Red Crescent planned to construct another hospital near Manbij in the near future, according to press reporting.⁹⁸

Physical and economic insecurity in northeastern Syria compounded the SNES’s challenges, according to media reports.⁹⁹ Those reports noted that previous incursions by the Turkish military, tense relations with the Syrian regime, and a partial closure of the border with Iraq hamper the SDF.¹⁰⁰ Water shortages were particularly problematic. Tensions between different armed groups have led to the inconsistent functioning of water supply infrastructure in northeastern Syria; large numbers of people depend on these resources as a source of water for drinking and hygiene, according to media reporting.¹⁰¹

In early April, a senior leader at the International Committee of the Red Cross told the International Crisis Group what to expect if a COVID-19 outbreak were to occur at IDP camps in northeastern Syria, including al-Hol.¹⁰² The official stated that there would be considerable loss of life and the SDF stationed at the camps would likely be overwhelmed.¹⁰³ Another official assessed, “Any spreading of the virus [at the camps] will lead to unprecedented catastrophe.”¹⁰⁴

STATUS OF ISIS

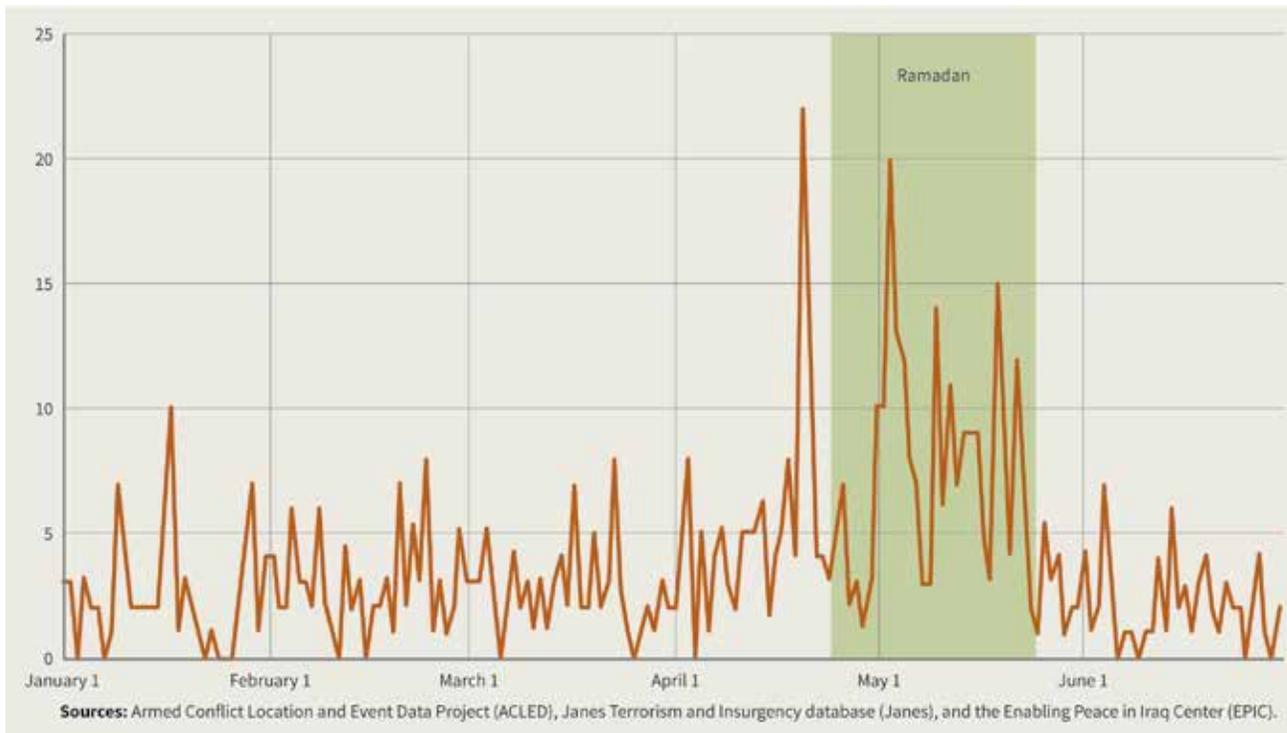
DOD Reports Uptick in ISIS Attacks but No Resurgence This Quarter

This quarter, ISIS temporarily increased the pace of its attacks in Iraq and Syria, which USCENTCOM attributed to the group’s typical escalation in Syria during the holy month of Ramadan (April 24 through May 23). CJTF-OIR said that in Iraq, this increase in attacks likely indicated an “opportunistic exploitation of a confluence of factors,” such as the ISF’s “preoccupation” with measures to contain COVID-19 in Iraq, as opposed to any “notable increase in [ISIS] capability.”¹⁰⁵ CJTF-OIR stated that historical attack numbers, the complexity and consequences of the attacks, and the fact that ISIS was unable to sustain the increased tempo, “indicate that ISIS is not resurging.”¹⁰⁶

During the quarter, independent experts and researchers offered differing assessments of ISIS’s level of resurgence, with some saying the uptick in ISIS activity signified the group is growing stronger. One research organization’s assessment in May said that the spike in ISIS attacks in the first half of the quarter had “raised new fears about the revival of the group,” and appeared to be “early signs of an ISIS recovery.”¹⁰⁷ The assessment said that the increase in attacks correlated with a weakening of sustained military pressure against the group in

Figure 1.

Number of ISIS Attacks in Iraq by Day, January–June 2020



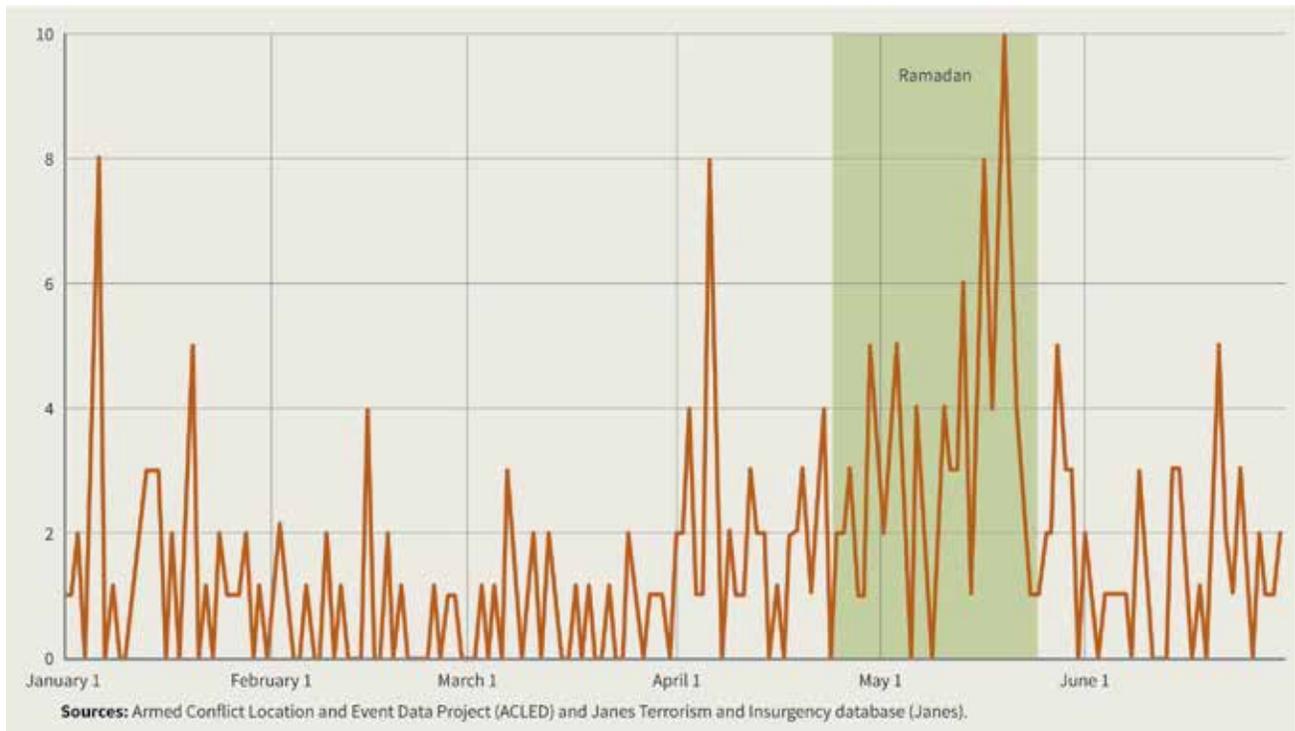
both countries. The report said that in Syria, ISIS benefited from the “chaos” that followed Turkey’s October 2019 incursion into Syria and the U.S. troop redeployment.¹⁰⁸ In Iraq, ISIS benefited from sustained mass protests and the ensuing political paralysis. The report said that without renewed counter-ISIS operations, the group could gain a firm foothold that would allow it to carry out frequent, large-scale attacks in both countries.¹⁰⁹

Additionally, researchers claimed that ISIS was taking advantage of COVID-19 in both Iraq and Syria. One research institute analyst assessed that ISIS benefited from a security vacuum left by the various military forces reducing activity due to COVID-19.¹¹⁰ A counterterrorism researcher told the press that ISIS was indeed trying to make the most of the pandemic by unleashing a “wave of attacks” that also coincided with Ramadan.¹¹¹

Separately, the DIA reported that ISIS attacks may increase further if pressure on the group is reduced due to the pandemic or competing priorities of anti-ISIS forces.¹¹²

Another research institute analyst assessed that ISIS is quite well adapted for operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting that ISIS units in Iraq and Syria are isolated and self-contained, the researcher characterized the group as “the ultimate doomsday preppers.”¹¹³ Small ISIS cells operating in non-permissive terrain, including remote desert and mountainous locales, have little risk of exposure to the virus, according to CJTF-OIR, which reported that it saw no indications that COVID-19 adversely affected ISIS this quarter.¹¹⁴

Figure 2.
Number of ISIS Attacks in Syria by Day, January–June 2020



In May, a senior Norwegian military official told the press that ISIS was targeting Iraqi forces “that are not currently coordinated to the same extent as before the virus struck.”¹¹⁵ The official did not clarify which aspects of ISF operations were less coordinated.

CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi government’s restrictions, including curfews, likely limited ISIS’s freedom of movement in urban or residential areas, but also likely allowed ISIS to move more freely and with less fear of detection or interdiction by the ISF in outlying areas where restrictions were less enforced, which enabled the group to conduct more attacks.¹¹⁶ Moreover, due to travel restrictions, ISIS may have more easily identified officials exempted from such restrictions as potential targets, CJTF-OIR said.¹¹⁷

Other experts noted that unless the root causes of ISIS’s proliferation are addressed—such as ineffective governance and service delivery, lack of economic opportunity, and sectarian division—the group would continue to regenerate. In a collaborative report compiled by the Wilson Center, one research analyst said that ISIS poses a “growing threat” to the Iraqi government and security forces and to the SDF, and it will seize on the reduction of Coalition troops in Iraq to reestablish itself.¹¹⁸

Another security analyst said that ISIS has “reconstituted a capable insurgent force in Iraq and Syria, surging dangerously in areas difficult for the U.S.-led anti-ISIS Coalition to operate.”¹¹⁹ She said that Coalition forces have been able to suppress ISIS, but without addressing the underlying political and economic conditions that alienate Syrians and Iraqis from their government, “anti-ISIS Coalition pressure is unlikely to block or reverse ISIS’s reconstitution and may fail to prevent its re-establishment of a physical caliphate.”¹²⁰

In previous quarters, U.S. officials stated that the alienation of local populations can provide an opening for ISIS to gain traction. In January 2020, the DIA reported that ISIS seeks to influence local Sunni populations by exploiting their grievances, including perceived political marginalization and neglect, reconstruction delays, and sectarian divisions.¹²¹ CJTF-OIR deputy commander Major General Alexander Grynkewich told reporters in January that to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, it is necessary to address “underlying conditions” like governance and corruption.¹²² Similarly, the DoS reported in 2019 that populations in both Iraq and Syria face high unemployment, insecurity, displacement, humanitarian crises, and a government failure to provide basic services. The DoS said that these security and socio-economic challenges in Iraq and Syria “leave ordinary civilians vulnerable to recruiting by ISIS and other extremists.”¹²³

USCENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie Jr., speaking at the Middle East Institute on June 10, said that the ISIS threat from Iraq and Syria was “not going to go away,” and that it was “only the result of direct pressure” that ISIS is being prevented from reasserting itself and attacking the United States and its allies.¹²⁴ General McKenzie said he looked forward to a time when “local security forces are able to contain ISIS without significant external help.”¹²⁵ He also stated that in areas of Syria under control of the Syrian regime and its Russian backers, the regime was failing to fix the lack of “basic human requirements” that allowed ISIS to rise in the first place, creating what he called a “plan for failure west of the Euphrates.”¹²⁶

ISIS Maintains Internal Cohesion, but Remains Unable to Direct External Operations

The DIA reported that there was a significant degradation to ISIS’s senior leadership cadre, but there was no change in ISIS’s internal cohesiveness in Syria.¹²⁷ Similarly, CJTF-OIR reported that it was unaware of any “internal factionalization, ideological disputes, or power struggles” among ISIS members in Iraq that could threaten the group’s “internal cohesion and unity of effort.”¹²⁸

The DIA reported that ISIS “most likely” remains unable to direct external operations from Iraq and Syria against targets in western countries, including the United States.¹²⁹ The DIA stated that ISIS relies on inspiring small-scale attacks outside of Iraq and Syria by publicly encouraging external branches and networks, citing recent arrests of Europe-based ISIS supporters in contact with ISIS members in Syria.¹³⁰ The DIA reported that these attacks tend to be localized, targeting security forces and government collaborators in home countries.¹³¹

According to the DIA, the most likely threat outside of Iraq and Syria remains lone actors inspired by ISIS propaganda, because these supporters are already in the United States or Europe, and can attack with little or no warning.¹³² For example, the DIA cited an ISIS claim that the perpetrator of a February stabbing that injured three people in London was responding to calls by ISIS to attack the citizens of Coalition countries.¹³³

ISIS Reserves Estimated at \$50 to \$300 Million

The DIA reported that it concurs with unclassified estimates the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) provided last quarter, placing ISIS financial reserves between \$50 to \$300 million.¹³⁴ Treasury reported this quarter that ISIS continues to have access to financial reserves in the hundreds of millions of dollars.¹³⁵ It assessed that the group’s revenues in Syria remain at historic lows due to its lack of territorial control over “extortable populations” or recurrent access to natural resources.¹³⁶

Treasury said that ISIS continues to raise funds through extorting, looting, kidnapping for ransom, and using front companies.¹³⁷ Treasury reported that ISIS primarily uses cash couriers, hawaladars (who front the cash), and money services businesses to move funds within and out of Syria and Iraq, including through neighboring countries. ISIS uses Turkey in particular to facilitate money movements, noting the designation of more than 10 Turkey-based ISIS facilitators or money services businesses in the past 9 months, Treasury said.¹³⁸ Treasury reported that it continues to work with interagency and Coalition partners, including the Iraqi government, to identify and disrupt ISIS’s finances and networks in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and elsewhere.¹³⁹

Treasury said that ISIS continues to raise funds through extorting, looting, kidnapping for ransom, and using front companies.

ISIS Online Recruitment Efforts Increase amid COVID-19 Pandemic

According to reporting by several research institutes, ISIS increased its online activity this quarter to recruit new members. In late April, a researcher assessed that ISIS messaging supported recruiting, particularly content that framed ISIS as exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴⁰ A news report from mid-May noted a recent spike in media activity from ISIS

supporters online that included “the launching of Facebook accounts, the opening of new media outlets and increased activity by established ones, Telegram channels, and other media and propaganda ventures.”¹⁴¹

Analysts at a research institute assessed ISIS supporters were “taking advantage of a reduction in [terrorism] prevention activity by Internet companies during the COVID-19 pandemic.”¹⁴² In late May, a terrorism researcher assessed that ISIS capitalized on the stress of physical isolation made necessary by the COVID-19 pandemic, tailoring its propaganda by employing an Internet-centric recruitment methodology.¹⁴³

STATUS OF ISIS IN IRAQ

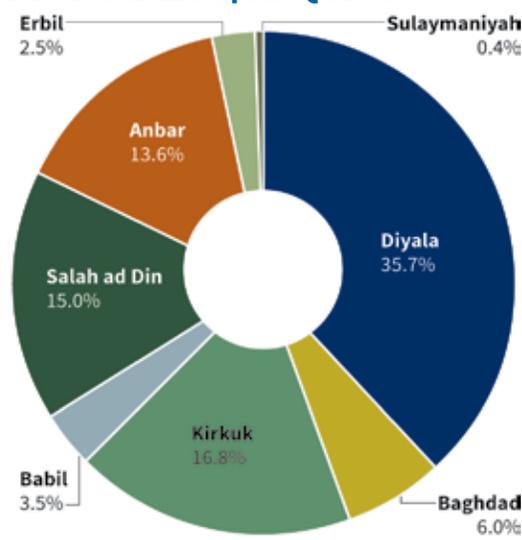
Most ISIS Attacks in Iraq are Small-scale, Target Iraqi Forces

CJTF-OIR reported that in Iraq ISIS relied mainly on small arms, improvised explosive devices (IED), and mortars to target the ISF, as well as members of groups that it considers apostate, such as Kurds and Shia Muslims, and those it accuses of spying or collaborating with security forces.¹⁴⁴ There were also increases in ISIS attacks against electrical infrastructure, field burning, the use of snipers, and extortion and kidnapping for ransom.¹⁴⁵

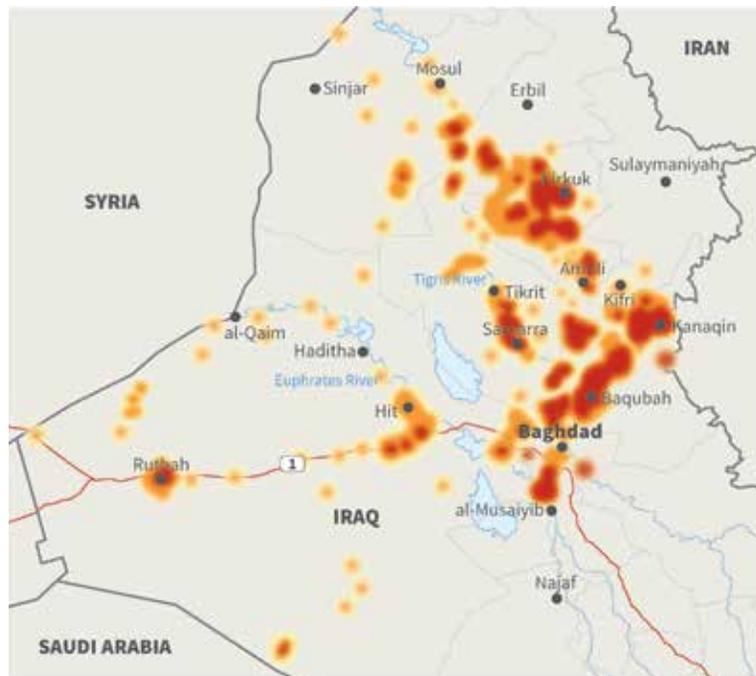
However, CJTF-OIR also described one deadly spate of ISIS attacks this quarter, which “displayed increased complexity” compared to the group’s “more usual opportunistic hit-and-run attacks.”¹⁴⁶ On May 2 and 3, dozens of ISIS fighters coordinated multiple attacks against the ISF and the PMF in Diyala and Salah ad Din provinces, killing more than 20 people and wounding at least 36.¹⁴⁷ CJTF-OIR reported that the series of attacks, which it

Figure 3.

ISIS Attacks in Iraq This Quarter



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



described as “more audacious and larger-scale” than those carried out last quarter, involved a higher number of ISIS fighters than usual and showed evidence of “extensive pre-operational planning and preparation.”¹⁴⁸

CJTF-OIR said that ISIS operated mostly as small, cohesive cells of 5 to 15 fighters in Iraq, usually living in austere conditions in outlying desert, mountainous, or rural areas in Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah ad Din, and Anbar provinces—largely Sunni areas that stretch across northern Iraq.¹⁴⁹ A DoD OIG analysis of open-source data correlated generally to CJTF-OIR reporting that ISIS was most active in this band of territory north of Baghdad this quarter. The DoD OIG logged more than 400 ISIS-claimed or suspected attacks this quarter, and found that 55 occurred in Anbar province, 70 in Kirkuk province, 61 in Salah ad Din province, 24 in Ninewa province, and nearly 150 in Diyala, an ethnically diverse province northeast of Baghdad and bordering Iran that has consistently experienced the highest number of ISIS attacks.¹⁵⁰

A report released by a U.S.-based think tank estimated that the attacks were carried out by a small number of ISIS fighters operating in Iraq. The report, issued by the Center for Global Policy in May, said that groups of 350 to 400 ISIS fighters were concentrated in five areas north and west of Baghdad, including 50 to 100 fighters operating in urban centers in Anbar, Salah ad Din, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Baghdad provinces.¹⁵¹ CJTF-OIR reported that its estimates of the number of ISIS fighters in Iraq are classified.¹⁵²

According to this DoD OIG data, while most ISIS-claimed attacks in Iraq targeted the Iraqi Army, a significant number of claimed attacks targeted other forces. For instance, this quarter, there were more than 70 ISIS attacks against the largely Shia PMF and more than 30 ISIS attacks on the Tribal Mobilization Forces.¹⁵³

The DIA reported that ISIS attacked local security forces in Iraq such as the Tribal Mobilization Forces to erode public confidence in the ability of the security forces to protect the public and to convince Sunnis that ISIS is the “only viable security guarantor” in Iraq.¹⁵⁴ For an overview of ISIS attacks in Iraq this quarter and the first 6 months of this year, see Figure 1 and Figure 3.

ISIS Concentrates Attacks in Diyala, Other Northern and Western Provinces in Iraq

Some of ISIS’s major attacks this quarter occurred in Diyala province, where the PMF have outsized influence relative to the ISF.¹⁵⁵ For instance, according to the DoD OIG analysis of open-source data, ISIS killed three police officers on April 19 during an armed attack near the provincial capital, Baquba. The next day, ISIS killed four ISF soldiers in a complex attack.¹⁵⁶ The day after that, two civilians were killed by an ISIS-planted IED, also near Baquba.¹⁵⁷

While most ISIS attacks in Diyala were small and resulted only in injuries, many resulted in deaths, and attacks occurred almost daily throughout the quarter. Many of the targets were farmers and other civilians, who were often killed or kidnapped for ransom.¹⁵⁸ While ISIS attacks were slightly less frequent in other provinces north and west of Baghdad, ISIS’s attack methods and targets were largely the same as in Diyala, according to the data analyzed by the DoD OIG.¹⁵⁹

Why ISIS Is Most Active in Diyala Province

Since the fall of ISIS's territorial caliphate in March 2019, Diyala province northeast of Baghdad has consistently seen the highest concentration of ISIS attacks in the OIR battlespace.¹⁶⁰ The DIA, CJTF-OIR, and the DoD OIG's own independent analyses indicate that ISIS activity in Diyala remained high relative to other Iraqi provinces this quarter.¹⁶¹ Given its place as a persistent focal point of ISIS's insurgency, examining the various ethnic, political, security, and geographic dynamics within Diyala provides a case study of the conditions that enable ISIS remnants to survive despite nearly 6 years of counter-ISIS operations.

Diyala features a complex environment where political, sectarian, and geographic fault lines converge, making it difficult to assess a single or dominant factor that has enabled ISIS to operate at such a high tempo. According to various government and independent sources, ISIS benefits from a chaotic security environment where Coalition forces have little engagement and access. Historic disputes between Kurdish, ISF, PMF, and local tribal forces have created large power vacuums. Moreover, dominant authority in the province is held by Iranian-backed forces, mainly the Badr Organization, who combat ISIS, but also exacerbate sectarian tensions. These PMF groups lack coordination with local tribal forces, the Peshmerga, and Coalition forces, and are mainly concerned with using Diyala's strategic location to smuggle arms and other assistance from Iran.¹⁶² Iraq analysts state that Diyala is likely to remain the most consistent site of ISIS attacks if present conditions continue.¹⁶³

According to CJTF-OIR, Diyala province has served as a support and "fallback area" for ISIS and its forerunner, al Qaeda in Iraq, since at least 2004.¹⁶⁴ CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that elements displaced from Anbar and other provinces are able to regroup and find sanctuary in Diyala. This ability to regroup is primarily because of Diyala's geographic location as a hub and conduit for ISIS cells moving to and from battlefronts in neighboring Salah ad Din and Kirkuk provinces, areas east of Baghdad, and safe havens in the Hamrin Mountains and Jallam Desert. Diyala's terrain, which includes dense palm groves, rivers, and rugged mountains, impedes security force movement within and access to the province.¹⁶⁵

CJTF-OIR reported that beyond ISIS's ability to "skillfully" exploit Diyala's physical terrain, the group exploits the large security "seam"—the area of disputed territory where neither the ISF nor the Kurdish Peshmerga are capable of enforcing security—that runs through Diyala and other northern Iraqi provinces.¹⁶⁶ A study published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point assessed that ISIS is able to find sanctuary in the security gaps and deserted villages between Kurdish and ISF troops in Diyala, which in some places can be 5 to 10 miles wide and 40 to 60 miles long.¹⁶⁷ Both the Combating Terrorism Center study and a report by the Center for Global Policy note that ISIS actively seeks to keep these rural areas depopulated to enable freedom of movement, evade informants, and stage for attacks on weaker local forces.¹⁶⁸

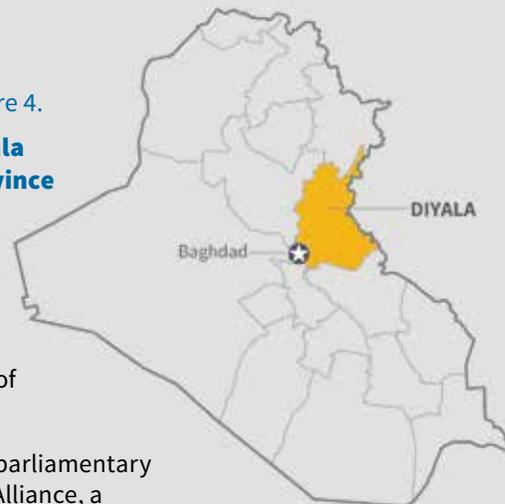
The DIA assessed that in addition to these factors, ISIS was able to maintain a high rate of attacks in Diyala province this quarter due to U.S. force consolidation, security forces' preoccupation with managing COVID-19, and other security-related crises. The DIA said that in early June, protests over the lack of security from ISIS attacks emerged in a northern Diyala village, despite the frustration over lack of security, locals continue to view ISIS negatively.¹⁶⁹

SHIA MILITIA GROUPS MAINTAIN A DOMINANT PRESENCE IN THE PROVINCE, EXACERBATING SECTARIAN TENSIONS

According to the DIA, Iranian-backed Shia militia groups belonging to the PMF are also heavily concentrated in Diyala.¹⁷⁰ Particularly the Badr Organization, a decades-old militia headed by Hadi al-Ameri, who has

deep ties to Iran and power in Iraqi politics.¹⁷¹ USCENTCOM reported that al-Ameri holds “informal sway” over the province, and that PMF influence outweighs ISF influence “to a degree,” though the level of influence is difficult to qualitatively measure.¹⁷² USCENTCOM noted, however, that the 5th Iraqi Army Division, which is responsible for Diyala, operates as an extension of the Badr Organization, making it more responsive to Iran than to the Iraqi Prime Minister and the formal Iraqi chain of command.¹⁷³

Figure 4.
Diyala
Province



This quarter, al-Ameri, a Diyala native, resigned from his parliamentary position but remains the leader of the pro-Iranian Fatah Alliance, a parliamentary bloc.¹⁷⁴ He continues to lead the Badr Organization.¹⁷⁵ Multiple sources indicated that Badr and other PMF groups play a conflicting and largely ambiguous role within Diyala. They participate in counter-ISIS operations but also exacerbating sectarian tensions and the lack of rule of law to the benefit of ISIS.¹⁷⁶

CJTF-OIR reported that during the 2014 through 2019 fight against ISIS, PMF groups entered historically Sunni areas of Diyala and other northern and western provinces and remained there following ISIS’s territorial defeat.¹⁷⁷ ISIS has sought to exploit ethno-sectarian conflicts in nearby cities such as Tuz Khurmatu in neighboring Salah ad Din province, which in turn provides PMF groups with a pretext for pushing their forces into Diyala to protect Shia communities and confront ISIS elements in the province.¹⁷⁸

The DIA reported that PMF groups routinely conduct counter-ISIS operations in coordination with ISF units in Diyala, including drone surveillance, raids, and clearing operations. PMF groups also maintain extensive checkpoints aimed at preventing ISIS freedom of movement. The DIA noted that Shia militias also maintain autonomous units in Diyala, which are strategically located near Baghdad and the Iranian border.¹⁷⁹ The DIA explained that the autonomous units operate outside the formal command structure of the Popular Mobilization Committee, which oversees the PMF. According to the DIA, these types of units are usually involved in counter-ISIS activities but also engage in illicit activities, including extortion and smuggling weapons from Iran.¹⁸⁰

CJTF-OIR said that local Sunnis claim that these Shia PMF groups use checkpoints to shake down and harass them as they transit the checkpoints. CJTF-OIR also noted that Sunnis accuse PMF groups of detaining Sunnis on false charges in security operations as a pretext to extort their families into paying for their release.¹⁸¹ The Combating Terrorism Center and the Center for Global Policy also assessed that ISIS is able to exploit the intense sectarian tensions and instability caused by friction between local tribal forces in Diyala and non-local PMF.¹⁸²

Iran benefits in other ways from its ties to the Badr Organization and other Shia militias it supports in Diyala province. USCENTCOM reported that Diyala is a vital military and economic entry point for Iran into Iraq.¹⁸³ Moreover, control over Diyala also allows Iranian-supported groups to intervene in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, which lies just north of Diyala, as they did alongside the ISF following a failed referendum on Kurdish independence held in September 2017.¹⁸⁴

(continued on next page)

Why ISIS is Most Active in Diyala Province

(continued from previous page)

COALITION CONTACT AND VISIBILITY WITHIN DIYALA OPERATIONS COMMAND REMAINS LIMITED

CJTF-OIR reported that its visibility into Iraqi operations in the Diyala Operations Command was largely limited to steady checkpoint and local patrol operations, and that it is difficult to obtain full visibility into ISF operations. CJTF-OIR said that this is primarily the result of Coalition forces' limited contact with partner forces and commanders in the province.¹⁸⁵

CJTF-OIR indicated that contact remains limited and irregular, which it said was likely due to the lack of a historic Coalition base presence in Diyala similar to the presence maintained by Coalition forces elsewhere in Iraq to bolster relationships with ISF partners. CJTF-OIR reported that its relationship with the Diyala command improved this quarter as Coalition forces strengthened centralized advising relationships from Taji, a nearby base.¹⁸⁶

CJTF-OIR stated that a new "Enhanced Joint Operations Center" in Baghdad offers an opportunity for improving relationships with the Diyala command and other Iraqi commands by embedding dedicated liaison officers and partnering them with Coalition advisors to assist each command more effectively in planning, resourcing, and synchronizing their operations with the main JOC-I.¹⁸⁷ CJTF-OIR reported that the Enhanced Joint Operations Center was under renovation to support the newly formed Military Advisor Group, and when it is fully operational the ISF "expects" to provide liaison officers from most operations commands.¹⁸⁸

STATUS OF ISIS IN SYRIA

ISIS in Syria also Surges Attacks During Ramadan

As in Iraq, ISIS stepped up attacks in Syria during Ramadan, although overall, the DIA said that ISIS monthly attack claims across Syria decreased this quarter compared to the previous quarter.¹⁸⁹ USCENTCOM reported that a mid-May spike in attacks during ISIS's most recent "Raid of Attrition" campaign was not sustained following the campaign and this demonstrated a limited ability to ramp up its operations for a brief period before dropping back to normal levels.¹⁹⁰

While ISIS continues to demonstrate the ability to surge attacks for periods, the DoD OIG saw no evidence this quarter that ISIS has the ability to retake or hold territory in the Combined Joint Operations Area. ISIS mounted a complex offensive this quarter and briefly occupied several Syrian regime positions in Homs province during an April 9 attack.¹⁹¹ The DoD OIG observed that this underscores the challenge of defeating ISIS when Coalition and partner forces have limited territorial reach, and ISIS has the ability to operate in parts of Syria under regime control.

CJTF-OIR cited the April 9 attack and another in Homs province as the most significant ISIS activity this quarter.¹⁹² This attack appeared to demonstrate that ISIS in Syria has limited ability to carry out complex attacks, particularly in areas where the SDF and Coalition forces are operating. According to several media and monitoring group reports, in the April 9 attack in Homs, ISIS attacked multiple Syrian regime positions near the town of Sukhna, temporarily capturing six regime forces positions and holding houses in the town during a

2-day battle.¹⁹³ Citing media reports, CJTF-OIR said that Russian jets were called in to drive back the ISIS fighters.¹⁹⁴ Monitors reported that as many as 32 government forces and 26 ISIS militants were killed.¹⁹⁵ On April 30 in Homs, ISIS ambushed a bus carrying regime soldiers. USCENTCOM said that ISIS claimed it killed 10 soldiers, including 6 officers, and wounded at least 15 in an IED attack followed by small arms fire.¹⁹⁶

However, as in Iraq, ISIS in Syria relied mainly on small-arms fire or IED attacks directed against the SDF, the Syrian Arab Army, and pro-regime forces, according to CJTF-OIR.¹⁹⁷ It said that ISIS also regularly claimed through social media to have assassinated “spies” who it believed reported on its activities, including civilians, pro-regime forces, and SDF personnel.¹⁹⁸

The DIA stated that it has not seen any significant or sustained increase in ISIS capabilities in pro-regime controlled areas this quarter, and ISIS attacks were “opportunistic,” targeting pro-regime forces convoys and checkpoints in eastern Homs province and in southwest Syria.¹⁹⁹ ISIS elements remain capable only of operating in small cells and conducting asymmetric attacks, according to the DIA.²⁰⁰

Citing media reporting, the DIA said that ISIS’s activities focused along a broad area of majority Sunni Arab territory in northern Syria. However, it said that ISIS does not have the capability it once had to “target Sunni tribes writ-large,” and that it fears reprisals.²⁰¹

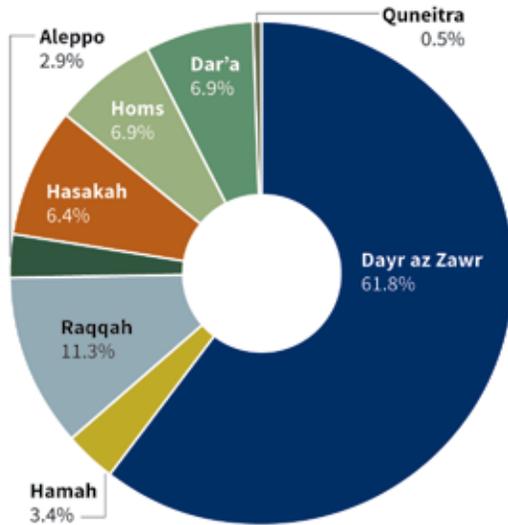
ISIS Surges Attacks in Dayr az Zawr, with Brief Spikes in Other Syrian Provinces

ISIS conducted most of its attacks this quarter in Syria in Dayr az Zawr province, where it continues to receive some support from Sunni communities along the Middle Euphrates River Valley.²⁰² CJTF-OIR said that the majority of claimed attacks targeted the SDF with IEDs or small arms fire. CJTF-OIR said that based on media reporting, the most significant ISIS attacks this quarter targeted Syrian regime forces in Homs province.²⁰³ CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS claimed 140 attacks in Syria this quarter.²⁰⁴ It said that ISIS attack claims remained constant from March to April at 43, rose to 64 in May, then dropped down to 33 in June.²⁰⁵

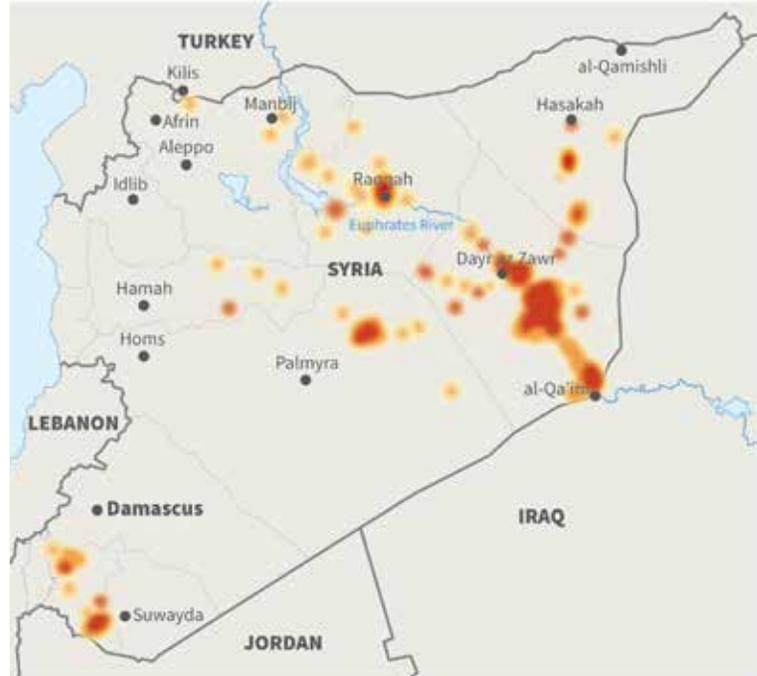
ISIS attacks surged sporadically in Raqqah, Dara and Suwayda provinces. USCENTCOM reported that Raqqah province experienced the biggest surge in ISIS attacks, with 14 attacks in one week from May 14 to May 20, but that attacks subsequently dropped to one per week.²⁰⁶ The DIA said that the surge in Raqqah “does not indicate an increase in ISIS capabilities,” and it saw no increase in ISIS activities in the northern areas of Aleppo, Raqqah and Hasakah provinces this quarter.²⁰⁷

ISIS claimed 19 attacks in Dara and Suwayda provinces from the beginning of April to the last week of May, compared to 2 for the rest of 2020. USCENTCOM said that ISIS claims indicated the attacks were mostly assassinations of regime officers and Syrian Army personnel it labeled “spies,” including one brigadier general and one colonel. USCENTCOM stated that as with other parts of Syria, the rate of attacks in Dara and Suwayda fell off after the “Raid of Attrition” at the end of May.²⁰⁸

Figure 5.

ISIS Attacks in Syria This Quarter

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



Additionally, USCENTCOM said that ISIS elements in the Badiyah desert region enjoy substantial freedom of movement due to a lack of consistent or effective counterterrorism pressure from overstretched Syrian regime security forces.²⁰⁹ CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS elements operating from the Badiyah region frequently conducted raids or ambushes on pro-regime forces, and set up checkpoints to abduct alleged Syrian regime “intelligence agents.”²¹⁰

ISIS Steps Up Extortion of Local Residents in Northeast Syria, Targets Disaffected Sunnis for Recruitment

The DIA reported that ISIS is struggling financially and remains primarily focused on generating revenue, freeing ISIS families and detainees from displacement camps and detention facilities, and exerting greater influence on local populations.²¹¹ The DIA said that ISIS’s extortion efforts have increased since the Turkish incursion into Syria in October 2019.²¹² Residents said that ISIS members stepped up checkpoints and harassment of local businesses after Kurdish security forces focused their attention to the northern border.²¹³

The DIA reported that ISIS targets disaffected Sunnis in Syria and has attempted to use hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to increase its recruitment efforts.²¹⁴ According to the DIA, ISIS recruiters are working to encourage ISIS family members residing at the al-Hol camp to take on active roles in the group’s operations.²¹⁵ The DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) reported that while some services at the al-Hol displacement camp were suspended as part of COVID-19 prevention efforts, basic services continued without disruption and there have been no reported infections in the camp.²¹⁶

CJTF-OIR reported that all Iraqi operations commands resumed operations against ISIS this quarter.

The DIA further reported that since Turkey’s military incursion into northern Syria, ISIS has focused on targeting local tribal leaders for assassinations, and intimidating the local populace to influence and recruit among Arab populations in the province who are dissatisfied with SDF counter-ISIS measures.²¹⁷

EVENTS IN IRAQ

ACTIONS AGAINST ISIS IN IRAQ

Iraqi Commands Resume Operations against ISIS

CJTF-OIR reported that all Iraqi operations commands resumed operations against ISIS this quarter.²¹⁸ Some Iraqi commands paused counter-ISIS operations last quarter when the Coalition stopped operations in early January. At the time, the Coalition turned its focus to force protection following a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad, which killed Iranian Qods Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani.²¹⁹

Additionally, CJTF-OIR reported that relationships with ISF commands largely returned to pre-pause levels and that the ISF continued to be receptive to sharing information on mutual force protection concerns.²²⁰ However, CJTF-OIR said that the “fluid nature” of the operating environment is different than it was in January, due to the transition of several bases to the ISF, the measures put in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and the effect of the pandemic on ISF personnel.²²¹ Despite these differences, CJTF-OIR said that the Coalition has built upon existing relationships with the ISF and that the relationship remains strong.²²²

ISF Completes Phase III of “Heroes of Iraq” Campaign

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF continued the “Heroes of Iraq” campaign against ISIS this quarter, launching attacks against the group from a joint operating location in Kirkuk province.²²³ The ongoing campaign wrapped up its third phase at the end of June, according to a CJTF-OIR press release.²²⁴

The third phase of the campaign incorporated units from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, the CTS, and the PMF. CJTF-OIR characterized the campaign as “effective” and said that it allowed the ISF to “generate operational momentum” as it prepares to launch the next phase of the campaign, which is slated to include eight phases.²²⁵ CJTF-OIR said that coordination between the Iraqi units was “deliberate,” and the Coalition provided limited air support.²²⁶

According to the press release, elements from across the Iraqi military, police, and intelligence agencies cleared more than 1,850 square miles in search of ISIS hideouts in Salah ad Din province from June 22 through June 24.²²⁷ The ground clearance mission in Phase III was enabled by Coalition intelligence, aviation, and planning support, including more than 20 Coalition airstrikes in support of Iraqi ground forces.²²⁸

Phase III also sought to clear and search the boundaries between Salah ad Din and neighboring Diyala and Kirkuk provinces—areas where ISIS primarily operates, according

to CJTF-OIR.²²⁹ According to the press release, the campaign destroyed buildings used by ISIS between the cities of Samarra and Kirkuk, resulted in the capture and destruction of ISIS weapons and vehicles, destroyed 11 tunnels and 29 operating sites used by ISIS, and disabled 76 IEDs. The ISF also cleared 89 villages of “terrorist cells” and seized 6 explosives manufacturing sites.²³⁰

CJTF-OIR said that Phase II of the campaign, which occurred in early June, focused on clearing ISIS remnants from areas around Kirkuk province and its border with Salah ad Din province. For this phase, the Iraqis also deployed multiple forces, including the Army, Federal Police, Rapid Response Division, and PMF. The ground forces were supported by Coalition aircraft, Iraqi Army Aviation, and the Iraqi Air Force. CJTF-OIR stated that Iraqi forces searched 31 villages, destroyed a minefield, 6 tunnels, and a large number of explosives devices, and freed 3 kidnap victims, among other actions against ISIS.²³¹

Phase I of the campaign, which was launched in mid-February, focused on conducting operations against ISIS in the Anbar desert, areas of the border with Syria, and “seams” along the adjacent regional commands.²³² The “Heroes of Iraq” campaign follows a similar campaign called “Will of Victory” that focused on the same provinces and concluded in 2019.²³³

Iraqi Security Forces cleared 4,800 square kilometers in search of ISIS hideouts during Operation “Heroes of Iraq III” in Salah ad Din Province, Iraq. (DoD photo)



CTS Conducts Counter-ISIS Operations Independent of Coalition Support

CJTF-OIR reported that Iraq's CTS carried out counter-ISIS operations throughout northern and central Iraq, and intelligence-led and warrant-based arrests in Baghdad and western Iraq. The CTS conducted the majority of these operations independent of direct Coalition advisory support due to COVID-19-related restrictions on Coalition activities.²³⁴

The CTS also benefitted this quarter from increased support from the ISF including airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, air strikes, and casualty evacuation. Additionally, CJTF-OIR said that the CTS's operations tempo increased following the end of Ramadan through a combination of arrests in urban areas and airstrikes followed by "ground clearances in remote and mountainous areas assessed to be ISIS safe havens."²³⁵

Peshmerga Focuses on Preventing ISIS Attacks in Kurdish-controlled Territory

This quarter Kurdish Peshmerga forces focused on preventing ISIS from operating in the Iraqi Kurdish Region (IKR), mainly through local patrolling.²³⁶ CJTF-OIR reported that its situational awareness of Peshmerga operations was "degraded" during the quarter due to the relocation of Coalition Forces within the IKR.²³⁷

CJTF-OIR said that security "seams" located in territory between the IKR and the ISF operational command in nearby Kirkuk province remained a primary operating area for ISIS.²³⁸ To counter this, the JOC-I directed operational commands to execute operations along the seams and to coordinate with adjacent operational commands.²³⁹

However, CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS continued to "exercise some degree of freedom of maneuver" along the "Kurdish Control Line" that demarcates territory claimed by Iraq's central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).²⁴⁰ A DoD OIG analysis of open-source data found that ISIS claimed at least six attacks on Peshmerga forces this quarter.²⁴¹

CJTF-OIR previously reported that the United States partnered with Peshmerga Regional Guard Brigades, which operate along the control line.²⁴² Last quarter, CJTF-OIR characterized these brigades as the most likely Peshmerga forces to engage ISIS and to interact with the ISF across disputed territory.²⁴³

This quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that the most significant progress in closing operational seams occurred on the Iraq-Syria border, at the western side of the control line, due to dedicated communications between the Iraqi commands and the SDF in Syria. CJTF-OIR said that the two security forces had established coordination centers that enable complementary operations to deny ISIS "maneuver and facilitation operations."²⁴⁴

This quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that the most significant progress in closing operational seams occurred on the Iraq-Syria border, at the western side of the control line, due to dedicated communications between the Iraqi commands and the SDF in Syria.



Coalition Transitions More Bases

On April 4, the Coalition transitioned the Taqaddum Air Base west of Baghdad, an Iraqi airbase hosting Coalition forces, to the ISF.²⁴⁵ The withdrawal of Coalition forces was the sixth in a series of transitions that are part of the planned restructuring of the Coalition footprint in Iraq.²⁴⁶ Last quarter, the Coalition transitioned five Iraqi bases: al-Qaim in Anbar province, Qayyarah Airfield West and Ninewa Operations Command in Ninewa province, the K-1 Airbase in Kirkuk province, and the Balad Airbase in Salah ad Din province.²⁴⁷

CJTF-OIR reported that the transitions were possible due to the ISF’s increasing ability to fight ISIS independently.²⁴⁸ Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that the Coalition accelerated its withdrawals from the Iraqi bases due to the increased threat to Coalition forces posed by malign actors and a resulting emphasis on force protection.²⁴⁹

A Peshmerga soldier throws a ratchet strap used to secure boxes filled with divested uniforms to the bed of a truck at Erbil Air Base in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

IRAQ: SELECTED KEY EVENTS, 4/1/2020-6/30/2020

APRIL 4

Coalition transitions Taqaddum Base to the ISF

MAY 2-3

ISIS launches multiple “complex” attacks in Diyala and Salah ad Din provinces, killing 20 ISF and PMF and injuring 36

MAY 9

Iraq’s new government orders the release of nonviolent protesters detained during anti-government demonstrations and launches a committee to investigate attacks on protesters

APR

APRIL 9

Iraqi President Barham Salih nominates Iraq’s intelligence chief, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, to form a government

MAY

MAY 6

Iraq’s parliament votes to approve new government, led by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, ending more than 5 months of political deadlock

The withdrawals from ISF bases occurred as the DoD continued planning for future force requirements to defeat ISIS and partial Coalition troop withdrawals from Iraq due to the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵⁰ According to media reports, several countries that make up the 82-member Coalition, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, France, Portugal, the Czech Republic, and New Zealand, withdrew some of their forces from Iraq this quarter, some of them temporarily.²⁵¹ In June, New Zealand announced that it would close its embassy in Baghdad after withdrawing most of its forces earlier this year.²⁵² According to OUSD(P) ISA, some countries intend to return forces to Iraq once COVID-19 has subsided.²⁵³

PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT

CJTF-OIR reported that the COVID-19-triggered suspension of face-to-face training and mentoring made establishing relationships with ISF leaders more difficult this quarter. Nonetheless, “all critical relationships and advising missions” continued according to CJTF-OIR.²⁵⁴ Further, CJTF-OIR reported that it views the partnerships between Special Operations Joint Task Force–OIR (SOJTF-OIR) and the CTS, and between Task Force–Iraq and the rest of the ISF, as its most important security relationships in Iraq. These relationships remained “strong” this quarter, according to CJTF-OIR.²⁵⁵

Partner Force Capabilities Show Improvement

In early May, CJTF-OIR Commander, Lieutenant General Robert White, stated the ISF is “better equipped, led, and trained than just a few short years ago, and their success has allowed us to shift our focus from training to higher-level mentoring and advising.”²⁵⁶

CJTF-OIR reported that in late May, after a brief pause due to COVID-19, CJTF-OIR resumed efforts to assess ISF capabilities.²⁵⁷ CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF’s greatest strengths include an abundance of available forces, an ability to conduct major operations on short notice, and public support.²⁵⁸ Its greatest weaknesses include a lack of digital connectivity, inconsistent employment of command and control measures, and an inability to integrate fires assets into combined operations effectively.²⁵⁹

CJTF-OIR noted that a continued operational shortfall was the ISF’s inability to coordinate organic reconnaissance and kinetic support between operational units and the JOC-I.²⁶⁰ As

JUNE 2

ISF launches second phase of the “Heroes of Iraq” campaign against ISIS

JUNE 14–16

Turkey launches two major operations into northern Iraq targeting the PKK terrorist group

JUNE 25

Iraq’s CTS launches raid on Kata’ib Hezbollah cell, arresting 14 members

JUN

JUNE 11

United States and Iraq initiate Strategic Dialogue to address bilateral relationship, including the future deployment of U.S. troops in Iraq

JUNE 22

ISF launches third phase of the “Heroes of Iraq” campaign against ISIS



Norwegian soldiers fire weapons during a joint live-fire range exercise. (U.S. Army photo)

the ISF becomes more proficient and capable, it will frequently operate without ISR or fires support from Coalition forces, which demonstrates its ability to operate independently.²⁶¹ However, according to CJTF-OIR, the ISF still seeks support from Coalition forces when their organic capabilities are insufficient.²⁶²

In June, USCENTCOM Commander, General McKenzie, stated, “I think [the ISF] is good enough to fight effectively against ISIS.”²⁶³ Later, a CJTF-OIR spokesperson cited the “Heroes of Iraq” campaign as an example showing the ISF’s superior capabilities against ISIS.²⁶⁴ CJTF-OIR reported that the operation showed that the ISF continues to improve its ability to deny ISIS terrain.²⁶⁵

The ISF was able to conduct successful operations against ISIS this quarter, despite COVID-19 and Ramadan, according to CJTF-OIR.²⁶⁶ The CTS and Iraqi Army Aviation Command continued to improve their capabilities, enabling them to conduct operations against ISIS with less need for Coalition support.²⁶⁷ CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS increased its intelligence gathering and operational planning capabilities, particularly in relation to the employment of ISR and rotary-wing assets. However, the CTS remains “constrained in a number of technical areas affecting its ability to leverage ISR capabilities fully.”²⁶⁸ CJTF-OIR reported there were no changes to the Iraqi Air Force’s ability to perform close air support or aerial interdiction this quarter.²⁶⁹

CJTF-OIR observed an increase in the integration of judicial investigation and information operations capabilities and processes into CTS operations.²⁷⁰ CJTF-OIR noted that this is an important development because the CTS is both a law enforcement and a counterterrorism organization.²⁷¹ According to CJTF-OIR, information sharing among the CTS and the broader ISF also increased. CJTF-OIR noted a greater degree of coordination among the JOC-I and regional operations centers.²⁷²

CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition personnel at the JOC-I observed ISF leaders demonstrating an increased capability to consume intelligence, which provides them with a more tailored operational picture and supports operational planning.²⁷³ The ISF also showed an increased capacity and willingness to fuse Coalition-derived intelligence, according to CJTF-OIR.²⁷⁴ Coalition personnel did not observe the ISF demonstrating increased capabilities in relation to the synchronized use of Iraqi ISR to collect against intelligence needs, close intelligence gaps, or validate collected intelligence.²⁷⁵ Coalition advisors emphasized regularly the benefits of utilizing available ISR assets to confirm other intelligence reporting, according to CJTF-OIR.²⁷⁶

Most Training Pauses Due to COVID-19

In April, the Political Directors of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Small Group released a statement summarizing their ongoing commitment to the fight against ISIS, and agreement that CJTF-OIR's provision of training, suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, would resume as conditions permit.²⁷⁷ In early May, Lieutenant General Robert White clarified the process by which Coalition trainers who redeployed from Iraq would return to the country. He offered, "There have been no nations necessarily that have left the physical environ of Iraq that have said they will not return."²⁷⁸ He went on to explain that the redeployed

U.S. Army soldiers during a night live-fire exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)



personnel are on a “notice-to-move” to return to Iraq and help train the Peshmerga or the ISF.²⁷⁹ If CJTF-OIR leaders decide, based on local conditions, that an opportunity and need to recall personnel exists, they would notify member countries and request their personnel return within 60 days.²⁸⁰

Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition forces made significant progress in developing and transitioning ISF training sites to ISF control.²⁸¹ However, due to the pause in training, COVID-19 response measures, and Ramadan, CJTF-OIR was unable to assess the degree to which the ISF conducted independent training this quarter.²⁸²

CJTF-OIR reported that its formal training was “unlikely to recommence in the manner in which it formerly took place.”²⁸³ Based on the ISF’s capabilities, CJTF-OIR decided to establish teams of mentors and advisors at the JOC-I and the operational commands to continue developing partner forces.²⁸⁴ CJTF-OIR reported that it has already begun shifting from training to mentoring and advising, and will offer specialized support as required.²⁸⁵ According to CJTF-OIR, the Coalition’s efforts to advise the ISF on post-clearance operations, including tactics to deny ISIS the terrain from which it has historically operated, continued to improve ISF planning and operations.²⁸⁶

In late June, CJTF-OIR reported that all Coalition training and mentoring of Peshmerga forces, including Finnish partner force development activities, remained paused due to COVID-19.²⁸⁷ In addition, the payment of Peshmerga stipends for this quarter was delayed. CJTF-OIR reported that it had not yet paid Peshmerga stipends for April.²⁸⁸ CJTF-OIR was awaiting receipt of documents from the Ministry of Peshmerga that are necessary to process the May and June payments.²⁸⁹

CJTF-OIR reported that its formal training was “unlikely to recommence in the manner in which it formerly took place.”



Boxes of masks donated by the President of Poland to the Government of Iraq at Camp Taji, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

NATO Mission–Iraq is assuming a more prominent role in partner force development, according to Lieutenant General White.²⁹⁰ In April, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, “Ministers agreed to enhance our training mission in Iraq, taking on some of the training activities of the global Coalition, including the training and education of noncommissioned officers, engineers, and federal police.”²⁹¹ In early June, Ambassador James Jeffrey stated NATO was well underway in identifying ways to strengthen NATO Mission–Iraq.²⁹² According to Ambassador Jeffrey, whereas NATO was previously conducting very senior-level coordination and capacity building with Iraqi forces, it was considering how it might provide additional training and education to the ISF.²⁹³ Soon thereafter, Denmark announced that it would deploy 285 military personnel to Iraq to train and advise the ISF.²⁹⁴ In November 2019, Denmark offered to take charge of NATO’s training mission in Iraq for a period of 18 months starting in 2021, according to press reports.²⁹⁵

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN IRAQ

The DIA reported that Iranian-backed militias continue to pose a high threat to U.S. personnel in Iraq. According to the DIA, suspected Iranian-backed groups continue to conduct “deniable attacks” against U.S. interests in Iraq.²⁹⁶ The DIA noted, however, that this quarter, suspected militia front-groups publicly claimed responsibility for rocket attacks against U.S. facilities as well as IED attacks against logistic convoys.²⁹⁷ The DIA assessed that Iranian-backed militia attacks against U.S. interests in Iraq are very likely an attempt to compel the United States to reduce or remove its forces in the country.²⁹⁸ CJTF-OIR reported that as of June 19, there had been eight rocket attacks near facilities housing U.S. personnel in the CJTF-OIR joint operations area during the third quarter of FY 2020.²⁹⁹

Despite a reduction in attacks this quarter, the persistent threat from Iranian-backed groups continued to place additional demands on the OIR mission. CJTF-OIR reported that malign actors who are hostile toward the CJTF-OIR counter-ISIS mission present a security threat to Coalition service members operating in the joint operations area. CJTF-OIR stated that with any military operation, it is the duty of the commander to ensure the force is secure while executing the mission. As such, the CJTF-OIR Commander has continued to invest in security measures, beyond what is required for the counter-ISIS mission, to ensure that Coalition service members can continue their counter-ISIS operations safely. CJTF-OIR said that the investment in additional force protection measures has not interfered with the CJTF-OIR Defeat-ISIS mission.³⁰⁰

However, USCENTCOM reported that the threat posed by Iran and Iranian-backed militias to Coalition forces in Iraq has resulted in the reduced availability of ISR capacity to conduct the counter-ISIS campaign. USCENTCOM stated that every airborne ISR sortie that is needed to provide force protection against Iranian threats is a sortie that is not available to be used to conduct counter-ISIS activities in support of the ISF.³⁰¹

This quarter, the ISF demonstrated an increased ability to thwart attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces by Iranian-backed groups, according to press reports.³⁰² However, the persistent threat from Iranian-backed groups placed an additional burden on key ISF units needed for counter-ISIS operations. For example, the Iraqi CTS conducted a June 25 raid on a Kata’ib Hezbollah cell suspected of involvement in rocket attacks on U.S. facilities.³⁰³

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that CTS has consistently maintained security elements on the main route between the International Zone and Baghdad International Airport, and in the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy, in accordance with the arrangement between Iraq and the United States. CJTF-OIR said that the CTS is employed to provide security due to organization's reliability, but this has meant that these CTS elements are not available for counterterrorism operations.³⁰⁴ According to press reporting, CTS units deployed outside the U.S. Embassy in December 2019 in response to violent demonstrations by supporters of pro-Iranian militias.³⁰⁵

New Prime Minister Asserts Authority, Provoking Stand-Off with Iranian-backed Militias

According to the DIA, most Iranian-backed actors in Iraq supported the new Iraqi prime minister. The DIA stated that in order to secure support for his candidacy in May, al-Kadhimi conceded authority over most cabinet seats to Iraq's political elites, including Iran-aligned political parties.³⁰⁶ The DIA assessed that the ministries of Defense, Interior, Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Oil were appointed to "pro-U.S. officials" who are not beholden to Iranian-aligned political parties.³⁰⁷ Still, some Iranian-backed militias have publicly opposed al-Kadhimi's appointment. The DIA noted that Kata'ib Hezbollah, which has been the most outspoken critic of Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, accused him of being a U.S.-backed puppet.³⁰⁸ Kata'ib Hezbollah also blames the prime minister for the U.S. strike that killed Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and PMC Chief of Staff Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in January, according to the DIA.³⁰⁹

The DIA reported that Tehran probably will seek to avoid the perception of overt meddling in Iraqi affairs while still leveraging its support to Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's premiership to protect Iranian interests. However, the DIA said that Iran will very likely tout the January 5 non-binding vote by Iraq's parliament in favor of expelling U.S. forces from the country to advocate for such action. Additionally, the DIA said Iran will use its solidified influence over the PMC to try to demonstrate that a large U.S. role in Iraq is unnecessary. The DIA assessed that Iran will probably also leverage its annual bilateral trade with Iraq and its importance as a power supplier to the country as a means to appeal to and pressure Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, given ongoing Iraqi economic woes.³¹⁰

The tension between Iranian-aligned militias Prime Minister al-Kadhimi escalated in June as the prime minister sought to assert more control. The DIA told the DoD OIG that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi publicly called for the cessation of rocket attacks that target Iraqi civilian and military sites and foreign diplomatic facilities in Baghdad, which he claims undermine Iraq's national sovereignty. The DIA, citing a statement from the Prime Minister's Office, said that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi chaired an emergency meeting of Iraq's National Security Council in June to address the rocket attacks and called for security services to increase their intelligence efforts to prosecute those responsible. The DIA noted that while past attacks received "notional investigations," Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's order was the first substantive effort by the Iraqi government to take action against the militias based on intelligence information.³¹¹

The DIA reported that Tehran probably will seek to avoid the perception of overt meddling in Iraqi affairs while still leveraging its support to Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's premiership to protect Iranian interests.

According to policy analysts, the June 25 CTS raid targeting Kata'ib Hezbollah members demonstrated the seriousness of al-Kadhimi's order to stop militia attacks and it was the first time the Iraqi government referred to attacks on U.S. personnel and facilities as a terrorist offense.³¹² The DIA, citing the Iraqi government's official spokesperson, said that during the raid the CTS detained 14 individuals in the process of executing a warrant for a single individual. However, shortly CTS detained the individuals, more than 100 Kata'ib Hezbollah and other militia members armed with mounted machine guns and anti-aircraft weaponry drove to the International Zone in Baghdad as other militiamen surrounded a CTS headquarters and demanded the release of the detainees, according to the DIA.³¹³ The DIA said that the CTS remanded an arrested individual connected directly to previous rocket attacks to the Iraqi judiciary, who an Iraqi spokesperson claims will face the judicial process.³¹⁴ The other 13 detainees were released to the PMC's Security Directorate but the DIA said it is unclear whether CTS or the Iraqi judiciary was the element that officially released them.³¹⁵ According to the DoS, after the 13 detainees proved their membership in an official PMF unit—Kata'ib Hezbollah—the judiciary released them as they were legally permitted to be in proximity to weapons and ammunition.³¹⁶

The DIA assessed that the Iraqi government will continue to face tension from Kata'ib Hezbollah, which perceives Prime Minister al-Kadhimi as too closely connected to the United States. According to press reporting, other pro-Iranian surrogates have also issued public threats in response to the prime minister's aggressive approach, including Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq leader Qais al-Khazali, who warned the prime minister he “might lose everything” if he did not ignore militia attacks on U.S. forces.³¹⁷ Additionally, the DIA said that other Iranian-aligned militias are likely to join Kata'ib Hezbollah in opposing any continued U.S. military presence in Iraq after believing the June 11 Strategic Dialogue failed to address a timetable for withdrawing U.S. forces. According to the DIA, the Iraqi government faces increased pressure from both pro-Iranian groups seeking a U.S. withdrawal and Coalition partners pushing for government control of the militias that nominally fall under its command.³¹⁸ Both Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and his cabinet told the DoS they seek a longer-term, broader relationship with the United States outside the military sphere to include increased civilian-led security cooperation.³¹⁹

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Iraq Forms New Government

On April 9, Iraqi President Barham Salih named Mustafa al-Kadhimi prime minister-designate after President Salih's previous two designees failed to win support in the Iraqi parliament. According to the DoS, President Salih resisted pressure to designate someone with stronger ties to the Shia Islamist parties, recognizing that the Iraqi public demanded a new prime minister who was not viewed as a product of the sectarian, partisan system from which previous prime ministers had originated. According to the DoS, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi is an Iraqi nationalist who seeks a stronger relationship with the United States and positive, normal relationships with Iraq's neighbors, including Iran. He was backed by a strong majority of the Shia moderate and Islamist parties, the Kurdish parties, and most Sunni parties.³²⁰

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's Cabinet

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's final cabinet lineup comprised 22 ministers. The complete list includes their previous positions and party affiliations, where known.

KURDISTAN

Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) (3)

- **MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**
Fuad Hussein—Previously served as Finance Minister. Nominated by the KDP.
- **Minister of Migration and Displaced People**
Evan Faiq Yaqoub Jarbo—Civil society activist, nominated by the KDP.
- **Minister of Housing and Construction**
Nazineen Mohammed Wasso Sheikh Mohammed—She is the only woman in the cabinet and previously served as the KRG's Minister of Municipalities and Minister of Construction and Housing. Affiliated with the KDP.

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (1)

- **MINISTER OF JUSTICE**
Salar Abdul-Sattar Mohammed—Judge in Laylan Court of First Instance in Kirkuk. Nominated by the PUK.

IRAN-ALIGNED

Fatah Alliance (3)

- **MINISTER OF INTERIOR**
Othman Ali Farhood Musheer al-Ghanimi—Previously served as Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Army. He was confirmed as Minister of Interior by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi after extensive government formation negotiations. Al-Ghanimi has an extensive record of service in the Iraqi military and has been decorated for his efforts to defeat ISIS by CJTF-OIR. As Minister of Interior he holds influence over domestic security, counterterrorism, and border security. Nominated by Fatah Alliance.
- **Minister of Communications**
Arkan Shihab Ahmed Kadhim—Born in 1977, he is the youngest member of the cabinet and has served as an engineer at the Ministry of Communications since 2002. Affiliated with the Fatah Alliance.
- **Minister of Transportation**
Nasir Hussein Bander Hamad—Previously served as Aviation Affairs Advisor to the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. Affiliated with Fatah.

SUNNI

Iraq Forces Alliance (1)

- **Minister of Industry and Minerals**
Manhal Aziz Mahmoud—Industrial researcher and trainer. Previously served in senior roles in state-owned enterprises. Affiliated with the Iraqi Forces Alliance.
- **MINISTER OF DEFENSE**
Juma'a Enad Saadon Khattab—Former commander of the land forces and Salah ad Din Operations. He is one of the few Sunni officers in the Shia-dominated Iraqi military.

Parliament Approves 15 Cabinet Nominees; al-Kadhimi Becomes Prime Minister

The Iraqi parliament approved the al-Kadhimi government program and 15 members of his proposed cabinet during a 2-day session on May 6 and 7. Prime Minister al-Kadhimi and the ministers took their oaths of office immediately following parliament's session. His confirmation gave Iraq a fully empowered prime minister for the first time since Adil Abd al-Mahdi resigned on December 1, 2019.³²¹ On May 7 and 8, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi

SHIA ISLAMIST PARTIES

Hikma (2)

- **MINISTER OF OIL**
Ihsan Abdul Jabbar Ismael—Former Director General of Basrah Oil Company. Nominated by Hikma.
- **Minister of Labor and Social Affairs**
Adil Hashush Jabir Jassim—Former Director General of the ministry’s Administration, Financial and Legal Department. Affiliated with Hikma.

Sairoon (3)

- **MINISTER OF ELECTRICITY**
Majid Mahdi Hantosh—Career employee of the Ministry of Electricity. Nominated by Sairoon.
- **Minister of Health**
Dr. Hassan Mohammed Abbas—Previously served as Director General of the Baghdad Health Directorate. Born in 1969, Dr. Abbas has a doctorate in pharmacy from the University of Baghdad. Affiliated with Sairoon.
- **Minister of Agriculture**
Mohammed Karim Jassim Salihs—Previously served as the Director General of Agricultural Land within the Ministry of Agriculture. Nominated by Sairoon.

Nasr Alliance (1)

- **Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology**
Nabil Khadim Abd Al-Sahib—Former President of al-Nahrain University. Affiliated with the Nasr Alliance.

NON-ALIGNED MINISTERS

- **MINISTER OF FINANCE**
Ali Haidar Abdul Amir Abbas Allawi—Also served as Minister of Finance in 2005-2006. Most internationally known member of the new cabinet and a friend of Prime Minister al-Kadhimi. Educated at MIT and Harvard.
- **Minister of Water Resources**
Mehdi Rasheed Mehdi—Previously served as Director General of the General Authority for Dams and Reservoirs. Career water specialist.
- **Minister of Education**
Ali Hameed Mukhlif—Previously served as the Director General of Public and Private Education at the Ministry of Education.
- **Minister of Planning**
Khalid Battal Najim Abdullah—Former president of Anbar University.
- **Minister of Youth and Sports**
Adnan Dirjal Matar Jasim—Former professional coach and popular soccer player.
- **Minister of Culture**
Hassan Nadhum Abd Hamadi—Former Deputy President of Kufa University.
- **Minister of Trade**
Alaa Ahmed Hassan—Former Deputy Head and Assistant Professor of Tourism at Mosul University.

Sources: DoS, response to DoS OIG request for information, 7/2/2020; Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Who’s Who in Iraq’s New Cabinet,” The National, 5/7/2020; DoS, vetting comment, 7/22/2020.

designated acting ministers to fill the remaining vacant positions.³²² The Iraqi parliament approved those ministers on June 6.³²³

Al-Kadhimi Moves Forward with Reform Initiatives

According to a Middle East analyst, the new prime minister is not seeking to overhaul the Iraqi government; instead, he is seeking incremental reform, working within the existing system. Prime Minister al-Kadhimi wants to address the impasse between Iraqi citizens and

the country's political elites and strike a balance between reform and the status quo. Part of his initial strategy has been to convince protesters that he represents their voice and wants to win back public trust.³²⁴

Early efforts by Prime Minister al-Kadhimi are highlighted by his first Council of Ministers meeting. Following the meeting, according to the DoS, the prime minister announced the immediate release of imprisoned, non-violent anti-government protesters. Further, he added the formation of a legal committee to investigate the use of force against demonstrators who participated in protests that began on October 1, 2019.³²⁵ The DoS reported that the Higher Judicial Council followed up this announcement on May 10, ordering the release of non-violent protesters, citing Article 38 of the Iraqi constitution, which permits the right to protest.³²⁶

Early elections were also a high priority of the first Council of Ministers meeting. Prime Minister al-Kadhimi announced the formation of a committee to re-evaluate Iraq's efforts for fair, early parliamentary elections. He urged the Council of Ministers to complete its work on an election reform law and offered support to the Independent High Electoral Commission to organize early elections.³²⁷ However, a Middle East analyst reported that the time frame for incremental reform may not satisfy protesters who are demanding more immediate action rather than more promises from the prime minister. For example, instead of calls for early elections, the protesters wanted a committed election date.³²⁸ The DoS said Iraqi elections are logistically and legally unlikely before May 2022, at the earliest.³²⁹

Iraq's Economy, Economic Reforms, and 2020 Federal Budget

The Iraqi government has not passed a 2020 budget and instead is operating using the equivalent of a U.S. Government continuing resolution, with one-twelfth of the 2019 budget being allocated each month. The collapse in oil prices put extreme pressure on Iraq's government finances, according to the DoS, because more than 90 percent of government revenues come from oil. The government faced a multi-billion dollar gap between revenues and expenditures during the quarter and has been shifting funds to cover salaries.³³⁰

On June 24, the Iraqi parliament passed a law on Domestic and External Borrowing, authorizing the Iraqi government to borrow funds to cover state expenses in light of the fallout from the decline in oil revenues and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.³³¹

On June 7, Iraq's new Minister of Finance, Ali Abdul Amir Allawi, rejected parliament's call for a new budget proposal by June 30. According to the DoS, finance ministry officials said there are no identified sources of revenue and no practical way to prepare a budget. The DoS noted that the Iraqi government planned to rely on the continuing authority from the Financial Management Law to pay for government operations.³³²

The World Bank projected that Iraq's GDP would contract by 9.7 percent, with the fiscal deficit expected to reach almost 30 percent of GDP. Prime Minister al-Kadhimi's new government is facing the challenging task of implementing long-overdue structural reforms, such as reducing public sector employment while minimizing public unrest.³³³

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During a media interview in late June, Finance Minister Allawi stated that Iraq's economy could reach irreversible lows within the next year unless urgent reform measures are adopted. When he assumed control of the finance ministry in May, Allawi said he was "shocked" to find so little liquidity. He explained that a government should normally have at least 1.5 months of spending in its accounts in order to respond to emergencies or shocks, but Iraq had only one-tenth of this amount. Allawi said there should have been up to \$12 billion but there was only \$1.6 billion. Iraq's finances are in worse condition than they were in 2005 or 2006, reported Allawi, who was also finance minister at that time.³³⁴

New Prime Minister Prioritizes Counter-corruption

Corruption is a major problem in Iraq, according to the DoS. Given this use of corruption as part of governance and power sharing among parties, past U.S. Government programs to curb corruption had a limited impact absent a real commitment from the Iraqi government. According to the DoS, a new opportunity may exist now with anti-corruption protests and a new prime minister who has publicly expressed support to tackle corruption. According to the DoS, if Prime Minister al-Kadhimi puts in place a credible program to fight corruption, the U.S. Government could support that program through rule of law and e-government programs.³³⁵

Prime Minister Orders Investigation of Abuse of Protesters

The DoS reported to DoS OIG that Prime Minister al-Kadhimi ordered security agencies to release imprisoned protesters, although the order has not been uniformly followed. The prime minister also ordered the compilation of a list of names of people wounded and killed during the protests. Further, he ordered that the investigation into cases of kidnapping and killing of protesters be expedited and instructed Minister of Interior Ghanimi to form a committee for this purpose. Following a phone call with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in May, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi issued a statement committing to uphold human rights laws and to investigate incidents cited in a report by the UN's Human Rights Office on enforced disappearances and other abuses. The DoS reported that in June, the Ministry of Defense spokesperson announced that they had detained a suspect who had confessed to "stabbing and killing peaceful protesters" among other crimes.³³⁶

According to the DoS, the new prime minister stated he was committed to holding early elections, in response to the demands of many protesters. He also pledged to fight corruption, another key demand. The Iraqi government responded to protests by establishing employment programs with various government ministries and directives to create jobs for youth and university graduates.³³⁷

Al Hurra Iraq, a U.S.-funded media outlet, reported in mid-May that protest organizers were committed to a new wave of demonstrations as soon as COVID-19 restrictions pass. The activists remained focused on elections, with key demands including electoral law changes, reform of the Independent High Electoral Commission, and early elections. Activists also complained that, despite al-Kadhimi's promises, force was still being used against protesters, and protesters were being detained.³³⁸

STABILIZATION

USAID Staffing Is Restored

USAID reported that at the end of the quarter Ambassador Matthew Tueller approved an increase from 8 to 13 authorized USAID expatriate staff in Iraq—positions allocated for U.S. direct hires, U.S. personal service contractors (PSC), and third country nationals—on the condition that more positions were made available in Erbil relative to Baghdad.³³⁹ The approval has made positions available for third-country nationals, some with more than 10 years of experience supporting the USAID Mission in Iraq, which will allow the institutional knowledge of the mission to be preserved when U.S. personnel rotations occur.³⁴⁰

The authorized staffing increase is in line with needs identified by USAID staff to USAID OIG earlier in the quarter.³⁴¹ The increase is also more consistent with the proposed posture adjustment to the USAID Mission in Iraq that was submitted by USAID in Congressional Notification #138 on May 31, 2019.³⁴² On January 21, 2020, USAID submitted a second posture adjustment (Congressional Notification #35) to notify Congress of its intent to further reduce staff in line with the staffing review conducted by the DoS in July 2019.³⁴³ USAID reported that to date, both Congressional Notifications remain on hold.³⁴⁴ According to USAID, these holds signaled congressional support to restore USAID staffing to the communicated level of need.³⁴⁵

USAID reported that the authorized staffing increase will provide much needed relief to the mission after more than a year of operating below capacity.³⁴⁶ USAID reported that the staffing increase approved by the ambassador will be incorporated into the fall recruitment cycle, which will open bidding for the following year.³⁴⁷ The USAID Mission in Iraq stated that it intends to advertise five positions in the upcoming recruitment cycle and will continue to utilize PSCs and Foreign Service Officers (FSO) based in Washington, D.C., to meet staffing needs in the interim.³⁴⁸

USAID stated that to meet the operational capacity needed for Iraq, current arrangements have relied on the institutional knowledge of a network of PSCs and FSOs outside the country and the ability of regional platforms to host staff on temporary duty assignment.³⁴⁹ Despite the 2-week quarantine period associated with COVID-19, USAID indicated that staff are able to telework while under quarantine to maintain efficiency of operations.³⁵⁰

According to USAID, preparations ahead of the summer transition are a continuing difficulty because of challenges with securing visas and conditions under COVID-19 in Iraq.³⁵¹ However, USAID said it anticipated that institutional knowledge will be preserved for the handoff.³⁵² On June 18, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo extended the March 25 COVID-19-related ordered departure by 30 days for the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the Consulate General in Erbil, and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, according to the DoS.³⁵³ The extension requires that prior to July 22, the Iraq Chief of Mission must “re-evaluate conditions and request continuation or termination of the departure status from the Under Secretary of Management.”³⁵⁴ USAID reported that the COVID-19 2-week quarantine period complicates the logistical planning for staffing relief because transportation into and out of the country is conducted by DoS chartered flights that occur once monthly.³⁵⁵

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IDP Returns Slow

According to the DoS PRM-funded International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix, nearly 1.4 million Iraqis remained displaced, and approximately 4.7 million IDPs have returned to their areas of origin in Iraq as of April 29. The DoS PRM reported that IDP returns have slowed to a trickle this quarter, adding that this low return rate is unsurprising considering the mobility restrictions imposed by the Iraqi authorities starting in March to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁵⁶

The ability and willingness of IDPs to return to their areas of origin provide some indication of levels of security and quality of governance in the areas formerly controlled by ISIS. According to IOM, as reported by DoS PRM, overall reasons for IDPs returning have remained consistent across rounds and include improvements in the security situation and the provision of services, including schools, employment opportunities, and the rehabilitation of houses in areas of origin.³⁵⁷

IOM's data collection for their most recent report (Round 115) took place during March and April. As of April 30, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix identified 4,705,182 returnees (784,197 households) across 8 provinces, 38 districts, and 2,027 locations. An additional 44,778 returnees were recorded during data collection for the latest report, which is lower than the number of new returnees in the previous round (63,954 new returnees in Round 114). Most returnees were recorded in Anbar (22,170), Ninewa (13,890) and Salah ad Din provinces (7,974). The majority of new recorded returns were either households who had returned in previous months but were only identified in this round, or those who returned before the implementation of the country-wide curfew in early March. Closure and consolidation of IDP camps is on hold due to COVID-19 movement restrictions. Reporting on returns more recently than April has not been released.³⁵⁸

DoS PRM reported that the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Iraq decreased 40 percent in 2020 compared to 2019. Although the overall number is diminishing, the United Nations reported that the number of people in acute need remains significant. Of the 4.1 million people in need, 1.77 million people are acutely in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, of which more than 816,000 are children.³⁵⁹ According to the United Nations 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Iraq, "The most vulnerable people in Iraq and those in acute need of humanitarian assistance are those directly affected by the 2014-2017 conflict against [ISIS], particularly those who were displaced and whose lives and livelihoods were uprooted and destroyed."³⁶⁰

During the quarter, DoS PRM reported working closely with IOM and other humanitarian partners on facilitating returns to communities of origin.³⁶¹ The U.S. Government and other humanitarian actors also continued to advocate with the Iraqi government, noting the need to push for durable solutions beyond return, most importantly sustainable local integration. PRM reported that during the quarter, the most acute needs continued to be found in provinces that witnessed direct conflict, such as Anbar, Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Salah ad Din, with half concentrated in Ninewa and Anbar provinces.³⁶²

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

COVID-19 Caseloads Surge Across Iraq

USAID reported confirmed cases of COVID-19 began surging from late May to early June after being relatively low across Iraq throughout April into early May.³⁶³ According to USAID, the COVID-19 outbreak was most acute in Baghdad, with smaller but significant caseloads in Basrah and Sulaymaniyah.³⁶⁴ USAID reported that the dramatic increases in reported COVID-19 cases correspond to an increase in testing capacity and more robust contact tracing throughout the country.³⁶⁵

According to DoS PRM, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees program for contact tracing and testing has been conducted, and camp coordination and camp management COVID-19 preparedness and response plans have been activated and implemented in all affected camps. The camp managers are following the strict movement restrictions and screening procedures instituted by the Iraqi government and KRG, and are coordinating closely with health authorities to ensure compliance with measures and full tracing of potential contacts.³⁶⁶ USAID reporting as of mid-June stated that none of the reported cases have resulted in outbreaks in IDP camps or refugee settlements.³⁶⁷

The Iraqi Kurdistan Health Ministry announced that daily COVID-19 cases in the IKR reached a peak of 326 on June 21, according to a DoS cable.³⁶⁸ The cable also reported that tracking by the Kurdistan Health Ministry showed daily caseloads have been consistently more than 100 since June 7 and above 200 since June 18.³⁶⁹ Health authorities asserted the recent rise in confirmed cases was a result of community transmission.³⁷⁰ According to statements made by a KRG official, some areas in Sulaymaniyah Province reported positive case-to-test ratios close to 50 percent, suggesting that double or triple the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are going unreported.³⁷¹ A spokesperson from the Iraqi Kurdistan Ministry of Health stated separately that as the government has doubled the number of tests administered from 1,000 to more than 2,000 per day, the number of cases detected has increased substantially from 3 to 4 cases per day to hundreds per day.³⁷²

According to a U.S. Embassy in Baghdad cable, the increased caseloads have exacerbated deficiencies in Iraq's public health infrastructure and limited the Ministry of Health's ability to contain the virus.³⁷³ The cable reported more than 4,034 COVID-19 cases and 44 deaths among healthcare workers, as well as poor quarantine procedures, shortages of PPE, and long lines of patients reported by local doctors and health officials.³⁷⁴

According to a U.S. Embassy in Baghdad cable, the increased caseloads have exacerbated deficiencies in Iraq's public health infrastructure and limited the Ministry of Health's ability to contain the virus.

In-Person Meetings Continue Despite COVID-19 Risk

At the end of the quarter, USAID reported that in-person meetings between the chargé d'affaires (ambassador or Chief of Mission), accompanied by DoS and USAID staff, and parliamentary members have continued despite 20 members of the Iraqi parliament testing positive for COVID-19.³⁷⁵ According to a press release by the Kurdistan Parliament on June 11, after learning a parliament employee contracted COVID-19, all parliament members and staff were tested for COVID-19 by Ministry of Health teams on June 9. Several persons tested positive for the virus resulting in a decision by parliament's president to close parliament for two weeks.³⁷⁶

In early May, the DoS and USAID released guidance—known as “Diplomacy Strong” and “The Roadmap to Return,” respectively—outlining the agencies’ plans for a three-phase approach to returning to routine operations both domestically and overseas after the pandemic.³⁷⁷ Guidance in the USAID Roadmap to Return states that it will “coordinate return of USAID’s employees to on-site work at post with the conditions laid out in the DoS’s Diplomacy Strong framework,” delegating post-specific decision-making to the Chief of Mission (ambassador or chargé d'affaires), Emergency Action Committees, and Management Counselors, in partnership with the DoS Bureau for Management.³⁷⁸

The Chief of Mission has overall authority to determine when to enter each phase.³⁷⁹ DoS guidance states that medical and health conditions at each post will be the primary drivers of decisions by Chief of Mission, followed by local conditions and policy and operational considerations.³⁸⁰ Under the phased approaches of the DoS Diplomacy Strong framework and the USAID Roadmap to Return, official travel within a host country is authorized by the Chief of Mission.³⁸¹

U.S. Government Adapts Awards as COVID-19 Cases Soar

According to USAID and DoS PRM, to continue advancing U.S. strategic objectives in Iraq amid the outbreak, both agencies have transitioned to conducting humanitarian and stabilization activities virtually when possible and reported that implementers are successfully holding virtual forums.³⁸² USAID and DoS PRM report that communication between USAID, DoS PRM, and implementers has remained strong because of virtual meetings during telework.³⁸³ In addition, USAID and DoS PRM reported that implementers are adjusting programming to meet needs under conditions of COVID-19.³⁸⁴

At the beginning of the quarter, the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives cancelled three and re-scoped four activities for COVID-19-related reasons, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding Facility for Stabilization resumed rehabilitation projects.³⁸⁵ Adapting to limitations in physical access, USAID reported that Iraq Governance and Performance Accountability Project has held trainings using Zoom the web-conferencing software, and Catholic Relief Services Shared Future is conducting social cohesion activities, work readiness, and entrepreneurial sessions online.³⁸⁶ Other activities, such as those provided through IOM, assisted students and teachers in the transition to virtual learning through the provision of Internet data cards and by providing teachers with training in online teaching.³⁸⁷ According to USAID, many other relief activities were also implemented throughout the quarter, although some faced delays.³⁸⁸

IRAQ: QUARTERLY FOCUS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

ANBAR AND NINEWA

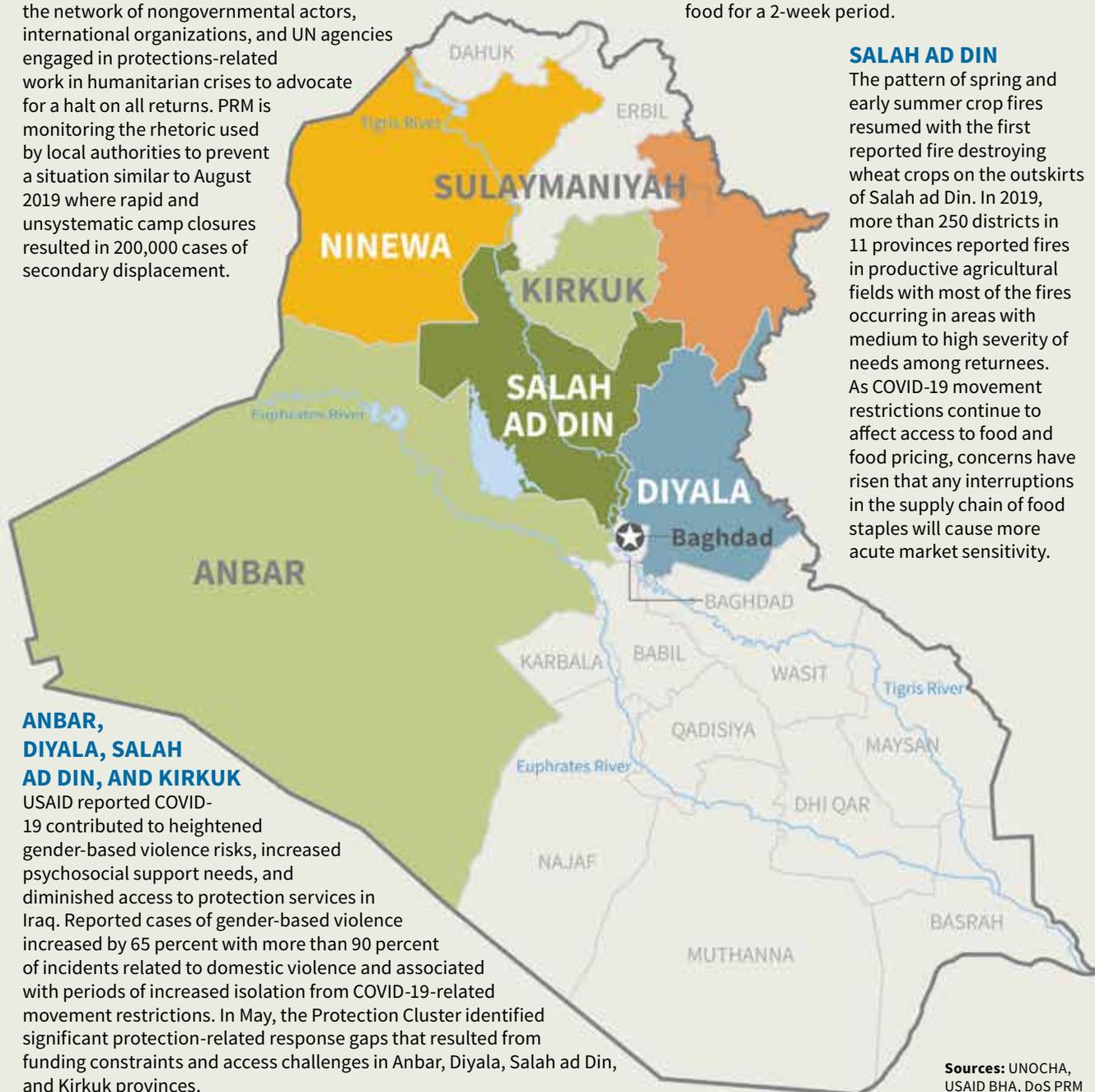
Authorities in Anbar and Ninewa provinces have continued plans to close all IDP camps by the end of 2020 and mid-2021, respectively. However, concerns that protection and COVID-19 mitigation measures have not been incorporated into return procedures has prompted the network of nongovernmental actors, international organizations, and UN agencies engaged in protections-related work in humanitarian crises to advocate for a halt on all returns. PRM is monitoring the rhetoric used by local authorities to prevent a situation similar to August 2019 where rapid and unsystematic camp closures resulted in 200,000 cases of secondary displacement.

ANBAR AND SULAYMANIYAH

The World Food Program reported the cost of essential commodities rose 6 percent countrywide from March to April, with the largest recorded spikes in Anbar (24 percent) and Sulaymaniyah (17 percent). Additionally, the prices of 8 of 23 staple food commodities rose up to 24 percent. According to a USAID implementer assessment, only 45 percent of surveyed households across 7 Iraqi provinces reported having sufficient food for a 2-week period.

SALAH AD DIN

The pattern of spring and early summer crop fires resumed with the first reported fire destroying wheat crops on the outskirts of Salah ad Din. In 2019, more than 250 districts in 11 provinces reported fires in productive agricultural fields with most of the fires occurring in areas with medium to high severity of needs among returnees. As COVID-19 movement restrictions continue to affect access to food and food pricing, concerns have risen that any interruptions in the supply chain of food staples will cause more acute market sensitivity.



ANBAR, DIYALA, SALAH AD DIN, AND KIRKUK

USAID reported COVID-19 contributed to heightened gender-based violence risks, increased psychosocial support needs, and diminished access to protection services in Iraq. Reported cases of gender-based violence increased by 65 percent with more than 90 percent of incidents related to domestic violence and associated with periods of increased isolation from COVID-19-related movement restrictions. In May, the Protection Cluster identified significant protection-related response gaps that resulted from funding constraints and access challenges in Anbar, Diyala, Salah ad Din, and Kirkuk provinces.

Sources: UNOCHA, USAID BHA, DoS PRM

The USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA) and DoS PRM reported that at least nine implementing partners had temporarily suspended on-the-ground programming due to COVID-19.³⁸⁹ According to USAID and DoS PRM, relief activities involving large gatherings, such as group psychosocial support sessions, child-friendly spaces, formal and non-formal education activities, and in-person training, are most affected by COVID-19.³⁹⁰ USAID and DoS PRM reported that implementers have also needed to suspend some activities involving rehabilitation or maintenance work, such as water infrastructure rehabilitation and shelter repair, in part due to COVID-19 concerns and in part due to movement restrictions imposed by the Iraqi government.³⁹¹ Implementers have found some workarounds, however, such as holding trainings over the Internet rather than in person.³⁹²

In contrast, the majority of critical health programming activities have continued unimpeded.³⁹³ Other humanitarian activities, such as cash and non-food distributions, hygiene promotion, and awareness raising campaigns, have been modified to continue in the context of COVID-19.³⁹⁴ USAID BHA reported that as of early-June, 19 awards had been modified in response to COVID-19 challenges and that USAID anticipated awards will continue to require adjustments as implementers continue to adapt and respond to COVID-19.³⁹⁵ USAID indicated further intentions to modify the UNDP Fund for Stabilization award to indicate that USAID will fund rehabilitation of healthcare facilities to create isolation units in southern Iraq and Dahuk, and provide related medical equipment in support of the COVID-19 response.³⁹⁶ During the quarter, DoS PRM has modified six awards to adapt projects to COVID-19 restrictions and to provide additional support to vulnerable refugees and IDPs.³⁹⁷

The Iraqi government's change in procedures and effective suspension of the issuance of access letters for NGOs and humanitarian organizations in November 2019 continues to limit the ability of humanitarian actors to move supplies to meet humanitarian needs throughout Iraq.

COVID-19 Movement Restrictions Eclipse Access Letter Challenges

In response to the nearly threefold increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases in late May, the Iraqi government and KRG re-imposed comprehensive movement restrictions and have maintained varying province-level curfews on most inter-province travel as of mid-June, according to USAID.³⁹⁸ The combination of COVID-19-related restrictions and the ongoing difficulty of obtaining humanitarian access letters from the Iraqi government has resulted in more than a four-fold increase in the number of Iraqi districts with high access constraints: from 3 districts in November 2019 to 13 districts in April 2020, according to United Nations reports.³⁹⁹ USAID reported that of the approximately 4.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, nearly 1.8 million, including more than 343,000 IDPs, reside in areas perceived by relief actors as having medium or high levels of access constraints.⁴⁰⁰

The Iraqi government's change in procedures and effective suspension of the issuance of access letters for NGOs and humanitarian organizations in November 2019 continues to limit the ability of humanitarian actors to move supplies to meet humanitarian needs throughout Iraq.⁴⁰¹ This quarter, USAID reported that Iraq's National Operations Center (NOC) has accepted NGO application requests for access letters, but the NOC's capacity to process access letters remains a challenge as it does not match the number of required access letter approvals.⁴⁰² DoS PRM reported the Humanitarian Coordinator continued to press the issue of access letters. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs also continued to ask for donor advocacy, and the Embassy in Baghdad has raised the issue with the Iraqi government.⁴⁰³

DoS PRM reported COVID-19 restrictions have also made it difficult to implement technical assistance and to hold in-person meetings with key contacts. PRM's third-party monitors have largely been unable to carry out in-person activities due to COVID-related movement restrictions and curfews. Due to COVID-19, DoS PRM requested that third-party monitors conduct beneficiary surveys for selected projects using questions PRM developed rather than directly monitoring project sites. At least monthly, refugee coordinators conduct regular follow-up calls and meetings with implementing partners, and will continue to do so as long as in-person visits cannot be carried out due to COVID-19.⁴⁰⁴

COVID-19 Restrictions Add to Fiscal Crisis Strains

According to USAID, Iraq's fiscal crisis and COVID-19 restrictions have created increasing banking and payment transaction difficulties for USAID implementers.⁴⁰⁵ USAID reported that after Central Bank Decree No. 822 went into effect on March 29, many Iraqi banks have limited cash withdrawals in U.S. dollars.⁴⁰⁶ The decree caps dollar withdrawals from banks across Iraq, including the IKR, at 75 percent of the transaction amount in dollars, converting the remaining 25 percent to Iraqi dinars at the central bank exchange rate, placing further limitations in addition to COVID-19 restrictions on implementers' access to cash.⁴⁰⁷

However, USAID received reports from vendors in Erbil that the Trade Bank of Iraq and RT Bank exhausted dollar reserves and could not honor withdrawals in dollars within the provisions set by the Central Bank Decree.⁴⁰⁸ According to USAID, banks required all dollar withdrawals to be converted in full to dinars, resulting in increased transaction costs, delayed payments, and conversion of project payments, grants, and cash assistance from dollars to dinars.⁴⁰⁹ USAID reported that vendors with obligations in dollars were required to convert dollar obligations to dinars at a weaker market rate than the conversion rate offered by Iraqi banks, resulting in a further value loss on behalf of USAID vendors.⁴¹⁰ While USAID only has received reports of transaction issues through the Trade Bank of Iraq and RT Bank, USAID said it believes other Iraqi banks are facing similar shortages contributing to potential wider spread loss.⁴¹¹

EVENTS IN SYRIA

STATUS OF OIR IN SYRIA

CJTF-OIR: Partnership with SDF Remains Strong, Amidst Crowded Field of Forces in NE Syria

CJTF-OIR reported that SOJTF-OIR continues to have a strong relationship with the SDF and supports the SDF in securing key petroleum infrastructure in eastern Syria.⁴¹² USCENTCOM said that the United States remains the partner of choice for the SDF and the SDF has resisted pressure from Russia and the Syrian regime to separate from the United States. In areas where U.S. forces have withdrawn, the SDF turns to Russia and the Syrian regime for protection against Turkey and Turkish supported opposition, USCENTCOM said.⁴¹³

CJTF-OIR said that its overall force posture and composition did not generally change from last quarter. Forces remain in the ESSA that was created following the October 2019 Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria, and at the Tanf Garrison in southeastern Syria.⁴¹⁴ The garrison, near the border with Jordan and Iraq, is where Coalition forces train and work with a local force called the Mughawir al-Thawra.

SDF Increases Cooperation with Russian Forces

The DIA reported that the disposition of Russian and Syrian regime forces in northeastern Syria have not changed dramatically since the October 2019 Turkish incursion.⁴¹⁵ The DIA said that the Russian military maintains a presence at the Qamishli airport and patrols in Hasakah and Raqqah provinces, including in towns along the M4 highway leading to the Iraqi border.⁴¹⁶

The DIA said that between 4,000 and 10,000 Syrian regime forces have been deployed in northeastern Syria since the Turkish incursion. The DIA reported that Syria has stepped up efforts to recruit from the local populations to increase its force numbers there.⁴¹⁷

However, the DIA said it has not observed any substantive decreases to the SDF's support to Coalition counterterrorism activities.⁴¹⁸ And despite evidence of increasing cooperation between the SDF and Russian forces, the DIA said it has not seen substantive increases in pro-regime support to SDF direct action activities outside of the ESSA.⁴¹⁹

Russian Military Buildup Sidesteps Deconfliction Efforts

In June, General McKenzie stated that the Coalition was observing a buildup of Russian military hardware in Syria.⁴²⁰ He noted that Russia's presence in the country gives them an opportunity to “throw sand in our gears and to make it harder for us” to operate.⁴²¹ Press reporting from late June said that Russian forces are encroaching on territory where Coalition forces are present as part of a deliberate campaign to eject them from the region.⁴²²

CJTF-OIR reported that the Russian military continued to violate established deconfliction protocols in northeastern Syria this quarter. Russian ground and air incursions into the ESSA occurred on a “regular but often sporadic basis,” according to CJTF-OIR.⁴²³ For example, in May, a convoy of Russian trucks encountered U.S. armored vehicles as it entered Tal Tamr.⁴²⁴ In early June, a CJTF-OIR spokesperson cited a recent example of U.S. forces encountering a Russian patrol in eastern Syria whose presence Russia did not make known.⁴²⁵ According to media reporting, in early June, a U.S. convoy and a Russian patrol encountered each other outside the city of Derik, near the Turkish and Iraqi border, resulting in a standoff that blocked local civilian traffic for hours.⁴²⁶

The Coalition and Russia established a number of deconfliction zones in northeastern Syria. According to CJTF-OIR, it tracks Russian activities in the Qamishli Deconfliction Zone and Coalition forces respond to non-deconflicted Russian ground incursions into the East Zone. This ensures the integrity of the ESSA for ongoing counter-ISIS operations and protects Coalition forces.⁴²⁷ Both sides have grown accustomed to each other's actions and behavior under deconfliction protocols, and tensions generally remain low, according to CJTF-OIR.⁴²⁸

A CJTF-OIR spokesperson described aspects of the deconfliction process. He told the press, “Each day there are conversations between leaders here in the Coalition and Russian leaders in Syria, where we share and exchange information on where our patrols will go.”⁴²⁹ CJTF-OIR avoids escalations with Russian military forces and calls on them not to interfere with the SDF mission to defeat ISIS, according to the spokesperson.⁴³⁰ The DIA, citing media sources, reported that the SDF was “indirectly enabling Russia-led efforts to contravene U.S. deconfliction protocols.”⁴³¹ The DIA noted that in May, the SDF escorted Russian patrols transiting the ESSA and could have been supporting Russian efforts to recruit local militias for patrols.⁴³²

CJTF-OIR did not report any imminent plans to improve deconfliction within the ESSA or near Tanf Garrison. Coalition forces were maintaining “the current foundation of deconfliction protocols in order to ensure the safety to Coalition forces and reduce the risk of tactical miscalculation,” according to CJTF-OIR.⁴³³ However, CJTF-OIR and Russian military representatives were conducting a review of the deconfliction protocols.⁴³⁴ CJTF-OIR reported that, at the operational level, Russian ground and air violations did not hinder the Coalition’s mission to defeat ISIS in these areas.⁴³⁵ CJTF-OIR allocates resources to address the Russian incursions, but these forces are separate from those conducting counter-ISIS operations.⁴³⁶

SDF Bolsters Presence, Takes on More Security Force Responsibility at Oil Fields

CJTF-OIR said that it has been training an SDF “critical petroleum infrastructure” security force, and at the end of the second quarter of FY 2020, approximately 50 to 60 percent of the required guard force had been trained.⁴³⁷ According to CJTF-OIR, the oilfield guard force is made up of site security guards and mobile perimeter security elements, who are trained to conduct perimeter security—including standing watch in guard towers and conducting mobile patrols, to set up blocking positions like tactical control points and emergency check points, and to employ technical security like surveillance cameras. In addition, CJTF-OIR said the forces can serve as localized quick reaction forces to respond to attempts at sabotage.⁴³⁸

SYRIA: SELECTED KEY EVENTS, 4/1/2020-6/30/2020

APRIL 9

ISIS conducts coordinated attacks against Syrian government positions in Homs; 2-day battle leaves nearly 50 dead

APRIL 30

ISIS ambushes bus carrying Syrian government soldiers in Homs desert, killing 10, wounding at least 15

MAY 17

Coalition and SDF kill 2 ISIS regional leaders who were responsible for running ISIS cells and logistics in Iraq and Syria

APR

APRIL 23

ISIS conducts coordinated attacks as Ramadan starts; ISIS marks holiday with “Raid of Attrition”—a weeks-long spike in attacks in northeastern, central, and southern Syria

MAY

MAY 2-3

ISIS detainees in Hasakah facility stage escape attempt; SDF reports damage to prison, calls for international solution

CJTF-OIR said that training continued in Shadadi throughout the quarter, with 250 qualified critical petroleum infrastructure guards graduating every month and each issued an AK-47, body armor and helmet funded by the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF).⁴³⁹ CJTF-OIR said that as the force is trained, it is taking on more and more responsibility for securing critical petroleum infrastructure.⁴⁴⁰ However, due to movement restrictions and preventive measures put in place because of COVID-19, the oilfield security force remained at the less-than 60 percent level of security responsibilities it had assumed by the end of March.⁴⁴¹

The DIA reported that while the SDF bolstered its security presence near major oil and gas fields in northeastern Syria, SDF forces remained co-located with Coalition forces whose protection SDF leaders still depend on.⁴⁴² The DIA added that the SDF has attempted to use oil and gas resources as a bargaining chip during intermittent reconciliation negotiations with the Syrian regime.⁴⁴³

According to the DIA, as of June, the SDF was increasingly subject to attempts by Russian and Syrian regime patrols to gain more access to the ESSA near major northeastern oil and gas fields, particularly in rural areas south and east of Qamishli.⁴⁴⁴ The DIA said that as recently as December 2019, the Syrian regime had awarded oil exploration contracts to Russian companies for areas of eastern Syria where the SDF is present, showing their intent to eventually reassert control over SDF-held oil fields.⁴⁴⁵

SDF OIL REVENUES DECLINE WITH FALL OF GLOBAL PRICES

The DIA said that the collapse of global oil prices in conjunction with the Syrian currency crisis during the first half of 2020 almost certainly has led to a severe decline in SDF oil revenues.⁴⁴⁶ This has strained the SDF's ability to fund military, economic, and governance activities, according to the DIA.⁴⁴⁷ As a result, the SDF faced difficulty providing effective governance, the DIA said. However, the DIA said it has not seen any impact on public support for the SDF, which has been able to continue counter-ISIS operations because of its partnership with the Coalition.⁴⁴⁸

Citing industry and press reporting, the DIA reported that oil fields in northeastern Syria controlled by the SDF have likely produced at least 30,000 barrels of oil per day, garnering between \$1 million and \$3 million a day in revenue until the recent price collapse.⁴⁴⁹ It was unclear as of the end of the quarter how much revenue the SDF had lost.

JUNE 4

SDF launches “Deterrence of Terrorism” campaign in Hasakah countryside, sweeps more than 150 villages, captures at least 110 ISIS fighters

JUNE 17

First Caesar Act sanctions announced, increasing pressure on Syrian regime

JUN

MAY 26

Coalition and SDF kill senior ISIS leader known as “Governor of Iraq”

JUNE 10-12

SDF conducts biometric registration at foreign annex in the al-Hol displacement camp

JUNE 30

ISIS detainees in Hasakah facility riot again, demanding trials and to see families

Arab Communities Have Unequal Power, Face Multiple Pressures

The SDF and its affiliated civilian institutions control a large swathe of territory in northeastern Syria, where there is also a large Arab population. According to USCENTCOM, a majority of Arabs in northeastern Syria continue to provide at least passive support to the SDF and its associated institutions, and see the SDF as a preferred alternative to ISIS or the Syrian regime.⁴⁵⁰ USCENTCOM stated, however, that multiple factors are reducing popular support for the SDF, including the worsening economic environment, perceived ambiguity in Coalition commitment in the area, and increased ISIS activity in Dayr az Zawr province.⁴⁵¹

Experts assess that while the SDF and its Coalition partners continue to put pressure on ISIS militarily, that ISIS exploits disorder and the group will take advantage of ethnic and sectarian divides and deep economic and political grievances to influence alienated populations and attempt to achieve a resurgence.⁴⁵²

The SDF was originally a majority Kurdish force comprising mostly People's Protection Unit (YPG) fighters, but has expanded greatly in recent years, and according to a think tank survey conducted in northeastern Syria in early 2019, the force has become more than 50 percent Arab. USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that this is still accurate.⁴⁵³

However, both USCENTCOM and the DoS reported that power-sharing between Kurdish and Arab leadership in northeastern Syria remains imbalanced.⁴⁵⁴ USCENTCOM said that the SDF and its political arm, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), have made limited efforts to incorporate Arab military and civil leaders into their ranks.⁴⁵⁵ It said that local Arabs occupy positions on SDF and SDC-associated military and civilian institutions, but they lack equal influence and feel excluded from military and political decision-making processes.⁴⁵⁶ USCENTCOM said that persisting rivalries among Arab tribes also complicated efforts at power-sharing between Arabs and Kurds.⁴⁵⁷

The DoS reported that among Arab leader participation in local governing structures, decision-making authority is disproportionately concentrated in the hands of a small number of individuals perceived as having close ties to the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the main Kurdish political party.⁴⁵⁸ The DoS said this was true in both Raqqah and Tabqa.⁴⁵⁹ The DoS said that there are no Kurds on the local council in Dayr az Zawr, but residents report that PYD advisors from outside the province constrain the decision-making ability of local council leadership.⁴⁶⁰

USCENTCOM said that a number of local Arab leaders have strong influence in northeastern Syria, including an Arab tribal leader on the SDF's Tal Abyad council who has been in exile since Turkey's October 2019 incursion, but continues holding meetings seeking support for the SDF.⁴⁶¹ A number of Arab leaders in Dayr az Zawr, including the co-president of the Civil Council and a tribal leader, reported that Kurds maintain too much control over existing institutions, USCENTCOM reported.⁴⁶²

ARAB COMMUNITIES FACE PRESSURES FROM MULTIPLE OTHER ACTORS

USCENTCOM reported that Arab communities in northeastern Syria continue to be pressured by a variety of state and non-state actors, including the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran and Iranian-aligned Shia militia groups, and Turkey.⁴⁶³ Previously, USCENTCOM reported that this pressure was aimed at coercing local communities to "renounce support for the SDF."⁴⁶⁴ These pressures on local Arab

communities coincide with ISIS activities aimed at intimidating the population and targeting local officials to end their cooperation with the SDF.⁴⁶⁵

- **Syrian regime efforts**

According to USCENTCOM, these efforts to sway the local populations include: hosting tribal gatherings seeking public declarations of support for the regime, recruitment or conscription into regime militias, reconciliation arrangements, and threats of violence.⁴⁶⁶

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that public support for the Syrian regime remains limited mostly to sheikhs long loyal to the regime, while multiple factors impede its efforts to garner greater support. These include regime corruption, abuses against the population during the conflict, the economic crisis, the regime's dependence on unpopular external supporters like Iran, and the presence of the Coalition and its local partner forces.⁴⁶⁷

- **Russian efforts conducted both unilaterally and in tandem with the Syrian regime**

These include publicized aid deliveries, deployment of military police, meetings with tribal leaders, recruitment into Russian-supported militias, communication on behalf of the regime, and some financial and economic incentives, according to USCENTCOM. Russia also recruits eastern Syria tribesmen to fight in Libya.⁴⁶⁸ USCENTCOM said that Russia will seek to exploit the ongoing economic crisis impacting northeastern Syria.⁴⁶⁹

USCENTCOM reported that Russia's outreach has had mixed success.⁴⁷⁰ It said that while some Arab populations resist Russian influence because of its support for the Syrian regime, some populations near Russian bases have impeded U.S. patrols in northeastern Syria.⁴⁷¹

- **Iranian, Lebanese Hezbollah, and other Shia militia groups' efforts**

USCENTCOM reported that these groups recruit tribesmen into Iranian-aligned local militias, deploy out of area and foreign militias into northeastern Arab communities, and offer financial and economic incentives to tribal leaders and civilians who support Iran or convert to Shia Islam.⁴⁷²

USCENTCOM reported that Iranian outreach efforts, including proselytization, have only had success in a small number of villages in the Euphrates Valley where the SDF is not present.⁴⁷³ Elsewhere, efforts by Iranian-aligned Shia militia groups have motivated people to align with the SDF and Coalition to counter Shia influence in the area.⁴⁷⁴

- **Turkish efforts**

USCENTCOM said that Turkey actively supports several hardline Islamist militias and groups "engaged in violent criminal activities" who are composed of tribesmen originally from SDF-held territory.⁴⁷⁵ Turkey also formed and maintains a "Supreme Council of Syrian Tribes" that includes tribal representatives who fled northeastern Syria very early in the Syrian civil war.⁴⁷⁶

According to USCENTCOM, this Supreme Tribal Council has little influence over populations that remain in northeastern Syria. In addition, actions by Turkey's partners have likely limited Turkey's ability to turn some Arab populations against the SDF.⁴⁷⁷

ACTIONS AGAINST ISIS IN SYRIA

SDF Launches Counter-ISIS Campaign with Coalition Forces and Iraqi Cooperation

In early June, the SDF announced the launch of a counterterrorism campaign against ISIS in cooperation with Coalition forces, following an increase of ISIS attacks in the “recent period.”⁴⁷⁸ This campaign also coincided with the full resumption of SDF counter-ISIS operations following the shift to mitigating the spread of COVID-19.⁴⁷⁹ The “Deterrence of Terrorism” campaign included combing geographic areas where ISIS was active in the eastern desert, along the Kabour River and the Syrian-Iraqi border in cooperation with the ISF, and targeting ISIS cells with special operations forces.⁴⁸⁰

The SDF said the operations targeted ISIS “hideouts and hotbeds” that “work to disturb security and stability in the region” and threaten the “return of ISIS.”⁴⁸¹ CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF swept 150 villages and farms in the eastern desert, across southern Hasakah to the Syria-Iraq border, and in the countryside of Dayr az Zawr, ultimately capturing 110 ISIS terrorists.⁴⁸² A CJTF-OIR spokesperson said it provided support with technical advice and ISR.⁴⁸³

CJTF-OIR reported that within the Combined Joint Operations Area, all counter-ISIS operations were conducted either unilaterally by the SDF or jointly with Coalition forces.⁴⁸⁴ CJTF-OIR said that the SDF is unilaterally continuing the fight against ISIS outside of the ESSA, showing successes in its ability to locate and detain ISIS fighters and facilitators, and executing these operations “with minimal Coalition support.”⁴⁸⁵ CJTF-OIR said that the SDF regularly reports about its operations to CJTF-OIR.⁴⁸⁶

CJTF-OIR said that within the ESSA, the SDF is divided into three regional commands, Middle, South, and East, with the Middle and South units being most active. CJTF-OIR said these units partnered with the Internal Security Forces (InSF) and the Provincial Security Forces (PRISF) on operations.⁴⁸⁷

In the second half of May, three top ISIS leaders were killed during two SDF and Coalition raids in Dayr az Zawr.⁴⁸⁸ CJTF-OIR announced that in a May 17 raid, the SDF and its Coalition partners killed two ISIS leaders whose removal would “disrupt future attacks against innocent civilians.”⁴⁸⁹

- Ahmad ‘Isa Ismail al-Zawi, known as Abu Ali al-Baghdadi, was a regional leader responsible for disseminating terrorist guidance from senior ISIS leadership to operatives in North Baghdad. CJTF-OIR said he was known as the ISIS Wali of Baghdad.
- Ahmad ‘Abd Muhammad Hasan al-Jughayfi, known as Abu Ammar, was a senior ISIS logistics and supply official. CJTF-OIR said he directed the acquisition and transport of weapons, IED materials, and personnel across Iraq and Syria.⁴⁹⁰

CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF swept 150 villages and farms in the eastern Badiyah desert, across southern Hasakah to the Syria-Iraq border, and in the countryside of Dayr az Zawr, ultimately capturing 110 ISIS terrorists.

On May 27, the SDF announced the killing of a third prominent ISIS leader in Dayr az Zawr during a Coalition airstrike aided by the SDF.⁴⁹¹

- Mu'ataz Nu'man Abdul Naif Najm al-Jabouri, also known as Hajji Taysir, was considered by ISIS to be the “governor of Iraq” and a top deputy to the ISIS leader as of mid-2017, the SDF said.⁴⁹² A U.S. poster announcing the bounty on Jaburi said that he oversaw manufacturing in Syria during ISIS’s period of territorial control, including research into chemical and biological weapons.⁴⁹³

On June 24, the DoS announced it had doubled to \$10 million the reward it is offering for information leading to the “identification or location” of the ISIS leader Amir Muhammad Said Abdal Rahma al-Mawla.⁴⁹⁴ Al-Mawla rose to the position in late October 2019, following the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi during a U.S. raid on his compound in western Syria.⁴⁹⁵ The Iraqi-born al-Mawla was a religious scholar in al-Qaeda in Iraq and rose through the ranks. The U.S. Government designated him a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” in March, generally prohibiting U.S. citizens from engaging in transactions with him or his property interests.⁴⁹⁶

Regime, Regime-aligned Forces, and Turkey Conduct Some Counter-ISIS Activities

The DIA reported that the Syrian military and pro-regime forces conducted a number of counter-ISIS operations in the desert region of southeastern Homs and Dayr az Zawr provinces this quarter, following an increase in ISIS attacks in central Syria early in the quarter that inflicted losses to regime and pro-regime forces personnel.⁴⁹⁷ The DIA said that the Syrian regime lacks available manpower and equipment in the remote desert areas where ISIS maintains a presence, because the regime has prioritized fighting in northwest Syria.⁴⁹⁸

A reporting group monitoring activity in regime-controlled central Syria said that the Syrian regime and its allied militias conducted increasingly persistent and widespread counter-ISIS operations in the second half of the quarter to address the increase in ISIS attacks. The report said these attacks and counter-insurgency operations took place not only in Homs and Dayr az Zawr, but also in Hama and Raqqah provinces.⁴⁹⁹

The DIA said that the Russian Air Force conducted limited counter-ISIS air strikes in the Badiyah region in late May, but overall, there were no major changes to Russian counter-ISIS operations in Syria this quarter. The DIA said that in June, the Syrian military reinforced its presence in Dara province, and along with Iranian-affiliated fighters, also conducted sporadic counter-ISIS operations in the Badiyah.⁵⁰⁰

Turkey increased its counter-ISIS activities in Syria this quarter, conducting raids and detentions, and improved its security presence along its borders with Syria and Iraq, USEUCOM reported. It said that Turkey’s proximity to the conflict zone continues to make it a major facilitation hub for ISIS, as well as a target for high-profile ISIS attacks. USEUCOM said that while Turkey’s actions “impacted ISIS’s ability to smuggle fighters, funds and supplies,” into or out of Turkey or Turkish-controlled areas of Syria, the difficulty in securing the entirety of Turkey’s borders with Syria and Iraq “likely ensures” that ISIS will continue attempts to move supporters and family members across the borders.⁵⁰¹

Turkey increased its counter-ISIS activities in Syria this quarter—conducting raids and detentions, and improved its security presence along its borders with Syria and Iraq, USEUCOM reported.

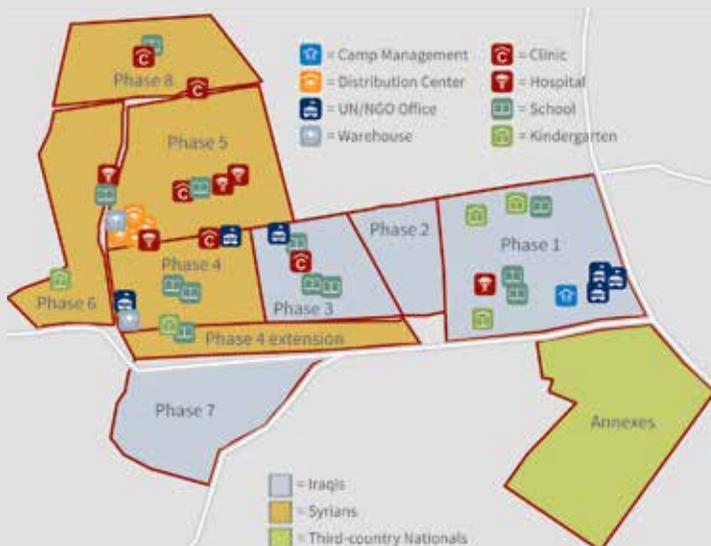
AL-HOL CAMP: MANAGEMENT AND CHALLENGES

The International Community Faces Unprecedented Logistical, Humanitarian, and Security Needs at the Camp

After the March 2019 fall of Baghouz, the last territory controlled by ISIS in Iraq and Syria, tens of thousands fled to the al-Hol displacement camp, which swelled from a population of less than 10,000 to more than 70,000. This included families of ISIS fighters who held out in Baghouz until the very end of the fight. The surge overwhelmed physical, humanitarian, and security structures in the camp.

The camp has since expanded into eight phases, or sections, to house Iraqi and Syrian residents, with a separate section of annexes for foreign country nationals—mostly women and children. Some of these residents are suspected of actively recruiting, enforcing religious edicts, or instigating violence on behalf of ISIS.

The Self-Administration of Northeast Syria maintains overall control of the camp, international agencies provide humanitarian and health services, and Asayish guards with SDF support maintain security. Local and international agencies continue to struggle with a long-term solution for al-Hol, as countries of origin remain reluctant to take their foreign nationals back.



CAMP MANAGER

Humanitarian NGO funded by DoS

- Manages infrastructure
- Manages provision of services (food, water, shelter)
- Coordinates NGOs

PARTNERS

Funding: DoS, USAID, and UN European Commission for Humanitarian Aid (includes numerous European donors—primarily the United Kingdom and Germany)

NGOs and UN Agencies (such as UNHCR, WHO, WFP, UNICEF)

Basic health services, daily food distribution, water and sanitation projects, protection activities, and address humanitarian needs

HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

- Long-term needs of residents including education programming, psychological services, and humanitarian protections
- Complications to humanitarian services due to COVID-19
- Additional training in humanitarian principles for camp administration and camp security

CAMP ADMINISTRATION**Self-Administration of Northeast Syria**

- **General Administration:** Provides strategic planning and programs and oversees security issues.
- **Relations Department:** Coordinates with all organizations operating in the camp and approves all activities in the camp.
- **Services Department:** Oversees all distributions in the camp.
- **Security:** Manages security approvals and vetting for all agencies operating in the camp.

CAMP RESIDENTS (65,000)

- 46% Iraqis (approximately 30,000, including 10,000 in place before Baghouz influx)
- 39% Syrians (approximately 25,000)
- 15% third-country nationals (approximately 10,000)
- 53% of camp residents are children under the age of 12
- More than 25% of camp residents are under the age of 5
- 65% of third-country nationals are under the age of 12

*Numbers are approximate and collected for assessment of humanitarian need

CAMP LAYOUT

No resident can leave camp without permission from Administration

Main Camp Phases

(relative freedom of movement among phases, similar to neighborhoods)

- Phases 1, 2, 3, 7: Iraqis
- Phases 4, 5, 6, 8: Syrians

Annex (Self-contained for services, movement more restricted than in phases, residents cannot leave Annex without permission from camp security)

- Houses third-country nationals

REPATRIATION CHALLENGES

- Third-country nationals: Countries of origin work with SDF on specific cases
- Repatriations of third-country nationals contingent on country of origin and resident acquiescence. Many countries reluctant to repatriate from Syria
- Iraqis: Process in development beset by indefinite delays. Iraqis wishing to return will go through screening process set up by the Iraqi government

CAMP SECURITY

Asayish (internal security service of the SNES) police the camp with support of law enforcement and military units such as YPJ and Syrian Democratic Forces providing a further layer of support when needed

SECURITY INCIDENTS

- Camp administration coordinates with camp security to address any challenges
- Individuals found to be instigating violence are removed from the camp by camp security
- Suspected perpetrators taken to external women's detention facility for "cooling off period" before returning to annex

SECURITY CHALLENGES

- Lack of capacity in women's detention facility
- Lack of juvenile detention facilities
- Non-humanitarian funding needed in order to build detention centers for women or juveniles

Sources: See Endnotes, page 128.

ISIS IN CAMPS AND DETENTION FACILITIES

CJTF-OIR: ISIS Detainees, Affiliated Displaced Pose “Ever-increasing Risk to Mission”

Some 10,000 ISIS fighters remain in detention facilities run by the SDF in northeastern Syria, including approximately 2,000 foreign fighters—most remaining there because their countries of origin are unable or unwilling to repatriate or prosecute them.⁵⁰² CJTF-OIR reported a deterioration of the situation in the detention centers this quarter due to the increasing frustration of the detainees. CJTF-OIR said this was demonstrated by several recent riots, adding that “the risk of a mass breakout cannot be discounted.”⁵⁰³

At the same time, OUSD(P) ISA reported that the foreign annex at the al-Hol displaced persons camp remains in a “vulnerable security state.”⁵⁰⁴ There are 10,000 civilians in the foreign annex, 65 percent of whom are under the age of 12. The DoS reported that there are an unknown number of active ISIS members who continue to live in the foreign annex and need to be identified and removed from the civilian setting.⁵⁰⁵ OUSD(P) ISA said some camp residents are susceptible to ISIS sympathies or radicalization, citing the raising of the ISIS flag during the recent Eid holiday.⁵⁰⁶ CJTF-OIR said that together, these populations are “an enduring and ever-increasing risk to mission.”⁵⁰⁷

The Northeast Syria Coordination Group (NESCG) was set up as a CJTF-OIR-led international effort to better coordinate multi-government and agency efforts to address the risk posed by ISIS supporters in detention and in IDP camps in Syria.⁵⁰⁸ CJTF-OIR said it is working closely with the DoS and other U.S. departments and agencies to pass on relevant information from partner force contacts working in al-Hol camp, to inform their plans.⁵⁰⁹ CJTF-OIR is also providing assistance to the SDF to improve security at the facilities. In addition, it said the NESCG is providing information to the European Union to assist a planning effort by the European Institute for Peace for an enduring solution to al-Hol.⁵¹⁰

ISIS Detainees Riot, Attempt Escapes

CJTF-OIR reported that within the ESSA, there are 16 SDF-run detention facilities holding ISIS fighters, but the vast majority of the ISIS detainees—some 85 percent—are held in two facilities, in the city of Hasakah and the town of Shadadi, some 40 miles further south.⁵¹¹ CJTF-OIR said that internal security is “poor due to the ad hoc nature of these facilities.”⁵¹² It said that external prison security is far better, but neither facility is viable in the medium- or long-term.⁵¹³

At the Hasakah facility this quarter, ISIS detainees rioted several times, protesting their conditions.⁵¹⁴ OUSD(P) ISA reported that following a riot at the end of last quarter on March 29 and 30, detainees rioted again on May 2 and 3.⁵¹⁵ According to the SDF, during the riot, ISIS detainees removed dormitory and corridor doors and seized control of the internal portion of the facility before SDF special operations and counterterrorism forces regained control.⁵¹⁶ OUSD(P) ISA said that no fighters were reported to have escaped and the SDF remains capable of both responding to external attacks and quelling internal riots.⁵¹⁷

Some 10,000 ISIS fighters remain in detention facilities run by the SDF in northeastern Syria, including approximately 2,000 foreign fighters—most remaining there because their countries of origin are unable or unwilling to repatriate or prosecute them.

In late June, detainees at Hasakah rioted again. According to the DIA, some 3,000 to 5,000 ISIS fighters are detained at the Hasakah prison, and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said rioters were demanding to see their families and to have trials.⁵¹⁸ As in previous attempts, OUSD(P) ISA and the DIA said that no detainees were reported to have escaped during this event. OUSD(P) ISA said that similar to the previous riots, the interior of the facility was damaged by the external perimeter remained fully intact.⁵¹⁹

Although ISIS continues to advocate publicly for detainee breakouts, OUSD(P) ISA said there were no coordinated external attacks or breakout attempts on SDF-controlled detention facilities.⁵²⁰ OUSD(P) ISA said that the SDF reported that no ISIS detainees escaped from SDF-controlled facilities this quarter.⁵²¹

CJTF-OIR PROVIDES MILLIONS TO SHORE UP SDF DETENTION FACILITIES

Following a May 3 riot, the SDF renewed its call for the international community to “find a solution to the issue of detained ISIS members,” as well as to provide more support for greater security measures and to help improve conditions for ISIS detainees.⁵²²

A CJTF-OIR spokesperson said in an interview at the end of May that the Coalition is supporting the SDF with funding for detention equipment to make the facilities safer. The spokesperson said the Coalition provided more than \$2 million in recent months for riot

Empty trucks that held basic hygiene and medical supplies for detention facilities across northeast Syria prepare to move out. (DoD photo)



equipment and security equipment, including cameras, structural security wire, improved doors and personal protective equipment to stop the spread of COVID-19.⁵²³

CJTF-OIR reported that its small prison survey team visits to the SDF detention centers were severely curtailed this quarter due to COVID-19, and CJTF-OIR has instead relied on information provided by the SDF.⁵²⁴ The exception was a visit to the Hasakah facility, where the survey team was tracking the level of security provided by the SDF, living conditions, and the long-term viability of the facility.⁵²⁵

USCENTCOM reported that initial site surveys of most SDF detention centers were already completed, and it had identified the need to improve living conditions both for SDF guards and ISIS detainees, as well as repairing and refurbishing the security infrastructure of the facilities.⁵²⁶ It said that improvements were initiated at several sites this quarter, and USCENTCOM continues to advise and assist the SDF in addressing security concerns associated with ISIS detention sites.⁵²⁷

OUSD(P) ISA reported that COVID-19 constraints impacted SDF and SDC activities this quarter, slowing actions that might have decreased the detainee population, such as local justice commissions, local reintegration or international repatriations.⁵²⁸ The DoS reported that reintegration of Syrian detainees suspected of ISIS affiliation was also on hold this quarter due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In January, the SDF released 180 Syrian male detainees to local communities or tribes who had agreed to sponsor them.⁵²⁹

SDF Launches Biometric Registration at al-Hol Annex

This quarter, the SDF conducted a three-day registration at the al-Hol annex to collect biometric information from residents. The DoS reported that access to the biometric information is intended to identify and add suspected ISIS-linked individuals to an electronic database used by international law enforcement and intelligence officials.⁵³⁰ It said that the SDF also intends to use these biometrics to support countries of origin to repatriate women and children.⁵³¹ The DoS said that the Coalition had previously supplied biometric collection equipment to the SDF.⁵³²

The DoS said that during the registration, which lasted from June 10 through June 12. Internet access for the whole camp shut down, and some humanitarian activities paused. The DoS said all food distributions and water access continued, but critical medical cases in the annex were denied access to health facilities during the registration.⁵³³ USAID BHA reported that because local authorities did not provide advance notice of the registration activities, the increased presence of the SDF in and around the camp disrupted relief operations during the process. Activities have since resumed.⁵³⁴

USAID also reported that authorities collected biometric data from all individuals aged 10 years and older during the registration. It said this raised concerns among some agencies about the secure handling and storage of sensitive data relating to children and the lifelong stigma this places on them. Almost two-thirds of the foreign population in the annex are children under the age of 12, with more than a quarter being under the age of five, according to the DoS.⁵³⁵

The DIA reported that in the al-Hol and al-Roj camps, ISIS activists continued to agitate, attempting escapes from the foreign annexes and enforcing ISIS Sharia law on other camp residents.

The DIA reported that in the al-Hol and al-Roj camps, ISIS activists continued to agitate, attempting escapes from the foreign annexes and enforcing Sharia law on other camp residents. The DIA said that in April, al-Hol security forces confiscated flammable liquids intended for attacks against tents and security personnel in the camp.⁵³⁶ Some Iraqi women in the camp also conducted a pro-ISIS demonstration in al-Hol, which security forces later broke up.⁵³⁷

The DIA reported that camp authorities generally consider foreign women housed in displaced persons camps in northeastern Syria as affiliated with ISIS, but seek to clarify their current level of involvement through internal investigations, individual renunciations of ISIS, and western intelligence reporting.⁵³⁸ The DIA said that the SDF prohibit women held in the foreigners' annexes at al-Hol and al-Roj from leaving unless they have a repatriation agreement from their respective governments.⁵³⁹

More information about the organizational structure and security challenges at the al-Hol camp are contained on pages 58-59 of this report.

PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT

CJTF-OIR reported that it views the partnership between SOJTF-OIR and the SDF as its most important security relationship in Syria. SOJTF-OIR supports SDF efforts to defeat ISIS, in part by securing petroleum infrastructure.⁵⁴⁰ The relationship between SOJTF-OIR and the SDF remained “strong” this quarter, according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁴¹ USCENTCOM reported that the United States remains the SDF’s “partner of choice” in northeastern Syria.⁵⁴² In areas where the United States has withdrawn, the SDF turns to Russia and the Syrian regime for protection against Turkey and the militias it supports, according to USCENTCOM.⁵⁴³

CJTF-OIR: SDF Capable of Maintaining Pressure on ISIS

CJTF-OIR reported that it briefly paused assessing SDF capabilities due to COVID-19.⁵⁴⁴ Assessing partner force capabilities helps CJTF-OIR identify how to best develop the SDF through advise and assist activities or via formal training courses.⁵⁴⁵ CJTF-OIR assessed that the SDF’s greatest strengths include its abilities to gather intelligence in support of counterterrorism operations, and to independently and dynamically target ISIS.⁵⁴⁶ The SDF’s greatest weaknesses include its inability to enable fully the population’s freedom of movement within northeastern Syria, to clear IEDs and remnants of war, and to secure sufficiently the provision of essential community services.⁵⁴⁷

According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF maintained its counterterrorism capabilities, with no assessed changes from the previous quarter. The SDF continued unilateral operations and resumed partnered operations with modifications to account for COVID-19.⁵⁴⁸ The SDF regularly updated Coalition personnel on its operations to defeat ISIS outside the ESSA, which it conducted unilaterally with minimal Coalition support.⁵⁴⁹ According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF showed an ability to effectively locate and detain ISIS fighters and facilitators in these operations.⁵⁵⁰ CJTF-OIR’s assessments of SDF capabilities only apply to the SDF

operating inside the ESSA and near the Tanf Garrison, as CJTF-OIR does not track SDF activities outside these areas.⁵⁵¹

The SDF remained capable of clearing and holding terrain in northeastern Syria, according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁵² While the SDF maintains bases east of the Euphrates River, SDF leaders did not direct units to conduct any clearance operations this quarter. CJTF-OIR reported that partnered operations include raids against specific named objectives.⁵⁵³

CJTF-OIR stated that perimeter security at SDF detention facilities within the ESSA is more robust than internal security, which CJTF-OIR characterized as “poor.”⁵⁵⁴ CJTF-OIR provided the DoD OIG with a more detailed assessment of the SDF’s management of detention facilities this quarter; however, this assessment is not publicly releasable.⁵⁵⁵ CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF experienced multiple detainee disturbances.⁵⁵⁶ According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF demonstrated an ability to contain detainee disturbances and restore order at these facilities.⁵⁵⁷ After the SDF quelled riots at a detention facility in early May, Lieutenant General White, characterized the SDF’s response as “absolutely professional.”⁵⁵⁸

According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF’s intelligence collection, analysis, and targeting capabilities, which it characterizes as “moderate,” remained stable this quarter.⁵⁵⁹ The

Green Berets and their partner force, the Mughawir al-Thawra, conduct a joint patrol mission near the Tanf Garrison, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)



SDF are “good at gathering intelligence but poor at analyzing it for exploitation purposes,” according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁶⁰ Last quarter the SDF began conducting unilateral operations that show an increased collection, analysis, and targeting capability.⁵⁶¹ CJTF-OIR, citing classification concerns, was unable to provide a publicly releasable description of these operations.⁵⁶²

Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF organizational structure poses challenges in integration between intelligence collection and operations.⁵⁶³ This quarter, CJTF-OIR clarified that despite intelligence gathering being one of the SDF’s strengths, “the hierarchical nature” of the SDF’s organization structure hinders its ability to translate intelligence into meaningful operational planning.⁵⁶⁴

The SDF was very proactive in conducting information operations this quarter, according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁶⁵ The degree to which the SDF held sway over the population in northeastern Syria is unclear. However, CJTF-OIR noted that SOJTF-OIR research indicates that a majority of the Syrian population does not trust ISIS propaganda or believe the group is capable of a resurgence.⁵⁶⁶

CJTF-OIR Clarifies Desired End-strengths for Select Partner Forces in Syria

The InSF provides internal security and accomplishes counterterrorism tasks in Syria, while the PRISF is a standing guard force.⁵⁶⁷

The InSF includes three elements manned at different levels. The Hzen Anti-Terror (HAT) is a paramilitary counterterrorism force that routinely conducts partnered counter-ISIS operations with Coalition forces, but can also conduct counterterrorism and detention operations unilaterally. CJTF-OIR reported that the HAT numbers roughly 250 personnel against a wider requirement for 800 personnel.⁵⁶⁸ The InSF also includes forces that conduct routine policing tasks and activities such as controlling traffic and staffing checkpoints. These forces number roughly 11,200 against an end-strength requirement for 28,200, according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁶⁹ Internal Security Forces—General Security is a highly specialized unit that conducts human intelligence and reconnaissance. The unit, which numbers roughly 1,000 personnel, has “proven instrumental” as an indigenous intelligence force that drives the tempo of many SDF operations, according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁷⁰

The PRISF also includes three elements. Border security forces, located throughout northeastern Syria, undertake a broad range of border security tasks to deter, amongst other activities, ISIS movement of fighters and material. According to CJTF-OIR, the desired end-strength for these forces is approximately 22,000.⁵⁷¹ The critical petroleum infrastructure security forces protect sites throughout northeastern Syria and will number 2,200 once fully-manned and trained, according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁷² The prison security force, numbering some 1,200 personnel, provides security at detention facilities in northeastern Syria that hold ISIS fighters.⁵⁷³

CJTF-OIR Pauses Training of SDF, Other Support Continues

CJTF-OIR reported that it paused all formal training in the ESSA due to COVID-19.⁵⁷⁴ CJTF-OIR is conducting partner force assessment in lieu of formal training, which will resume when safe to do so.⁵⁷⁵ According to CJTF-OIR, Coalition forces continued advising and assisting the SDF. In so doing, Coalition personnel employed social distancing and PPE, and remodeled operational facilities to reduce the risk of infection while planning and monitoring operations.⁵⁷⁶ Additionally, at the start of the pandemic, CJTF-OIR provided a written COVID-19 Preparation and Response Plan to the SDF, as well as short training videos covering infection prevention and control.⁵⁷⁷ Coalition forces plan to provide the SDF with water, sanitation, and hygiene training in the future, according to CJTF-OIR.⁵⁷⁸

Coalition forces continued assisting the SDF in repairing and renovating detention facilities to improve security in the near-term until the parties find a long-term, sustainable solution.⁵⁷⁹ For example, Lieutenant General White stated that there are “some improvements that need to be made to [detention] facilities, and we are offering to figure out how to get them security cameras.”⁵⁸⁰ He also said that CJTF-OIR equipped SDF personnel at detention facilities with riot gear, provided training, and supplied hygiene and medical materials.⁵⁸¹ A CJTF-OIR spokesperson told the press that CJTF-OIR used \$1.2 million from the CTEF to provide the SDF with surgical kits, defibrillators and oximeters, as well as protective gear for prison guards.⁵⁸² A CJTF-OIR press release said these divestments “help protect the SDF as they hold ISIS detainees and protect the public.”⁵⁸³ CJTF-OIR reported that the divestments improve the SDF’s ability to contain ISIS.⁵⁸⁴

CJTF-OIR is conducting partner force assessment in lieu of formal training, which will resume when safe to do so.

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN SYRIA

Turkish Forces Clash with YPG Elements in Northeast Syria Border Region

USCENTCOM reported that Turkey continues to maintain a presence in the region where it launched the October 2019 incursion.⁵⁸⁵ However, there have been minimal operations by Turkey this quarter, likely due to Turkey’s operation in the western Idlib province, followed by COVID-19 lockdowns.⁵⁸⁶

The DIA reported that Turkey continues to try to remove YPG elements from the Syria-Turkey border, while also providing aid to the Syrian population in Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain, the major cities in the incursion area.⁵⁸⁷ The DIA reported that the Turkish government makes no distinction between the YPG or the SDF and the PKK, which has waged a longstanding violent insurgency inside Turkey. The DIA said that Turkey considers them all terrorist organizations that present an existential threat.⁵⁸⁸

The DIA reported that in northeastern Syria, Turkish military forces have captured or killed YPG members who attempt to enter the zone of the incursion, where Turkish-trained Syrian police forces, in conjunction with Turkish Armed Forces, provide internal security.⁵⁸⁹

However, the SDF said that Turkish assertions about SDF or YPG in the Turkish incursion zone were “unfounded,” and the SDF remained fully committed to its obligations under agreements to remove its forces from those areas.⁵⁹⁰ The SDF said that nonetheless, Turkish forces have continued firing artillery and mortars into the region and Turkish-supported opposition forces continue to operate in those areas, sabotaging infrastructure and harming civilians.⁵⁹¹

The DIA, citing a May 25 statement by the Turkish Defense Minister, said that the Turkish government claimed to have eliminated 1,458 “terrorists” in Iraq and Syria during the last 12 months.⁵⁹² It did not clarify who these “terrorists” were.

The DoS PRM reported that due to COVID-19 mitigation measures, such as border closures and movement restrictions inside Syria, there was little to no population movement during the quarter. PRM is not aware of any actions by Turkey during the quarter to move refugees into northeast Syria.⁵⁹³

The DIA said that as of late February, approximately 70,000 people remained displaced by hostilities since October in northeastern Syria in the areas impacted by the Turkish incursion and 130,000 have returned to their areas of origin, according to the United Nations.⁵⁹⁴ The DIA said it has not seen any indications that Turkey is preparing to renew or expand military operations in northeastern Syria against the YPG at this time.⁵⁹⁵

Iran and Affiliated Groups Remain a Persistent Threat to Coalition and Partner Forces in Syria

The DIA reported that Iranian-affiliated forces continue to monitor and develop contingency attack plans against U.S. forces in Syria. The DIA said that Iranian-affiliated forces probably retain the ability to attack U.S. interests and partners in Syria with little warning. The DIA assessed that Iran may also seek to retaliate against U.S. forces more broadly across the region in response to perceived support to strikes on Iranian-affiliated targets in the region and the ongoing “Maximum Pressure” Campaign.⁵⁹⁶

The DIA reported that Iranian personnel in Syria are responding to the natural shift in battlefield priorities as active conflict areas decrease and Iran begins to prepare for its post-conflict presence, but the overall Iranian strategic objectives in Syria remain unchanged. Over the last year, Iran has made some tactical shifts to its force disposition in Syria following adversary strikes on Iranian targets, including possibly shifting some logistics equipment and personnel away from Damascus. The DIA stated that Iranian officials may be concerned that the perceived impact of strikes so close to the capital may create tension with the Syrian regime.⁵⁹⁷

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

DoS: Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act and U.S. Sanctions Increase Pressure on Regime, Supporters

The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, enacted in December 2019, targets individuals and businesses who support the Assad regime and obstruct a peaceful, political resolution of the conflict, according to the DoS. On June 17, the date on which public implementation of the sanctions could begin, the DoS and the U.S. Department of the Treasury released 39 designations under the Act and Executive Order 13894 against Bashar Assad and members of his family and immediate circle of associates. Secretary of State Pompeo said that “we anticipate many more sanctions,” and that the sanctions would continue until the Assad regime agrees to a political solution to the conflict in accordance with UNSCR 2254.⁵⁹⁸ The DoS also reported that U.S. economic sanctions against Russian and Iranian entities severed their access to the financial system and serve as a warning to those considering supporting the regime’s war effort.⁵⁹⁹

This quarter, the Assad regime agreed to a third meeting of the Constitutional Committee as part of the UN-guided, Syrian-led process called for in UNSCR 2254, though it is unclear if there has been any progress on agreeing to terms of a settlement.⁶⁰⁰

The SNES expressed concern in press interviews about the indirect impact of the Caesar Act sanctions against the Syrian regime announced by the United States in June. The U.S. Government has, however, broad sanctions exemptions for humanitarian assistance, food, and medicine, which allow these items to reach Syrians through Syria. Although the SNES itself expected to be exempt from sanctions, as the sanctions target the Assad regime’s Damascus-based economy, an SNES leader said he feared that an expected weakening of the Syrian economy would make conditions even more difficult for its residents, who trade with regime-held Syrian territory and use the Syrian pound, which is dropping in value. This decline in the Syrian pound is predominately due to the Lebanese economic crisis and the Assad regime’s corruption and gross mismanagement of the Syrian economy.⁶⁰¹

Administration Yet to Report the Identity of a Senior U.S. Official to Coordinate on Matters Relating to the SDF’s ISIS Detainees

In section 1224 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2020, Congress directed the President to determine and report within 60 days of the date of enactment of the law (December 20, 2019) “whether a senior-level coordinator exists on all matters for the United States Government relating to ISIS members who are in SDF custody,” and that if such a coordinator could not be identified, to designate an existing official to serve as such a coordinator. The law also requires the coordinator to submit a first annual report to Congress on matters relating to ISIS members in SDF custody and on related issues within 180 days of the date of enactment of the law. Among the matters to be covered in the report are efforts to arrange for the prosecution of ISIS members.⁶⁰²

The DoS also reported that U.S. economic sanctions against Russian and Iranian entities severed their access to the financial system and serve as a warning to those considering supporting the regime’s war effort.

This quarter, the DoS said it remained concerned by reports that Turkish-supported opposition groups may have violated the law of armed conflict or abused human rights in northeast Syria.

The initial report, which was due to Congress on February 18, 2020, was in the final review process within the DoS as of the publication of this Lead IG report. If approved, “the National Security Council will submit the final version to Congress,” the DoS said. As of this writing, the first annual report which was due to Congress in mid-June, is also being prepared, the DoS said.⁶⁰³

Concerns Over TSO Alleged Violations Remain

This quarter, the DoS said it remained concerned by reports that Turkish-supported opposition groups (TSO) may have violated the law of armed conflict or abused human rights in northeast Syria.⁶⁰⁴ The DoS said it received multiple reports of TSO abuses in the Turkish incursion area this quarter, among them “arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, seizure of and resettlement of new populations in private properties, the repeated and deliberate shutting off of water access to half a million civilians, and transfer of arbitrarily-detained Syrians across an international border into Turkey.”⁶⁰⁵ The DoS continued to raise these alleged violations with Turkey and to press for credible and transparent investigation of the allegations and for those responsible to be held accountable.⁶⁰⁶ The United States has not sanctioned any TSOs in response, although the Executive Order on Syria-related Sanctions provides authority to do so if certain criteria are met, according to the DoS.⁶⁰⁷

The DoS also stated its concern regarding reports of human rights abuses in Afrin, including desecration of several Yezidi shrines, kidnapping for ransom of Yezidi and Kurdish women, and looting and vandalizing of homes and archaeological sites. The DoS told DoS OIG that “as we do not have a presence on the ground, we are not in the position to confirm these reports but many appear to be credible.”⁶⁰⁸

The DoS said it raised the issue of alleged human rights violations or abuses and violations of international humanitarian law with officials at high levels of the Turkish government: “We have reiterated our expectation that Turkey, and the Syrian opposition, investigate alleged violations and abuses and promote accountability where appropriate.”⁶⁰⁹

Syrian Interim Government and Turkish Government Take No Credible Action to Hold TSOs Accountable

During the quarter, the DoS said it had no evidence that the Syrian Interim Government has consistently arrested, prosecuted, or otherwise held accountable any TSO members implicated in human rights abuses or violations of the law of armed conflict. To date, the DoS said that the Syrian Interim Government had imprisoned only one 19-year-old fighter for a series of high-profile abuses.⁶¹⁰

According to the DoS, Turkish officials have said they take these allegations seriously and are supporting the Syrian Interim Government’s investigations into these actions. However, human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Syrians for Truth and Justice, the Violations Documentation Center, and the UN Commission on Inquiry, continue to report that TSOs operate with relative impunity and express a lack of confidence in the Syrian Interim Government’s accountability efforts to date.⁶¹¹

The DoS also reported that several of the armed groups fighting the Syrian regime in Idlib are U.S.-designated terrorist organizations, among them the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/Al-Nusra Front, Hurras al-Din, and the Turkistan Islamic Party.⁶¹²

Report Finds YPG Recruits Child Soldiers

The annual report on Trafficking in Persons, issued by the DoS on June 25, notes that the SDF's Kurdish components have recruited children into their ranks from displacement camps in northeastern Syria. The report states that in June 2019 the SDF "took steps to end the recruitment and use of children and demobilize children within SDF ranks after adopting a UNSCR-mandated action plan."⁶¹³ Considerable additional detail on the SDF's actions to end the use of child soldiers subject was provided in the DoS Country Report on Human Rights Conditions section for Syria for 2019, issued in March 2020, but the report also notes allegations that children were still being forcibly conscripted and that at least one 14-year-old boy was killed in the fighting in Baghouz in early 2019.⁶¹⁴ Each year's edition of the DoS Country Reports on Human Rights Practices since 2014 have contained similar promises by Kurdish entities partnered with the United States to end the use of child soldiers, and each report notes that their use apparently continued.⁶¹⁵

The DoS Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs/Office of Levant Affairs (NEA/LEV) reported that "every time we have heard of individual cases of recruitment under the age of 18" the issue was raised to the SDF command for resolution, and that they assessed "this issue is limited more to the YPG rather than the SDF or internal security forces as a whole."⁶¹⁶

STABILIZATION

This quarter the DoS Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs/Office of Assistance Coordination (NEA/AC) said that due to the security situation in northeast Syria, DoS and USAID Syria Transition Assistance Response Team (START)-Forward personnel remain outside Syria. The DoS and USAID withdrew the team after the Turkish incursion in October 2019. However, DoS NEA/AC and USAID staff with START and the Jordan-based Southern Syria Assistance Platform continued to manage and oversee stabilization and humanitarian assistance programming from the United States and U.S. embassies in the region, and said that no programs or efforts have been slowed due to the redeployment of START-Forward.⁶¹⁷

Stabilization Programs Paused Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The DoS NEA/AC said that due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19, some activities were paused this quarter, following the guidance of local health officials.⁶¹⁸ Other programs, such as train-the-trainer, were held remotely and some community security programs continued with risk mitigation measures in place. Some educational programs used distance-learning platforms instead of physical classrooms, but these efforts were hampered by limited Internet access.⁶¹⁹

In northeast Syria, the governance program staff worked with local councils to continue essential services activities. The implementing partners procured personal protective equipment locally to protect staff in the field delivering these services. The NEA/AC said that all in-person training and mentoring was paused and that these activities would

The annual report on Trafficking in Persons, issued by the DoS on June 25, notes that the SDF's Kurdish components have recruited children into their ranks from displacement camps in northeastern Syria.

resume once conditions allow. Another NEA/AC program, Facilitating Urban Recover and Transition, helped build the capacity of local councils in liberated areas of Syria to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the NEA/AC. Program staff worked remotely with local councils to assist with the development of new projects and provide guidance on current council activities.⁶²⁰

USAID Continues to Raise Lack of Stabilization Funding as Major Impediment

USAID Middle East Bureau reported continued concern regarding uncertainty of U.S. Government funding for stabilization efforts in Syria. With foreign donor funds nearly expended, and the March 2018 Presidential funding freeze still in place for Syria stabilization efforts, USAID reported that programming has decelerated pending additional resources. Opportunities for U.S. engagement in needed stabilization activities are at times impossible due to lack of funding. For example, USAID reported that it explored funding possible mitigation measures to the Allouk water station, including rehabilitation of the Suwar Canal to Hasakah pipeline. However, this project would require approximately \$20 million to repair or replace the pumping stations and pipes, which exceeds USAID's FY 2019 total budget of \$14 million for stabilization activities in Syria.⁶²¹ USAID Middle East Bureau reported that the \$14 million has already been allocated to sustain existing projects throughout northeastern Syria.⁶²²

Stabilization Activity Concentrates Mostly in Raqqah and Dayr az Zawr Provinces

According to an activity tracker spreadsheet furnished to the DoS OIG by the DoS, stabilization efforts were overwhelmingly concentrated in Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah provinces this quarter. In Dayr az Zawr, 12 programs were active in the education, "governance capacity," waste management, and water sectors, dealing with specific matters such as remedial education, teacher training, and winterization. According to the tracker, in Raqqah province, 15 programs were active in sectors including civil society and advocacy, economic growth/livelihoods, education, and governance capacity. Programs included light rehabilitation, remedial education, and community outreach. Stating that public release of detailed data could pose a serious security risk to implementation partners, the DoS did not permit the DoS OIG to disclose to the public details of the amounts obligated for individual activities, implementing partners, and other related details. DoS NEA/AC reported that the "topline number for U.S. Government and foreign donor money programmed in northeast Syria through State Department and USAID mechanisms (including overhead) is approximately \$350 million."⁶²³

Turkish Incursion Continues to Affect Stabilization Activities

This quarter, START civil society partners in Raqqah and Tabqa reported that the October 2019 Turkish incursion and subsequent withdrawal of Coalition forces to the ESSA continues to hinder projects in Turkish-controlled areas, but is no longer inhibiting stabilization projects in non-Turkish controlled areas outside the ESSA.⁶²⁴ Since the October 2019 Turkish incursion, DoS stabilization partners discontinued large infrastructure projects

outside of the ESSA due to funding limitations. However, they have continued stabilization activities that support livelihoods, operational costs for certain essential services, civil society activities, and capacity building in Raqqah, Tabqa, and western Dayr az Zawr.⁶²⁵

\$50 Million in White House Funding Allocated for Syria's Religious and Ethnic Minorities

In October, President Trump announced funding for vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities in Syria.⁶²⁶ In March, the DoS and USAID notified Congress of the \$50 million in FY 2019 funding for Syria stabilization, with a focus on protecting members of persecuted religious and ethnic minorities and advancing human rights and accountability.⁶²⁷ The DoS received \$33.5 million; USAID received \$16.5 million; and the White House separately announced \$4.5 million for the Syria Civil Defense. The DoS NEA/AC reported that the DoS and USAID began obligating this funding onto awards in April and May, and expects to continue programming it to meet its stabilization objectives and support accountability efforts and religious and ethnic minority communities.⁶²⁸

According to the DoS, this funding is intended to protect persecuted members of ethnic and religious minority groups, advance human rights, and support accountability and stabilization in Syria. The funding supports the collection, compilation, and analysis of human rights abuses committed by ISIS and the Syrian regime to use in future or existing justice efforts. The DoS reported that this funding will assist Syrian human rights defenders, civil society activists, and ethnic and religious minority victims of the conflict.⁶²⁹

USAID reported that minority activities will restore essential services; rehabilitate infrastructure; strengthen minority participation in governance and civil society; restore economic activity, particularly for those displaced by the Turkish incursion, and expand education, vocational training, and health care. Funding will also provide oversight and program support.⁶³⁰ According to USAID, based on the crises of the moment, there are two primary essential services needs: strengthening health systems (based on gaps made more apparent by COVID-19), and livelihoods and economic activity (as the value of the Syrian pound continues to drop under the pressure quarantines, corruption, and economic mismanagement by the Syrian government).⁶³¹

USAID reported to USAID OIG that to ensure programs could start as quickly as possible, resources will flow through existing mechanisms. USAID reported that it is currently assessing and prioritizing projects, vetting partners, and finalizing details of awards, and that projects will take place in Raqqah, Dayr az Zawr, and Hasakah provinces.⁶³²

According to USAID, minority communities in northeast Syria are not geographically distinct; they are blended into larger multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian communities. Therefore, USAID will use these funds to help locate minority communities that suffered persecution along with the diverse communities that host them.⁶³³

The funding supports the collection, compilation, and analysis of human rights abuses committed by ISIS and the Syrian regime to use in future or existing justice efforts.

According to USAID BHA, this quarter, the most prominent humanitarian problems in Syria included a fragile but holding ceasefire in Idlib; uncertainty regarding the continuity of UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to northern Syria; and the emergence of COVID-19.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

According to USAID BHA, this quarter, the most prominent humanitarian problems in Syria included a fragile but holding ceasefire in Idlib; uncertainty regarding the continuity of UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to northern Syria; and the emergence of COVID-19.⁶³⁴ According to the DoS, the global economic fallout from COVID-19 has reverberated in Syria, as the country experiences its worst economic crisis since the beginning of the war nearly a decade ago.⁶³⁵ These new challenges exacerbate the already fragile human security of the 11.1 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance.⁶³⁶

Idlib Ceasefire Allows Syrians to Return Home

The March 6 ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey has largely held. Under the agreement, the governments of Russia and Turkey agreed to cease all military actions in the Idlib area and conduct joint patrols.⁶³⁷ Amidst an improvement in security conditions, approximately 182,000 Syrians displaced since December have returned to their areas of origin in northwest Syria.⁶³⁸ However, on June 8, Russian and Syrian regime airstrikes hit several villages in southern Idlib and northern Hamah provinces, representing the first recorded instance of airstrikes since the ceasefire was instated.⁶³⁹ Russia claimed that its air strikes in the ceasefire zone were in response to provocations by the extremist group Hurras al-Din.⁶⁴⁰ According to USAID, Turkey persists in reinforcing its positions in Idlib even as joint Russian-Turkish patrols continue.⁶⁴¹ Despite the gradual escalation in hostilities, media reporting has indicated that the ceasefire largely remains intact.⁶⁴²

Russia Opposes Renewal of Security Council Resolution

Since 2014, the UN Security Council has authorized UN aid deliveries into opposition held areas through four designated border crossings—the Bab al-Salaam and Bab al-Hawa crossings with Turkey, the Yaroubia crossing with Iraq, and the Ramtha crossing with Jordan.⁶⁴³ In January, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 2504, which authorized continued UN aid deliveries via the Bab al-Salaam and Bab al-Hawa crossings for 6 months, but closed the Yaroubia and Ramtha border crossings.⁶⁴⁴ The resolution demands that all parties allow “safe, unimpeded and sustained access for United Nations’ and their implementing partners’ humanitarian convoys,” including across conflict lines and across borders.⁶⁴⁵

UNSCR 2504 limited access only to the two crossings with Turkey, and only for 6 months. Ultimately, the Russian and Chinese governments both used their veto power to compel a dramatic reduction in humanitarian assistance in Syria.⁶⁴⁶ After five rounds of voting over the course of the week leading up to the July 10 expiration of UNSCR 2504, including efforts to re-authorize the Yaroubia crossing that had been closed since January, the UNSC voted on July 11 to renew only one of the humanitarian access points: the Bab al-Hawa crossing from southern Turkey into northern Syria, for 12 months.⁶⁴⁷ While severely compromising the United Nations’ ability to meet the humanitarian needs in both northwest and northeast Syria, the vote was ultimately seen as positive as it extended cross-border access for a full year, and preserved the primary crossing point for humanitarian aid into Syria.⁶⁴⁸

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft stated, “. . .this resolution is not what the United States and a majority of this Council fought for. This resolution is also not what the United Nations, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and dozens of NGOs operating in Syria have repeatedly urged this Council to do.”⁶⁴⁹

Since 2017, UNSCR 2165 has increasingly come under scrutiny by Russia and China, resulting in added qualifications, reduced renewal periods, and crossing closures.⁶⁵⁰ According to USAID, the failure to reauthorize the Yaroubia crossing for a second time is particularly worrisome amidst concerns of COVID-19 spreading throughout Syria. USAID reported that the border crossing from Rabia, Iraq, to Yaroubia in northeast Syria was mainly used by the WHO to supply the region with medical aid.⁶⁵¹ The DoS reported that the loss of the Yaroubia border crossing has become even more critical due to the increased need for specialized medical equipment to combat COVID-19. According to the DoS, NGOs are unable to procure and transport the amount and types of medical supplies that WHO could bring into northeast Syria through Yaroubia.⁶⁵²

On May 15, the UN Secretary-general released a report detailing the impact of the loss of the Yaroubia border crossing, noting that the Syrian regime has approved less than half of cross-border delivery requests, and most of those shipments have gone to regime-controlled areas of northeast Syria. One of the WHO consignments to the northeast included PPE, intensive care unit beds, incubators, and seven ventilators; however, the majority of medical facilities that were previously supported by the cross-border operation were excluded from the distribution of this consignment.⁶⁵³

Ambassador Craft stated that the outcome of the vote “leaves us outraged at the loss of the Bab al-Salaam and Yaroubia border crossings. Behind those locked gates are millions of women, children, and men [whose] health and welfare are now at great risk.”⁶⁵⁴

Potential COVID-19 Outbreak Looms Despite Low Caseloads

According to the WHO, as of July 2, the Syrian regime’s Ministry of Health reported 312 cases of COVID-19 in Syrian government-controlled areas of the country, including 9 COVID-19-related deaths.⁶⁵⁵ According to the WHO, these small numbers of COVID-19 cases are partly due to Syria being less open to international travelers, but mainly a result of Syria’s low incidence of laboratory testing (33 per 100,000) and inadequate local surveillance capacities.⁶⁵⁶ USAID reported that the existence of separate COVID-19 surveillance mechanisms across Syria, varying by area of control, has created challenges in verifying and triangulating information on COVID-19 cases.⁶⁵⁷

Across Syria, COVID-19 testing capacity is limited by a lack of trained laboratory technicians, medical supplies, and testing facilities, health actors report. The United Nations has reiterated the need to coordinate and decentralize COVID-19 testing in Syria to accommodate more timely diagnosis of samples from a greater geographical range, particularly in northeast Syria, which faces a significant delay in COVID-19 test results.⁶⁵⁸

According to USAID, this has not impeded humanitarian assistance but does present challenges in terms of determining broader response priorities. However, the humanitarian community in Syria—led by the WHO—has developed a COVID-19 response plan based

312

Total Confirmed
COVID-19 Cases
in Syria

190

Active Cases

113

Recovered

9

Deaths

Note: Data does not include areas outside of Syrian government control.

Source: WHO and the Syrian Ministry of Health.

on years of navigating the existing health infrastructure, assessed humanitarian needs, population concentration, and shared technical expertise.⁶⁵⁹ USAID reported that surveillance is one activity among many when it comes to mitigation and response efforts for any communicable disease.⁶⁶⁰ Health NGOs continue to work to decentralize COVID-19 testing by establishing testing capacity in all provinces in Syria.⁶⁶¹

According to the DoS, PRM's humanitarian partners were forced to change the way they provided humanitarian services as part of the effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the IDP camps. The DoS reported that humanitarian partners maintained all life-saving services, including food and water distributions, but were otherwise forced to suspend most group activities and other face-to-face interactions, including education and protection activities. The DoS reported that humanitarian partners also reduced staff numbers at the camps, increased the number of staff working remotely, and adjusted their programming to increase COVID-19 prevention awareness that included establishing protocols to improve hygiene awareness.⁶⁶²

Despite these challenges, USAID reported that it is in the process of programming an additional \$25 million—part of the more than \$775 million announced for global COVID-19 programming—to address humanitarian needs directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁶³ USAID reported to USAID OIG that more information about these activities will be available next quarter.⁶⁶⁴ The DoS provided \$6 million to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in Syria.⁶⁶⁵

According to the WHO, as of July 1, the WHO had provided the Syrian regime's Ministry of Health and health sector partners—including the United Nations, the Syrian Red Crescent, national institutions, and local NGOs—with essential supplies that are in high demand. To date, almost 1 million pieces of PPE for healthcare workers have been delivered, along with intensive care beds, and 27 ventilators.⁶⁶⁶

Syrian and Russian Destruction of Medical Facilities Worsens Ability to Respond to COVID-19

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Syrian and Russian government airstrikes have repeatedly struck hospitals throughout Syria.⁶⁶⁷ Physicians for Human Rights has corroborated 595 attacks on at least 350 separate medical facilities and documented the killing of 923 medical personnel. Of the total corroborated attacks, 536 were allegedly committed by Syrian government and allied forces (297 by Syrian government forces, 239 by either Russian or Syrian government forces), 34 by non-state armed groups (24 by opposition forces, 10 by ISIS), 4 by international coalition forces, and 21 by unknown forces.⁶⁶⁸ According to Human Rights Watch, airstrikes have displaced more than a million Syrians, who have been forced to live in tents or in the open without access to water, unable to practice precautionary hygiene or social distancing. In addition, high rates of these Syrians who are food insecure (9.3 million) and at greater risk of malnutrition and other disease outbreaks, are less likely to recover if they contract COVID-19.⁶⁶⁹

Economic Crisis Exacerbates Food Insecurity

According to USAID, the rapid inflation that Syria was experiencing before the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified.⁶⁷⁰ The value of the Syrian pound has fallen to less than half of its pre-COVID-19 value due to the economic disruptions associated with the ongoing conflict and capital controls in Lebanon limiting Syrians' access to foreign currency.⁶⁷¹ Food prices, already rising before the pandemic, continue to spike, compounded by the Syrian regime's moves to limit subsidized food due to shortages. Prices for medicines also increased—as much as 30 percent in less than a week—as the rapidly depreciating Syrian pound led to higher import prices and forced the regime to raise prices on domestically produced medicines to reflect rising costs of production.⁶⁷² According to USAID, rising costs impacted relief operations as well, particularly those providing material assistance. For example, one stabilization project providing sheep and feed to vulnerable households cut the number of livestock distributed per household due to rising costs of domestically sourced sheep.⁶⁷³

According to a June study conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the economic crisis has had a devastating impact on Syrian's jobs and income. Almost 90 percent of households surveyed reported losing employment or revenue in past months, with 70 percent having no savings.⁶⁷⁴

According to USAID, food security and nutrition partners have monitored an increase in malnutrition and food insecurity in Syria, a result of sporadic hostilities; the depreciation of the Syrian pound; and rapidly increasing food prices.⁶⁷⁵ These trends are compounded by COVID-19 response and mitigation measures, including panic buying in markets and government-imposed movement restrictions, USAID implementer the WFP reports. As of April 2020, an estimated 9.3 million people in Syria were food-insecure—an increase of 1.4 million people in the past 6 months, compared to approximately 7.9 million people in late 2019. The WFP estimates that an additional 2.2 million people are at risk of food insecurity.⁶⁷⁶

With the support of USAID and other donors, WFP reached approximately 5 million people with emergency food assistance across Syria's 14 provinces during April, delivering more than 68,600 metric tons of food assistance. Approximately 30 percent of assistance—sufficient to meet the needs of approximately 1.5 million people—was delivered through the cross-border operation from Turkey to areas of Aleppo and Idlib not accessible from inside Syria. The WFP included soap in food assistance distributions during April to support handwashing and safe hygiene as part of the COVID-19 response in collaboration with UNICEF. According to USAID, UNICEF also dispatched nutrition products for the prevention of acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, sufficient to support approximately 168,700 children and pregnant and lactating women across 11 provinces in April.⁶⁷⁷

Almost 90 percent of households surveyed reported losing employment or revenue in past months, with 70 percent having no savings to tide themselves over.

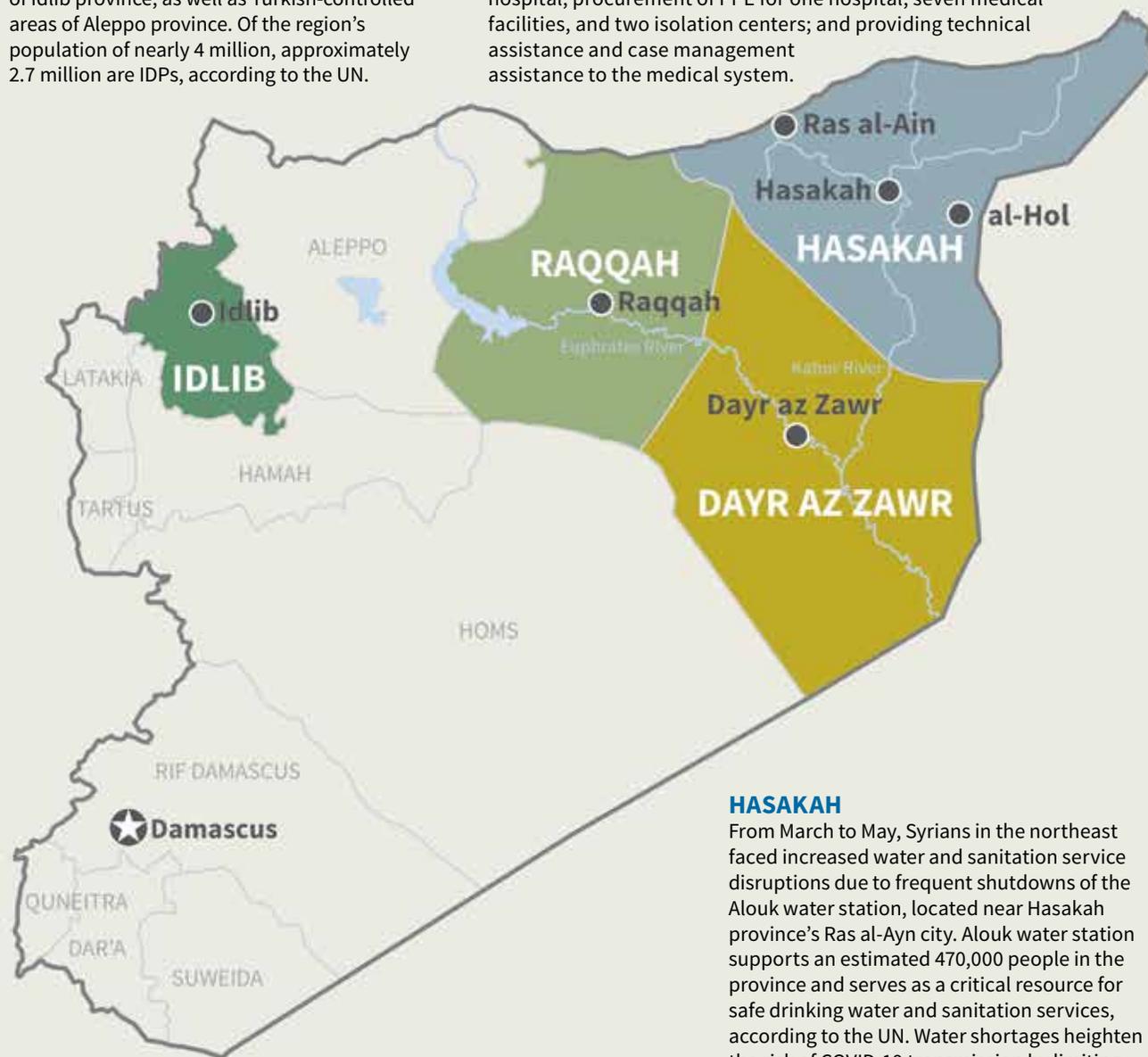
SYRIA: QUARTERLY FOCUS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

IDLIB

As of late May, an estimated 780,000 of the 961,000 people displaced by hostilities between December and the March ceasefire remained displaced, primarily in the northernmost areas of Idlib province, as well as Turkish-controlled areas of Aleppo province. Of the region's population of nearly 4 million, approximately 2.7 million are IDPs, according to the UN.

RAQQAH

USAID reported that the Syria Recovery Trust Fund will provide emergency COVID-19 medical assistance in Raqqah province including establishing two community isolation centers with a 50-bed capacity; providing triage facilities to a hospital; creating isolation areas within a hospital; procurement of PPE for one hospital, seven medical facilities, and two isolation centers; and providing technical assistance and case management assistance to the medical system.



DAYR AZ ZAWR

An Atlantic Council study on Russian-provided humanitarian assistance in Syria found that from November 2018 to October 2019, more than half of Russia's 443 humanitarian assistance missions in Syria were focused around Dayr az Zawr City. The study argued that focusing assistance in this area is an effort by the Russian government to undermine U.S. military efforts in the region.

HASAKAH

From March to May, Syrians in the northeast faced increased water and sanitation service disruptions due to frequent shutdowns of the Alouk water station, located near Hasakah province's Ras al-Ayn city. Alouk water station supports an estimated 470,000 people in the province and serves as a critical resource for safe drinking water and sanitation services, according to the UN. Water shortages heighten the risk of COVID-19 transmission by limiting handwashing and sanitation activities.

Sources: USAID BHA, USAID ME Bureau, The Economist, The Atlantic Council, UNHCR

SUPPORT TO MISSION

Embassy Ordered Departure Continues

Under threat of rocket attacks, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center have implemented curfews. After designated hours, outdoor movements must be for mission-critical reasons, and personnel must wear personal protective gear. The DoS also approved ordered departure status for Mission Iraq on March 25, because of security conditions and health precautions related to COVID-19.⁶⁷⁸ Ordered departure status means specific staff “are ordered to leave for a designated safe haven. Some staff designated by the Chief of Mission to be critical for ongoing operations must remain at the post.”⁶⁷⁹ The current ordered departure expires on July 22. The embassy was already operating with minimum staffing when it went on ordered departure, and it is constantly evaluating procedures and operations in light of these threats, reported the DoS. Direct-hire personnel who were away from post on ordered departure, and more recently locally employed staff not permitted on the compound, have begun to telework. The embassy has postponed some critical work functions, including most visa services, until locally employed staff are expected to come back to the compound in mid-July.⁶⁸⁰

Under threat of rocket attacks, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center have implemented curfews.

DoS Implements COVID-19 Restrictions in Iraq

The Iraqi government has taken several actions because of COVID-19, including suspending commercial flights into Iraqi airports, and instituting a 24-hour weekend curfew (Thursday-Saturday) and evening-hour curfews (6pm-5am) during the work week. Local Iraqi government agencies have limited their hours, making it more difficult to conduct diplomatic operations.⁶⁸¹

According to the DoS, Mission Iraq went into lockdown status the week before the ordered departure. Local staff and contractors have been kept off compounds and will remain off premises until mid-July. Many personnel are now teleworking, including some locally employed staff. Strict social distancing practices (for example, maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from others, permitting only groups of less than 10 people), in addition to already strong hygiene and cleaning protocols, have been put in place. Management has reduced seating in the cafeteria and other eating areas and issued guidelines on keeping personal spaces clean. Mail delivery has continued, but the embassy continues to postpone some critical work functions until it can bring back local staff. Mission Iraq has put in place a protocol to move mission-critical staff between compounds as well as protocols for when staff returns from ordered departure and for dealing with potential COVID-19 cases. In compliance with DoS guidance, most visa services are closed. The embassy and consulate continue to provide limited emergency services, including repatriation assistance and arranging evacuation flights.⁶⁸²

Erbil New Consulate Compound Completion Date Changes

Construction of the Erbil New Consulate Compound has slowed. The Erbil-wide curfew that began in March continues to block access for most of the contractor's local workers, leaving approximately 20 percent of the workforce unable to reach the site. The Erbil airport closure has continued to prevent the return of some DoS Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations and contractor staff. The contractor's estimated substantial completion date was pushed to September 5, 2022, due in large part to COVID-19 and the local worker curfew that reduced man-hours worked in May by 50 percent compared to monthly pre-COVID levels.⁶⁸³

Foreign Military Financing Shifts Focus to Professionalization of the ISF

In response to a DoS OIG inquiry about Foreign Military Financing (FMF) transactions during the quarter, the DoS responded that FMF is used to support the long-term relationship with the ISF and is not intended for or used to support OIR.⁶⁸⁴ As the Lead IG reported in the OIR second quarter report for FY 2020, the embassy noted in response to an inquiry from the DoS OIG that the FMF and International Military Education and Training programs are part of a considerable U.S. strategic effort to build an effective, civilian-controlled, self-sustaining ISF. According to the DoS, paramount to this endeavor is professionalization, which entails an effort to increase the ISF's ability to sustain security investments made to date. Because counter-ISIS combat operations have transitioned to low-intensity operations, FY 2019 through 2022 FMF will be directed at:

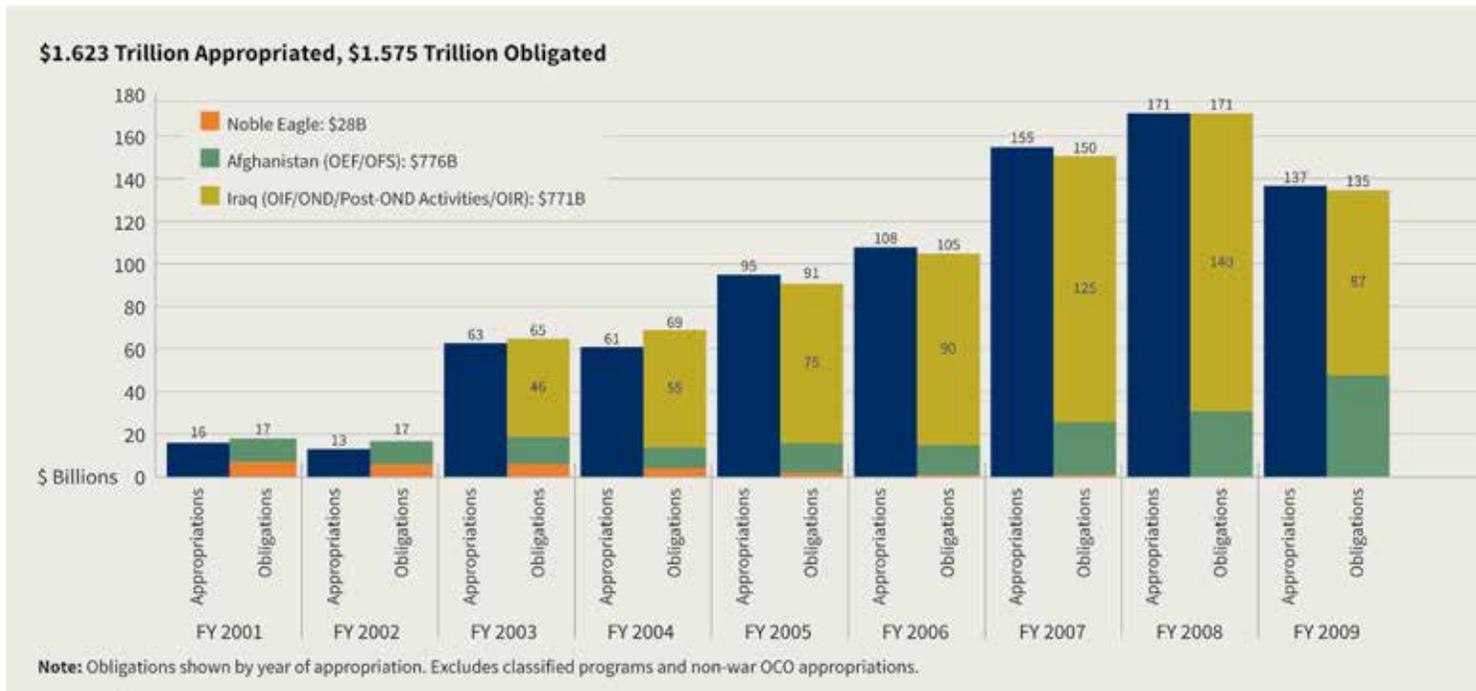
- Reducing dependence on contracted logistics services;
- Filling critical capability gaps;
- Providing professional military education;
- Upgrading and modernizing select combat systems;
- Replacing limited major combat systems after combat loss; and
- Building defense institutions and reforming the security sector.

Conventional Weapons Destruction

All conventional weapons destruction programming managed by the DoS Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM) in Iraq and Syria is coordinated with the START, the Special Representative for Syria Engagement, USAID Assistance Response Team, Syria Desk, Iraq Desk, NEA Assistance Coordination Office, and the Office of the Special Envoy for Countering ISIS (SECI). Future PM plans to increase funding for weapons destruction programming in areas of Iraq and Syria liberated from ISIS will depend largely on Department-wide policy guidance. PM actively participates in these discussions; however, the ability to scale programs up or down as well as identify appropriate mechanisms and resources will be driven by what NEA and SECI identify as being the broader goal (i.e., stabilization and humanitarian assistance) in both Iraq and Syria.

Figure 6.

Total DoD War-Related Appropriations and Obligations from September 11, 2001 through September 30, 2019



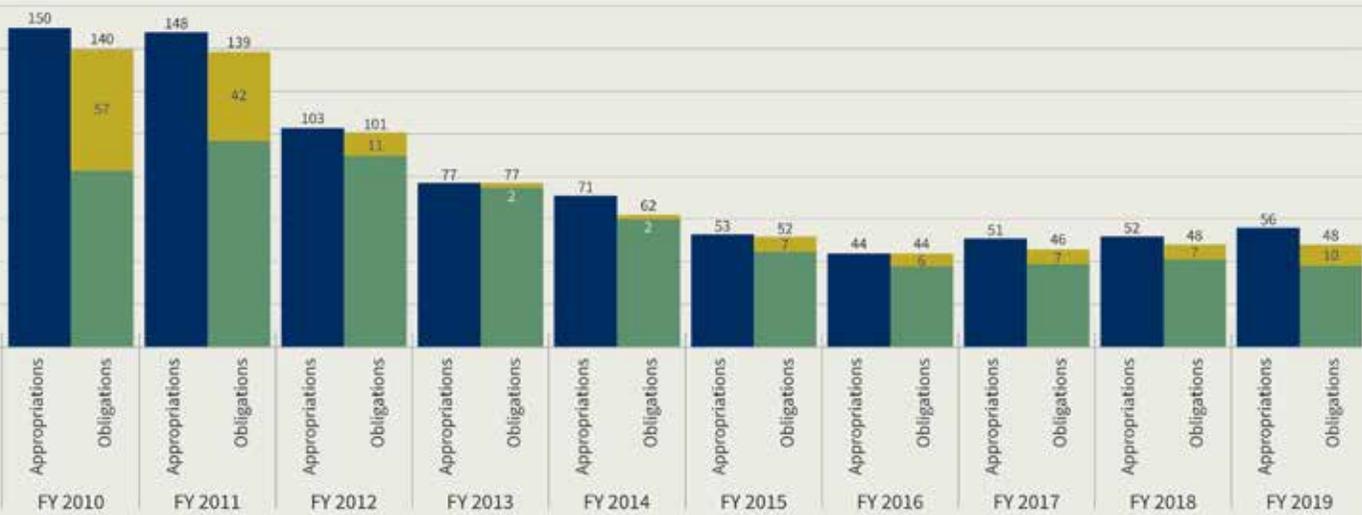
In addition to coordinated interagency efforts to advocate for additional funding, PM has received and encourages members of the Coalition to contribute to explosive remnants of war removal programs through PM implementing partners. The Office of the Special Envoy for the Coalition to Defeat ISIS continues to advocate for funding from Coalition partners.⁶⁸⁵

End Use Monitoring

During the quarter, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad reported that the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq continued end use monitoring activities albeit in an environment made more difficult by security-related movement restrictions and COVID-19 lockdown measures. Post could communicate only in writing or virtually in conducting inspections to ensure that the Iraqi government could account for major U.S.-origin defense equipment. The DoS has seen no reporting indicating any U.S. defense systems were improperly transferred or misused during the reporting period.⁶⁸⁶

FY 2020 Appropriations Supporting the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad

The following lists FY 2020 appropriations allocations made by the DoS to fund key operations and programs at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and Consulate General Erbil. The



Source: DoD Comptroller.

DoS reported that no FY 2020 appropriated funds had been allocated for the UN Assistance Mission Iraq. Funding for Diplomatic Engagement Iraq and Foreign Assistance includes:

- **\$744.4 million:** support Mission Iraq's ongoing security operations under the Worldwide Security Protection Overseas Contingency Operation funding;
- **\$104.0 million:** funds for diplomatic programs to support Enduring and OCO operations;
- **\$49.0 million:** funds support for fixed-wing aircraft service for Mission Iraq;
- **\$9.9 million:** embassy security, construction, and management;
- **\$150.0 million:** Economic Support Fund;
- **\$45.0 million:** Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs;
- **\$5.6 million:** International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement; and
- **\$1.0 million:** International Military Education and Training.⁶⁸⁷

In addition, the DoS plans to allocate an additional \$420 million of Worldwide Security Protection Security Assistance Funding to Mission Iraq for the replacement of Camp Condor, a housing complex for contractors providing support for the embassy. These funds will be transferred to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations for the actual execution of the construction project. The transfer will not occur until at least FY 2021, at which time the DoS will officially notify Congress of the transfer.⁶⁸⁸





A U.S. military working dog at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

Strategic Planning	84
Audit, Inspection, and Evaluation Activity	86
Investigations and Hotline Activity.....	97

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

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

STRATEGIC PLANNING

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

FY 2020 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan Activities

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

The FY 2020 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for Operation Inherent Resolve, effective October 1, 2019, organized OIR-related oversight projects into three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations and Security Cooperation; 2) Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development; and 3) Support to Mission. The strategic plan for OIR was included in the FY 2020 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations.

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

In May 2020, the Joint Planning Group held its 50th meeting, carried out virtually to accommodate participants because of coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) limitations. Vice Admiral James Malloy, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, spoke about the Navy's role in improving security and stability in the region, particularly in the Middle East area of operations.



**FY 2020
Comprehensive
Oversight Plan
for Overseas
Contingency
Operations**

Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

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

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

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

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

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

SUPPORT TO MISSION

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

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

AUDIT, INSPECTION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Lead IG agencies use dedicated, rotational, and temporary employees, as well as contractors, to conduct oversight projects, investigate fraud and corruption, and provide consolidated planning and reporting on the status of overseas contingency operations. Some oversight staff from the Lead IG agencies are stationed in offices in Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, and Germany. Oversight teams from these offices and from offices in the United States travel to Iraq, Kuwait, and other locations in the region to conduct fieldwork for their projects.

However, the COVID-19 global pandemic continued to affect the Lead IG agencies' ability to conduct oversight on projects related to overseas contingency operations. Due to the evacuation of many deployed staff and country-imposed travel restrictions, some oversight projects by Lead IG agencies have been delayed or deferred. For some projects, the scope of the work has been revised or narrowed. The Lead IG agencies reported that their personnel were able to conduct some work while teleworking and practicing social distancing.

Despite these restrictions and limitations, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed 12 reports related to OIR during the quarter. These reports examined various activities that support OIR, including the DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism's oversight and management of its foreign assistance programs, the DoS Global Engagement Center's management and monitoring of its Federal assistance awards, and financial accountability in humanitarian assistance programs. Lead IG partner agencies also issued reports related to internal controls and accounting for transportation of personnel and cash disbursements at Air Force installations supporting the OIR mission, and the Army's management of contracting support during contingency and expeditionary operations.

As of June 30, 2020, 26 projects related to OIR were ongoing and 13 projects related to OIR were planned.

Final Reports by Lead IG Agencies

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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

ISP-I-20-16; June 12, 2020

The DoS OIG inspected the executive direction, program and policy implementation, resource management, and information management operations of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland (Mission Geneva). Geneva is home to more than 100 UN-affiliated and other international organizations. The U.S. Government engages with these multilateral institutions through Mission Geneva. Among the international organizations based in Geneva are several—including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—through which the U.S. Government directs substantial portions of its humanitarian assistance funding for migrants, refugees, and others affected by conflicts in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. For example, the UNHCR works in Iraq and Syria to protect and assist refugees, displaced people and others affected by ongoing armed conflict.

Among other things, the DoS OIG found that the Charge d’Affaires and the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission led Mission Geneva in a professional and collegial manner; Mission Geneva and the DoS’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs did not have shared procedures for promoting and tracking U.S. citizen employment at Geneva-based UN and other international organizations; Mission Geneva had deficiencies in its procurement program, including unauthorized commitments and poor contract administration; and while Mission Geneva’s Information Management Office met customer needs, the Mission did not always carry out information security responsibilities, putting the DoS’s information systems at risk of compromise.

The DoS OIG made 20 recommendations—18 to Mission Geneva, 1 to the DoS Bureau of International Organization Affairs, and 1 to the DoS Bureau of Global Talent Management—to address the shortcomings identified in the report. Management agreed with the recommendations.

The DoS OIG also completed a classified annex to this report after the quarter ended, which was distributed to authorized recipients.

Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism’s Foreign Assistance Program Management

ISP-I-20-14; June 1, 2020

This report was among three issued based on an inspection of the DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau), which is discussed below (Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism; ISP-I-20-13).

During the DoS OIG’s inspection of the CT Bureau, the DoS OIG inspected CT Bureau’s management of its foreign assistance program. The CT Bureau leads the DoS’s efforts on international counterterrorism strategy, policy, and operations. The CT Bureau advances its efforts, in part, through its foreign assistance programs, which aim to strengthen partner countries’ capabilities to help achieve U.S. counterterrorism policy goals and objectives. The CT Bureau’s policy mandate includes areas such as terrorist detention and repatriation, countering violent extremism, and management of aspects of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. The CT Bureau managed more than \$384 million in foreign assistance funds during FY 2018, the most recently completed fiscal year as of the time the inspection.

The DoS OIG determined that the CT Bureau’s monitoring and evaluation framework did not fully comply with DoS standards because the CT Bureau had yet to develop performance management plans for 13 of its 15 major programs; the CT Bureau relied on third-party contractors to help with foreign assistance program oversight, and these contractors inappropriately performed inherently governmental functions in some instances; the CT Bureau’s Federal assistance award files did not always include documentation to show whether a recipient performed the award in accordance with the statement of work; and the CT Bureau returned \$51.9 million in expired and canceled funds from FYs 2016 to 2019, partly as a result of weaknesses in its oversight and management of foreign assistance awards.

The DoS OIG made seven recommendations to the CT Bureau to resolve the management weaknesses and gaps identified in the inspection. Management agreed with the recommendations.

The third report associated with this inspection was a classified annex distributed to authorized recipients on May 4, 2020.

Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism

ISP-I-20-13; May 7, 2020

The DoS OIG inspected the DoS CT Bureau's executive direction, policy and program management, administrative operations, and information management and information security activities. The CT Bureau leads the DoS's efforts on international counterterrorism strategy, policy, and operations. The CT Bureau is responsible for a complex set of policies and programs ranging from international information sharing to foreign assistance programs. The CT Bureau's policy mandate includes areas such as terrorist detention and repatriation, countering violent extremism, and management of aspects of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

This report is a companion report to the DoS OIG Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism's Foreign Assistance Program Management (ISP-I20-14, discussed above). The DoS OIG determined that the CT Bureau established effective internal policy coordination and communication processes; the head of the CT Bureau spearheaded interagency efforts to increase the pace and number of terrorist designations in 2018, which resulted in more than 50 designation packages being completed; employees from other DoS bureaus and Federal agencies expressed differing opinions about the CT Bureau's effectiveness in promoting its policy goals in interagency processes; the CT Bureau did not provide sufficient policy guidance, training, and administrative support to overseas employees who are responsible for coordinating and reporting on regional counterterrorism issues; and the CT Bureau's statutorily mandated annual Country Reports on Terrorism—the CT Bureau's flagship product, on which Congress, the media, and the public rely as an authoritative statement of terrorist incidents worldwide—were submitted late in seven of eight instances reviewed during the inspection.

The DoS OIG made 11 recommendations to the CT Bureau to address the deficiencies identified in the report. Management agreed with the recommendations.

Audit of Global Engagement Center Federal Assistance Award Management and Monitoring

AUD-MERO-20-26; April 22, 2020

The DoS OIG conducted this audit to determine whether Federal assistance awards provided by the DoS Global Engagement Center (GEC) aligned with the GEC's statutory mandate and authority and whether the GEC monitored those awards in accordance with Federal requirements, DoS policies and guidance, and the terms and conditions of each award. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2017 mandated that the GEC "lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the U.S. Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter

foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining U.S. national security interests.” The GEC counter-disinformation efforts relate to state actors including Russia, China, and Iran, and terrorist groups including ISIS and al-Qaida.

The DoS OIG reviewed all 39 grants and cooperative agreements that the GEC awarded in FY 2018 and found that the stated purpose of 38 of 39 awards aligned with the GEC’s statutory mandate and authority. However, the DoS OIG selected 10 of the 39 awards for detailed testing and found that the GEC did not consistently manage and monitor those awards in accordance with Federal requirements, DoS policies and guidance, and award terms and conditions. Specifically, the DoS OIG found that GEC officials did not always clearly designate roles and responsibilities for grants management personnel; 3 of 10 risk assessments for the selected awards contained errors; and 9 of 10 monitoring and evaluation plans for the selected awards did not include all required elements and did not demonstrate a direct link to the award’s scope of work. Moreover, the DoS OIG found that GEC officials did not review award recipients’ performance reports. The DoS OIG determined that these deficiencies occurred, in part, because the GEC did not have enough experienced personnel to issue, manage, and monitor cooperative agreements when the FY 2018 awards were issued, and the GEC had not formally adopted internal policies, processes, and procedures for managing and monitoring Federal assistance awards.

The DoS OIG made five recommendations to the GEC that were intended to improve the GEC’s administration of Federal assistance awards. Management agreed with the recommendations.

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

Financial Audit of USAID Resources Managed by Norwegian Refugee Council in Multiple Countries Under Multiple Awards, January 1 to December 31, 2018

4-000-20-084-R; June 26, 2020

The Norwegian Refugee Council contracted with an independent certified public accounting firm to express an opinion on whether its fund accountability statement for 2018 was presented fairly, in all material respects, to evaluate internal controls, and to determine whether it complied with award requirements and applicable laws and regulations. Norwegian Refugee Council expenditures of U.S. Government financial assistance included two sub-awards and two grants in Iraq, and one sub-award and two cooperative agreements in Syria.

The contracted audit firm performed an audit that covered USAID expenditures of \$24,960,857 for the calendar year ended December 31, 2018. The accounting firm concluded the fund accountability statement presented fairly, in all material respects, program revenues and costs incurred under the awards for the period audited. The accounting firm reported no questioned costs, no material weakness in internal controls, and no instances of material noncompliance. Upon receiving the contracted accounting firm’s report, USAID OIG made one recommendation to USAID to verify that Norwegian Refugee Council take corrective action on 10 instances of noncompliance noted in the report as other matters of concern.

USAID Needs to Improve Policy and Processes to Better Protect Information Accessed on Personal Devices

A-000-20-006-P; June 19, 2020

USAID OIG conducted this audit to determine whether USAID implemented key internal controls to protect information available in the external cloud when accessed through staff's personal devices. The internal controls under review are based on controls recommended by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, Digital Services Advisory Group, and the Federal Chief Information Officers Council.

USAID staff—including those serving at embassies in countries supporting OIR—rely on both the agency's internal computing systems and external cloud computing systems to conduct their daily business. USAID OIG found that USAID had implemented some internal controls to address the risk of information security breaches. For instance, USAID required staff to take training on protecting sensitive information and having users sign an agreement of conduct. USAID also required staff to use an agency-issued electronic secure authentication device when accessing the external cloud on personal devices. However, USAID OIG concluded that there were significant gaps in USAID's policies on the use of personal devices, and that these gaps presented an increased risk of security breaches to the external cloud and the information contained within the cloud.

USAID OIG made four recommendations to USAID's Chief Information Officer to address the gaps in internal controls identified in the audit. On the basis of the responses USAID provided, USAID OIG considers three of the recommendations closed, and one of them resolved but open pending completion of planned activities.

Audit on G4S Risk Management Limited's Incurred and Billed Costs, Local Governance Program in Iraq, Subcontract AID-267-C-11-00006-G4S With Chemonics International, Inc., USAID Prime Contract AID-267-C-11-00006, January 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015

8-267-20-006-D; May 20, 2020

USAID/Iraq contracted with the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA) to determine if direct costs incurred and billed by G4S Risk Management Limited complied with applicable subcontract terms from January 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015. The audited award was for a local governance program in Iraq.

DCAA performed an audit that covered \$4,100,563 in expenditures from January 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015, and expressed a qualified opinion on G4S Risk Management Limited's incurred and billed costs and questioned ineligible costs of \$278,583. The audit found one material instance of noncompliance and reported that incurred and billed costs do not materially comply with regulations and subcontract terms pertaining to accumulating and billing incurred amounts. DCAA identified two limitations to their scope related to not performing real-time labor resting in FY2014, and to the existence of a deficiency in G4S Risk Management Limited's timekeeping procedures. Although DCAA performed alternative procedures to evaluate labor costs, real time labor testing may have identified undetected mischarging and additional questioned costs.

USAID OIG recommended that USAID/Iraq determine the allowability, and collect as appropriate, \$278,583 in ineligible questioned costs. Since G4S Risk Management Limited has no current awards with USAID/Iraq, USAID OIG did not make a procedural recommendation for the material instance of noncompliance. However, USAID OIG stated that if USAID/Iraq considered future awards to G4S Risk Management Limited, USAID/Iraq should ensure that G4S Risk Management Limited has established adequate policies and procedures. In addition, USAID OIG suggested to USAID that USAID/Iraq, if it considers future awards to G4S Risk Management Limited, determine whether G4S Risk Management Limited has addressed the material internal control deficiencies identified in the audit report.

Independent Audit Report on Development Alternatives Inc.'s Direct Costs Incurred and Billed Under, USAID/Iraq Contract AID-267-H-17-00001, June 26, 2017, to September 30, 2018

8-267-20-005-D; April 27, 2020

USAID/Iraq contracted with the DCAA to determine whether direct costs incurred and billed by Development Alternatives Inc. complied with applicable contract terms under USAID contract AID-267-H-17-00001, a contract that was in force from June 26, 2017, to September 30, 2018. Development Alternatives Inc. carries out humanitarian assistance programs in Iraq.

DCAA performed an audit that covered \$17,430,219 in expenditures for the period from June 26, 2017, to September 30, 2018. The contracted audit firm expressed a qualified opinion, arising from a scope limitation regarding real-time labor cost testing. DCAA did not identify any questioned costs related to the direct costs incurred and billed by Development Alternatives Inc. during the period reviewed. The audit report contained no recommendations.

Independent Audit Report on Chemonics International Inc.'s Direct Costs Incurred and Billed Under USAID/Iraq Contract AID-267-11-00006, January 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015

8-267-20-004-D; April 16, 2020

USAID/Iraq contracted with the DCAA to determine whether direct costs incurred and billed by Chemonics International, Inc. (Chemonics) under USAID contract AID-267-11-00006 complied with applicable contract terms from January 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015. Chemonics is a consulting firm that implements humanitarian assistance programs in Iraq and Syria.

DCAA performed an audit of \$12,314,321 in expenditures during the period from January 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015. DCAA expressed a qualified opinion, arising from scope limitations regarding real-time labor cost testing, verified cash payments made to third-country national employees in Iraq, and testing scanned copies of source documents. DCAA did not identify any questioned costs related to the direct costs incurred and billed by Chemonics during the period reviewed, and concluded Chemonics complied in all material respects with the terms of the contract from January 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015. There were no recommendations.

Final Reports by Partner Agencies

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Reachback Contracting Support

A-2020-0043-BOZ; April 1, 2020

The Army Audit Agency (AAA) conducted this audit to determine whether the Army has an effective plan, procedures, and organizational structure in place to directly provide contracting support during contingency and expeditionary operations.

In military contracting, reachback is the process of obtaining products, services, and applications; forces; equipment; or material from organizations that are not forward deployed. This support allows contracting offices in the United States to assist deployed contracting offices during expeditionary and contingency operations such as OIR. The audit included work conducted at the 408th Contracting Support Brigade, a subordinate command within the Army Contracting Command, with a field office at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. The brigade has theater-level contracting responsibilities related to base life support for U.S. Central Command's (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility.

The AAA determined that the Army had only limited plans and procedures to establish a well-defined way to provide reachback support for expeditionary contracting. For example, the Army didn't have full visibility over all reachback support provided by U.S.-based contracting offices. Further, the AAA determined that the Army needed controls and other capabilities to oversee the use of reachback support.

As a result, the AAA found that the Army didn't have effective visibility and oversight of reachback support efforts. Without a more structured and formal program, the AAA determined that the Army may not be able to maximize the benefits of using reachback support, to include minimizing the risk of contracts not meeting operating needs in future contingency and expeditionary operations.

The AAA made three recommendations in the report: one recommendation to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology to require an automated information system to identify reachback contracts that support expeditionary contracting operations; and two recommendations to the Commander of U.S. Army Contracting Command to include the use of reachback contracting support in future operating plans and to establish plans and procedures to enable better visibility over reachback support for expeditionary requirements.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

AIR FORCE AUDIT AGENCY

Disbursements for Contingency Operations 39th Air Base Wing, Incirlik Air Base, Turkey

F2020-0028-REE000; April 23, 2020

The Air Force Audit Agency (AFAA) conducted this audit to determine whether the 39th Air Base Wing maintained documents supporting disbursements; determined cash holding requirements; and accounted for and executed disbursements in accordance with DoD and Air Force guidance.

As part of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 39th Air Base Wing provides support to U.S. and NATO assets and personnel throughout Turkey and surrounding countries.

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service disburses appropriated funds through cash, U.S. Department of the Treasury checks, or electronic funds transfers. When cash disbursements are necessary, disbursing officers authorize deputy disbursing officers or disbursing/paying agents to maintain cash-on-hand at their own personal risk and to make official disbursements for contingency operations. As of January 14, 2020, the 39th Air Base Wing had accountability of over \$2.4 million and 4.4 million Turkish lira with authorization to hold over \$2.5 million and 14.1 million Turkish lira for disbursements.

A KC-135 Stratotanker awaits to take-off to support a NATO mission in partnership with the U.S. Air Force at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. (U.S. Air Force photo)



The AFAA determined that the 39th Air Base Wing maintained documents supporting disbursements in accordance with DoD and Air Force guidance. However, the AFAA determined that the 39th Air Base Wing could improve cash holding requirements and improve accountability and execution of disbursements. Maintaining accurate cash holding authority to support contingency operations provides the wing available resources for critical operations, while also minimizing the amount of cash at risk. Furthermore, accounting for and properly executing disbursing operations provide protection for wing assets and reduce the risk of theft or mismanagement of funds.

The AFAA made seven recommendations to improve the effectiveness of disbursements for contingency operations. Management agreed with the recommendations.

Channel Airlift Operations 39th Air Base Wing, Incirlik Air Base, Turkey

F2020-0023-REE000; April 13, 2020

The AFAA conducted this audit to determine whether the 39th Air Base Wing maximized the use of the Patriot Express, when available, including adequately justifying instances when travelers took commercial transportation rather than the Patriot Express and obtaining complete travel orders to aid in obtaining proper reimbursements for taking the Patriot Express.

As part of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 39th Air Base Wing provides support to U.S. and NATO assets and personnel throughout Turkey and surrounding countries.

Channel airlift is the transportation of passengers on aircraft chartered from the commercial air industry. The DoD purchases all seats on the charter, called the Patriot Express, whether these seats are used or not. Defense Transportation Regulation requires that the Patriot Express must be used for international official travel unless there is a documented negative critical mission impact, regardless of whether commercial air transportation is less expensive or more convenient for the traveler. When seats on chartered aircraft go unused and a traveler flies instead on a separately booked commercial flight, the U.S. Government pays twice for the air travel.

From June 2018 through June 2019, 39th Air Base Wing personnel booked approximately 2,900 passengers on the Patriot Express charter flights, and more than 2,900 passengers on commercial flights.

The AFAA determined that the 39th Air Base Wing could improve the use of the Patriot Express, when available, for temporary duty travelers. Moreover, the AFAA determined that the 39th Air Base Wing did not obtain complete travel orders or enter required reimbursement data for 20 of 21 travelers (95 percent). As a result, the AFAA determined that the Air Force is at risk of not receiving appropriate compensation for transportation services, and paying unjustified travel expenses.

The AFAA recommended that the 39th Logistics Readiness Squadron Commander direct personnel who book passenger travel to obtain required supporting documentation before booking commercial air; and direct the Squadron's transportation officer to perform periodic oversight reviews to ensure personnel obtain supporting documentation for travelers booked commercially.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

Ongoing Oversight Activities

As of June 30, 2020, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 26 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 7 describes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 1 and 2, contained in Appendix E, list the title and objective for each of these projects. Appendix E also identifies ongoing projects that the DoD OIG suspended due to COVID-19; those projects will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Military Services' pre deployment training to counter an adversary's use of unmanned aircraft systems is done in accordance with the geographic combatant commands' operational requirements.
- The **DoD OIG** is evaluating USCENTCOM's civilian casualty evaluation and reporting procedures to determine if there are accurate accounts of potential civilian casualties resulting from OIR airstrikes.

Figure 7.

Ongoing Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



- The **DoS OIG** is evaluating whether the operations of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Special Program for Embassy Augmentation Response are meeting DoS goals and expectations.
- The **GAO** is evaluating U.S. Government assistance to Iraq's Ministry of Interior to determine the amount and objectives of assistance to the ministry and its forces.

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- The **DoS OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoS Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Post Security Program Review process is sufficient to identify and resolve deficiencies in the management of selected posts' life safety, emergency preparedness, and information security programs.

- The **DoS OIG** is evaluating whether the U.S. Agency for Global Media’s programs are meeting DoS goals and expectations for journalistic standards and principles.
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine what corrective actions a Syria response implementer has taken to remedy internal control weaknesses and known gaps identified by USAID OIG investigations.
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to assess USAID’s management of its transition strategy for humanitarian assistance in Iraq and oversight of its humanitarian assistance and stabilization activities.

SUPPORT TO MISSION

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Air Force implemented appropriate screening and quarantine procedures for personnel entering Al Udeid Air Base in response to COVID-19.
- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Military Services properly stored, tracked, and safeguarded pharmaceuticals at locations supporting overseas contingency operations.
- The **DoS OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoS considered established procedures, guidance, and best practices to adjust the size and composition of the U.S. Missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has taken action to prevent and detect sexual exploitation and abuse; and to assess USAID’s process for responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- The **Army Audit Agency** is conducting an audit to determine whether Army units performed maintenance on theater provided equipment to meet readiness and potential contingencies, and whether theater provided equipment meets readiness and capabilities for future contingencies.

Planned Oversight Projects

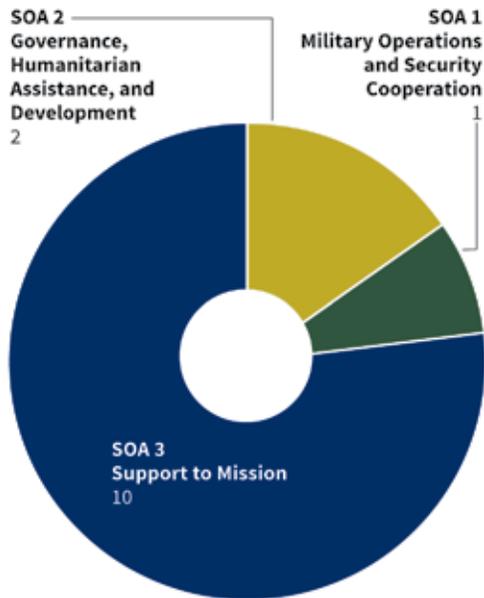
As of June 30, 2020, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 13 planned projects related to OIR. Figure 8 describes the planned projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 3 and 4, contained in Appendix F, list the project title and objective for each of these projects. The following highlights some of these planned projects by strategic oversight area.

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

- The **DoD OIG** intends to evaluate whether tactical signals intelligence processing, exploitation, and dissemination support is sufficient to satisfy OIR priority intelligence requirements.
- The **DoD OIG** intends to evaluate whether USCENTCOM screened, documented, and tracked DoD service members suspected of sustaining a traumatic brain injury were given adequate attention and care before returning to duty.

Figure 8.
Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoS Office of Global Women’s Issues has tailored its programs to meet its goals of helping women be more prepared for, and able to participate in, decision-making processes related to conflict and crisis.

SUPPORT TO MISSION

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoD protects arms, ammunition, and explosives transported by sea in accordance with the Defense Transportation Regulation.
- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems
- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoS followed its acquisition policy in awarding sole source contracts for overseas contingency operations.
- The **Army Audit Agency** intends to evaluate whether base operations support in Kuwait and Qatar meets mission needs.

INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

Investigations

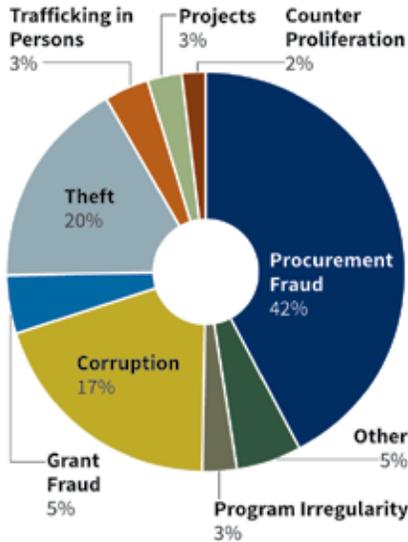
The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OIR during the quarter. The Lead IG agencies used investigators in Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as in Germany and Washington, D.C., to conduct OIR-related investigations. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS, the DoD OIG’s investigative and criminal component) has temporarily removed investigative personnel from Afghanistan, Djibouti, and Qatar, and is continually monitoring the health and welfare of the personnel performing DCIS’s mission in the USCENTCOM and U.S. Africa Command areas of operation. DoS OIG and USAID OIG investigators based in Frankfurt have been teleworking from their residences.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO OIR

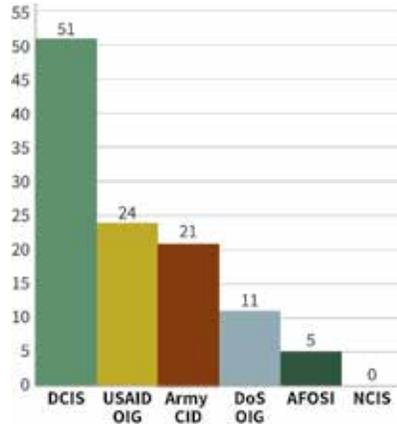
During the quarter, investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 13 investigations, initiated 2 new investigations, and coordinated on 112 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations.

ACTIVITY BY FRAUD AND CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIVE WORKING GROUP

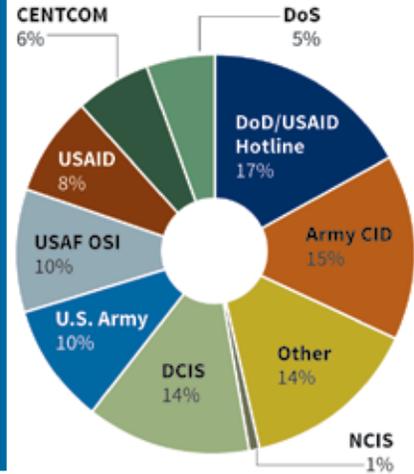
OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE
As of June 30, 2020



OPEN INVESTIGATIONS BY WORKING GROUP MEMBER*



SOURCES OF ALLEGATIONS



OPEN INVESTIGATIONS*

112

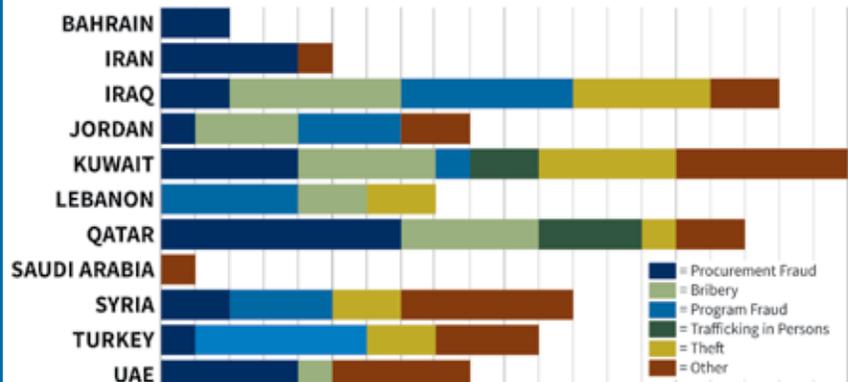
Q3 FY 2020 BRIEFINGS

Briefings Held	2
Briefings Attendees	22

Q3 FY 2020 RESULTS

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

PRIMARY OFFENSE LOCATIONS



*Some investigations are joint with more than one agency and some not joint with any other agency. Therefore, the total number of Joint Open Cases may not equal the total number of Open Cases. Open Cases as of 6/30/2020.

The Lead IG agencies and partners continue to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from DCIS, the DoS OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. This quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 2 fraud awareness briefings for 22 participants.

The Dashboard on page 98 depicts activities of the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO LEGACY CASES

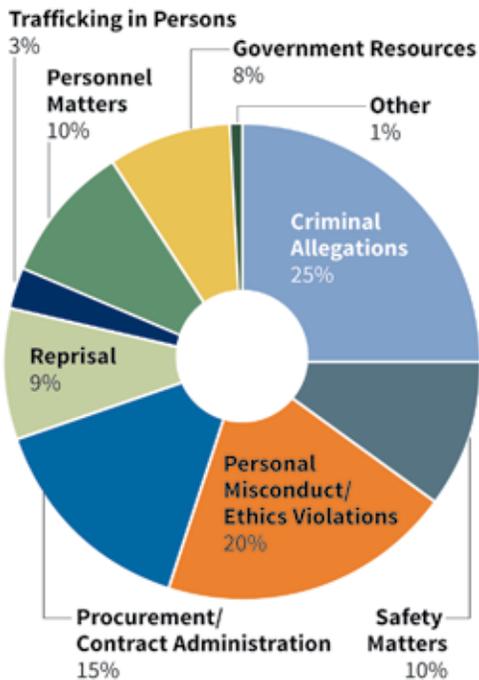
The Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies have 10 ongoing “legacy” investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the designation of OIR.

Hotline

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the DoD OIG investigator referred 84 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations.

As noted in Figure 9, the majority of the cases opened during the reporting period were related to personal misconduct, reprisal, criminal allegations, and personnel matters.

Figure 9.
Hotline Activities







A belt of NATO cartridges for a M240B machine gun. (U.S. Army photo)

APPENDICES

- APPENDIX A
Classified Appendix to this Report 102

- APPENDIX B
Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG
Quarterly Report 102

- APPENDIX C
Department of Justice Prosecutions 103

- APPENDIX D
Department of the Treasury and Department
of State Actions Against Terrorist Financing 104

- APPENDIX E
Ongoing Oversight Projects 105

- APPENDIX F
Planned Oversight Projects 108

- Acronyms 110

- Map of Iraq 111

- Map of Syria 112

- Endnotes 113

APPENDIX A

Classified Appendix to This Report

This unclassified report normally includes a classified appendix that provides additional information on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). Due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

APPENDIX B

Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

This report complies with sections 2, 4, and 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, which requires that the designated Lead Inspector General (IG) provide a quarterly report, available to the public, on an overseas contingency operation. The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the Department of Defense (DoD) IG as the Lead IG for OIR. The Department of State (DoS) IG is the Associate Lead IG for the operation.

This report contains information from the three Lead IG agencies—DoD Office of Inspector General (OIG), DoS OIG, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) OIG—as well as from partner oversight agencies. This report covers the period from April 1 through June 30, 2020.

To fulfill its congressional mandate to produce a quarterly report on OIR, the Lead IG agencies gather data and information from Federal agencies and open sources. The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of formal audits, inspections, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or requests for information to Federal agencies.

INFORMATION COLLECTION

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

OPEN-SOURCE RESEARCH

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

- Congressional testimony
- Press conferences and official U.S. Government briefings
- United Nations reports
- Reports issued by nongovernmental organizations and think tanks
- Media reports

Materials collected through open-source research provide information to describe the status of the operation and help the Lead IG agencies assess information provided in their agency information collection process.

REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD OIG, as the Lead IG, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies. The Lead IG agencies then provide those offices that provided information with opportunities to verify and comment on the content of the report.

Each OIG coordinates the review process with its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask their agencies to correct inaccuracies and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review. Each Lead IG agency participates in reviewing and editing the entire quarterly report.

APPENDIX C

Department of Justice Prosecutions

Since 2016, the Department has charged more than 105 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS. From those cases charged since 2016, the Department has obtained more than 65 convictions; the remaining cases remain open. These numbers include individuals who could be described as foreign terrorist fighters or homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS, as well as those who may have assisted their conduct, obstructed investigations, or otherwise involved an identified link to ISIS.

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

- **On May 29, 2020, in the Middle District of Florida, Alison Sheppard** was sentenced to 5 years and 10 months in federal prison and 15 years of supervised release for attempting to provide material support to ISIS. According to court documents, from January to July 2017, Sheppard knowingly attempted to provide material support and resources to ISIS. Beginning in early 2016, Sheppard used Facebook and social media applications to network and find like-minded individuals who supported a Salafi jihadist mindset and ISIS, and she posted videos that she had created to her YouTube channel to instruct her online friends. Sheppard also used social media applications to engage in encrypted communications with individuals she believed were supporters of ISIS. One of those individuals was someone Sheppard believed had later traveled to the Middle East to join ISIS. Sheppard sent that person an ISIS e-book detailing how ISIS members travel in and out of Syria, including operational security measures to assist foreign fighters in evading detection in their pursuit to join ISIS. Sheppard also began communicating with two other individuals who she believed were ISIS supporters, but who were, in fact, undercover law enforcement officers. During one of those conversations, Sheppard told the undercover officer that she had sworn allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the now-deceased former leader of ISIS. In June 2017, while engaging in online social media conversations with the cooperating individual and the two undercover law enforcement officers, Sheppard offered to purchase and ship cellphones that ISIS members could use to detonate improvised explosive devices. Later, in July 2017, Sheppard purchased 10 cellphones and arranged to have the phones mailed to one of the undercover officers, believing that they would be forwarded to the Middle East and that ISIS would use them as timers for “pressure cooker” bombs.
- In addition, seven people have been transferred to the United States from Iraq and Syria to face federal criminal charges related to terrorism since 2014.

During the quarter, the DoJ was not able to conduct activities to strengthen the rule of law overseas to help counter ISIS. Neither DoJ International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program activities, nor FBI training programs, were suspended due to the coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic.

APPENDIX D

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

Under Executive Order 13224, as amended, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of State have global terrorism authorities to target activities of extremist groups, including ISIS. The Department of the Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence and its Office of Foreign Assets Control work to disrupt the ability of terrorist organizations to fund their operations. The DoS's Bureau of Counterterrorism leads DoS activities to counter terrorist finance and to designate Specially Designated Global Terrorists and Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY DESIGNATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Since 2014, the Secretary of the Treasury has designated a total of 90 individuals and entities providing support to ISIS pursuant to Executive Order 13224.

This quarter, the Secretary of the Treasury made no new designations. No individuals or organizations sanctioned for providing support to ISIS were removed from the sanctions list during this reporting period.

In addition to designations, the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) leverages its participation and influence to develop a shared understanding of the threat posed by ISIS, as well as to encourage countries to take action within their jurisdictions and in coordination with others to disrupt ISIS financing and facilitation. During the quarter, the Treasury worked with interagency and Coalition partners, including the Government of Iraq, to prioritize identifying ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders, disrupting its financial facilitation networks in Iraq, and designating ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and elsewhere. The Treasury also takes a leadership role in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, serving as a co-lead of the Counter ISIS Finance Group (CIFG). Currently, co-leads are planning a virtual CIFG meeting during the summer of 2020 and an in-person CIFG meeting in the fall, with a regional focus on West Africa and Sahel.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE DESIGNATIONS

This quarter, the Secretary of State did not make any designations relevant to OIR.

APPENDIX E

Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 1 and 2 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 1.

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

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Evaluation of U.S. Central Command's Kinetic Targeting Processes and Reporting Procedures

To evaluate U.S. Central Command's target development and prosecution processes, as well as post-strike collateral damage and civilian casualty assessment activities.

*Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19). Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations.

Evaluation of Tactical Signals Intelligence Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination Support to Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Freedom's Sentinel

To determine whether Theater Support Activity's Tactical Signals Intelligence Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination support is sufficient to satisfy OIR and OFS priority intelligence requirements.

*Suspended due to COVID-19. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations.

Audit of Pre-Deployment Training on Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems

To determine whether the Military Services conducted pre-deployment training to counter an adversary's use of Unmanned Aerial Systems in accordance with the operational requirements of the geographic combatant commands.

*Suspended due to COVID-19. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations.

Evaluation of the Use of Geospatial Intelligence Collection for Operation Inherent Resolve

Contact DoD OIG Evaluations for more information.

*Suspended due to COVID-19. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations.

Audit of the Cybersecurity of DoD Additive Manufacturing Systems

To determine whether DoD Components are securing additive manufacturing systems and data to prevent unauthorized changes and ensure integrity of design data.

Audit of Management of Pharmaceutical Inventories in Support of Overseas Contingency Operations

To determine whether the Military Services properly stored, tracked, and safeguarded pharmaceuticals at its overseas locations supporting overseas contingency operations, including OIR.

Evaluation of Combatant Command Counter Threat Finance Activities in Support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. European Command Priorities

To determine whether U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command are planning and executing counter threat finance activities to impact adversaries' ability to use financial networks to negatively affect U.S. interests.

*Suspended due to COVID-19. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations.

Evaluation of U.S. Special Operations Command Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center

To determine whether U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center provides U.S. combatant commanders the increased capability to conduct Internet-based information operations globally.

*Suspended due to COVID-19. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations.

Audit of Screening and Quarantine Procedures at Al Udeid Air Base

To determine whether the Air Force has implemented screening and quarantine procedures for personnel entering Al Udeid Air Base in accordance with applicable criteria in response to COVID-19.

Audit of Infectious Disease Medical Treatment Capabilities At Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar

The objective of this audit is to determine whether Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar has the capability to treat COVID-19 patients and isolate or quarantine suspected infected service members, civilians, and contractors.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL***Audit of Department of State's Risk Assessments and Monitoring of Voluntary Contributions to International Organizations***

To determine whether the DoS policies, processes, and guidance for voluntary contributions ensure that risks are identified, assessed, and responded to before providing funds to public international organizations and funds are monitored to achieve award objectives.

Audit of the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations Approach to Identifying and Communicating Construction Project Risks, Best Practices, and Lessons Learned

To determine the extent to which the DoS evaluated completed construction projects, including the U.S. Embassy in Amman, to identify and communicate best practices and lessons learned that can be applied to future construction projects.

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

To evaluate the Special Program for Embassy Augmentation Response.

Audit of Department of State's Post Security Program Review Process

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

Audit of the Staffing Review Processes for U.S. Mission Iraq and U.S. Mission Afghanistan

To determine whether the DoS used established procedures, guidance, and best practices in its approach to adjust the size and composition of Missions Afghanistan and Iraq and has aligned resources invested at these Missions with U.S. priorities.

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

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva.

Inspection of U.S. Agency for Global Media Journalistic Standards and Principles

To evaluate the U.S. Agency for Global Media's journalistic standards and principles.

Review of the Department of State's Foreign Assistance Tracking and Reporting

To evaluate DoS processes and procedures for tracking and reporting on foreign assistance awards.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL***Audit of USAID's Oversight of Selected Implementer Delivering Humanitarian Assistance in Response to the Syrian Crisis***

To determine what corrective actions the selected Syria-response implementer has taken to remedy internal control weaknesses identified by investigations; and if USAID eliminated oversight gaps identified by investigations of the selected Syria-response implementer.

Audit of USAID/Iraq Activities

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

Audit of USAID's Initiative Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

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

Audit of USAID's Self-Reliance Initiative

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

Audit of USAID's Contract Termination Practices

To assess USAID's procedures guiding acquisition award terminations, and selected acquisition awards were terminated in accordance with established requirements.

Table 2.

Ongoing Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of June 30, 2020**ARMY AUDIT AGENCY*****Expeditionary Contracting Material Weakness***

To determine whether the Army has taken necessary actions to mitigate risks associated with the expeditionary contracting material weakness.

Audit of Theater Provided Equipment Maintenance and Reset

To determine whether units performed maintenance on theater provided equipment to meet readiness and potential contingencies; and whether the Army's reset of theater provided equipment meets U.S. Army Central Command's readiness and capabilities for future contingencies.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE***U.S. Assistance to Iraq's Ministry of Interior***

To determine the amounts and objectives of U.S. assistance to the Ministry of Interior and its forces; the extent to which U.S. agencies have assessed their assistance to the Ministry of Interior and its forces, and the results of the assessments; and the extent to which the DoD and the DoS have vetted the Ministry of Interior and its forces for gross violations of human rights and associations with terrorist groups or groups associated with the Iranian government.

APPENDIX F

Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 3 and 4 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects.

Table 3.

Planned Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of June 30, 2020

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Entitlements and Allowances for Processing for Military Service Reserve Deployments

To determine whether the deployment process resulted in accurate and timely entitlements and allowances for deployed members of the military service Reserves.

Audit of Unmanned Systems Cybersecurity Controls

To determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems.

Audit of the U.S. Army Central Command's Modernized Enduring Equipment Set in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility

To determine whether the Army's implementation of the modernized enduring equipment sets in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility is meeting mission goals.

Follow Up Audit of the U.S. Army's Management of the Heavy Lift VIII Contract to Meet Changing Middle East Mission

To determine whether the Army implemented corrective actions in response to six open recommendations in Report No. DODIG-2017-095, "U.S. Army's Management of the Heavy Lift 7 Commercial Transportation Contract Requirements in the Middle East," June 26, 2017. In addition, to determine whether the Army implement the corrective actions before issuing the Heavy Lift VIII contract.

Evaluation of Traumatic Brain Injury Screening in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility

To determine whether U.S. Central Command screened, documented, and tracked DoD service members suspected of sustaining a traumatic brain injury to determine whether a return to duty status for current operations was acceptable or evacuation and additional care was required.

Audit of DoD Oversight of Base Operations Support Contract at Balad Air Base in Iraq

To determine whether the DoD protects arms, ammunition, and explosives transported by sea in accordance with the Defense Transportation Regulation.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Construction of the New Consulate Compound in Erbil, Iraq

To determine whether the DoS Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations has effective quality assurance processes in place to ensure that the contractor builds U.S. Consulate General Erbil to contract specifications.

Audit of DoS Implementation of National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security

To determine whether the DoS Office of Global Women's Issues has tailored applicable DoS engagements and program to help women be more prepared for, and able to participate in, decision-making processes related to conflict and crisis; established metrics and targets to evaluate, measure, and report DoS performance; and created a process to modify or redirect program resources on the basis of performance that informs resource allocation and planning.

Inspection of Embassy Doha, Qatar

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Qatar.

Audit of Construction of the New Embassy Compound in Ankara, Turkey

To determine whether the DoS administered the design and construction contract for New Embassy Compound Ankara in accordance with Federal acquisition regulations and whether the contractor fulfilled the contract terms and conditions.

Compliance Follow-up Review on Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Selection of Contracting Officer Representatives

To determine whether the recommendations of an earlier DoS OIG audit report are being efficiently and effectively implemented.

Audit of Use of Sole Source Contracts in Overseas Contingency Operations

To determine whether acquisition policy was followed in awarding sole source contracts; there were urgent and compelling needs to justify awarding sole source contracts; the DoS is paying more by having sole source contracts than it would pay if contracts were competitively awarded.

Table 4.

Planned Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of June 30, 2020**ARMY AUDIT AGENCY*****Base Operations Support–Area Support Groups Kuwait***

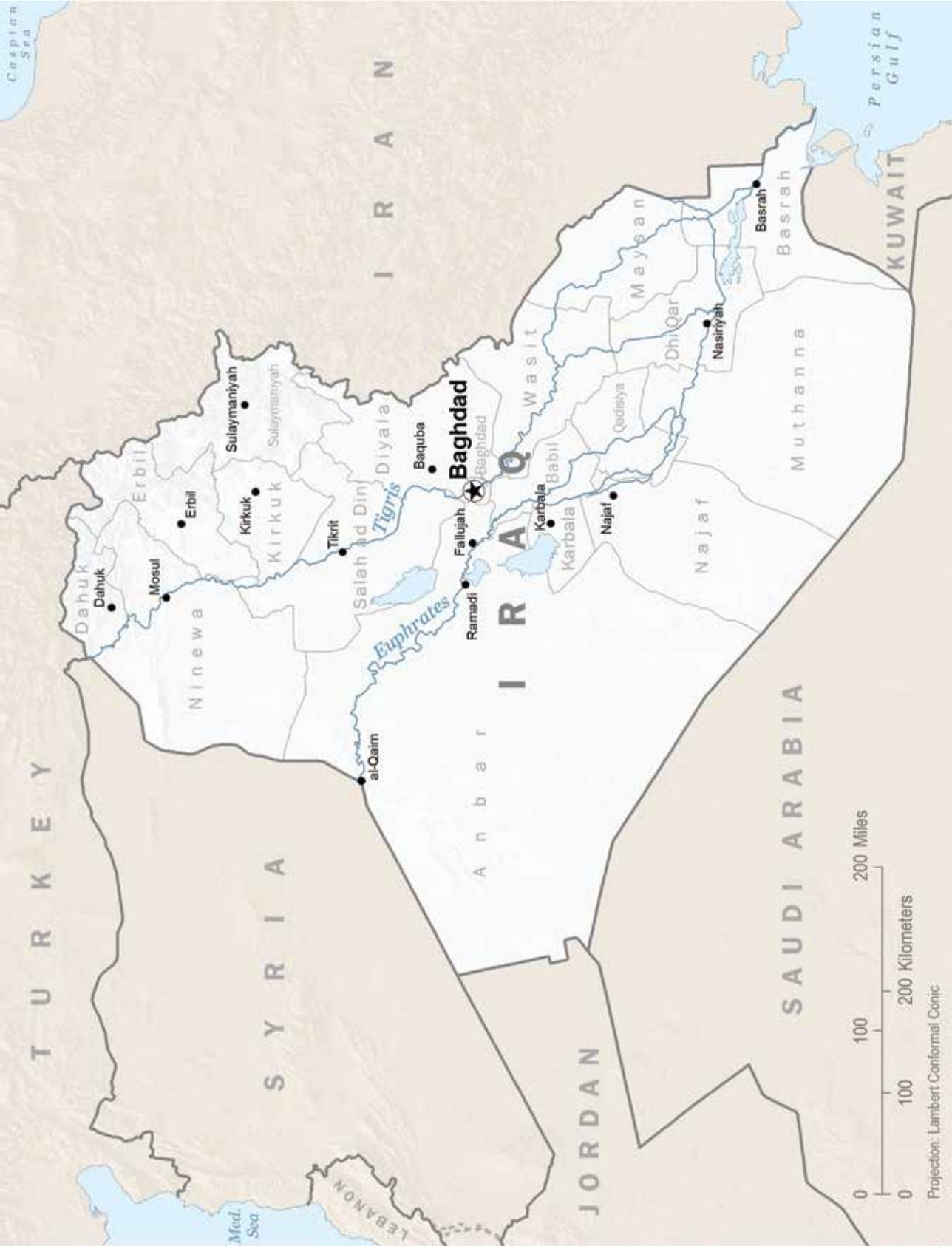
To determine whether base operations support management and oversight at long term contingency locations in Kuwait and Qatar efficiently and effectively met mission needs; and determine whether base operations support personnel had adequate training and experience to oversee necessary services.

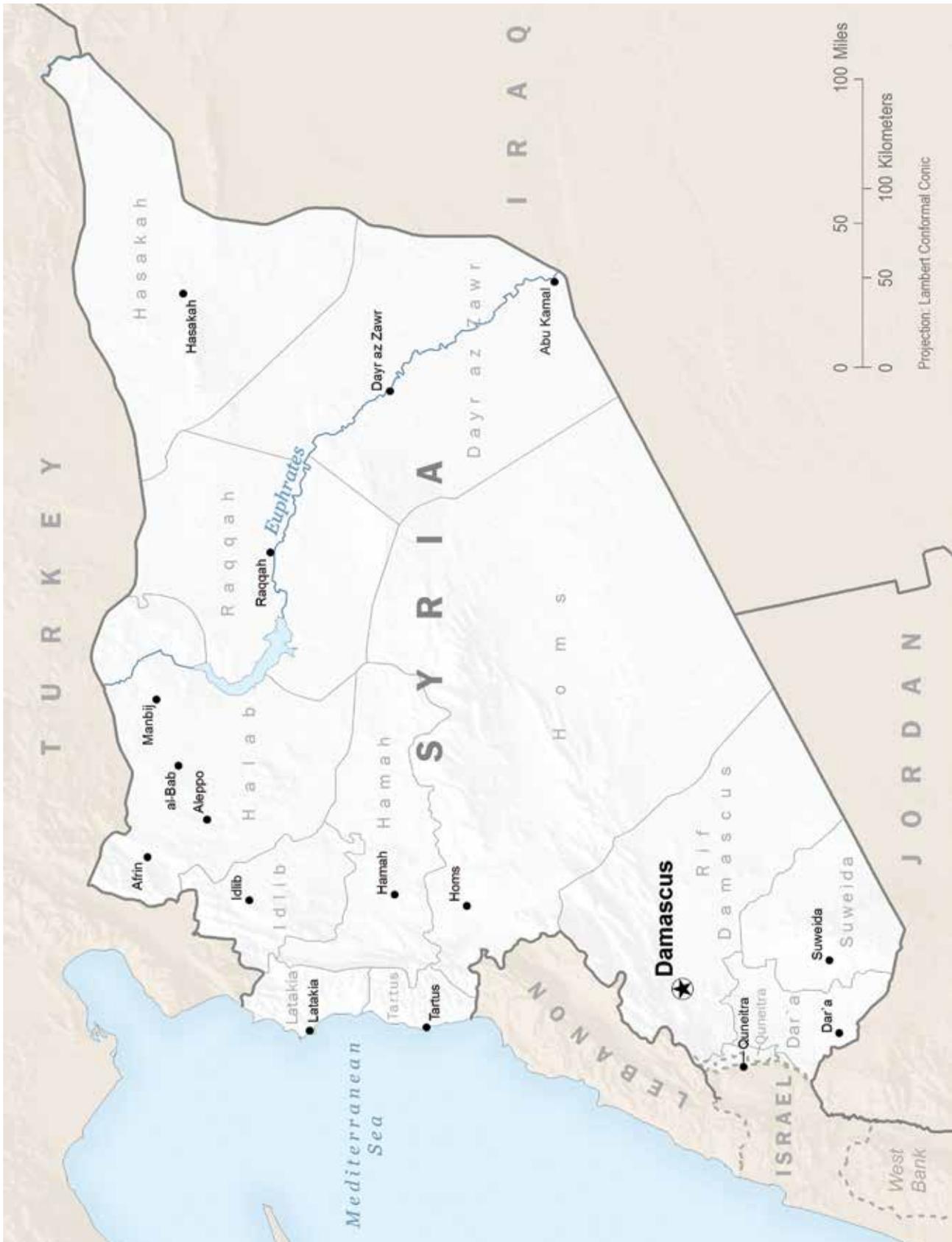


ACRONYMS

Acronym	
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs
CJSOTF	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force-OIR
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
CTS	Counter Terrorism Service
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
DoS	Department of State
ESSA	Eastern Syria Security Area
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FY	fiscal year
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
InSF	Internal Security Forces
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iraqi Kurdish)
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	Refers to DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG
NEA	DoS Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
NEA/AC	DoS NEA Office of Assistance Coordination
NEA/LEV	DoS NEA Office of Levant Affairs
NESCG	Northeast Syria Coordination Group
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Acronym	
OCO	Overseas Contingency Operation
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OUSD(P) ISA	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy/Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Turkish)
PM	DoS Bureau of Political-Military Affairs
PMC	Popular Mobilization Committee
PMF	Popular Mobilization Force
PRISF	Provincial Internal Security Forces
PRM	Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)
SAC	Syrian Arab Coalition
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNES	Self-Administration of Northeast Syria
SOJTF-OIR	Special Operations Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
START	Syria Transition Assistance Response Team
Treasury	U.S. Department of the Treasury
TSO	Turkish-supported Opposition Groups
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U. S. Central Command
USUN	United States Mission to the United Nations
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units





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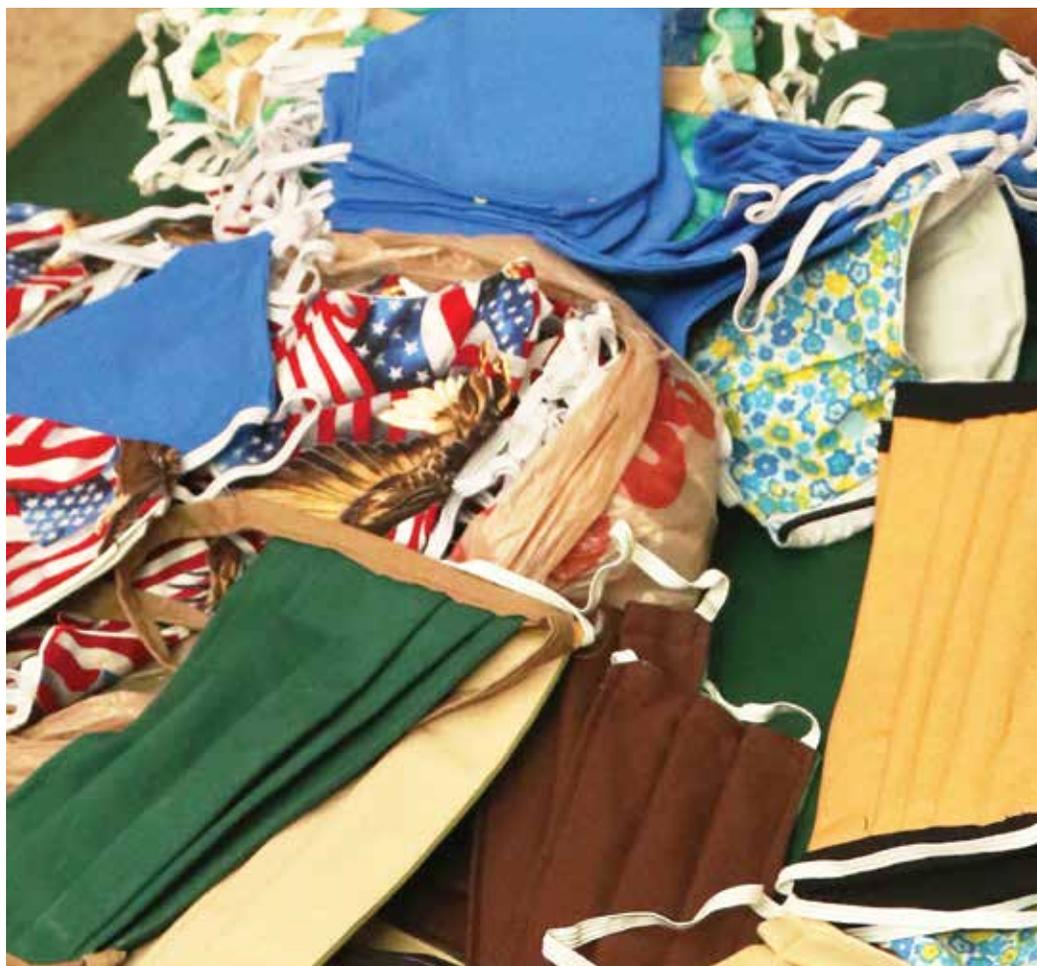
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Volunteers in the United States made about 2,000 cloth masks and sent them to 248th Medical Company at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

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