

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO

IRAQ & SYRIA



JULY 1, 2023–SEPTEMBER 30, 2023



On the cover: Syrian workers collect okra in fields supported by a World Food Programme irrigation rehabilitation project. (WFP photo)



We are pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This report discharges our quarterly reporting responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

The United States launched OIR in 2014 to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), while setting the conditions for follow-on activities to increase regional stability. The U.S. Government 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 (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to further the U.S. Government's policy goals in Iraq and Syria during the period of July 1 through September 30, 2023. This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies—the DoD, State, and USAID OIGs—and our partner oversight agencies.

Handwritten signature of Robert P. Storch in black ink.

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Development





Peppers dry in a Syrian home. (WFP photo)

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A U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II arrives at al-Udeid Air Base, Qatar. (U.S. Air Force photo)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) mission is to advise, assist, and enable partner forces until they can independently maintain the enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq and designated areas of Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks.¹ The broader counter-ISIS campaign includes supporting the Iraqi government and local Syrian partners with civilian-led stabilization activities.²

ISIS capabilities remained degraded and the group operated in survival mode in Iraq and Syria, with an ongoing loss of leadership and revenue.³ ISIS attack numbers continued to decline, and become less sophisticated and complex. The group's ability to employ IEDs, conduct activities near urban centers, and diversify its targets weakened.⁴ However, ISIS seeks to resurge and recruit from vulnerable communities, particularly through indoctrination and training of youth from al-Hol and other displaced persons camps in Syria, while also seeking to free detainees from detention facilities.⁵ The group has adopted new tactics to stretch the millions it retains in cash reserves and its leadership continued to emphasize raising funds.⁶

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) continued to improve some capabilities, while key deficits persist, including rotary wing readiness and Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) reform.⁷ During the quarter, the ISF continued to experience deficits in mission planning, intelligence, artillery, and logistics capability.⁸ Nearly all of the ISF's Russian-designed helicopters are grounded, with the remaining aircraft, including its entire fleet of medium lift helicopters, expected to be out of service in early 2024.⁹ However, the Iraqi operations center successfully integrated tactical air controllers, which should expand the ISF's ability to independently conduct airstrikes.¹⁰ In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), ongoing efforts to unify IKR forces under the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) slowed due to an ongoing political divide between the IKR's two main political parties.¹¹ U.S. and Iraqi leaders continue to assess the conditions necessary for the Coalition's mission to evolve and transition to a traditional security cooperation framework.¹²

Clashes between local Arab forces and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) prompted concerns that ISIS could exploit the situation.¹³ Coalition forces continued to partner with the SDF in the northeast and the Syrian Free Army (SFA) further south at the At Tanf Garrison.¹⁴ During the quarter, the SDF completed an assessment of security at SDF detention facilities holding ISIS detainees.¹⁵ U.S. Special Forces continued to train guards for SDF detention facilities and security forces for the al-Hol camp.¹⁶ Conditions in the camp, while improving due to security improvements and repatriations of residents to home countries or communities, continued to pose a challenge for local security and humanitarian partners.¹⁷ 355 Syrians departed al-Hol for Raqqah and 770 Iraqis and third-country nationals were repatriated.¹⁸

Other forces operating in Iraq and Syria—particularly Iran, Türkiye, Russia, and the Syrian regime—increased Coalition force protection needs, distracted partner forces, and escalated the risk of further conflict. This included an ongoing threat from Iran and Iran-aligned militia groups against U.S. and Coalition forces; Turkish military strikes targeting SDF personnel in northern Syria and the IKR; and dangerous or harassing Russian aircraft activity in and around Coalition aircraft and bases.¹⁹ The Syrian regime and its allies Russia and Iran cooperated and shared intelligence to pressure the United States to withdraw its forces from Syria.²⁰ Iran and Iran-aligned forces in Iraq and Syria continued their pause on attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces, while Iran threatened to resume attacks on Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups in northern Iraq.²¹

There was limited progress toward U.S. goals to improve governance, promote economic growth, and address humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria. The Iraqi government began to implement its new budget—which includes increases to welfare payments, public sector salaries, and infrastructure spending. The budget heavily depends on the continuation of relatively high oil prices to meet target revenues and includes a number of provisions that have been challenging to implement given the stalled negotiations between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi government.²² USAID reported that tight bank liquidity in Iraq constrained organizations that it supports.²³ In Syria, the U.S. Government continued to support areas affected by the February 2023 earthquake while addressing emerging challenges, such as rising food prices and the failure of a key water station in Hasakah governorate.²⁴ State remained concerned about reports of human rights abuses—including abuses against children—and attacks by the SDF, Turkish-supported forces, and other organizations.²⁵

The Syrian regime and its allies Russia and Iran cooperated and shared intelligence to pressure the U.S. to withdraw its forces from Syria.

Lead IG Oversight Activities

Lead IG and partner agencies completed three oversight reports related to OIR during the quarter, including on the DoD's end-use monitoring of sensitive equipment given to the Iraqi government, on State's management of cooperative agreements supporting Refugee Resettlement Support Centers, and on State's management and use of temporary structures at high-threat posts overseas. As of September 30, 2023, 12 projects related to OIR were ongoing, and 5 projects were planned.

Lead IG investigations resulted in a \$108.75 million settlement in a legacy case initiated before the designation of OIR. Investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 9 investigations and coordinated on 61 open investigations. The investigations involve a variety of alleged crimes, including procurement fraud, corruption, grant fraud, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the investigator referred 58 cases to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.







U.S. Army Soldiers fire an M119 Howitzer during a live-fire exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

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A U.S. Soldier, right, corrects an InSF student during a combative training class in Syria. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

This section describes U.S. and Coalition activities during the quarter and progress toward meeting the OIR campaign objectives. The following section, “Broader U.S. Policy Goals,” describes U.S. diplomatic, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance activities that seek to set the conditions necessary for ultimate success of the OIR mission.

MISSION UPDATE

The Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) mission is to advise, assist, and enable partner forces until they can independently maintain the enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq and designated areas of Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks.²⁶


Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), the military arm of the 86-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, executes the OIR campaign.²⁷ CJTF-OIR comprises 29 troop-contributing countries, 25 of which are in the Combined Joint Area of Operations, led by the United States.²⁸

The OIR campaign is organized around four lines of effort.²⁹ (See Figure 1.) In June, CJTF-OIR issued an amendment to its campaign plan that outlines conditions-based milestones against which to measure progress of the mission. Specifically, this assessment framework contains milestones set against an estimated timeline of 2 to 4 years to transition OIR dependencies to a long-term security framework.³⁰

Figure 1.

OIR Lines of Effort

OIR is currently in Phase IV, Normalize, during which CJTF-OIR provides security, planning, and support to the Iraqi government and appropriate authorities in Syria.



- 1. ADVISE, ASSIST, AND ENABLE PARTNER FORCES TO MAINTAIN THE DEFEAT OF ISIS** Coalition Forces are focused on transferring the long-term work in the fight against ISIS to local partner forces by providing those forces with advice, assistance, and other measures needed to enable them to maintain the territorial defeat of ISIS.
- 2. MAINTAIN THE COALITION** The protection and preservation of the Coalition is critical to continuing the mission to maintain the defeat of ISIS.
- 3. ENABLE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ENDURING SECURITY COOPERATION FRAMEWORK IN IRAQ** This complements parallel efforts at the institutional level by Unified Action Partners (including NATO Mission-Iraq and OSC-I) to set the conditions for the future transition of the OIR mission.
- 4. MAXIMIZE EFFECTS IN THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT** Through press releases and social media, the Coalition reinforces the messages that support CJTF-OIR's regional partners and combats disinformation from ISIS.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.1 OIR 004, 12/21/2022 and 23.2 OIR 004, 6/21/2023; CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 7/18/2023.

In July, CJTF-OIR completed an initial, baseline assessment using the new assessment framework.³¹ The campaign plan and the assessment results are classified, though CJTF-OIR provided unclassified information about campaign progress that is presented in this report.

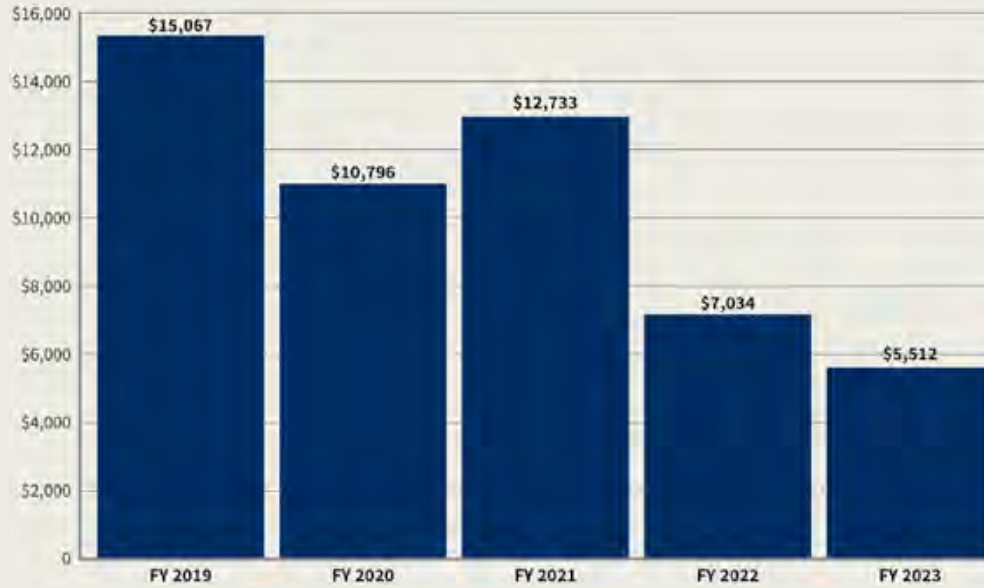
FUNDING

In FY 2023, Congress appropriated approximately \$5.5 billion to the DoD for OIR, of which \$4.5 billion had been disbursed as of the end of August.³² (See page 10.) CJTF-OIR uses the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) as the primary vehicle for providing materiel and other support to partner forces in Iraq and Syria.³³ Of the \$475 million CTEF appropriation for FY 2023, \$315 million was designated to support partner forces in Iraq, of which \$264 million had been disbursed as of the end of August. Of the \$160 million designated for Syrian partner forces, \$71.9 million had been disbursed as of the end of August.³⁴

FMF/FMS: Congress approved \$1.25 billion for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Iraq (\$250 million annually) for FY 2019 through FY 2023.³⁵ For FY 2024, State requested a reduced amount, \$75.5 million, for FMF since substantial funds appropriated in previous years for FMF remain available for immediate expenditure against cases developed with the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).³⁶ As of the end of the quarter, approximately \$476 million of these funds had been spent.³⁷ Although funding for FY 2023 for Iraq has been appropriated by Congress, it has not been apportioned. State said the process to apportion and obligate the FY 2023 funds was not completed prior to the end of the fiscal year.³⁸

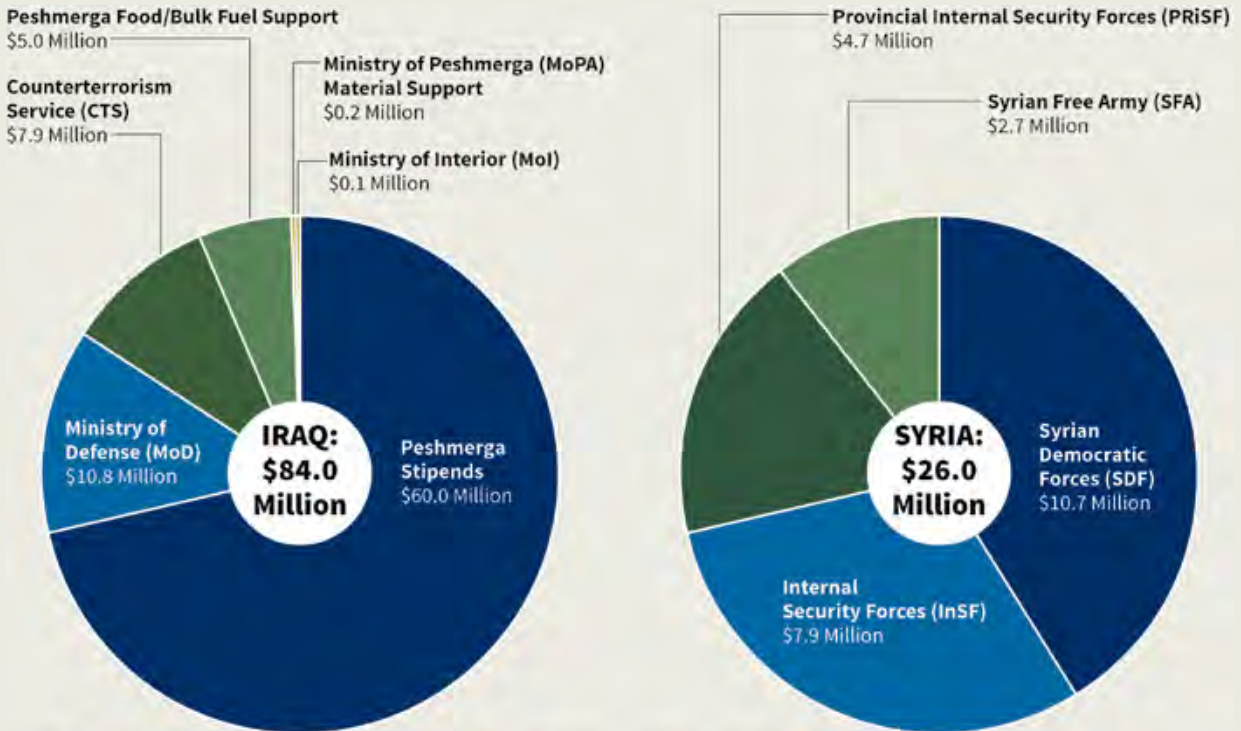
DOD FUNDING FOR OIR

DoD Enacted Funding for OIR FY 2019-FY 2023, in \$ Millions



Funding information for stabilization and humanitarian assistance programs managed by State and USAID is available on page 46. State and Mission Iraq require separate funding for personnel, operations, facilities, and security that support U.S. Government activities and programs in Iraq and Syria.

CTEF-funded Support to Iraq and Syria, July–September 2023



Notes: Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. Syria includes \$14.0 million in stipends paid.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD DIG request for information, 23.4 OIR FOL006, 10/6/2023.

End-Use Monitoring: During the quarter, the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) end-use monitoring (EUM) team inventoried approximately 300 night-vision devices with the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (CTS). OSC-I staff and CTS leaders reviewed the status of night-vision devices and future inventories at the CTS headquarters. In September, the OSC-I EUM team met with Iraqi officials to discuss the way ahead to properly inventory night-vision devices deployed across the country. Additionally, the OSC-I EUM team submitted two third-party transfer questionnaires to State’s Office of Regional Security and Arms Transfers for U.S. authorization to demilitarize 20 M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tanks that are battle damaged, unaccounted for, or at the end of their life and beyond economical repair.³⁹

Leahy Vetting: State reported that OSC-I was not aware of any instances during the quarter where assistance was provided by the United States to Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) in violation of the Leahy law. The Leahy law refers to two statutory provisions prohibiting the United States from providing certain assistance to a unit of a foreign security force if the U.S. Government has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. State vets proposed recipients of such assistance to determine if there is credible information that they have committed a gross violation of human rights.⁴⁰

STATUS OF ISIS

ISIS capabilities remained degraded in Iraq and Syria as ISIS continued to lose leaders and maintained a survival posture.⁴¹ CJTF-OIR reported that overall, ISIS claimed 41 attacks in Iraq and Syria during the quarter, down 72 percent compared with the same period in 2022.⁴² (See pages 12-13.)

Major General Matthew McFarlane, then Commander of CJTF-OIR, stated in August that despite the decrease in activity, ISIS seeks to resurge and remaining fighters aspire to rebuild the group’s territorial caliphate.

Major General Matthew McFarlane, then Commander of CJTF-OIR, stated in August that despite the decrease in activity, ISIS seeks to resurge and remaining fighters aspire to rebuild the group’s territorial caliphate.⁴³ He said that the Coalition continued to work with partner forces to contain the immediate threat of ISIS fighters still at large, and to repatriate tens of thousands of displaced persons, from which ISIS seeks to recruit, and thousands of ISIS detainees the group wants to break out as part of its long-term strategy.⁴⁴

The United Nations Secretary-General’s bi-annual assessment of the ISIS threat stated that “the risk of resurgence remained.”⁴⁵ The report said that ISIS is carefully choosing battles to limit losses, while continuing to recruit from displaced persons camps and vulnerable communities in Syria and neighboring countries.⁴⁶ The large numbers of displaced persons in the camps and ISIS detainees held in facilities in northeastern Syria continued to present “serious challenges to the region and beyond.”⁴⁷

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessed that ISIS will “undoubtedly” aspire to exploit tensions that erupted in violent clashes during the quarter between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the leadership of the Arab tribes in eastern Syria.⁴⁸ Anti-regime protests in Syria also suggest public dissatisfaction that ISIS might exploit.⁴⁹ The DIA said that the ongoing economic crisis is weakening all parties, including ISIS, the SDF, and rival groups in Syria.⁵⁰

ISIS ACTIVITY AND CAPABILITY

Attack Trends This Quarter

ISIS continued to operate in a survival posture in both Iraq and Syria, prioritizing security over conducting frequent attacks. Though degraded, ISIS remained able to conduct attacks and respond in its own defense.

Leadership losses continued to disrupt and degrade the group's ability to plan and carry out complex attacks, though ISIS still aspires to conduct such operations.

IRAQ

ISIS militants killed a French Special Forces soldier and wounded 8 French and Iraqi soldiers during a counter-ISIS raid in Salah al-Din province. The planned ambush demonstrated that, given notice, ISIS can still respond to raids in Iraq, the ISF assessed.

ISF operations prevented ISIS freedom of movement, while Iraqi leaders prevented ISIS from stoking sectarian tensions by resolving sectarian issues quickly.

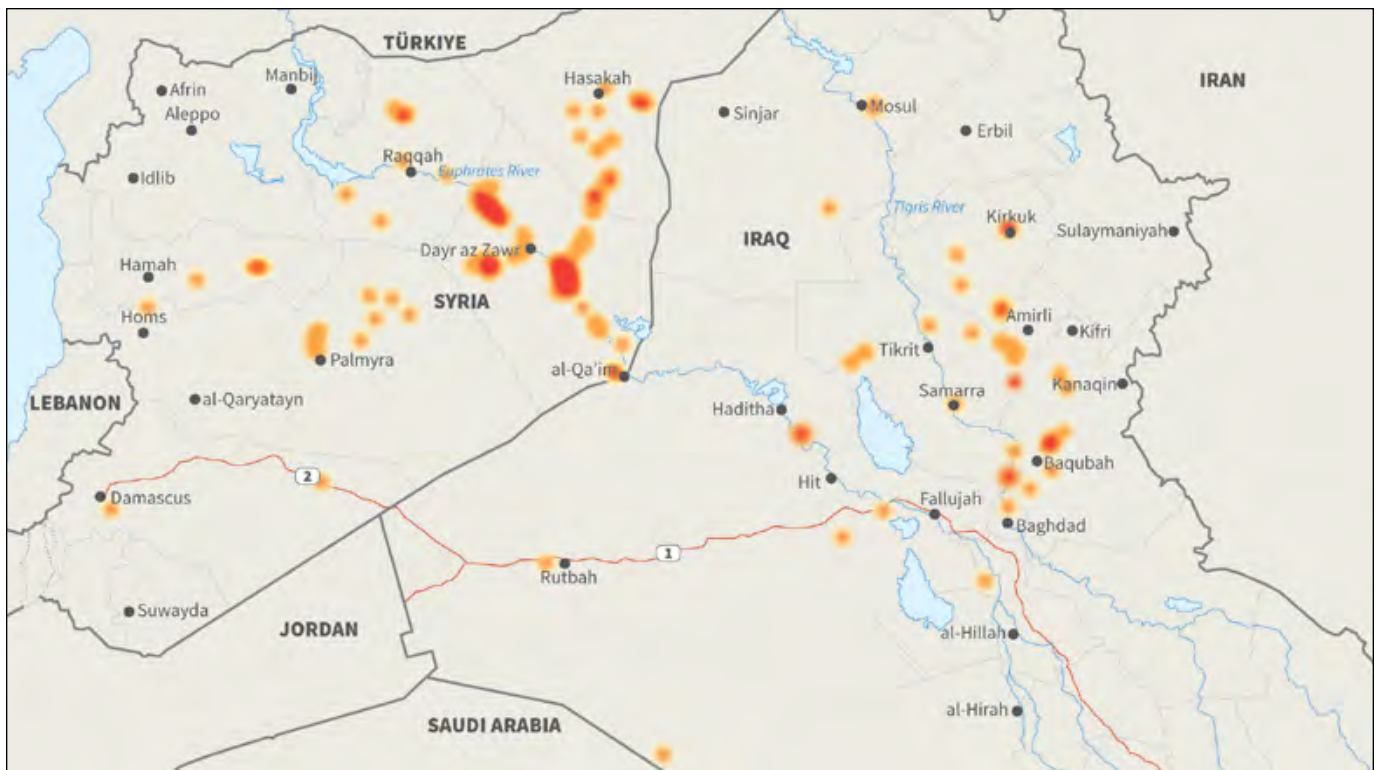
ISIS maintained a low-grade insurgency in rural areas, and continued to exploit security gaps along the Iraqi Kurdistan Region border.

SYRIA

While ISIS capability levels remained low, unlike in Iraq, the trajectory of its declining capabilities in Syria appeared to level off.

ISIS claimed several high profile attacks, including an attack on a Shia shrine in Damascus in late July that killed 6 people, and a strike on a bus carrying Syrian Regime military personnel in Dayr az Zawr governorate in early August, which killed more than 20 people.

ISIS engaged in multiple clashes with regime forces in Dayr az Zawr governorate and in the Syrian Desert, according to media reports.



REMOVAL OF ISIS LEADERSHIP With the ongoing removal of ISIS leaders, ISIS faces a shrinking cadre of experienced leaders and likely a degradation of internal and external attack capabilities.

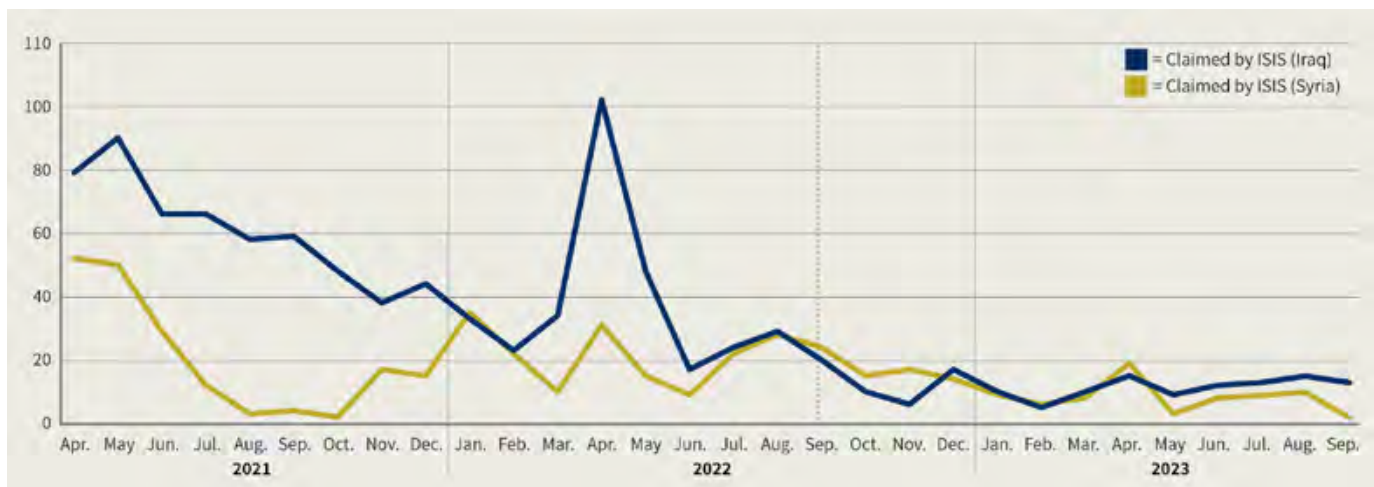
On July 7, U.S. Forces conducted a strike in eastern Syria that killed the ISIS leader in eastern Syria, Abu Usama al-Muhajir, who oversaw daily operations in the region.

On August 3, ISIS named a new leader, Abu Hafs al-Hashimi, after confirming the death of its previous leader Abu al-Husayn al-Qurayshi in northwestern Syria in April during clashes with militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Türkiye claimed in April that it killed the ISIS leader.

On September 23, U.S. Forces captured ISIS Syria Operational and Facilitation official Abu Halil al-Fad'ani during a helicopter raid in northern Syria. Al-Fad'ani was assessed to have relationships throughout the ISIS network in the region.

On September 30, U.S. forces captured ISIS facilitator Mamduh Ibrahim al-haji Shaykh during a helicopter raid in northern Syria.

ISIS Attacks by Month, April 2021–September 2023



ISIS Capability Assessment

CAPABILITIES: ISIS attack numbers, sophistication, and complexity **continued to decline** during the quarter, as did the group’s ability to employ IEDs, conduct activities in proximity to urban centers, and diversify its targets. ISIS remains unable to make any progress toward its ultimate objective of restoring the territory-controlling “caliphate.”

STRATEGY AND TACTICS: Facing counterterrorism pressure, ISIS has adopted a more **decentralized, networked structure**, with regional groups having more operational autonomy. While ISIS Core leadership does not appear to be exercising command and control over regional affiliates, other connections, including financial and propaganda, remain. ISIS is increasingly **risk averse** to avoid personnel losses. The group is reportedly producing fewer and simpler IEDs and is only using suicide vests as a last resort, to avoid losing operatives. There are reports that ISIS is exploring new avenues for weapons advancement including with increased payloads for unmanned systems and improved IEDs.

ISIS STRUCTURE: ISIS leadership is organized under its General Directorate of Provinces. In Iraq, the Bilad al-Rafidayn Office oversees ISIS in Iraq and Iran. The Bilad al-Rafidayn Office emir is Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rifayi, who was previously the wali of ISIS’s Iraq province. The ISIS Iraq province has about 10 sub-provinces.

The al-Ard al-Mubarakah Office oversees ISIS-Syria. As in Iraq, this construct allows ISIS to **interact globally and support branches** outside of its current area of operations. ISIS has traditionally divided the organizational structure of its Syria and Iraq branches by geographical regions and functional activities such as military, Islamic jurisprudence, and general administration.

EXTERNAL OPERATIONS: ISIS leaders in Iraq and Syria almost certainly remain committed to **directing and enabling** attacks in the West, particularly in Europe. ISIS senior leaders continued to publicly encourage branches and supporters to conduct attacks in the West. However, the majority of the branches probably lack both the intent and capability to direct attacks against the U.S.

homeland. In Turkey, counterterrorism pressure almost certainly constrained ISIS’s ability to conduct attacks in and from Turkey, but the group continues to use the country as a facilitation hub to support regional and global activity.

FINANCES: ISIS Core’s revenue **continued to decline** due to Coalition and law enforcement actions targeting ISIS leaders and financial reserves and disrupting its financial facilitation networks in the Middle East. This included Treasury working to designate ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in various countries. (See page 65.)

As a result, ISIS Core remained **unable to meet its financial obligations**, particularly payments to family members of deceased and imprisoned ISIS personnel. ISIS also paid its leaders sporadically, probably several hundred dollars a month, while missing payments for fighters, likely to extend its limited financing.

ISIS remained able to draw from millions of dollars in **cash reserves** it held as of late 2022. The reserves are buried in physical caches and dug up and smuggled across Iraq and Syria. To raise funds, the group engages in **extortion and kidnapping** for ransom, and, some soliciting of donations via online platforms. ISIS Core relied on regional offices of its General Directorate of Provinces to fund and guide ISIS branches and networks around the world, particularly across Africa, Yemen, and in South, Central and Southeast Asia. Leaders in Iraq and Syria increasingly emphasized to their subordinates the importance of fundraising.

ISIS continued to use informal cash transfer networks, known as **hawalas**, to distribute cash throughout Iraq and Syria. ISIS is also increasingly using virtual assets for international funds transfers, in order to support militant operations, recruit and maintain loyal supporters, and secure the release of its members from detention. ISIS also transferred funds—up to \$20,000 per month—to individuals at al-Hol through intermediaries in Türkiye via the hawala system, and via **cash transfer apps** and **cryptocurrency**.

Sources: See Endnotes on page 103.



Iraqi Army officers inspect a M119 Howitzer during an exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

In Iraq, CJTF-OIR operates at the invitation of the Iraqi government in an advise, assist, and enable role to support ISF and KSF operations to defeat ISIS.⁵¹ (See page 15.) In August, Iraq and the United States reaffirmed their mutual commitment to the campaign to defeat ISIS following the bilateral Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue. The dialogue focused on a range of bilateral defense issues, including the Coalition’s Defeat-ISIS campaign and ongoing efforts to prevent an ISIS resurgence and affirm joint cooperation with the ISF and KSF.⁵²

During the meetings, the U.S. and Iraqi governments agreed to continue a separate dialogue, inclusive of the Global Coalition, to determine a timeline for the Coalition’s military mission in Iraq according to three factors: the threat level from ISIS, operational and environmental requirements, and ISF capability levels.⁵³ The DIA reported that, according to media accounts, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani is reassessing Iraq’s relationship with Coalition forces.⁵⁴

New Iraqi Budget Boosts Funding for Security Forces

During the quarter, Iraq began to implement its new 3-year budget, which passed in June after more than a year of parliamentary negotiations. The lack of a budget had stalled many OIR-related reform efforts.⁵⁵ The budget includes funding increases of at least 40 percent to the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Ministry of Interior. The budget also includes increased funding for the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an umbrella of more than 50 armed factions—the largest and most influential of which are aligned with Iran—that does not receive U.S. support.⁵⁶

COALITION ADVISING IN IRAQ

Kurdish Security Forces

Coalition advisors work with leaders from the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs at the Kurdistan Coordination Center to enhance operational-level command and control, promote coordination with the ISF, and support other ministry reform objectives. The advisors occasionally work with lower-level KSF units.

Iraqi Security Forces

Coalition military advisors have daily contact with Ministry of Defense leaders at Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I), located at Union III in Baghdad. This advising focuses on the five areas most important for defeating ISIS: target development, air operations, logistics and sustainment, information sharing/command and control, and planning. The advisors do not have regular contact with subordinate ISF units, including the Iraq Ground Forces Command, or ISF personnel outside of Union III.

Non-OIR Advising and Support

Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad conducts bilateral security assistance and security cooperation activities, including training, with partner forces. NATO Mission-Iraq advises ISF leaders at the ministerial level.

Note: OCs are not shown in their actual location within each province.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 22.2 OIR 035, 3/23/2022; Michael Knights and Alex Almeida, "Back to Basics: U.S.-Iraq Security Cooperation in the Post-Combat Era," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 10/26/2021.



Counterterrorism Service

Coalition military advisors work with the CTS at the strategic and operational levels. The advising focuses on air-to-ground integration, ISR, site exploitation, and other areas to develop and assess CTS capabilities.

The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) reported that the budget lists two different personnel numbers for the PMF, including 238,075 total authorized personnel and 122,000 budgeted salaries. USCENTCOM said that the MoD has 453,000 personnel, but the budget does not specify salaries.⁵⁷ One-sixth of the MoD's \$1.45 billion acquisition budget supports contracting at Ali Flaih Air Base so that Iraqi F-16s and AC-208s are able to conduct operations against ISIS.⁵⁸

ISF Lacks Artillery and Logistics Capabilities and Relies on Coalition for Intelligence Gathering

CJTF-OIR continued to advise ISF leaders at the Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I) on several warfighting functions, with incremental improvement in some areas. (See Table 1.) Coalition advisors reported that overall, the JOC-I continued to suffer from a lack of information-sharing between directorates and a lack of coordination among directorates to facilitate mission planning.⁵⁹

The ISF did not conduct large “named” operations against ISIS during the quarter, instead focusing its attention on quelling civil unrest and protecting pilgrims participating in Arba’een, a religious pilgrimage observed by Shia Muslims in early September.⁶⁰ CJTF-OIR reported that security operations were conducted multiple times in Baghdad due to protests against Coalition forces and in response to an incident in Sweden in which an Iraqi national burned a copy of the Qur’an.⁶¹

According to USCENTCOM, the Coalition partnered with the ISF during 20 operations against ISIS in July resulting in 2 ISIS operatives killed and 24 detained and 28 operations in August resulting in 6 ISIS fighters killed and 18 detained.⁶²

COUNTERTERRORISM FORCES

CTS Remains Reliant on Coalition Support, But Receives Little From Other ISF Entities

The Counterterrorism Service (CTS) is Iraq’s premier special operations force and one of the Coalition’s primary partners for targeting ISIS in Iraq. According to CJTF-OIR, the CTS is capable of executing operations “relatively independently.”⁶³ The new Iraqi budget will ensure funding for the next few years. However, logistical challenges could mount over time and the CTS remains reliant on Coalition forces for some intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support and intelligence.⁶⁴

CJTF-OIR reported no significant change in the CTS’s capabilities and ability to conduct targeted operations against ISIS compared to the previous quarter. However, the success rate of the CTS’s independent targeted operations against ISIS varies across Iraq, with each CTS battalion and brigade headquarters demonstrating differing levels of proficiency based on the extent of their capability, Coalition partnership, and threat environment of each province.⁶⁵

According to USCENTCOM, the Coalition partnered with the ISF during 20 operations against ISIS in July resulting in 2 ISIS operatives killed and 24 detained and 28 operations in August resulting in 6 ISIS fighters killed and 18 detained.

Table 1.
Status of JOC-I Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Status
Planning	JOC-I does not universally conduct integrated mission planning; that is a function frequently delegated to Operational Commands. Coalition advisers reported that they can assess “with moderate confidence” that the JOC-I does not orchestrate many operations at the national level, and instead delegates planning to provincial operations commands. If PMF is present, coalition advisers are not including in national level planning. During the quarter, Coalition advisers focused on fostering a greater level of cross-functional planning between JOC-I directorates. Advisers also sought increased access to JOC-I planning activities, and pressed for a greater level of partner force and Coalition collaboration regarding operations planning.
Operations	While the CTS is capable of executing operations against ISIS relatively independently, the ISF relies on Coalition ISR support to maintain overwatch to counter ISIS. In early summer, the JOC-I delayed or cancelled some operations due to potential exceedance capacity limits. This quarter it exhibited growing confidence in orchestrating multiple security operations during religious pilgrimages and in response to civil unrest in Kirkuk province. Coalition operations advisers reported a steady increase in the number of JOC-I senior leadership personnel attending a working groups for operations and planning despite a continued lack of information-sharing between JOC-I directorates.
Intelligence	The JOC-I continued to make incremental improvements in intelligence fusion and utilizes organic intelligence to cue Coalition force provided overhead ISR in support of operational target find, fix and finish. Coalition advisers reported that the JOC-I has improved its ability to fuse multiple intelligence sources to make assessments and this quarter produced the first JOC-I “Center of Gravity Analysis”—a military concept used to plan operations. During the quarter, Coalition advisers focused on improving the JOC-I’s ability to integrate intelligence from external agencies, such as the Federal Police, and coordinate intelligence collection plans involving multiple provincial operations commands. Coalition advisers reported incremental improvements, including providing Intelligence reporting ahead of ground operations and dynamically moving ISR assets to better facilitate intelligence collection. Partner Force counter ISIS operations are exhausting partner force ISR assets such as the Puma due to significantly increased use of this platform.
Command and Control	The JOC-I continued to incorporate two command and control technologies—Shout NANOs (a GPS-based hand-held radio) and the Harris radio system—into operations, with varying levels of success. Efforts focused on distributing Shout NANOs to the ISF and updating functions such as texting. The JOC-I continued planning to distribute Harris radios in December and train ISF personnel to use the associated software in October and November. Coalition advisers reported that the ISF is “very willing” to utilize the Shout NANOs but needs to “make more efforts” to use them, while ISF capability to use the Harris system is gradually developing.
Fire Support	The JOC-I is working towards the capability to integrate artillery into its operations processes. The ISF integrates artillery at the operational command-level and below, and intermittently provides a liaison officer to the JOC-I who brings portions of the process of incorporating indirect fires into the planning of operations. The artillery liaison officer lacks the staff and equipment necessary to integrate ISF cannon and rocket fires into planned or dynamic operations. To improve ISF confidence to employ indirect fire, Coalition advisers coordinate training events and a train-the-trainer program at al-Asad Air Base and reported that the ISF is “very receptive” to training. Concurrent efforts at the operational command and JOC-I have also been well received.
Sustainment and Logistics	The JOC-I’s logistics directorate is underdeveloped/under-resourced and is not meeting OIR expectations. The directorate faces challenges in maintaining awareness of spare parts and in maintaining effective contractor support to service existing equipment. Coalition advisers reported that logistical challenges could mount over time. The MOD is the force provider and JOC-I is the force employer. Iraq requires ministerial level engagement to establish a MTOE-like concept to ensure a baseline understanding of unit capabilities. Iraq still requires support from the Coalition, including the financial backing and logistical system support, and still requires assistance in building enduring processes that bridge siloed staff processes.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.4 OIR 022, 23.4 OIR 023, 23.4 OIR 025, 23.4 OIR 031, 23.4 OIR 033, 9/14/2023; CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 10/18/2023.

During the quarter, the CTS conducted 32 partnered operations with Coalition forces that resulted in 28 suspected ISIS fighters detained and 5 killed.⁶⁶ This compares to 39 partner operations with Coalition forces last quarter, which resulted in 15 ISIS detainees.⁶⁷ Additionally, the CTS conducted 15 combined operations with the Kurdish Counterterrorism Group (CTG) and Coalition forces during the quarter.⁶⁸ During these operations, the CTS destroyed enemy bed-down locations and captured weapons, phones, and SIM cards.⁶⁹ Coalition advisors continued to work with the CTS on exploitation of captured enemy material for follow-on targeting of ISIS individuals and proper processes for future prosecutions of suspected ISIS detainees. CJTF-OIR reported that conviction rates of ISIS detainees remained high during the quarter, with the overall conviction rate over 90 percent.⁷⁰

CJTF-OIR assessed that integration and interaction between ISF units and the CTS will need to increase as they take on a more significant role in their security, and the Coalition reduces its forces in theater.⁷¹ However, CJTF-OIR reported that it was not aware of any ISF support provided to the CTS during the quarter.⁷²

CTS to Train First Recruitment Class Since 2018

The CTS has not run a recruitment and force generation program since 2018, a delay that was exacerbated by the long government formation process. The 2023 Iraqi budget, which covers funding for fiscal years 2023 to 2025, has given the CTS authority to recruit 3,000 new soldiers from the Iraqi civilian population and an additional 500 soldiers from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). This recruitment will offset personnel losses due to retirement, absence without leave, and casualties.⁷³

CJTF-OIR said that Coalition advisors will be heavily involved in advising CTS force generation for many months as these new recruits are selected and sent to the CTS school for training. Coalition advisors are working with CTS leadership to enroll 75 high-quality CTS soldiers to be trainers at the CTS school with the goal of addressing upcoming training bottlenecks that will occur due to the high number of new recruits.⁷⁴

U.S. Materiel Support to the CTS

During the quarter, the United States delivered to the CTS CTEF equipment valued at a total of \$7.94 million, including small arms ammunition, water trucks and trailers, and containerized medical housing units. CJTF-OIR said that there were no CTEF-supported training and advising activities this quarter.⁷⁵

OSC-I continued to focus on the United States's long-term security partnership with the CTS to build its operational and institutional capacity through security cooperation activities and targeted reforms.⁷⁶ USCENTCOM said that OSC-I works in concert with the Coalition due to the limited scope and sustainability of CTEF support compared to FMS and FMF programming provided through OSC-I.⁷⁷ OSC-I's CTS portfolio consists of 16 active FMF cases, 4 FMS cases, 4 credit facility cases, and 2 title 10 section 333 build partner capacity cases, with a total portfolio value of \$87 million.⁷⁸

Table 2.

CTEF Deliveries to the CTS

U.S. Materiel Support to the CTS Snapshot

CTEF: \$7.94 million in Q4 2023

\$110.22 million since Q4 2021

FMF/FMS/Sec. 333: 26 active cases totaling \$87 million

Sources: USCENTCOM, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.4 OIR 028, 9/14/2023; 23.4 OIR FOL006, 10/6/2023; 23.4 OIR 006, 9/14/2023; 23.3 OIR FOL010, 7/10/2023; 23.1 OIR FOL007, 1/17/2023; 22.4 OIR FOL006, 10/11/2022; 22.3 OIR FOL006, 7/11/2022; 22.2 OIR FOL015, 4/11/2022; 22.1 OIR FOL014, 1/18/2022; and 21.4 OIR FOL016, 9/22/2021.

ISF AIR SUPPORT AND ARTILLERY

Iraqi Tactical Air Controllers Successfully Integrate into the JOC-I to Direct Airstrikes

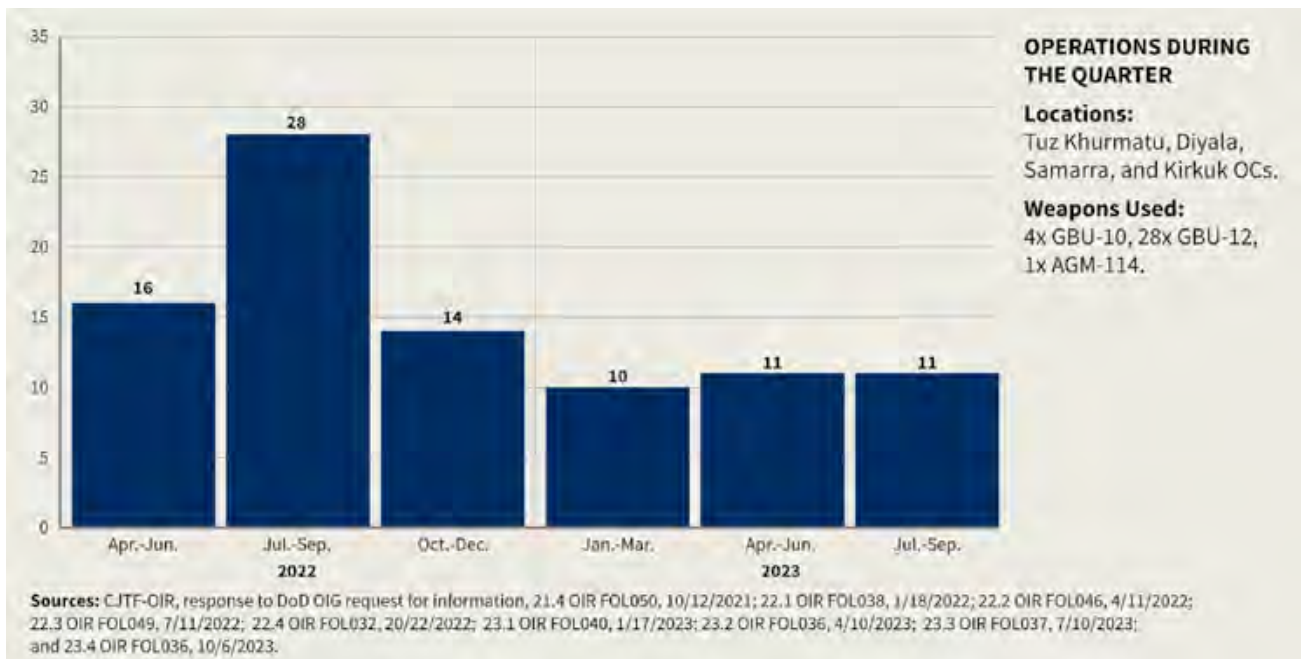
CJTF-OIR stated that overall there was no noticeable change in ISF aerial strike capabilities since last quarter. CJTF-OIR said notable observed shortcomings were a low mission capability rate of the majority of Iraqi Air Force (IqAF) airframes except the F-16, a small instructor force, and the critical reliance on Coalition advisors as a bridge between data collection and targeted effects.⁷⁹

During the quarter, ISF aircraft conducted 11 airstrikes targeting ISIS personnel and bed-down locations in Salah ad Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala provinces.⁸⁰ All airstrikes except one were enabled by Coalition forces. Additionally, CJTF-OIR said that the ISF met its objectives during every airstrike, including positioning the strikes within the information domain to message the Iraqi people that the ISF remains committed to the destruction of ISIS.⁸¹

Pilot Training: CJTF-OIR also reported that there are still too few Iraqi instructors to train IqAF personnel.⁸² Training instructors usually involves U.S.-delivered training outside of Iraq or limited in-country training from Coalition members.⁸³ During the quarter, U.S. Air Forces Central initiated a “fly-to-advise” project to support the IqAF. The commander of the Iraqi Air Defense Center also visited the Combined Air Operations Center at al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar in an effort to expand his understanding of how a shared air picture can improve air space management.⁸⁴

Figure 2.

Counter-ISIS Airstrikes by Iraqi Aircraft, April 2022-September 2023



CJTF-OIR reported that several instructional staff are newly arrived to support this training, including a new F-16 instructor pilot and an instructor for the T-6 trainer aircraft (who is waiting for the IqAF to secure a maintenance program for the fleet and pass the required airworthiness assessment). A MQ-9 unmanned aerial system (UAS) pilot and Hellfire missile expert arrived to help improve Iraqi use of the missile and ISR capabilities on their AC-208 aircraft. A qualified C-130 pilot is expected to arrive next year.⁸⁵

Target Development: CJTF-OIR reported that the IqAF continues to be heavily reliant on Coalition enablement to develop targets for precision strikes. This is in part because the ISF lacks persistent ISR even when target discovery is made with Iraqi assets. CJTF-OIR noted that the most notable improvement during the quarter was the use of U.S.-produced Puma UASs under the direction of the ISF's Military Intelligence Directorate for target discovery and contributed to target development.⁸⁶ However, the ISF's Chinese-produced CH-4 UASs and U.S.-produced Scan Eagles remain underutilized.⁸⁷

Air-to-Ground Coordination: The Coalition seeks to train more Iraqi tactical air controllers (ITAC) who direct Iraqi air assets as they provide support to units on the ground. CJTF-OIR reported that the JOC-I Strike Cell welcomed the inclusion of two CTS ITACs to direct airstrikes with their Coalition counterparts on hand to ensure quality control.⁸⁸ The ITACs are slowly taking on the responsibilities expected of them; they controlled at least two airstrikes during combat operations during the quarter.⁸⁹ CJTF-OIR added that the ITACs have positive working relationships with their JOC-I coworkers and require moderate input from the U.S. counterparts.⁹⁰

In addition, two Iraqis will attend a tactical air controller course next year hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Defense in order to meet the required standards for directing airstrikes.⁹¹ The UAE course would take at least 2 years to complete if everything goes right. In the meantime, CJTF-OIR has been providing training to existing ITACs to adapt to their role in the JOC-I which can be completed in a month. CJTF-OIR assesses that the ITACs will eventually be able to control air operations with little to no Coalition oversight. CJTF-OIR added that while ITAC skills are taught at the CTS school, the skills are not adequately maintained when soldiers return to the field.⁹²

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance: Overall, Coalition advisors do not assess any major improvements in the ISF's ISR collection abilities within the JOC-I because a dedicated ISR division does not exist, preventing ISR collection and target development planning as well as the possibility of asset and information sharing. CJTF-OIR stated that Coalition efforts to establish an ISR division within the JOC-I have been met with general unwillingness from the JOC-I leadership.⁹³

Command and Control: Communication between the JOC-I and ISF aircraft remains an obstacle as well. According to CJTF-OIR, the JOC-I Strike Cell is currently not equipped with an independent communications suite, preventing direct communication from ground-to-air during strikes. Instead, the Coalition's Strike Cell still serves as the communications link for all airstrikes.⁹⁴ Coalition advisors have identified a need for a satellite-based push-to-talk radio for AC-208 aircraft and Iraqi Army Aviation Command's (IqAAC) helicopters to be able to communicate with the JOC-I during flight missions. CJTF-OIR said that, currently, it is only possible for Iraqi F-16s to communicate directly from JOC-I Strike Cell,

CJTF-OIR reported that the IqAF continues to be heavily reliant on Coalition enablement to develop targets for precision strikes.

and AC-208s and IqAAC helicopters cannot due to distance and low operating altitude of those airframes.⁹⁵

Introduction of a Harris radio network in the JOC-I and creation of the JOC-I Fusion Cell will seek to add this capability with planned future FMF/FMS and CTEF deliveries.⁹⁶ CJTF-OIR explained that the creation of the JOC-I Fusion Cell, or a similar capability, will seek to improve command and control for the JOC-I Strike Cell and the ISF's ability to independently execute airstrikes. It will also provide an opportunity for improved communication between operations, intelligence, and plans.⁹⁷

Iraqis Rarely Use Rotary Wing, Non-U.S.-supplied Aircraft

The Iraqi forces also employ their rotary-wing aircraft infrequently for strikes. CJTF-OIR assessed this is due to low maintenance capable rates and the distance to areas of interest.⁹⁸ As noted earlier, IqAAC helicopters are also not directly under the JOC-I command and control, causing inefficiencies. The senior Coalition air advisor expressed a desire to bring all ISF aerial assets into a more coordinated and integrated chain of command.⁹⁹ During the quarter, IqAAC helicopters did attempt a strike with rockets, but inaccurate fire resulted in no positive effects.¹⁰⁰

USCENTCOM reported that the IqAAC's Russian-produced helicopters are rarely flown due to maintenance constraints, outdated systems, and a lack of available spare parts.¹⁰¹ In recent months, sanctions related to the war in Ukraine have prevented the acquisition of new parts.¹⁰² Of the IqAAC's 45 Mi-17 medium lift helicopters, only 7 are still operational, though the remaining aircraft are expected to be grounded and requiring overhaul by early 2024. Nearly one third (6 out of 21) Mi-35 attack helicopters are operational and all are expected to be grounded by the end of the year, while all Mi-28 attack helicopters are already grounded. USCENTCOM stated that the IqAAC has asked OSC-I to look for alternative sources for spare parts for their Russian aircraft, which OSC-I is actively pursuing.¹⁰³

CJTF-OIR also reported that the IqAF's Czech-made L-159 light attack fighters are on track for test flights with the desire of becoming an additional strike asset for precision guided munitions.¹⁰⁴ The L-159s were delivered to Iraq in 2015 and have only seen limited combat use.¹⁰⁵ CJTF-OIR explained that supply chain and parts delivery remain a critical shortcoming that continues to degrade IqAF's ability to conduct missions.¹⁰⁶

Integration of ISF Artillery into Operations Still Lacking

CJTF-OIR reported that the JOC-I still does not have an artillery integration process, despite the establishment of an Iraqi fire support team in October 2022.¹⁰⁷ This is due in part because the JOC-I does not have authorized artillery staff that would be responsible for integrating indirect fire into planned or dynamic operations.¹⁰⁸ Currently, the Iraqi artillery directorate intermittently provides a liaison officer to the JOC-I who provides very rudimentary capabilities to incorporate indirect fires into planning.¹⁰⁹

However, during the quarter the ISF expressed and demonstrated a desire to use artillery. CJTF-OIR explained that due to the nature of the current counter-ISIS operations, the JOC-I did not identify until recently the operational requirement to integrate indirect fire support with Iraqi national assets such as ISR and strike aircraft.¹¹⁰

STATUS OF U.S.-SUPPLIED AIRCRAFT AND EQUIPMENT



F-16: 19 out of 32 Full Mission Capable (FMC). In August, the Iraqi Minister of Defense signed a letter of request approving a \$10 million FMF-funded “train-to-transition” plan for contractors to train IqAF ground crews to improve their ability to independently maintain IqAF F-16s. An additional \$60 million in FMF-funds were approved to combine contractor logistics support cases for the F-16s through December 2024.



IA407s: 18 partially mission capable. The IA407s are degraded due to their MX-15 infrared laser designator requiring maintenance, preventing the use of laser guided munitions. Efforts to repair the MX-15s are delayed due to a contract dispute, but USCENCOM says a temporary solution has been found to have them repaired by the U.S. Army at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Additional flight system upgrades for the IA407s are expected to start in April 2024 and funded through FMF. An order for 15 new Armed Bell 407Ms (a modernized variant of the IA407) is also awaiting approval from the Iraqi government.



A/C-208: 10 out of 12 FMC. A \$84 million FMS and FMF-funded case to support contractor logistics support and training for the C-208 variants remain open. A new \$58.7 million FMF-funded contractor support and cockpit upgrade package is in development.



King Air 350: 4 out of 6 FMC. Contractor logistics support for the IqAF’s King Air 350 manned ISR aircraft has been lacking since October 2022. The Iraqi government signed a \$20 million FMS contract in July to go with sole source contractor for full logistics support for the King Air fleet.



C-172: 8 out of 9 FMC. The same \$84 million FMS and FMF-funded case that supports the C-208s also provides contractor logistics support and training for the IqAF’s C-172 trainer aircraft



C-130: 5 out of 6 FMC. OSC-I submitted a new \$34 million FMS case for Iraqi government approval to continue contractor logistics support for Iraq’s C-130 transport aircraft. An estimate for propeller and propulsion system support is also in development out of concern for engine spares.



T-6: 11 out of 14 FMC. A new \$29 million FMS contract was signed in July for sole source contractor logistics support to the IqAF’s T-6 trainer aircraft. The previous contract ended in October 2022.



OH-58s and Bell 206s: The IqAAC is considering retiring the helicopters due to spare parts being no longer produced and the likely savings from required contractor support. Both helicopter types are used as trainers and will be replaced with 15 new Bell 505s that are being purchased with FMF funding. The first seven Bell 505s are expected to be delivered in spring of 2024.

Sources: USCENCOM, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.4 OIR 035, 9/14/2023.

CJTF-OIR reported that compared with the previous quarter, the number of fire support operations significantly decreased due to a lack of trust in artillery capabilities and prioritizing other assets such as aircraft to strike specific targets.

CJTF-OIR reported that compared with the previous quarter, the number of fire support operations significantly decreased due to a lack of trust in artillery capabilities and prioritizing other assets such as aircraft to strike specific targets. However, since August 25, artillery strikes resumed in the Kirkuk operations command area.¹¹¹

In an effort to improve ISF confidence in utilizing indirect fire support, the Coalition continued to provide a train-the-trainer program at al-Asad Air Base focused on training Iraqi artillery crews who operate American-produced M198 155mm towed howitzers and maintaining their technical proficiency. The ISF possess over 100 M198 howitzers, utilized by 10 ISF artillery battalions. CJTF-OIR said that the training refreshed ISF artillery leaders on the techniques and procedures to achieve accurate predicted fires as well as technical training on howitzer maintenance and ammunition handling.¹¹² Additionally, the senior Coalition fires advisor delivered one course during the past quarter and is expected to deliver two courses by the end of the year. CJTF-OIR added that he will also support field artillery training at al-Asad Air Base for an Iraqi artillery battalion.¹¹³

CJTF-OIR hopes that the introduction of Shout NANO tracking systems and the upcoming delivery of Harris radio systems will improve the overall command and control abilities of the JOC-I and the ability to integrate artillery into operations.¹¹⁴

Additionally, there is an ongoing process for the acquisition of Lightweight Counter-Mortar Radar to support Iraqi field artillery targeting.¹¹⁵

KURDISH SECURITY FORCES

MoPA Reform Slowed by Kurdish Political Divide

In September 2022, the United States revised and renewed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) to support reform measures that the ministry is undertaking to create a unified, nonpartisan military that operates under its command.¹¹⁶ The non-binding MoU has served as an organizing framework for DoD counter-ISIS support to the MoPA since 2016 and encourages continued MoPA reform. The MoU will remain in effect until 2026, subject to the availability of funds.¹¹⁷

A key element of the MoPA reform plan is the transfer of politically-aligned Kurdish forces—specifically, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) 70s Unit and the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) 80s Unit—to the command of the MoPA.¹¹⁸ Most personnel transferred from these politically-affiliated forces to the MoPA have been organized into units known as Regional Guard Brigades (RGBs).¹¹⁹

The DIA reported that as of mid-August, the MoPA had established “nominal” control of at least 20 RGBs comprising roughly 54,000 personnel, but that tens of thousands of partisan forces remain under PUK and KDP party control.¹²⁰ CJTF-OIR reported last quarter that it was uncertain how and when the political parties will transfer the remainder of their forces, each numbering roughly 50,000 personnel, to the MoPA.¹²¹

CJTF-OIR said that the “underlying goal of unifying forces under MoPA has been slowed by the ongoing political divide between the KDP and PUK.”¹²² CJTF-OIR called on the KRG to implement reforms ahead of an annual review of the MoU, which had not been conducted by the end of the quarter.¹²³

Meanwhile, the MoPA lacks a permanent leader. MoPA Minister Shoresh Ismail of the PUK resigned last year citing constant meddling by political parties in the ministry’s affairs. Although his resignation was not accepted by the KRG Council of Ministers, he did not remain in his post, and the council did not approve the PUK’s nominated replacement.¹²⁴

MoPA Forces Show Little Improvement in Warfighting Functions Capabilities

CJTF-OIR reported that the Ministry of Peshmerga Operations Center (MoPOC), established in early 2023, has reached initial operation capability. The operations center is in a temporary location, but key personnel have been assigned and the center can conduct basic command and control of MoPA units, including the Regional Guard Brigades and Support Force Commands. The center is expected to be fully operational in 2026.¹²⁵

CJTF-OIR reported that the MoPOC will be responsible for operations against ISIS conducted within the IKR, along with other KRG agencies.¹²⁶ The MoPOC will coordinate operations with the JOC-I in Baghdad, including operations south of the Kurdistan Coordination Line, but these operations will be led by JOC-I and will include the respective Joint Coordination Centers.¹²⁷

During the quarter, Coalition advisers engaged with the KSF at various levels, but the KSF showed little improvement in executing warfighting functions. (See Table 3.) CJTF-OIR has previously reported that some of the most effective counter-ISIS capability, including aggressive patrolling, raids, and ambushes, lies with the commando forces in the 70s and 80s Units and the Zerevani Force, a police unit under the command of the KRG’s Ministry of Interior.¹²⁸ The United States does not provide direct advice or equipment to these forces because they are politically aligned and are not under the control of the MoPA.¹²⁹

MoPA Begins Planning to Contribute to a Joint ISF-KSF Brigade

CJTF-OIR reported that in August, the MoPA initiated planning and coordination to stand up KSF brigades that would operate jointly with the ISF within or near disputed areas claimed by both the Iraqi government and the KRG.¹³⁰ Planning for the joint brigades had been delayed by the stalled Iraqi budget, which passed in June.¹³¹ USCENTCOM reported that Coalition advisers were unable to confirm the distribution of funds allocated to the Joint ISF-KSF Brigades but said no major impacts to the brigades were expected based on the budget.¹³²

CJTF-OIR reported that the idea behind the Joint Brigades is to build greater cohesion between the ISF and KSF along the Kurdistan Coordination Line, areas of northern Iraq claimed by both the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal Iraqi government.¹³³ With an expected force size of 3,700 personnel, a joint brigade is larger than the regular

During the quarter, Coalition advisers engaged with the KSF at various levels, but the KSF showed little improvement in executing warfighting functions.

Table 3.
Status of KSF Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Capability
Planning	KSF Commanders plan, coordinate, and execute military operations without direction from the MoPA. Coalition Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) advisers supported the establishment of the MoPA's 1st and 2nd Divisions, with the aim of becoming fully operational by December. Coalition advisers worked to develop division staff ahead of a planned exercise. A Command Post Exercise revealed rudimentary functional capacity in basic staff functions, but the divisions are far from full operational capability and cannot yet effectively execute command and control of subordinate brigades, nor can they coordinate fire support, logistics, Medevac, or close air support.
Operations	The KSF are efficient in counter-insurgency operations. The development of KSF Joint Brigades is an opportunity to plan and execute counter-ISIS operations in areas along the Kurdistan Coordination Line, which CJTF-OIR described as “currently unreachable.”
Intelligence	Intelligence fusion capabilities have improved. The implementation of Division Intelligence Sections has improved intelligence fusion capabilities, but integrating these sections into the MoPA Intelligence cycle with enhanced training would further expand overall capability. CJTF-OIR reported that the MoPA had made no progress toward increasing MoPA intelligence planning capabilities. Coalition advisers are developing an advanced intelligence training course, and a train-the-trainers course is planned for later in the year.
Command and Control	The MoPA is in the process of establishing a central operations center that will synchronize all military operations conducted by MoPA units in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Coalition forces did not provide direct support to KSF operations, focusing instead on developing the operations center to enable the MoPA to better plan, coordinate, and track the operations of the sector commanders. The establishment of the Ministry of Peshmerga Operations Center (MoPOC) began in early 2023 and has reached initial operating capability. The current MoPOC is in a temporary location with assigned personnel capable of basic command and control of MoPA units, which was demonstrated during divisional exercises in August. The MoPOC will achieve full operating capability once it moves into its permanent building and additional certification events are completed in 2026.
Fire Support	CJTF-OIR has not verified the MoPA's counter-ISIS artillery capabilities. Artillery units under the 1st and 2nd Support Force Commands have not executed combined arms operations since 2017. The communications and command structure within these units is unpracticed and unverified. Coalition advising has focused on integrating artillery and infantry functions and training forward observers, but these efforts have stagnated mostly due to cancellation and postponement of MoPA training workshops.
Logistics and Sustainment	MoPA's logistics and sustainment capabilities degraded during the quarter. A 2-month pause (June and July) in Coalition provisions of food and fuel due to vetting issues of some KSF individuals forced the MoPA to rely on its own budget to procure these essential provisions. The Coalition did not provide logistics support, materiel, or equipment during the quarter. Coalition advisers focused on improving the MoPA's Ammunition Management System and making regional logistics hubs in Duhok and Sulaymaniyah fully operational by the end of 2024.
Information Operations	KSF information operations utilize social media. The KRG General Directorate for Media and National Awareness posts recaps of completed counter-ISIS operations on social media sites, including Facebook, X, Telegram, and Instagram. Posts also highlight efforts to unify the KSF under the MoPA's command. However, they do not post on social media before or during an operation. Coalition advisers urged the directorate to create a command-and-control structure to clarify responsibilities and to establish trainings and a campaign plan for information activities.

Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.4 OIR 042 and 23.4 OIR 043, 9/14/2023; 23.4 OIR CLAR042A and 23.4 OIR CLAR042B, 10/6/2023; CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 10/19/2023; State, vetting comment, 10/19/2023.

Kurdish RGB, which consists of 2,200 soldiers. Coalition advisers anticipate better coordination between the JOC-I, the MoPOC, and the four Joint Coordination Centers which will enable greater information-sharing between the ISF and KSF that will in turn lead to more effective counter-ISIS operations.¹³⁴ Fighting alongside each other also might engender trust between Sunni, Shia and Kurdish soldiers, CJTF-OIR said.¹³⁵

In late August, clashes broke out between the SDF and aligned local fighters from several Arab tribes in the Dayr az Zawr governorate.

SYRIAN PARTNER FORCES

To achieve its mission in Syria, CJTF-OIR works with vetted local partner forces, including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeastern Syria and the Syrian Free Army (SFA), further south along Syria’s southeastern border.¹³⁶

The SDF operates in Hasakah governorate, in areas of the Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah governorates east of the Euphrates River, and in portions of the Aleppo governorate.¹³⁷ The SFA mans outposts in and secures a deconfliction zone within a 55-kilometer radius around At Tanf Garrison, near the confluence of Syria’s border with Jordan and Iraq. (See page 27.) The SFA provides force protection against ISIS and Iran-aligned militia group positions surrounding the deconfliction zone.¹³⁸

Coalition forces operate and support the SDF in the Eastern Syria Security Area (ESSA), which includes Hasakah governorate and parts of Dayr az Zawr east of the Euphrates.¹³⁹ Coalition forces also support SDF operations in Raqqah governorate.¹⁴⁰

SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

Internal Clashes Distract SDF from Counter-ISIS Fight

In late August, clashes broke out between the SDF and aligned local fighters from several Arab tribes in the Dayr az Zawr governorate.¹⁴¹ The DIA reported that this was the first major outbreak of tensions between local Arab forces and the Kurdish-led SDF in northeastern Syria since 2019.¹⁴² The Dayr az Zawr Military Council has for several years been allied with the SDF in its battle against ISIS.¹⁴³

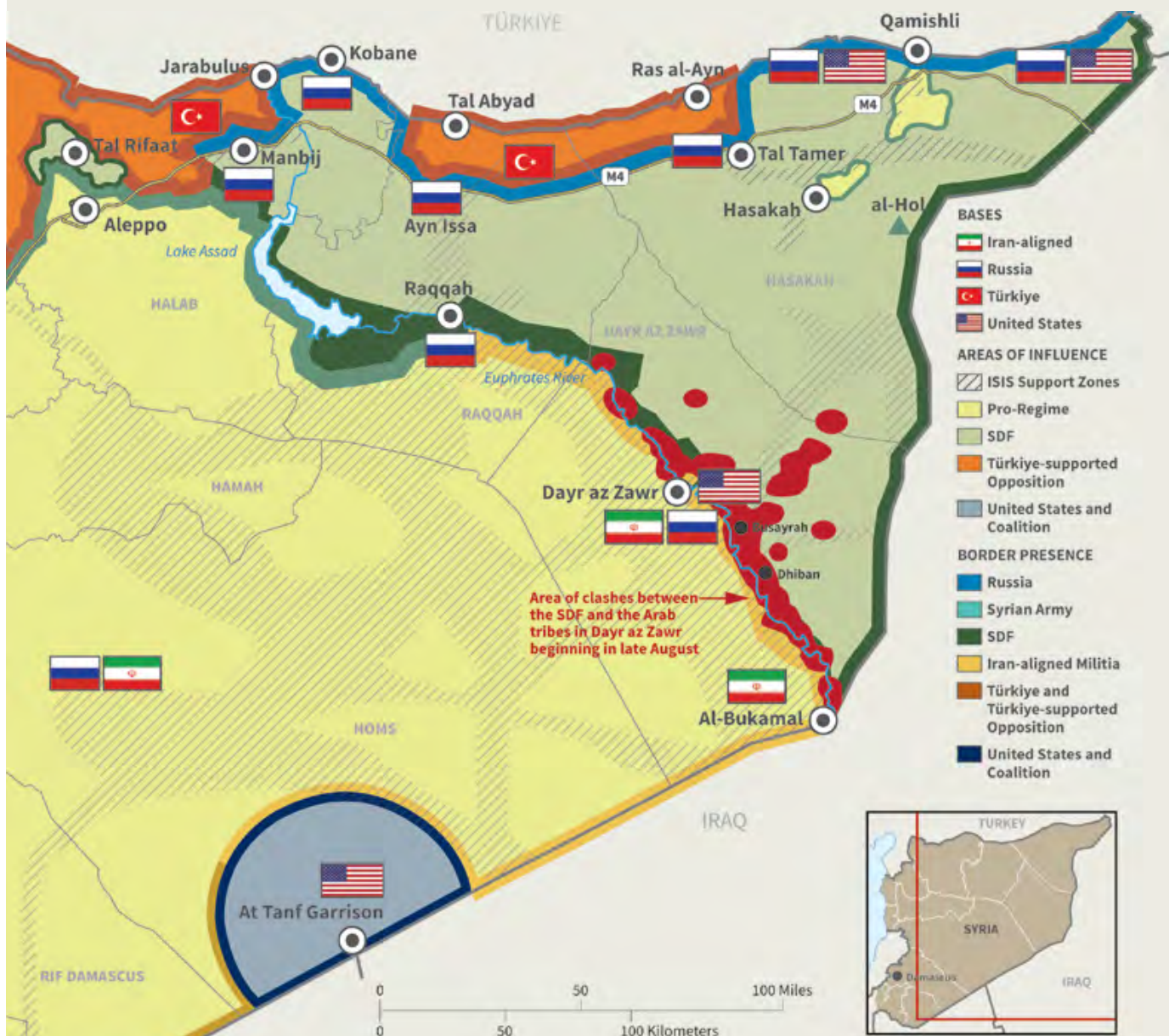
CJTF-OIR issued a statement calling for “an immediate end to the continued clashes,” warning that the violence posed dire consequences and allowed for a resurgence of ISIS.¹⁴⁴ The DIA said that ISIS “will undoubtedly” seek to exploit the tensions.¹⁴⁵ Independent think-tank analysts reported that SDF special operations units who usually focus on fighting ISIS were deployed to address the clashes in Dayr az Zawr.¹⁴⁶

The DIA noted that the clashes further degraded relations between the Kurdish-led SDF and Arab tribes, who believe that they are treated inequitably by the Kurdish-dominated SDF.¹⁴⁷ The fighting, which broke out on August 27, was prompted by the SDF’s detention of the Dayr az Zawr Military Council’s commander, Ahmad al-Khubayl, on charges that included drug trafficking and coordination with external entities. The DIA said that the charges possibly referred to communication between al-Khubayl and the Syrian government.¹⁴⁸

THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT IN SYRIA

Coalition forces in Syria operate in a complex political and military environment. Violence associated with the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, has destabilized the country and led to the deaths of more than half a million people. Today, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, with military support from Russia and Iran, controls most of the country.

The Coalition supports partner forces in areas not under regime control, including the SDF in the northeast and the SFA near the At Tanf Garrison. Russian and pro-regime forces also operate in these areas. Türkiye exercises influence over territory along the northern border and conducts cross-border operations that often target SDF forces. All of these rival forces operate in close proximity, often restricting Coalition and partner force movement, distracting partner forces, limiting humanitarian access, and putting civilians at risk.



Note: This map does not depict precisely or comprehensively bases or operational locations in Syria.

Sources: See Endnotes on page 103.

Independent analysts noted al-Khubayl’s removal tapped into “years of simmering tensions” between the Kurdish-led SDF and local Arab tribes. Arab tribes have a long list of grievances rooted in abusive and exploitative practices by both the Kurdish leadership and many of the Arab leaders they support.¹⁴⁹ Local communities were angered by SDF killings, detention of innocent civilians, a general lack of protection against ISIS attacks and assassinations targeting local leaders, and neglect for the region’s economy and services, according to analysts.¹⁵⁰

The SDF announced an end to the clashes on September 8, saying it had recaptured control of five villages.¹⁵¹ SDF forces continued to arrest people, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and local media and observer reporting.¹⁵² Clashes broke out again on September 25.¹⁵³ The SDF reported that armed groups affiliated with the Syrian regime security apparatus attacked SDF forces under cover of artillery shelling from the west bank of the Euphrates River. The SDF said it facilitated the movement of civilians to safe zones.¹⁵⁴

According to media reporting, dozens were killed in the clashes, including SDF, Dayr az Zawr Military Council members, and civilians.¹⁵⁵ OCHA reported that 96 people were killed and 106 injured during the first round of fighting, while 6,500 families fled their homes.¹⁵⁶ On September 28, a Syrian war monitor raised the death toll to as many as 118, following the renewed clashes.¹⁵⁷

Analysts noted that the SDF response to the clashes, including reports of indiscriminate shelling and heavy deployment of forces, contributed to popular grievances and could cause the unrest to expand geographically.¹⁵⁸

Coalition Supports SDF Counter-ISIS Operations

Coalition forces continued to partner with the SDF during the quarter on counter-ISIS operations with no significant changes from the previous quarter.¹⁵⁹ CJTF-OIR reported that this included training and advising efforts by Combined Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant (CSOJTF-L) and U.S. Special Forces advisors supporting SDF counter-ISIS operations.¹⁶⁰

The SDF reported multiple operations in which it killed or captured ISIS operatives with support from Coalition forces.¹⁶¹ In a July 10 operation, the SDF captured two ISIS operatives in Manbij in northern Syria.¹⁶² In partnered operations with the Kurdish Counterterrorism Group (CTG), the SDF said the CTG dismantled a three-man ISIS cell in the Shadadi area of Hasakah governorate on July 20, killing one member and capturing two along with multiple weapons and ammunition, and killed an ISIS official and seized weapons and ammunition in Raqqah on August 17.¹⁶³

Table 4.

SDF Operations During the Quarter

	July	August	September*
Partnered Operations	11	8	N/A
U.S. Only Operation	0	0	N/A
ISIS Operatives Captured	6	7	N/A
ISIS Operatives Killed	3	1	N/A

*September numbers not yet available.

Sources: USCENTCOM, press release, “July 2023 Month in Review: The Defeat ISIS Mission in Iraq and Syria,” 8/9/2023; USCENTCOM, press release, “August 2023 Month in Review: The Defeat ISIS Mission in Iraq and Syria,” 9/8/2023.

CJTF-OIR reported that the threat of ISIS fighters breaking out of SDF detention facilities remained a significant factor affecting the counter-ISIS mission in Syria.

CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF continued to increase its ability to conduct conventional-type operations due to the training and advising of U.S. Special Forces.¹⁶⁴ The SDF has the ability to successfully execute unilateral operations but relies on Coalition for some capabilities.¹⁶⁵ CJTF-OIR noted that the SDF is capable of operating within the Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze, and Disseminate targeting cycle, conducting unilateral operations to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, and provide regional security in northern and eastern Syria.¹⁶⁶

Efforts Continue to Secure SDF Detention Facilities

CJTF-OIR reported that the threat of ISIS fighters breaking out of SDF detention facilities remained a significant factor affecting the counter-ISIS mission in Syria.¹⁶⁷

CJTF-OIR noted that operations to remove key ISIS command-and-control nodes directly involved in the planning and/or facilitation of detention facility attacks have created a “relatively stable environment” in northeastern Syria’s Middle Euphrates River Valley and at SDF detention facilities.¹⁶⁸ There were no ISIS detainee uprisings, riots, escape attempts or other unrest during the quarter.¹⁶⁹

The SDF continued to operate and secure approximately 26 detention facilities in northeastern Syria, reflecting no significant change since the previous quarter.¹⁷⁰ Coalition forces and the SDF conducted a comprehensive accountability exercise that counted approximately 9,000 ISIS detainees in these facilities, a reduction from previous estimates of approximately 10,000 ISIS detainees.¹⁷¹ CJTF-OIR assessed that the majority of detention facilities are secure and able to keep detainees from escaping and rejoining the ISIS fight.¹⁷²

U.S. Special Forces conduct periodic threat vulnerability assessments of detention facilities as directed by CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM.¹⁷³ Recommendations for physical structure improvements (if required) are provided to the SDF for corrective action.¹⁷⁴ CJTF-OIR said that the SDF and U.S. Special Operations Forces conducted assessments of most SDF-controlled detention facilities during the quarter as part of the vulnerability assessments, to accurately count all persons within the detention centers.¹⁷⁵ The SDF have made steady improvements to fortify the facilities that were identified as more susceptible to breakout attempts by using available materials such concertina wire, jersey barriers, and T-walls.¹⁷⁶

A UN Special Rapporteur noted the spread of tuberculosis in the Ghwayran detention facility and that the authorities stated that they did not have the capacity to treat the outbreak or isolate sick detainees. According to the report, untreated tuberculosis is estimated to cause death in 50 percent of cases, and the report alleged that countries whose nationals are detained in the facility or materially support the facility may be responsible for reasonably preventable deaths from “a treatable disease or malnutrition.”¹⁷⁷

U.S. Forces Train Growing SDF Guard Force

U.S. Special Forces advisors continued during the quarter to provide specialized training to security forces for SDF detention facilities, and continued security improvements at these facilities.¹⁷⁸ The aim is to train a guard force capable of maintaining security at the detention centers and preventing ISIS's ability to reconstitute and threaten these facilities.¹⁷⁹ As of early to mid-September, 121 guards had graduated from training during the quarter, bringing the total number of guards trained to 1,225.¹⁸⁰

CJTF-OIR's hands-on training curriculum includes topics such as escalation of force, applying handcuffs, riot control, and basic international Law of Armed Conflict focusing on humane treatment of detainees.¹⁸¹ Trainers and advisors also continued identifying and training SDF instructors to supplement the U.S. personnel in order to create a sustainable indigenous training capability.¹⁸²

CJTF-OIR said that the SDF have demonstrated proficiency in their ability to manage the facilities and in the movement of ISIS detainees.¹⁸³ The SDF have made numerous improvements to security infrastructure and guard protocol across northeastern Syria since January 2022, when ISIS staged a complex and deadly attack on the Ghuwayran Detention Facility in Hasakah governorate that led to a days-long battle. CJTF-OIR said that the facility, now known as Panorama, was built for the purpose of detention, houses the majority of ISIS detainees, and maintains adequate protection and security.¹⁸⁴



A U.S. Soldier watches InSF students conduct takedown maneuvers during a combative class. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

State said that it vets units (or in some cases individuals) that are nominated for applicable U.S. Government assistance to ensure they have not been credibly implicated in a gross violation of human rights.

U.S. forces did not observe any indications of communication or smuggling between ISIS detainees and external facilitators during the quarter, nor has the SDF voiced related concerns.¹⁸⁵ Following the Ghwayran attack, reports emerged of ISIS smuggling and communication from inside the detention facility.¹⁸⁶ CJTF-OIR said that any potential guard force shortcomings and insider threats cannot be reported in an unclassified report.¹⁸⁷

Media Reports Cite Coalition Partner Force for Human Rights Abuses

The SDF and its affiliates, the Coalition’s main Syrian partner in the OIR mission, have been the subject of several recent media reports alleging it committed human rights abuses, State said. The media reports were sourced to entities such as the Syrian Network for Human Rights and Syrian Civil Defense (the “White Helmets”). One reported incident involved the death at an SDF detention center of a teacher due to torture. Another report alleged kidnappings of children for recruitment by “Revolutionary Youth,” a group reportedly linked with Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK).¹⁸⁸ State’s annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on Syria have contained similar reports since at least 2014.¹⁸⁹

State said that it vets units (or in some cases individuals) that are nominated for applicable U.S. Government assistance to ensure they have not been credibly implicated in a gross violation of human rights. State said that since September 22, 2014, “no Syrian [Security] forces have been vetted and determined to be ineligible for applicable assistance pursuant to the Leahy laws.”¹⁹⁰

SYRIAN FREE ARMY

Coalition Continues to Train and Advise the SFA to Defend At Tanf and Provide Area Security

Coalition forces also continued to conduct training-related operations with the SFA focusing on defensive tasks.¹⁹¹ During the quarter, the SFA conducted 64 partnered training operations with U.S. forces.¹⁹² The SFA also conducted routine area security operations and patrols independent of Coalition forces.¹⁹³ There were no kinetic engagements during the quarter.¹⁹⁴

CJTF-OIR said that U.S. forces worked to improve SFA maneuver proficiency as well as build staff capacity. The SFA achieved the defined benchmarks set by Coalition forces.¹⁹⁵ The SFA continued to build task proficiency in mounted and dismounted maneuver, incorporating mortars, using communications equipment, medical tasks, planning defensive operations, and messaging in the information environment, including social media.¹⁹⁶ The SFA also continued to improve its abilities in individual and collective tasks including communication capability, the establishment of observation posts, engagement area development, and conducting troop-leading procedures in a defensive capacity.¹⁹⁷ CJTF-OIR said the SFA continued to train in the integration of indirect and direct fire and has demonstrated incremental improvements since the previous quarter.¹⁹⁸

CJTF-OIR said that each tactical maneuver element of the SFA conducted live fire exercises during the quarter to validate standard operating procedures and build capacity to defend

the At Tanf Garrison area.¹⁹⁹ Based on the results, Coalition forces plan to continue live-fire exercises and more complicated SFA staff training for more complicated operations in the next two quarters.²⁰⁰

Coalition forces also conducted training with the SFA to maintain a cohesiveness in the force, providing extensive training to enable the SFA to conduct its own internal training for new and current members. This training included integrating the U.S. Army’s military decision making process into SFA mission command.²⁰¹ Coalition forces provided the SFA with training methodology for their staff and fighting units and shared best practices for current and future operations.²⁰² In a separate line of effort, Coalition forces supported SFA medics in providing medical support to SFA members and to residents at the nearby Rukban displaced persons camp.²⁰³

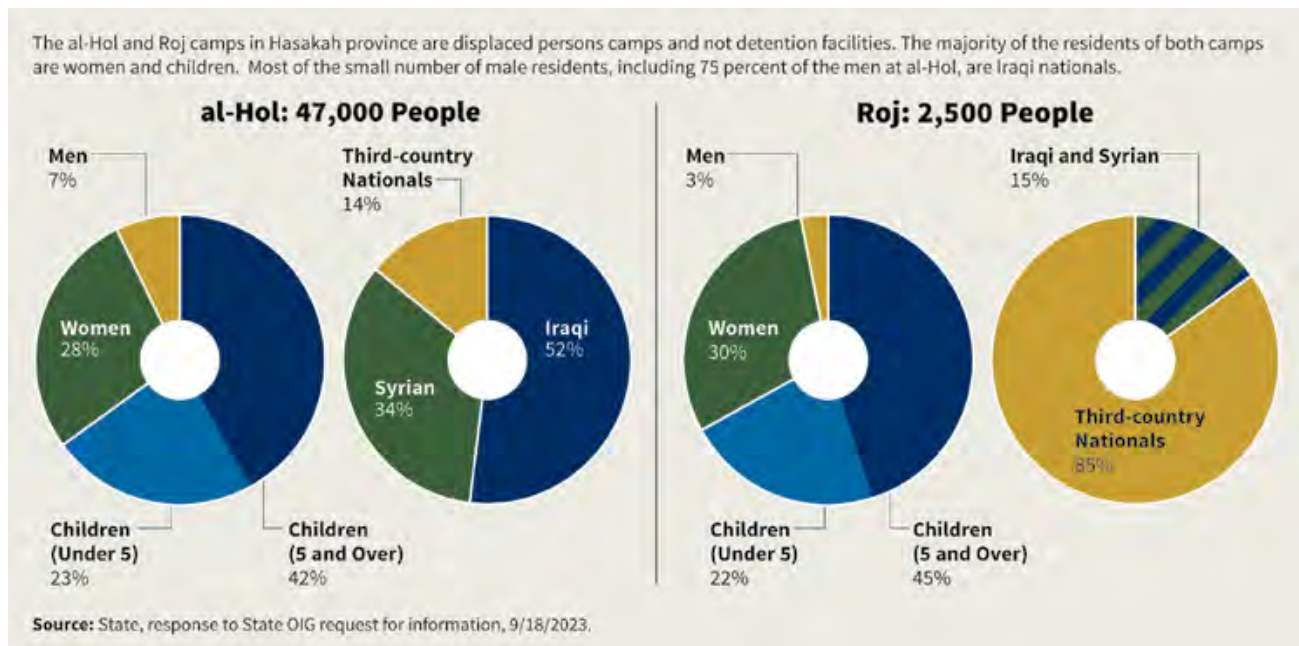
DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS

The United States continued to emphasize the ongoing need for multi-national efforts to repatriate, rehabilitate (when appropriate), or reintegrate residents of displaced persons camps in northeastern Syria, particularly the al-Hol camp, where humanitarian and security concerns remained a priority.²⁰⁴

CJTF-OIR said that the gradual and steady reduction of displaced persons and foreign terrorist fighters in northeastern Syria over the past 4 years bolsters the security capabilities of its partner forces.²⁰⁵ Fewer than 47,000 people lived in the al-Hol camp at the end of the quarter, down from the peak of more than 70,000 in 2019.²⁰⁶ (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3.

Demographics of al-Hol and Roj Displaced Persons Camps



Fewer than 47,000 people lived in the al-Hol camp at the end of the quarter, down from the peak of more than 70,000 in 2019.

Violent Incidents Decrease in al-Hol, but Conditions Remain “Generally Favorable” for ISIS Influence

Security improvements in al-Hol and an increase in repatriations from the camp have contributed to “steady progress” in the counter-ISIS fight in Syria and to improving camp conditions, then CJTF-OIR Commander, Major General Matthew McFarlane said in mid-August.²⁰⁷

However, both CJTF-OIR and State reported that despite a decrease in the number of violent incidents, and no reported killings in the camp since November 2022, conditions in al-Hol displaced persons camp remained a concern.²⁰⁸ State said that conditions in the camp continued to pose a challenge for local security and humanitarian partners, with “ordinary criminality” continuing at the same level as in previous quarters and including threats of extortion against humanitarian organizations working at the camp.²⁰⁹ Crimes against property and non-fatal violence remained the two most common crimes.²¹⁰ The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that poor conditions in al-Hol remained “generally favorable to ISIS to exert a coercive influence on the camp population.”²¹¹

ISIS-related violence also remained a concern for staff working in al-Hol, though the DIA said it assessed, based on a United Nations report, that incidents targeting al-Hol staff are likely declining, in keeping with ISIS’s overall degradation across Syria.²¹²

In the foreigners annex of the camp—where families who are neither Iraqi nor Syrian, including many families of ISIS detainees reside—the DIA said there are groups of women who remained strongly devoted to ISIS ideology.²¹³ ISIS activists in the annex continued to indoctrinate youth, which included desensitization to brutality and combat training in informal centers.²¹⁴ ISIS-affiliated women still seek funding to smuggle their children out of the camp, either to flee the country or train with ISIS, the DIA reported.²¹⁵

The DIA, citing media reporting, said that efforts to extract and rehabilitate children in the camp who are at risk of indoctrination by violent extremists has exacerbated grievances within the camp population.²¹⁶ A United Nations special rapporteur said after visiting al-Hol in July that boys continued to be taken from displaced persons camps in northeastern Syria and were arbitrarily detained because of security concerns based on their parents’ alleged prior links with ISIS.²¹⁷ The SDF has in the past said that boys in al-Hol who are at the highest risk of being influenced by violent extremism have been placed in “rehabilitation centers.”²¹⁸

The special rapporteur denounced what she characterized as the mass detention of children.²¹⁹ The special rapporteur also expressed concern about use of “dehumanizing language” to describe the residents of displaced persons camps, which she said was used to justify exceptional measures taken in the name of security. She said this activity risks perpetuating conditions that are “conducive to further social exclusion and violence in the region.”²²⁰

Interagency Cooperation to Improve Conditions Continues

This quarter State continued to work with the DoD and USAID to coordinate with local security partners on camp security, including ensuring that humanitarian concerns are considered.²²¹ These include freedom of movement for camp residents within the camp to access services, and reducing displacement of resident homes during construction of fencing and other security outposts, State said.²²²

State reported that improving humanitarian assistance at al-Hol camp is a priority for the United States and that humanitarian needs for al-Hol vastly outpace the availability of funding from the international community. Donors including the United States coordinate closely on funding priorities to ensure that the most pressing short-term needs of camp residents are met, but, according to State, additional funding is needed to support long-term needs.²²³

State reported that the al-Hol Working Group—an interagency group overseen by State—has been meeting regularly to coordinate interagency activities on four lines of effort: security, humanitarian services, repatriations/returns, and communications.²²⁴ These meetings have deconflicted programming, informed policy, and supported engagements with partner governments and international organizations, State said.²²⁵ State reported that the working group coordinates interagency efforts, including with the DoD, on implementing security improvements at the camps.²²⁶

Challenges Remain for Coalition-trained Camp Security Forces

CJTF-OIR reported that training camp security forces to improve security at displaced persons camps remained a key initiative for its forces.²²⁷ The forces continued to participate in professionalization courses conducted through both State and the DoD.²²⁸ CJTF-OIR said that the al-Hol security force is trained to conduct community police functions and protect displaced persons under the Law of Armed Conflict.²²⁹

During the quarter, Syrian partner forces made arrests and confiscated weapons and military equipment within al-Hol as part of efforts to curb ISIS activity in the camp.²³⁰ CJTF-OIR said that camp security forces established more patrols around the perimeter to put an end to ISIS smuggling into and out of the camp, which remains a security challenge.²³¹

CJTF-OIR said that the greatest security force vulnerabilities in al-Hol are the unwillingness of the forces to conduct patrols within the camp and the risk of bribes to security forces by ISIS affiliates.²³² CJTF-OIR said that while there is not conclusive evidence that bribes are occurring amongst the security forces in the camp, it remains a risk because security forces are critical to disrupting ISIS activity in the camps.²³³ As more security forces are trained and establish a presence in the camp, security is increased and the risks to personnel patrolling in the camp are mitigated, CJTF-OIR said, adding that security forces training continued to progress and should continue to be emphasized and prioritized.²³⁴

U.S. Government Funds Essential Services

This quarter, the U.S. Government continued to fund humanitarian partners working at al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps that provide life-saving and essential services to camp residents, including food, water and sanitation services, shelter, health, protection, and

CJTF-OIR reported that training camp security forces to improve security at displaced persons camps remained a key initiative for its forces.

During the quarter (as of mid-September) 760 individuals were repatriated from al-Hol, including more than 600 Iraqis and 135 third country nationals.

education services.²³⁵ State reported that priority actions include improving the sustainability of service provision, including upgrading the camp's water infrastructure and shelter layout.²³⁶

State continued to fund two nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that provide services to displaced persons in Syria. State said it coordinates closely with other U.S. Government agencies on its humanitarian assistance priorities related to al-Hol camp and also works with other international donors to prioritize funding for the most pressing requirements.²³⁷ USAID implementers continued to provide monthly food assistance, mental health and psychosocial support, nutrition, and access to clean water and sanitation facilities to the residents of al-Hol.²³⁸

Repatriation and Syrian Returns Continue

State reported that the United States continues to engage with countries of origin, advocating for the repatriation and reintegration of all foreign nationals in northeastern Syria.²³⁹ During the quarter (as of mid-September) 760 individuals were repatriated from al-Hol, including more than 600 Iraqis and 135 third country nationals.²⁴⁰

Syrians: State and USAID continued to support the return and reintegration of Syrian displaced persons to help communities of return better receive and support them.²⁴¹ State and USAID reported that 94 Syrian families, consisting of 355 individuals, departed al-Hol on September 3 for the Raqqah governorate.²⁴²

USAID implemented a case management system to register returnees, assess their needs, and connect them to available services.²⁴³ As of the end of the quarter, a USAID implementer had registered 74 families and planned to register all returning families in the coming weeks.²⁴⁴

Iraqis: During the quarter, 173 Iraqi households (635 individuals) were repatriated from al-Hol to the Jeddah 1 camp in Iraq, in the 11th convoy since Jeddah 1 opened in May 2021.²⁴⁵ As of late September, 1,556 Iraqi households (6,200 individuals) had been repatriated from al-Hol to Jeddah 1 since repatriations to Iraq began in May 2021.²⁴⁶ In addition, CJTF-OIR reported it assisted with the repatriation of 409 Iraqi nationals living outside camps in Syria.²⁴⁷ CJTF-OIR said that 47 Iraqi detainees from Syria were also repatriated to Iraq during the quarter.²⁴⁸

Other nationals: State reported that during 4 operations—2 with U.S. assistance—135 women and children were repatriated to their countries of origin.²⁴⁹ Repatriations during the quarter included five Canadian nationals—two women and three children—from the Roj camp, with U.S. Government support.²⁵⁰ In late August, Kyrgyzstan repatriated 95 people from the al-Hol and Roj camps.²⁵¹ State did not provide information on the remaining repatriation operations conducted this quarter.²⁵²

In mid-September, media reported that the U.S. Government seeks to repatriate a family of 10 Americans from camps in Syria.²⁵³ The report stated that the family includes a 49-year-old mother and 9 of her children, who range in age from about 6 to about 25.²⁵⁴ Citing State figures, the report indicated that the U.S. Government has repatriated 40 American citizens since 2016, 25 children and 15 adults, and that 2,500 people overall have been repatriated this year.²⁵⁵ The report indicated a lack of clarity about why the family was not repatriated from Syria a long time ago, given the United States' campaigning for other countries to take back their citizens.²⁵⁶ State said that it could not provide further information about the family due to privacy laws and national security concerns.²⁵⁷

Iraqi National Security Services Increase Security Measures in Jeddah 1

Once settled in Jeddah 1, Iraqis face barriers to return to their home communities such as a lack of housing, civil documentation, livelihoods, access to basic services, concerns about safety and security, and perceived affiliation with ISIS.²⁵⁸ Female-headed households and children may face significantly higher barriers for reintegration, especially for individuals that have weak social networks that affect their ability to identify a sponsor to help approve their returns to communities of origin.²⁵⁹

The Iraqi government has increased security measures in Jeddah 1.²⁶⁰ Some camp residents have been accompanied by security forces to healthcare facilities outside the camp.²⁶¹ USAID reported that these measures have led many camp residents to express safety concerns.²⁶²

State PRM funding supports the entirety of the return and reintegration process—both in Jeddah 1 and for returnees in areas of origin and return in Iraq while USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) also supports services within Jeddah 1.²⁶³ (See Table 5.) This range of services includes specialized interventions delivered in Jeddah 1 that are identified and tailored to individual needs, age and gender appropriate, and linked to continued service provision post departure from Jeddah 1 to ensure continuum of care and improve the overall reintegration outcomes.²⁶⁴

Iraq’s Ministry of Migration and Displacement is responsible for the reintegration of households from Jeddah 1 while the security services are required to approve departures and confirm households who are departing Jeddah 1 have received rehabilitation services, according to USAID.²⁶⁵ As of August, 839 Iraqi households (3,364 individuals) had departed from Jeddah 1 to their areas of origin or alternative areas of return.²⁶⁶ USAID and State PRM reported planning to support the reintegration of al-Hol returnees by focusing on acceptance by host communities and through case management which includes a system and dedicated, trained staff to identify returnees and their specific needs.²⁶⁷

Table 5.

State- and USAID-funded Services in the Jeddah 1 Camp

Camp management and support activities including infrastructure rehabilitation, care, and maintenance, tenting and physical site management

Protection services including mental health and psychosocial support, case management, interim care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children, referrals for civil documentation, and parenting education

Support for the **Jeddah 1 visitor’s center** to facilitate community and family outreach.

Medical and health care

Socioeconomic assistance

Education and training

Legal and civil documentation support

Source: USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/20/2023; State, vetting comment, 10/19/2023.

Once settled in Jeddah 1, Iraqis face barriers to return to their home communities such as a lack of housing, civil documentation, livelihoods, access to basic services, concerns about safety and security, and perceived affiliation with ISIS.

Iran continued its moratorium on attacking Coalition Forces during the quarter because Iranian leadership probably seeks to avoid destabilizing the Iraqi government and undermining Iran's political influence in the country.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Operations in Iraq and Syria by third-party-forces—particularly those from Iran and Russia, which back the Syrian regime, as well as from Türkiye—complicate the progress of the OIR mission by increasing Coalition force protection needs, influencing and distracting partner forces, and escalating the risk of further conflict.

IRAN

Iran Continues to Pause Attacks on Coalition Forces in Iraq and Syria

According to the DIA and CJTF-OIR, there were no attacks by Iran-aligned militias on U.S. or Coalition forces in Iraq and Syria during the quarter.²⁶⁸ The DIA assessed during the quarter that Iran-aligned forces maintained the ability to conduct indirect fire and UAS attacks with little to no warning.²⁶⁹ Militia attacks resumed in October following the outbreak of conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Iran continued its moratorium on attacking Coalition Forces during the quarter because Iranian leadership probably seeks to avoid destabilizing the Iraqi government and undermining Iran's political influence in the country.²⁷⁰ The DIA assessed that Iran and its proxies and partners seek to avoid the escalation that occurred following the March 23 UAS attack against Rumaylan Landing Zone in Syria that killed a U.S. contractor and injured multiple U.S. personnel.²⁷¹

However, the DIA noted that some militias aligned with Iran continued public threats against U.S. forces, in part to signal disappointment with the absence of a concrete timeline for the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq following August's bilateral U.S.-Iraq Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue in Washington.²⁷² CJTF-OIR also reported that Iran has trained militants to use attack UAS in eastern Syria, and increased their recruitment effort among the population. Iran has only allowed locals to access Iran-aligned militias medical support if their families currently have ties to the militias themselves.²⁷³

CJTF-OIR reported that Iranian malign influence continued to detract from the counter-ISIS mission through its political influence and threats from Iran-aligned militia groups, which distract from the partner-led campaign to defeat ISIS.²⁷⁴ CJTF-OIR explained that the threat posed by one-way attack UAS and indirect fire attacks remains high, requiring the Coalition to increase force protection at installations in Syria and Iraq. Also due to the credible threat of attacks from the militias, the Coalition reallocates ISR assets to monitor these threats, which reduce ISR availability to support counter-ISIS and partner force operations.²⁷⁵

Iran and Its Proxies and Partners Use Violence to Target Regional Rivals

While there were no attacks on facilities housing Coalition forces during the quarter, Iran and Iran-aligned militias continued to use violence or the threat of violence to target regional rivals and assert influence. According to CJTF-OIR, on July 5, a UAS targeted the KSF

1st Brigade Border Guards in Iraq’s Duhok province, resulting in no casualties. The KRG Directorate General of Counterterrorism said that the UAS was launched from an area controlled by the PKK, but a militia group with a history of attacks on Turkish forces called Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq claimed the attack and warned that foreign forces need to be expelled, including Türkiye.²⁷⁶ Also on July 5, an Iran-aligned militia front group claimed a successful UAS attack against a Turkish military position in Batifa in the IKR; however, Turkish state-run media blamed the PKK terrorist group for the attack. The DIA also reported that on August 30, unknown perpetrators—possibly Iraqi Shia militants—launched rockets at the Khor Mor gas field, also in the IKR.²⁷⁷

In August, Iran pressed Iraq to dismantle anti-Iranian Kurdish militant networks in the IKR and reiterated the September 19 deadline for Baghdad to fulfill its commitments to Tehran. The DIA said it cannot rule out that Iran will again resort to ballistic missile strikes on Kurdish targets in the IKR, as it did in September and November 2022.²⁷⁸

In July, Iraqi Sadrists led an effort with other militia groups to denounce the Swedish government by storming and burning the Swedish Embassy in Baghdad because Sweden did not stop Iraqi refugees in Stockholm from burning a Qur’an and publicly criticizing Iraqi government policies.²⁷⁹

Additionally, the DIA noted that Iran-aligned forces were accused of targeting Israelis in Iraq, highlighting the threat Iraqi militias pose to third parties and civilians. In July, Kata’ib Hezbollah, a U.S.-designated terrorist group, declined to publicly comment on Israeli accusations that the Iran-aligned group had kidnapped Israeli-Russian academic Elizabeth Tsurkov in March 2023 in Baghdad.²⁸⁰

RUSSIA

Russian Aircraft Continue to Harass and Endanger U.S. Aircraft and Forces in Syria

During the quarter, Russian aircraft continued to conduct “unsafe and unprofessional” activity while interacting with U.S. aircraft in Syria, U.S. Air Forces Central (USAFCENT) reported.²⁸¹ The activity occurred in the vicinity of mostly unmanned, but also manned U.S. aircraft that disrupted counter-ISIS operations in Syria.²⁸²

In July and August, Russian aircraft “harassed” and flew “dangerously close” to U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles, according to statements by Lieutenant General Alex Grynkewich, the USAFCENT and Combined Forces Air Component commander.²⁸³ Russian aircraft also flew over the U.S. forces at the At Tanf Garrison.²⁸⁴ (See Figure 4.)

“These events represent another example of unprofessional and unsafe actions by Russian air forces operating in Syria which threaten the safety of both Coalition and Russian forces,” Lieutenant General Grynkewich said. He urged the Russian forces to “cease this reckless behavior and adhere to the standards of behavior expected of a professional air force.”²⁸⁵

The Russian military routinely violates deconfliction and safety protocols with the Coalition governing air activity over Syria.²⁸⁶ CJTF-OIR reported that since July, the number and

During the quarter, Russian aircraft continued to conduct “unsafe and unprofessional” activity while interacting with U.S. aircraft in Syria, U.S. Air Forces Central (USAFCENT) reported.

Figure 4.

Russian Encounters with U.S. Aircraft and Forces During the Quarter

A U.S. MQ-9 camera captures a Russian fighter flying close to a U.S. MQ-9 before deploying flares in Syria on July 23, 2023. (U.S. Air Force photo)

July 5: Russian jets violated established safety protocols and dropped multiple parachute flares in front of U.S. UASs conducting a counter-ISIS mission, forcing the UASs to conduct evasive maneuvers. One Russian pilot engaged his after-burner in front of an MQ-9, reducing the operator’s ability to safely operate the aircraft.

July 6: Russian aircraft again dropped flares in front of U.S. MQ-9s conducting a counter-ISIS mission.

July 7: Russian aircraft “harassed” U.S. MQ-9s during an almost 2-hour encounter.

July 14: Russian warplanes flew directly over a portion of the 55-kilometer zone around the At Tanf Garrison in July, violating protocols.

July 16: A Russian jet intercepted a manned U.S. MC-12 conducting counter-ISIS surveillance in Syria, endangering the lives of the four U.S. crewmembers on board. The encounter was close enough to force the U.S. aircraft to fly through a turbulent wake.

July 23: A Russian flare struck an unmanned U.S. MQ-9 and damaged its propeller.

July 26: Close encounter occurred between Russian and U.S. aircraft.

August 3: Russian jets flew over At Tanf Garrison.

Sources: See Endnotes on page 103.

severity of Russian military violations have decreased significantly and progressively, with fewer violations in August than in July, and a further decrease in September.²⁸⁷

Russia claimed in August that there were multiple instances of near contact between U.S. and Russian aircraft in the vicinity of At Tanf.²⁸⁸ CJTF-OIR said that the Russian military portrays the Coalition as the perpetrator in all interactions. CJTF-OIR said that the Russian military publishes daily statements of the Coalition’s alleged violations of Syrian sovereignty and accuses the Coalition of creating dangerous “preconditions” for incidents.²⁸⁹

Russia maintains between 2,000 and 4,000 forces in Syria in support of regime operations.²⁹⁰ Russia also maintains a small number of artillery, aircraft, and air defense systems in Syria to facilitate support to these operations, the DIA said.²⁹¹ The majority of Russian forces are located at two main bases—Basel Al Assad Airfield and Tartus Naval Base, both located in the far west of Syria. The DIA said it has not observed any significant changes in Russian military disposition in Syria and it is not clear how Russia’s current force posture and positioning affects the counter-ISIS fight.²⁹²

The DIA reported that two of Russia’s primary goals in Syria are to ensure that President Bashar al-Assad remains in power and to return all Syrian territory to regime control.²⁹³ The Russian military works closely with its Syrian counterparts, providing the regime with weapons and training including air defense systems and conducting joint patrols, exercises, and counterterrorism operations.²⁹⁴ The DIA said that this support and cooperation enhance the Syrian military’s ability to carry out operations that could affect the OIR campaign. During the quarter, the DIA did not observe any change in Russia’s level of support to or cooperation with the Syrian regime.²⁹⁵

Russia’s cooperation with Iran in Syria is based on mutual goals of ensuring President Assad remains in power, countering U.S. interests, and pressuring the withdrawal of Coalition forces, the DIA said.²⁹⁶ The Russian military cooperates with Iran and its proxies and partners in Syria on information operations, counterterrorism efforts, and undermining Coalition forces interests. Russian military support to Iran is consistent with previous quarters.²⁹⁷ The DIA said there was no evidence that Russian military cooperation with Iran significantly impacted the OIR campaign during the quarter.²⁹⁸

Türkiye does not differentiate between the PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization and the SDF, a CJTF-OIR partner force.

TÜRKIYE

Türkiye Conducts Routine Counter-ISIS Operations

Since January, Turkish security forces have routinely conducted raids and detained ISIS members in an effort to deter cross-border facilitation, constrain financial and logistic support and disrupt potential threats.²⁹⁹ The DIA reported that during the quarter, Turkish law enforcement maintained robust counter-ISIS operations in Türkiye, including in provinces along the Syrian border, and against ISIS networks that intend to use Türkiye for transnational activities, according to press reporting.³⁰⁰

During the quarter, Turkish authorities said they arrested at least 98 individuals believed to be associated with ISIS, according to Turkish and regional press reporting.³⁰¹ In August, Türkiye announced collaboration with the United States to disrupt a human smuggling network that was aiding ISIS affiliates from the Caucasus and Central Asia attempting to travel to the United States, according to a media report.³⁰²

In May, the Turkish Defense Minister announced a plan to set up a military coordination center to fight terrorism in Syria alongside Russian, Syrian, and Iranian forces, as part of their quadrilateral efforts, according to press reporting.³⁰³

Türkiye Conducts Low-Intensity Operations Targeting the SDF and PKK

During the quarter, Türkiye continued to conduct low-intensity, targeted operations—including UAS and indirect fire strikes—against SDF and PKK targets in northern Syria, according to CJTF-OIR and media reporting cited by the DIA.³⁰⁴ In an incident on July 29, the SDF said in a statement that four of its fighters were killed by a Turkish UAS.³⁰⁵ Türkiye does not differentiate between the PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization and the SDF, a CJTF-OIR partner force.³⁰⁶ CJTF-OIR said it recognizes the legitimate security threat the PKK poses to Türkiye.³⁰⁷

On October 5, U.S. forces shot down a Turkish unmanned aircraft that was conducting airstrikes and entered a U.S. restricted operating zone in Syria.

In July, Turkish intelligence killed a PKK leader in Manbij in an apparent car bomb attack, according to regional press reporting.³⁰⁸ Media reported in August that a Turkish UAS strike near the city of Qamishli in northeastern Syria killed an SDF commander and three other SDF fighters who belonged to the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG).³⁰⁹

The DIA reported that Turkish airstrikes continued into early October, following a bombing in Ankara.³¹⁰ On October 5, U.S. forces shot down a Turkish unmanned aircraft that was conducting airstrikes and entered a U.S. restricted operating zone in Syria. The DoD said U.S. commanders assessed that the UAS posed a “potential threat.”³¹¹

CJTF-OIR said that the Self-Administration of North and East Syria (SANES) stressed that Turkish drone strikes in Syria in July obstructed efforts to combat ISIS.³¹² The Office for the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy reported that the DoD consistently engages Türkiye on a number of shared interests and issues, including mitigating disruption of the D-ISIS campaign.³¹³

CJTF-OIR said that Turkish activity in northern Iraq has “little to no impact” on the OIR counter-ISIS campaign.³¹⁴ (See page 52.)

The DIA assessed in September that there are no indications Türkiye is preparing for another major military operation in northeastern Syria. Rather, Türkiye plans to continue Russia-facilitated talks with the Syrian government on security issues in northern Syria and on a “road map” for eventual reconciliation between Türkiye and the Syrian regime, according to a press report.³¹⁵

Reconciliation between Türkiye and the Syrian regime appeared stalled during the quarter, with President Assad stating that Turkish troops must withdraw from northern Syria as a precondition for restoring ties, according to the Syrian state news agency.³¹⁶ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was re-elected to a new 5-year term in May, sees the Kurdish presence along the 900-kilometer northern Syria border it shares as a national security concern, and has launched repeated incursions across the Syrian border to keep Kurdish groups at a distance from the border.³¹⁷

Türkiye and Russia continued to coordinate during the quarter to deconflict activities, and in conducting joint patrols in northern Syria. They conducted notably fewer patrols during the quarter, possibly due to Turkish actions in northeastern Syria, the DIA said, citing press reporting.³¹⁸ The DIA further, citing press reports, said that the Russian military does not appear to cooperate or deconflict with Turkish-supported opposition groups.³¹⁹







Syrian workers collect okra in fields supported by a WFP irrigation rehabilitation project. (WFP photo)

BROADER U.S. POLICY GOALS

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BROADER U.S. POLICY GOALS

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Government pursues several policy goals in Iraq and Syria that, while not directly a part of the OIR mission, are integral to the success of the campaign. (See Table 6.) The U.S. Government, primarily through State and USAID, remains the largest donor for stabilization and humanitarian programming in Iraq and Syria.³²⁰ Other U.S. Government agencies, including Treasury and the Department of Justice, also contribute to the counter-ISIS mission through sanctions, prosecutions, and technical assistance programs.



A USAID implementer conducts an Explosive Ordnance Risk Education awareness session with Iraqi children. (USAID photo)

Table 6.

U.S. Policy Goals in Iraq and Syria

Iraq	Syria
Promote inclusive, economic reform	Sustain the U.S. and Global Coalition campaign against ISIS
Support an Iraqi democracy that delivers for all citizens	Support local ceasefires across the country
Support a resilient Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR)	Support the expansion of humanitarian access throughout Syria
Bolster Iraqi independence and advance regional integration	Press for justice, accountability, and respect for international law including promoting respect for human rights and non-proliferation
	Support a political process led by Syrian people, as envisioned in UNSCR 2254

Source: State, “Integrated Country Strategy-Iraq,” 5/30/2023; State, response to State OIG request for information, 9/18/2023.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

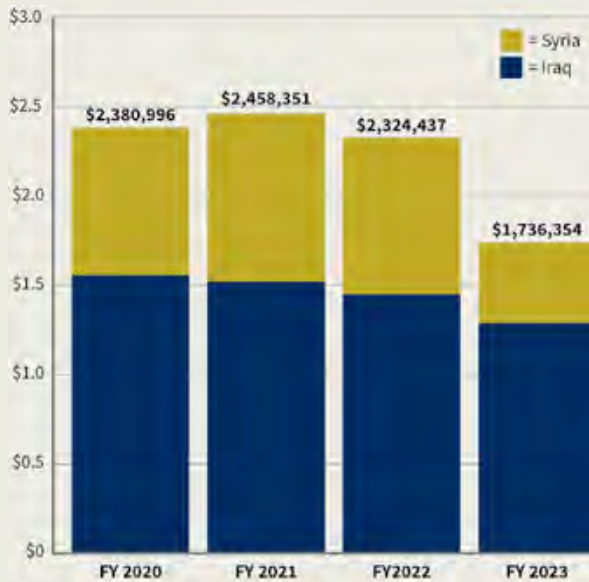
Through diplomacy and stabilization programs, State and USAID seek to help Iraq expand its inclusive private sector growth, create opportunities for U.S investment through comprehensive economic reform, implement anti-corruption measures, and diversify Iraq’s economy.³²¹ In Syria, where the economy has been ravaged by 12 years of conflict and natural disaster, the U.S. Government promotes economic rebuilding through stabilization programs and humanitarian assistance. (See page 57.)

State said that Iraq must address a range of issues to remain stable. Iraq is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change and is already experiencing many of its worst impacts. Despite being rich in energy resources, Iraq does not generate enough electricity to provide continuous power for its citizens. It needs to improve its energy infrastructure and capture flared gas to help meet ever-growing electricity demands. Iraq is facing an acute water crisis and a lack of jobs for young Iraqis, roughly 35 percent of whom are unemployed. Iraq’s focus on human rights remains a concern, as attention has waned in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). Endemic corruption remains a major problem. Citizen demands for improved public services have remained unfulfilled. According to State, the onus is on the Iraqi government to enact bold policies and reforms that concretely improve lives and reinforce democratic values, human rights, and good governance.³²²

The World Bank reported in July that while Iraq’s current oil price boom has moderated the call for significant economic reforms, the country’s economy remains at risk due to unaddressed deep structural challenges leaving it vulnerable to oil price shocks, inflation, climate change, and commodity price volatility. After a strong economic rebound in 2022, the World Bank assessed that Iraq “cannot continue to rely solely on oil windfalls ... Iraq runs the risk of rapidly depleting its reserves and returning to square one in a very short time.”³²³ The new Iraqi budget is “excessively expansionary,” funding public sector growth without addressing non-oil growth potential.³²⁴ Iraq’s 3-year budget plan includes large annual deficits and threatens to consume Iraq’s large oil revenue surplus should oil

STATE AND USAID FUNDING FOR IRAQ & SYRIA

Enacted Funding for State Programming in Iraq and Syria, FY 2020–FY 2023



Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 9/25/2023 and 10/13/2023.

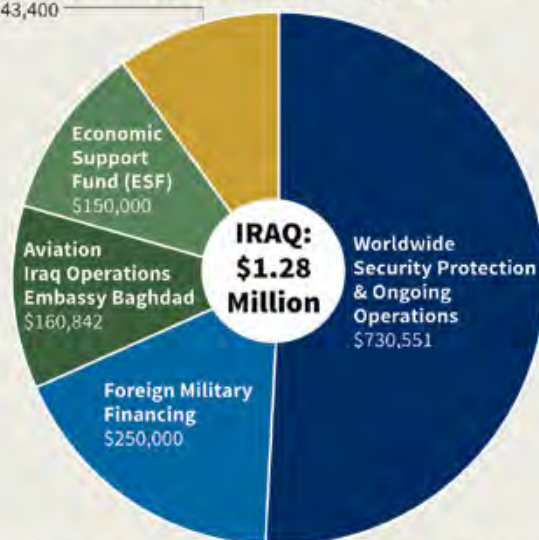
Humanitarian Assistance Funding, FY 2023

IRAQ	
Humanitarian Response	
USAID BHA	\$6,154,200
TOTAL	\$6,154,200
SYRIA	
Regional Crisis Response	
USAID BHA	\$583,031,555
State PRM	\$354,910,000
TOTAL	\$937,941,555
Earthquake Response	
USAID BHA	\$170,000,000
State PRM	\$22,900,000
DoD	\$4,475,623
TOTAL	\$197,375,623

Sources: USAID, "Iraq-Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #2," 5/5/2023; USAID, "Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #8," 8/16/2023.

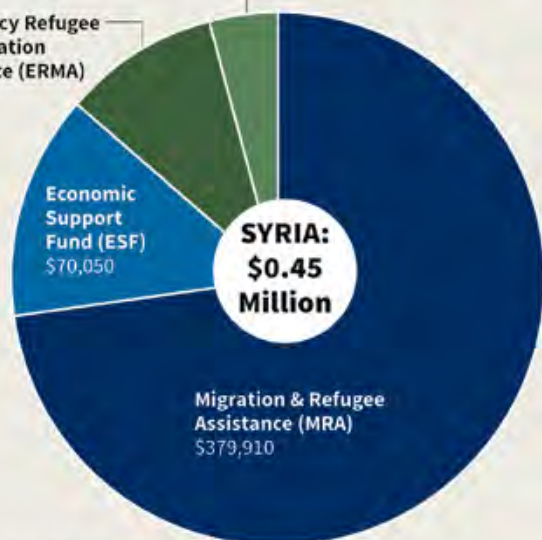
Enacted Funding for State Programming in Iraq and Syria, FY 2023

Diplomatic & Consular Programs & Operations; Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR); Migration & Refugee Assistance (MRA); International Military Education & Training (IMET)
\$143,400



International Narcotics & Law Enforcement (INCLE); Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR); Diplomatic & Consular Programs & Operations
\$20,656

Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA)
\$50,000



Notes: \$1.20 million of Iraq funding and \$0.43 million of Syria funding had been obligated as of October 13, 2023. Program allocations may not add to total due to rounding.

Sources: State, response to State OIG request for information, 9/25/2023 and 10/13/2023.

prices decline significantly. Further, the World Bank said Iraq urgently needs to implement financial sector reforms and modernize its banking sector.³²⁵

Iraq's 2023 Budget Implementation

Iraq's \$153 billion federal budget for 2023 is a 70-percent increase over authorized 2022 spending levels. State said that the new budget includes \$102 billion in operational spending and \$37.9 billion in capital spending. Iraq's defense and security sector spending increased by 9.5 percent to \$23 billion.³²⁶ The budget increases social welfare payments, public sector salaries, and public sector jobs, in addition to infrastructure spending. The budget heavily depends on the continuation of relatively high oil prices to meet target revenues and includes a number of provisions related to the IKR that have been challenging to implement given the stalled negotiations between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi federal government.³²⁷ Although the budget was not approved until June, the 2023 spending levels are retroactive to January 1, leaving only 6 months for spending at the significantly increased level.³²⁸

Negotiations between the KRG and Iraqi government on key issues relating to the IKR's share of the budget and management of oil revenues are ongoing. The Iraqi government made one advanced payment of \$460 million to the KRG in August. In mid-September, the Iraqis approved three monthly loans of \$538 million. The first loan was distributed in September. All four payments will offset future monthly payments after the final budget negotiations are complete.³²⁹

Oil Export Revenues Jump; Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline Shutdown Continues

During the quarter, Iraq's oil exports and revenues were at the highest levels since August 2022. Although oil exports fell short of the 2023 budget target of 3.5 million barrels per day, Iraq is exceeding the \$70 oil export target price, resulting in average daily revenue surpluses of \$30 million to \$75 million.³³⁰ (See Figure 5.)

As of the end of the quarter, Iraq and Türkiye had failed to reach an agreement for restarting the Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline, which Türkiye shut down in March in response to an arbitration ruling by the International Chamber of Commerce that fined Türkiye \$1.5 billion for unauthorized oil exports from the IKR without the approval of the Iraqi government.³³¹

As of mid-September, the pipeline closure had cost the oil production companies and the KRG nearly \$5 billion in revenue, according to a media report. The KRG has reached an initial agreement on managing oil exports with the Iraqi government, which insisted on having its oil marketing company, SOMO, oversee future oil sales from the IKR. Still to be resolved is the issue of managing the oil production contracts between the KRG and oil companies.³³²

The KRG and its oil contractors are keen for the pipeline to reopen. But in light of the arbitration ruling and Iraq's new budget, the federal government now has uncontested authority over the northern export system, meaning that negotiations with Türkiye fall primarily to authorities in Baghdad.³³³

Iraq is exceeding the \$70 oil export target price, resulting in average daily revenue surpluses of \$30 million to \$75 million.

Figure 5.

Actual vs. Projected Daily Oil Revenue, in \$ Millions, July 2022–September 2023



According to State, the Iraqi government has asked Türkiye to reopen the pipeline, but the Turkish government has kept it closed while negotiations are ongoing. State said that the U.S. Government continues to urge the Iraqi and Turkish governments to reach an agreement quickly to reopen the pipeline for the benefit of all parties, including Türkiye, the Iraqi government, the KRG, U.S. commercial investments, and consumers.³³⁴

Iraq and Türkiye recently traded ministerial-level diplomatic visits. On August 22, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan visited Baghdad and Erbil, where he met with Iraq’s Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein and other Iraqi and Kurdish government officials. Iraqi Oil Minister Hayan Abd al-Ghani traveled to Ankara and met with Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Alparslan Bayraktar, who announced that maintenance work on the pipeline was nearing completion and that “Türkiye aims to operate the pipeline as soon as possible,” according to State. However, at the end of the quarter, Iraq and Türkiye had not reached a political agreement to reopen the pipeline.³³⁵

Water Crisis Deepens During Quarter

According to State, Iraq’s growing water insecurity threatens its political and economic security and stability. Decades of conflict, weak institutions, poor management and resource allocation, environmental degradation, and elevated susceptibility to the effects of climate change have made Iraq one of the most vulnerable countries in a region that has been plagued with decades of political strife and economic underperformance.³³⁶

Specific areas of concern include failing water infrastructure, substandard sewage treatment and water reuse facilities, outdated agricultural practices, well-injection of water for oil production, and ineffective water regulation implementation.³³⁷ The new Iraqi budget can address needed public service improvements; previous failures to do so have led to frequent public dissatisfaction expressed on social media and contributed to sporadic and isolated protests during the summer's peak temperature months.³³⁸

In late September, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani announced new measures to address Iraq's water scarcity and its devastating impact on the country, which has been getting worse for decades.³³⁹ Media has reported the effects of the drought, citing government statements that Iraq's water reserves are the lowest in history and are 50 percent lower than 2022. Water from the Mosul Dam is being released to maintain the flow of the Tigris River.³⁴⁰ Swimming to avoid summer temperatures near 120 degrees Fahrenheit has become challenging because water levels are so low that individuals can wade across the river as it flows through Baghdad.³⁴¹

Iran periodically stops the flow of the Little Zab River into Iraq, causing reductions in water levels of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and causing low water levels at the Dukan Dam, the largest dam in the IKR, media reported. South of Baghdad in Najaf province, farmers are suffering from the drought and low water levels in the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Amber rice, a specialty grown in Najaf, is losing out to the drought, reducing the farmers' income on land passed down for generations.³⁴²

Aerial photo of Basrah's tidal flat region drying up. (WFP photo)



Iraq's southern Basrah province faces a different challenge. The oil fields in southern Iraq use large amounts of water to pump oil out of the ground. Oil production companies draw water at high rates from the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which is created as the Tigris and Euphrates rivers converge in southern Iraq. As Iraq pushes to increase its oil production from 3.5 million barrel per day to 5 million barrels per day, water demand from the oil fields is expected to “skyrocket,” according to an oil industry publication. To meet this demand, Iraq has contracted with a company to build the Common Seawater Supply Project, although the report did not say when the project would be operational.³⁴³

Embassy Operations Update

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad continues to be the largest embassy worldwide, and the soon-to-be completed new consulate compound in Erbil will be the largest consulate in the world. These two compounds combined with the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center make up Mission Iraq and cost on average nearly \$1.6 billion per year to operate. To maintain a diplomatic presence in Iraq, more than half of the expenditures go towards security and operating a fleet of helicopters and airplanes for movement within Iraq and to neighboring countries.³⁴⁴

NEW ERBIL CONSULATE COMPOUND

State reported that the Erbil New Consulate Compound project is 90 percent complete. The current estimated substantial completion date is October 2024, though that will change once changes to the contract are negotiated following changed and added Bureau of Diplomatic Security scope requirements, changes required following inspections, and changes to project conditions, such as required air shipments for secure material. Consulate move-in will be approximately 2 months after substantial completion.³⁴⁵

The estimated cost-to-complete the construction is \$795 million. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations continues to track the impact of added scope and other contract changes.³⁴⁶

MISSION IRAQ SECURITY THREATS

Threats to Mission Iraq remained largely unchanged from the previous quarter. Unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and indirect fire remained the most common threats to Mission Iraq security. Civil violence in Baghdad and Erbil could occur based on economic conditions, politics, lack of basic service, and regional events inflaming tensions.³⁴⁷

Chief of Mission staff have generally been able to meet with the new government leadership. Meetings with Iraqi government officials have become more routine since the new government formed in October 2022, most likely due to Iraqi government accessibility and the increase of stability and security in Baghdad and throughout Iraq. Mission Iraq secure vehicle movement teams have had minimal issues accessing Iraqi government venues. However, travel by vehicle outside the greater Baghdad area and Erbil may pose additional restraints on resources. Further compounding the issue, movements to far flung areas may require air support given the lack of life-support facilities in less developed areas.³⁴⁸



Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's 78th session in September. (UN photo)

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In Iraq, the U.S. Government encourages the development of an inclusive, responsive democracy that is transparent, accountable, and committed to international norms.³⁴⁹ In Syria, the U.S. Government seeks a political resolution to the ongoing conflict through the UN-facilitated, Syrian-led process under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.³⁵⁰

IRAQ

United States and Iraq Continue to Deepen Relationship

State reported that the United States and Iraq continue to enjoy a strong bilateral relationship rooted in the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement.³⁵¹ State said the U.S.-Iraq relationship is a “360-degree partnership” that includes cooperation on matters related to energy, climate, water, trade, investment, education, anti-corruption, and human rights, in addition to the traditional security relationship.³⁵² U.S. programs in Iraq aim to foster stability and economic growth, bolster Iraq’s democracy, and maintain security cooperation to preserve post-ISIS gains.³⁵³

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani has walked a political tightrope between the United States and Iran, balancing internal and external influences, since he was named prime minister last year with the strong support of the Iran-aligned Shia Coordination Framework, some of whose members are pressing for the removal of all Coalition troops from Iraq. The prime minister must balance competing priorities to maintain Iraq’s current fragile stability.³⁵⁴

In mid-September, Prime Minister al-Sudani participated in the UN General Assembly, where he met with Secretary Antony Blinken. Prime Minister al-Sudani and Secretary Blinken “renewed their commitment to continue strengthening the partnership between the two countries,” according to the State spokesperson.³⁵⁵

Provincial Council Elections Stay on Schedule

Iraq is scheduled to hold local elections on December 18. A total of 275 seats in Iraq’s provincial councils are up for election; 75 seats have been allocated for women and 10 seats for members of ethnic and religious minority groups. Iraq’s Independent High Election Commission announced in July that it had approved 270 political parties and blocs which are organized into 50 alliances, according to media reports. In addition, more than 60 independent candidates will vie for seats. Following the elections, the new provincial councils will select the provincial governors and executive officials.³⁵⁶

Due to a number of factors, including the fight against ISIS, the COVID-19 pandemic, and political disputes, the upcoming provincial council elections will be the first conducted since 2013.³⁵⁷ State reported that the Independent High Election Commission has been fully funded by the 2023 Iraqi federal budget.³⁵⁸

Iraqi Government Increases Pressure on Türkiye Over Airstrikes

Türkiye continued military activities in northern Iraq during the quarter, using airstrikes and drones to target members of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which is considered a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the United States, and the European Union and has been waging a longtime insurgency against Türkiye from bases in northern Iraq.³⁵⁹ (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6.

Reported Turkish Military Activity in the IKR During the Quarter

August 6

Dohuk province: A Turkish airstrike killed a civilian and wounded one other.

Sulaymaniyah province: Turkish airstrike killed a civilian.

August 9

Near the Türkiye-Iraq border: At least six Turkish soldiers were killed in clashes with PKK fighters in an area called Zap. The Turkish Ministry of National Defense (MoND) said that, in response, Turkish airstrikes killed four PKK members.

Sulaymaniyah province: A Turkish airstrike killed a civilian and wounded one other on the major road between Sulaymaniyah and Erbil.

August 11

Sulaymaniyah province: A Turkish airstrike killed three civilians on the Penjwen-Sulaymaniyah road.

Separate Turkish drone strikes near Sulaymaniyah and Erbil killed three PKK members.

September 18

Sulaymaniyah province: A Turkish drone strike at a small airport killed three members of the PUK’s counterterrorism group and wounded three others.

October 1

Following a PKK assault on the national police headquarters in Ankara, Türkiye struck 20 targets in northern Iraq followed by waves of attacks on October 3 and 4.

Sources: Amwaj.media, “In the Wake of Airstrikes, Turkish Ex-spy Chief-Turned-FM Tours Iraq,” 8/22/2023; Al Jazeera, “Six Turkish Soldiers Killed in Anti-PKK Military Operation in Iraq,” 8/10/2023; Agence France-Presse, “Turkish Drone Strike Kills Three Kurdish Rebels, Iraqi Kurds Say,” 8/11/2023; Al Jazeera, “Turkish Attacks Kill 7 PKK Members in Iraq as Delegation Visits KRG,” 8/24/2023; Reuters, “Three Killed in Attack on Small Airport in Iraq’s Kurdistan—a statement,” 9/18/2023; Associated Press, “Türkiye Strikes Kurdish Militants in Iraq Again after Warning of Retaliation for a Bombing in Ankara,” 10/4/2023.

During the days leading up to the September 19 deadline, media reported that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Force deployed artillery and armored vehicles to the border in preparation for an “all-out” assault across the border with the IKR unless Iraq met the deadline to disarm the groups and move them from the border.

Türkiye maintains military bases in northern Iraq and began stepping up military activity against PKK strongholds in April 2022 in an operation dubbed Claw-Lock. The Iraqi government has said that the Turkish airstrikes are a breach of Iraqi sovereignty.³⁶⁰

On September 19, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid said he would deliver a formal letter of protest to the Turkish ambassador over Turkish airstrikes on Iraqi territory.³⁶¹ The president’s protest follows a September 18 drone airstrike at a small airport in Sulaymaniyah province that killed three members of the counterterrorism group of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and wounded three others. Relations between Türkiye and the PUK, one of two main political parties in the IKR, have been deteriorating amid Türkiye’s claim that the PUK provided training and support to the PKK.³⁶²

Iraq Acts to Disarm Iranian Kurdish Rebels

In March 2023, Iraq and Iran reached a security agreement under which Iraq agreed not to allow armed Iranian opposition groups to use its territory in the IKR to launch cross-border attacks on Iran. According to media reports, the details of the agreement were never formally disclosed; however, it was later learned that the agreement called for disarming the Iranian Kurdish opposition groups and moving them away from the Iraq-Iran border. The deadline for Iraq to comply with the agreement to disarm the rebel groups was September 19. Iran said publicly that it would not extend the deadline. Further, Iran said that it would use military force should Iraq fail to meet the deadline, as it did last fall when it launched ballistic missiles and drones at Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in the IKR.³⁶³

During the days leading up to the September 19 deadline, media reported that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Force deployed artillery and armored vehicles to the border in preparation for an “all-out” assault across the border with the IKR unless Iraq met the deadline to disarm the groups and move them from the border.³⁶⁴ The Iraqi government told the media on September 19 that the anti-Iran groups had been disarmed, moved away from the border, and would be treated as refugees according to regulations of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.³⁶⁵

Iraq Continues Regional Engagement

Iraq continued to improve its relations with neighbors and in the region. On July 24, the Prime Minister of Jordan visited Baghdad and met with Prime Minister al-Sudani and President Abdul Latif Rashid. They discuss progress on Iraq’s electrical interconnections with Jordan and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) electricity interconnection, critical projects to address Iraq’s growing need for electricity. During the week of August 21, Iraqi Minister of Oil Hayan Abdulghani Alsawad visited Ankara and met with Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan visited Baghdad and Erbil in August to discuss such topics as water sharing, resuming oil exports via the Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline, and the threat to Türkiye posed by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in northern Iraq.³⁶⁶

Iraq continues to work with countries within and outside the region to stem the production and flow of narcotics, especially highly addictive captagon. Iraq has been working with Jordan to tackle the drug trade, noting that Jordanian authorities had carried out strikes

against drug traffickers in Syria.³⁶⁷ In August, U.K. Security Minister Tom Tugendhat visited Baghdad to increase United Kingdom-Iraqi cooperation on serious organized crime threats, including drug trafficking. According to a media report, Minister Tugendhat brought up the discovery by Iraqi authorities of a factory producing captagon in an area of Iraq bordering with Saudi Arabia, a major market for the pills.³⁶⁸

According to a media report, Iraq is seen as a key conduit for captagon, and Iraqi authorities frequently announced seizures of large quantities of the drug, often coming from Syria.³⁶⁹ On July 24, Iraqi security forces announced the seizure of almost one million captagon pills in Baghdad, hidden in a truck destined to a northern Iraqi province. In mid-September, Dubai police seized nearly 14 tons of captagon valued at more than \$1 billion, according to a press report. The seizure included more than 86 million tablets of the drug stored in 5 shipping containers, according to the report.³⁷⁰

SYRIA

No Progress on an International Political Settlement for Syria

On August 23, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen briefed the Security Council on his efforts to advance a political settlement for Syria. He said that he was deeply troubled that “for over a year, the intra-Syrian political process has been in deep freeze” and said that “the only path out of this is a political process that involves the Syrian parties themselves.”³⁷¹ Mr. Pedersen appealed for increased support for humanitarian operations, with a \$5.4 billion operations plan only about 25 percent funded and a separate plan to support Syrian refugees in the region only 10 percent funded.³⁷² Mr. Pedersen held talks in Damascus in early September and then travelled to New York where he met with several world leaders on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly meetings.³⁷³

State said that the Syrian regime was the main obstacle to achieving progress, including at the Constitutional Committee in Geneva, which is intended to play a major role in reaching a settlement. State is managing programming to provide technical expertise and capacity building for select Constitutional Committee members.³⁷⁴

Intra-Kurdish Dialogue Remains Stalled

According to State, the Syrian intra-Kurdish dialogue remained stalled this quarter as the main participants—the leaderships of the KDP-affiliated Kurdish National Council on the one hand, and the Kurdish National Unity Parties (comprising parties linked to the Democratic Unity Party (PYD) that currently dominates northeastern Syria), on the other—did not return to the table convened by the U.S. Senior Representative to Northeast Syria.³⁷⁵ State said the Syrian intra-Kurdish dialogue complements U.S. efforts to stabilize areas of northeastern Syria liberated from ISIS and to promote greater transparency and inclusivity in local governance.³⁷⁶

SDF Commander General Mazloum Abdi said that the Self-Administration of North and East Syria (SANES) was willing to resume intra-Kurdish dialogue with all groups.³⁷⁷ According to a Western monitoring service, the co-leader of the PYD, Salih Muslim, said on July 15 that the door was “wide open” for dialogue, “provided the [Kurdish National Council] had the courage” to leave Türkiye and the Türkiye-backed Syrian National Coalition.³⁷⁸

State said that the Syrian regime was the main obstacle to achieving progress, including at the Constitutional Committee in Geneva, which is intended to play a major role in reaching a settlement.



Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy for the UN Secretary-General for Syria, attends the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East. (UN photo)

UN Verifies Violations and Abuses Against Children by SDF, Turkish-supported Forces, and Others

In June, the UN Secretary-General released his annual report on children and armed conflict. Many of the verified violations and abuses against children took place in northern Syria; they were attributed either to the Coalition’s partner force, the SDF or its affiliates, or to the Turkish-supported Syrian National Army (SNA). Other violations and abuses attributable to the Syrian regime or to opposition or jihadist or terrorist elements may have occurred either there or elsewhere in Syria.³⁷⁹

The Secretary-General’s report verified that in 2022 the SDF or its components recruited or used 1,295 children, and the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement, which is administratively linked with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), recruited or used 10 children. The opposition SNA, which receives support from the Turkish government, recruited or used more than 600 children. Syrian government forces, pro-government militias, and jihadist or terrorist groups also recruited children. The Secretary-General noted that more than 600 children, including foreigners, “reportedly remained detained for alleged association with armed groups, mainly [ISIS],” in northeastern Syria.³⁸⁰

The Secretary-General said he was deeply concerned by the increase in verified cases of child recruitment and use by the SDF. However, the Secretary-General applauded the disengagement of 33 children from the SDF’s ranks and the screening out of 219 children in 2022 as a result of the implementation of the 2019 action plan relating to recruitment and use of child soldiers.³⁸¹

The Secretary-General said he remained alarmed by the deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with parties to conflict. He called upon “all parties to facilitate meaningful and systematic United Nations access to children deprived of liberty,” stating that children should be treated “primarily as victims, and that deprivation of liberty should

be a last resort and for the shortest period of time, in line with international juvenile justice standards and the best interests of the child.”³⁸² The Secretary-General expressed his concern about more than 600 detained for alleged association with armed groups and thousands of children residing in displaced persons camps in northeastern Syria.³⁸³

On September 15, Türkiye was included on the Child Soldiers Prevention Act list. The government of Türkiye provided support to elements of the Syrian National Army, a coalition of Syrian armed opposition groups that recruited or used child soldiers in Syria and Libya. The law requires the listing of governments that have governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces, or government-supported armed groups, that recruit or use child soldiers, even if the recruitment or use was carried out without that government’s awareness or participation.³⁸⁴ U.S. law prohibits certain types of U.S. security assistance and licenses for direct commercial sales of military equipment for countries which are listed, but President Biden waived most of the restrictions imposed on Türkiye.³⁸⁵

Türkiye publicly protested the decision and questioned why stronger action was not taken against the SDF, which the Secretary-General and the United States say also use child soldiers.³⁸⁶

The Secretary-General expressed his concern about more than 600 detained for alleged association with armed groups and thousands of children residing in displaced persons camps in northeastern Syria.

United States Sanctions TSO Factions

On August 17, Treasury sanctioned two Turkish-supported armed opposition (TSO) factions of the SNA, the Suleiman Shah Brigade and the Hamza Division; their leaders; and an associated enterprise in connection with serious human rights abuses against people living in the Afrin region of northern Syria.³⁸⁷ State said that the move was welcomed by more than 85 Syrian civil society organizations as well as the SDF and the SANES. According to State, some civil society organizations said they appreciated the fact that abuses against women and Kurds (and how they contribute to displacement) were specifically mentioned in the announcement.³⁸⁸

State cited additional media reporting of allegations of serious human rights abuses by Turkish-supported armed opposition factions, including torture, murder, and rape, the killing or injury of civilians in clashes between SNA factions; and the killing, injury, or endangering of individuals as they crossed borders between SNA-controlled areas and other areas of Syria.³⁸⁹

SDF Affiliates Commemorate PKK Attacks Inside Türkiye

According to media reports, several Syria-based groups marked the August 15 anniversary of the first PKK attack in Türkiye in 1984.³⁹⁰ In Syria, the Women’s Protection Units (YPJ), People’s Protection Units (YPG), and the PYD all issued statements or held events (as did the Shingal Resistance Units (YBS) in Sinjar province, Iraq).³⁹¹ The Syria-based groups are affiliated with the SDF or with entities leading the SANES. The YBS is considered to be an affiliate of the PKK.³⁹²

According to the media reports, the YPG and YPJ in Aleppo organized a military parade and a YPJ commander in her speech “congratulated the leader Abdullah Ocalan, the mothers of the martyrs and all peoples on the ‘Day of Resurrection,’” as, she said, August 15 is called

“by the Kurdish people and the freedom movement.”³⁹³ Ocalan is the founder of the PKK and is currently imprisoned in Türkiye.³⁹⁴ The PYD said “The first bullet is important, and no less important [is] the thought, philosophy, and motivation that pulled the trigger,” and “We reiterate our promise to remain loyal to our martyrs, to Leader Abdullah Ocalan, and to their path and struggle.”³⁹⁵

STABILIZATION AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

According to State, U.S. Government stabilization assistance plays a critical role in the counter-ISIS mission by addressing the economic and social grievances that ISIS and other violent extremist groups seek to exploit, including by improving local service provider capacity, and supporting civil society to advocate for critical needs that Syrians and Iraqis have identified.³⁹⁶



A Mercy Corps staff inspects gate valves during the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene activity rehabilitation of the Al-Ghilzane Water Treatment Plant, Mosul, Iraq. (USAID photo)

IRAQ

USAID reported that it supported stabilization activities in Iraq during the quarter through 10 active programs funded by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and the Middle East Bureau.³⁹⁷ (See page 82.) USAID obligated approximately \$32 million for stabilization programs in Iraq in fiscal year 2023, including \$18 million obligated for OTI programs.³⁹⁸ USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) reported that six new awards, one funded modification, and one incremental modification were obligated by the end of the quarter.³⁹⁹ Of the new awards, four are to Public International Organizations (IOM, WHO, OCHA, and UNICEF), including protection, health, and shelter assistance, and the remaining NGO awards will be obligated to provide humanitarian coordination and information management, protection, and water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance to the most vulnerable displaced persons.⁴⁰⁰

Lack of Banking Liquidity in Iraq Impacts USAID Implementers and USAID-Supported Businesses

Private banks in Iraq continued to lack liquidity and the technical capacity to lend to small businesses.⁴⁰¹ The banking sector does not offer sufficient risk-sharing for new businesses, which limits lending opportunities and increases the cost of finance, according to USAID.⁴⁰² The lack of liquidity in private banks also impacted USAID implementers.⁴⁰³ USAID reported that the Central Bank of Iraq notified implementers that new regulations will restrict their ability to withdraw U.S. dollars to pay their employees and other expenses.⁴⁰⁴ Implementers are now required to withdraw 70 percent of their employees' salaries in Iraqi dinars and only 30 percent can be paid in U.S. dollars.⁴⁰⁵

The Central Bank is also releasing fewer U.S. dollars to banks than is required for daily operations.⁴⁰⁶ In the absence of clear regulations, each bank is responding with different transfer limitations and daily U.S. dollar withdrawal limits.⁴⁰⁷ Most contracts are in dollars to protect employee incomes from currency devaluation and inflation.⁴⁰⁸ As a result, this change is expected to lower the income of USAID implementer employees, given the volatility of the Iraqi dinar, according to USAID.⁴⁰⁹

USAID-supported businesses also faced challenges in planning and effective budgeting due to the fluctuation of the exchange rate between the Iraqi dinar and the U.S. dollar.⁴¹⁰ The high prices of mineral raw materials also placed financial strains on businesses, impacting production costs.⁴¹¹ In response, USAID reported hosting a conference with 300 attendees from the private sector and investment stakeholders to identify solutions to improve access to finance in Iraq and working with the Development Finance Corporation to subsidize a \$50 million loan to private banks to expand their lending portfolios.⁴¹²

Limited Progress in Transfer of Humanitarian Operations to the Iraqi Government and KRG

Under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the international community is in the process of transferring of humanitarian response operations to the Iraqi government and the KRG, although with limited progress. Joint Coordination Forums, which include humanitarian, development, and stabilization organizations and were expected to be chaired by provincial governor-level officials, have not yet been finalized, according to USAID.⁴¹³

USAID-supported businesses also faced challenges in planning and effective budgeting due to the fluctuation of the exchange rate between the Iraqi dinar and the U.S. dollar.

Humanitarian sector coordination is still largely led by the international community and USAID doubts that the Joint Coordination Forums will improve local-level coordination and encourage government leadership.⁴¹⁴ Some progress had been made in the expansion of the mandate of caseworkers of the KRG Department of Labor and Social Affairs in Dohuk province to include child protection.⁴¹⁵ Capacity building efforts are ongoing to handover protection, health, and other services.⁴¹⁶ USAID also reported concerns that OCHA was not tracking the frequency or status of sectoral groups and that the chair of the UN-led Transition Advisory Group, the Humanitarian Coordinator, admitted to not having an understanding of current humanitarian coordination efforts.⁴¹⁷

In FY 2024, international funding, including funding from USAID BHA, will continue, albeit on a far smaller scale with less funding covering a smaller geographic area and largely focused on the most vulnerable populations in the protection; health; and water, sanitation, and hygiene sectors.⁴¹⁸ While donors, including USAID, continued to advocate for the government to provide services for populations served by international humanitarian programs, USAID reported that it did not expect the same level or standard of support to continue once donor funding in a given area or sector ends.⁴¹⁹ The level of support beyond what will be provided through donor funding will largely be determined by the capacity and will of local and national government authorities and by the amount of funding the government allocates to these priorities, according to USAID.⁴²⁰

SYRIA

Ongoing State stabilization programs and implementers in non-regime areas of Syria work with local Syrian governance entities and communities to support education, community security, independent media, civil society, reintegration, humanitarian mine action, transitional justice, accountability, restoration of essential services, and a political resolution to the Syrian conflict in line with UNSCR Resolution 2254.⁴²¹ USAID-supported stabilization programs supported elections and political processes, livelihoods, private sector-led growth and job creation, and essential services in northeastern Syria.⁴²² (See page 85.) This stabilization assistance is “vital...to accelerate inclusive economic recovery” in areas liberated from ISIS, State reported.⁴²³

While ISIS continues to pose a threat to stability in northeastern Syria, ISIS attacks did not directly affect U.S. stabilization activities this quarter, State reported.

Economic Challenges, Earthquake, Drought Increased Stabilization Needs

The economy in northeastern Syria faced ongoing challenges this quarter including high commodity price fluctuations, the continued devaluation of the Syrian pound, reduced agriculture yield due to drought conditions, and the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake in northwestern Syria.⁴²⁴ These conditions and the economic challenges have increased the overall need for stabilization and humanitarian assistance funding in Syria during the last 2 years, State reported.⁴²⁵

While ISIS continues to pose a threat to stability in northeastern Syria, ISIS attacks did not directly affect U.S. stabilization activities this quarter, State reported.⁴²⁶ Attacks continued to target individuals affiliated with the SANES and SDF, “posing a threat to immediate and longer-term stability in the area.”⁴²⁷

Earthquake Response Continues

The effects of the earthquakes in northwestern Syria in February 2023 continued to impact community infrastructure, affecting roads, public facilities, and sewage networks.⁴²⁸ The amount of funding needed for rehabilitating this infrastructure is substantial, according to USAID, and donors have not significantly increased their investments in these areas.⁴²⁹

The USAID-funded White Helmets continued to provide emergency response, ambulance services, health and awareness services, and rehabilitation work.⁴³⁰ The organization also implemented the opening of roads and the rehabilitation of schools and public facilities, in addition to providing logistical support to the other community services working on the earthquake response, according to USAID.⁴³¹ The White Helmets also raised over \$50 million (out of an estimated \$80 million needed for this year) to address earthquake recovery needs in northwestern Syria.⁴³²

USAID reported that while the White Helmets reportedly made significant efforts to restore infrastructure, the demand remained great with additional financial resources needed.⁴³³ The significant scale of debris and building rubble posed a critical challenge for the White Helmets, particularly considering the vast affected areas that require specialized vehicles and machinery for proper handling.⁴³⁴ The White Helmets cleared and transported the rubble to designated landfills, but there remained a crucial need for proper rubble management to mitigate any adverse side effects.⁴³⁵

In February 2023, USAID also awarded a direct, 5-year cooperative agreement with a ceiling of \$30 million to the White Helmets, with a total of \$9.9 million obligated in FY 2023.⁴³⁶ This quarter, USAID obligated \$1 million of Human Rights Grants Program funds to the White Helmets for the White Helmets to address human rights issues in northwestern Syria, including gender-based violence, and documenting violations, abuses and atrocities, to support efforts to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.⁴³⁷

A disinformation campaign targeted the White Helmets on Facebook in July.⁴³⁸ The White Helmets noted to USAID staff that a Facebook account impersonating Administrator Samantha Power had reported the White Helmets for violating Facebook advertising guidelines.⁴³⁹ USAID verified that the account was fake.⁴⁴⁰ Due to the report, the White Helmets were not able to fund raise for their International Women's Day social-media campaign.⁴⁴¹ Since the report, the fake account was deleted.⁴⁴²

Turkish Government Accelerates Deportation of Syrians

During the quarter, humanitarian organization and local media sources reported that Turkish authorities continued to increase operations to combat undocumented migration across Türkiye. Most operations took place in Istanbul and resulted in increased concerns about forced returns, especially from removal centers. According to a late September statement to the press, the Turkish Minister of Interior reported that since June 1, the Turkish government had deported 42,875 undocumented migrants. Press reports and some NGOs cited by USAID claimed hundreds, and possibly thousands, of refugees were deported daily.⁴⁴³ According to a human rights NGO cited by USAID, in July, the Turkish government deported nearly 1,000 Syrian refugees.⁴⁴⁴ In September, local media citing administrative sources at the Syria-Türkiye border crossings reported that Türkiye deported more than 11,000 Syrians.⁴⁴⁵

The effects of the earthquakes in northwestern Syria in February 2023 continued to impact community infrastructure, affecting roads, public facilities, and sewage networks.

According to a relief organization cited by USAID, the Turkish government deported more than 30,000 Syrians as of early 2023 and estimates that Turkish authorities deport approximately 1,000 Syrians from the country each week on average.

According to a relief organization cited by USAID, the Turkish government deported more than 30,000 Syrians as of early 2023 and estimates that Turkish authorities deport approximately 1,000 Syrians from the country each week on average, representing an increase in deportations prior to the 2023 Turkish elections.⁴⁴⁶ Many Syrian refugees deported by the Turkish government are transported to parts of the northern Aleppo governorate, despite not originating from that area, and face limited basic infrastructure and services, according to relief organizations.⁴⁴⁷

Local media reported that in late July, President Erdogan claimed that more than 600,000 displaced Syrians had returned to Syria.⁴⁴⁸ However, State PRM partners have not been able to verify this number.⁴⁴⁹ President Erdogan stated in May that he was working to ensure the “voluntary return of a million Syrian refugees.”⁴⁵⁰

In July President Erdogan said that Türkiye had completed construction of 100,000 to 150,000 brick homes in northern Syria and as the houses were completed, Syrians have returned.⁴⁵¹ Türkiye is currently host to more than 3.7 million refugees, including 3.3 million Syrians.⁴⁵²

Clashes Between the SDF and Local Tribes Impacted Stabilization Assistance in Dayr az Zawr and Hasakah

Conflict between the SDF and local Arab tribes prompted curfews and closures across the region and delayed some State and USAID activities in Dayr az Zawr and Hasakah as implementers could not access parts of the area.⁴⁵³ (See page 26.) Staff implementing USAID’s Essential Services activity hid in place but were reported safe while staff from another USAID implementer could not move within the governorate, with their offices closed in Dayr az Zawr for a few days while the security situation was being monitored.⁴⁵⁴

USAID’s Supporting Livelihoods in Syria activity closed on September 30. Current insecurity in Dayr az Zawr has limited the ability of the implementer to do final program data verification on recently distributed tractors and farming machinery.⁴⁵⁵ When the Farmer’s Union in Dayr az Zawr took 3 USAID-distributed portable seed sorting machines (out of 14 machines recently distributed) out of Dayr az Zawr city in August for other non-beneficiaries to process seeds, an action not aligned with the memorandum of understanding signed by Dayr az Zawr local authorities and the project (which states that such machines are owned and operated by cooperatives in participating villages where they are distributed), the USAID implementer was unable to deploy staff to monitor the situation due to the conflict.⁴⁵⁶

An armed group affiliated with the SDF entered al-Harjijeh Health Center, a Syrian Recovery Trust Fund-financed project, by force under the pretext of resting in the center.⁴⁵⁷ As a result, the center was evacuated and over \$2,000 of material (including internet routers, a DVR device, and a storage unit for surveillance cameras) was stolen when the armed group moved on to a school.⁴⁵⁸ USAID also reported delays in a telecoms grant due to difficulty in getting the evaluation committee together.⁴⁵⁹ All USAID monitoring site visits were also paused due to the security situation, according to USAID.⁴⁶⁰

UN Cross-Border Assistance Resumes in September After Temporary Pause

In July, the UN Security Council failed to pass a resolution reauthorizing UN cross-border access through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, effectively halting UN cross-border assistance.⁴⁶¹ In early August, the UN and Syrian regime reached an understanding to resume UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to opposition-held northwestern Syria from Türkiye via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point until mid-January 2024.⁴⁶² This marked the first time that Syrian regime authorities have consented to UN cross-border access via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point since the UN Security Council first passed a resolution authorizing UN cross-border humanitarian access to Syria in 2014, according to USAID.⁴⁶³

The Syrian Salvation Government, the de facto authorities in northwestern Syria's Idlib governorate, provided written approval to resume cross-border assistance on September 11.⁴⁶⁴ Following this approval, on September 19, the UN—including USAID implementers WFP, IOM, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO—transported 17 trucks carrying nutrition, health, and non-food commodities via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point from Türkiye into northwestern Syria.⁴⁶⁵ The Syrian regime also extended consent to UN cross-border access to Bab al-Salama and Al Ra'ee border crossing points, which was previously set to expire on August 13, until November 13.⁴⁶⁶

Approximately 90 percent of the 4.5 million people residing in northwestern Syria rely on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs, according to the UN.⁴⁶⁷ USAID reported that according to UNFPA, cross-border operations in the region are essential to ensuring women, especially those in areas where life-saving services are limited or nonexistent, have access to sexual and reproductive health services and support to address gender-based violence.⁴⁶⁸

Food Prices Continue to Increase in Northwestern Syria

OCHA estimates that approximately 3.7 million people are food insecure in northwestern Syria.⁴⁶⁹ Approximately 80 percent of the population in northwestern Syria does not have sufficient food, according to OCHA, with funding constraints reducing the food provided in July by the humanitarian community.⁴⁷⁰

Food affordability in northwestern Syria has deteriorated over the years due to inflation, currency depreciation and rising food prices.⁴⁷¹ WFP and the UN Food Security and Livelihoods cluster conducted monthly market monitoring assessments and reported an 11 percent commodity price increase in August for the standard food basket (a group of essential food commodities) compared to the previous month.⁴⁷² The cost of the food basket is 27 percent higher than 6 months ago and nearly double what it was a year ago.⁴⁷³

In 2023, the humanitarian community reached 2 million targeted people in northwestern Syria each month with food assistance, resulting in a gap of 1.7 million food-insecure people (out of the total 3.7 million food-insecure people).⁴⁷⁴ According to OCHA, a 40 percent reduction in assistance could widen the gap of people not reached to 2.8 million people from current 1.7 million.⁴⁷⁵ USAID implementers provide vulnerable populations with food vouchers, monthly in-kind food rations, and cash transfers for emergency nutritional

OCHA estimates that approximately 3.7 million people are food insecure in northwestern Syria.

Syria is currently experiencing a water crisis caused by insufficient and poorly distributed rainfall, severe drought conditions, combined with low water levels in the Euphrates River and damaged water infrastructure according to USAID.

products, while also distributing wheat flour and yeast to bakeries.⁴⁷⁶ With USAID BHA and other donor funding, the WFP pre-positioned 15,000 metric tons of food and nutrition commodities in northwestern Syria for distribution in July.⁴⁷⁷

Alouk Water Station Failure Leaves 1 Million with Limited Access to Water

Syria is currently experiencing a water crisis caused by insufficient and poorly distributed rainfall, severe drought conditions, combined with low water levels in the Euphrates River and damaged water infrastructure according to USAID.⁴⁷⁸ The water crisis has not only reduced access to water for drinking and domestic use for millions of Syrians, but also triggered substantial harvest and income losses, an increase in water-borne diseases and malnutrition rates and additional protection risks, especially for women and girls.⁴⁷⁹ Water shortages are also forcing households to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as changing regular hygiene practices and increasing household debt to afford high water costs.⁴⁸⁰

State reported that water shortages in Hasakah persisted due to the ongoing political stalemate on an al-Hol groundwater station.⁴⁸¹ In Dayr az Zawr governorate, reduced Euphrates water levels due to climactic changes and upstream damming in Türkiye similarly reduced water resources available for consumption and irrigation.⁴⁸²

On June 23, the Alouk water station in al-Hasakah governorate ceased functioning, affecting direct access to water for approximately 460,000 people in northeastern Syria, primarily al-Hasakeh and Tal Tamer cities.⁴⁸³ As of August, repairs to Alouk had enabled the resumption of water pumping; however, challenges ensuring sufficient electricity to the water station continue to result in inconsistent water access in surrounding areas.⁴⁸⁴ In total, up to 1 million people are impacted, including 100,000 people in al-Hol and other displaced persons camps and settlements.⁴⁸⁵

USAID supported 13 NGO implementers, as well as the International Organization for Migration and UNICEF, to provide water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance in Syria.⁴⁸⁶ USAID implementers distributed hygiene items to vulnerable populations and reportedly enhanced WASH facilities by rehabilitating small-scale sanitation and water systems—such as handwashing stations and latrines—in displacement camps and informal settlements.⁴⁸⁷ USAID also reported that in northern Syria, USAID implementers increased access to safe drinking water through emergency water trucking and the distribution of water storage tanks and water treatment devices.⁴⁸⁸

State reported that stabilization programs in these areas helped to maintain the vehicles that local councils use to facilitate water trucking and provide emergency services (such as fire engines and ambulances), as well as heavy machinery used for the rehabilitation of water, electrical, and sanitation infrastructure.⁴⁸⁹

PROSECUTIONS AND SANCTIONS OF ISIS ACTIVITY

Several other Federal government departments conduct activities to degrade ISIS capabilities in Iraq and Syria as part of a whole-of-government effort to reduce ISIS manpower and disrupt its financing. Efforts include prosecutions of foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS; disrupting ISIS financing; designations of ISIS-linked individuals and organizations as terrorists; support for efforts to repatriate ISIS-affiliated individuals in displacement camps in Syria; strengthening the ISF's ability to gather evidence in support of warrants and prosecutions; and mitigating threats to the homeland posed by ISIS-linked individuals attempting to enter the United States to conduct attacks.⁴⁹⁰

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Since 2014, the Department of Justice (DoJ) has charged more than 240 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS and obtained more than 195 convictions. The DoJ reported that the remaining cases are in various stages of litigation. During the quarter, three individuals prosecuted for ISIS-related activity were sentenced to prison.⁴⁹¹ (See Table 7.)

Table 7.

Department of Justice Prosecutions and Activities against Terrorism, July–September 2023

Date and Jurisdiction	Description
July 13 Middle District of Florida	Muhammed Momtaz al-Azhari was sentenced to 18 years in prison and a lifetime of supervised release for attempting to provide material support to ISIS. A U.S. citizen, Al-Azhari was released from a prison in Saudi Arabia in 2018, where he was serving a sentence for supporting terrorism in Syria. He was removed to the United States, and in or around April 2020 began to carry out an attack in support of ISIS. He acquired multiple firearms and researched and scouted potential locations for an attack in the Tampa Bay area.
July 14 Eastern District of New York	Mirsad Kandic was sentenced to life imprisonment following his May 2022 conviction for providing material support to ISIS in the forms of personnel, weapons, property, equipment, and false documentation and identification. Kandic recruited foreign fighters to ISIS, trafficked fighters from the West into Syria, and obtained weapons, military equipment, maps, money, and false identifications for ISIS fighters. He directed ISIS media, disseminating ISIS recruitment messages and gruesome propaganda on X, formerly known as Twitter.
August 25 District of Minnesota	Muhammad Masood was sentenced to 18 years in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release for attempting to provide material support to ISIS. Masood, a licensed medical doctor in Pakistan, was formerly employed as a research coordinator at a medical clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Between January 2020 and March 2020, Masood used an encrypted messaging application to facilitate his travel overseas to join ISIS. Masood expressed his desire to conduct “lone wolf” terrorist attacks in the United States. On February 21, 2020, he purchased a plane ticket to travel to Amman, Jordan, and planned to travel to Syria, but Jordan closed its borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Masood then agreed to fly from Minneapolis to Los Angeles, instead, where he met with an individual whom he believed would assist him with travel via cargo ship to ISIS-held territory. On March 19, 2020, the FBI arrested Masood at the Minneapolis airport.

Source: DoJ OIG, response to DoJ OIG request for information, 23.4 WOG DOJ 01B, 9/29/2023.

These efforts have resulted in Treasury designating 174 ISIS-associated individuals and entities since 2014.

The DoJ reported that no individuals were transferred to the United States from Iraq or Syria to face terrorism charges during the quarter. A total of 3 individuals from Iraq and 11 individuals from Syria have been transferred to the United States to face terrorism charges since 2014.⁴⁹²

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Treasury reported that it used the full range of its authorities to aggressively target ISIS leaders, operatives, financiers, and associated organizations around the world. These efforts have resulted in Treasury designating 174 ISIS-associated individuals and entities since 2014.⁴⁹³ Treasury reported that no individuals or entities associated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria were sanctioned during the quarter.⁴⁹⁴

Treasury reported that it continued to work with interagency and Coalition partners, including the Iraqi government, to identify ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders and disrupt ISIS financial facilitation networks in the Middle East. In addition, Treasury is working to designate ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in various countries.⁴⁹⁵

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) collaborates with other Federal agencies, USCENTCOM, and forward bases to monitor and mitigate threats that ISIS in Iraq and Syria poses to the United States. ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) office in Amman participates in joint plans and exercises and provides intelligence support to ongoing investigations and oversight of operational and investigative activity in Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.⁴⁹⁶

During the quarter, the DHS continued to monitor for threats from foreign terrorist organizations and homegrown violent extremists attempting to inspire potential followers to conduct attacks in the United States. DHS reported that it continues to be concerned that foreign terrorist groups, including ISIS, seek to rebuild overseas, maintain worldwide networks of supporters that could seek to target the United States, and engage with supporters online to solicit funds, create and share media, and encourage attacks.⁴⁹⁷







U.S. Air Force pilots stare down the runway before taking off in a U.S. Air Force HC-130J Combat King II in Southwest Asia. (U.S. Air Force photo)

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

- 68 Strategic Planning
- 70 Audit, Inspection, and Evaluation Activity
- 74 Investigations and Hotline Activity

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies’ strategic planning efforts; completed, ongoing, and planned oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; investigations; and hotline activities from July 1 through September 30, 2023.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, 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 2024 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. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR* was published on September 28, 2023, as part of the *FY 2024 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*. The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR* is organized by three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations and Security Cooperation; 2) Diplomacy, Governance, Stabilization, and Humanitarian Assistance; and 3) Support to Mission.

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 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, and the OIGs of the Departments of Justice, the Treasury, Energy, and Homeland Security, and of the Intelligence Community.

In August 2023, the Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group held its 63rd meeting. Guest speaker USAID Syria Country Director Sonila “Soni” Hysi spoke from Amman, Jordan, about USAID’s role and challenges in providing humanitarian and development assistance in conflict-affected Syria.



**FY 2024
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 and counterinsurgency operations
- Providing security assistance
- Training and equipping partner security forces
- Advising, assisting, and enabling partner security forces
- Advising and assisting ministry-level security officials

DIPLOMACY, GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance focuses on countering 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 emergency relief, assistance, and protection to displaced persons, refugees, and others affected by crisis
- 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. Government 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.

DoD OIG staff conducted oversight and investigations during the quarter from the United States, and from Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. State OIG staff in Baghdad, Iraq, and Frankfurt, Germany conducted oversight work of the Department of State's activities in Iraq and Syria. USAID OIG staff provided oversight of USAID activities in Syria and Iraq from their regional office in Frankfurt, supported by additional staff in Washington, D.C.

The DoD and State OIGs published three oversight reports related to OIR during the quarter: one on the DoD's enhanced end-use monitoring (EEUM) of sensitive equipment given to the government of Iraq, another one on State's management of cooperative agreements supporting refugee Resettlement Support Centers, and one on State's management and use of temporary structures at high-threat posts overseas.

As of September 30, 2023, 12 projects related to OIR were ongoing. The OIGs had five planned projects related to OIR as of the end of the quarter.

FINAL REPORTS BY LEAD IG AGENCIES

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Enhanced End-Use Monitoring of Sensitive Equipment Given to the Government of Iraq

DODIG-2023-119; August 31, 2023

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoD is conducting EEUM for sensitive equipment provided to the Iraqi government in accordance with the DoD Security Assistance Management Manual and the transfer agreement terms and conditions.

The DoD OIG determined that from early 2019 through mid-2022, the DoD did not conduct EEUM in accordance with applicable requirements for sensitive equipment provided or sold to the Iraqi government. It further identified how removing equipment that no longer required EEUM and applying approved alternate procedures for EEUM could result in efficiencies in the program and funds put to better use. The audit identified additional steps that should be taken to ensure that sensitive equipment provided or sold to the Iraqi government is subject to appropriate monitoring. These included recommendations that USCENTCOM develop guidance for conducting virtual EEUM inspections and provide minimum requirements for conducting quarterly end-use monitoring database reviews. Additionally, the DoD OIG recommended that the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq develop a plan of action to obtain and maintain 100 percent accountability of sensitive equipment and develop a plan for continuity in the end-use monitoring program manager position. USCENTCOM agreed with the recommendations, but the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq did not provide comments. All recommendations will remain open until appropriate actions are taken.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL***Audit of Physical Security Standards for Department of State Temporary Structures at Selected Overseas Posts***

AUD-SI-23-30, September 27, 2023

State OIG conducted this audit to determine whether State managed the use of temporary structures at overseas posts in compliance with applicable physical security standards and procedures, including maintaining an accurate and complete inventory of temporary structures used for residential and office purposes. The audit team performed fieldwork regarding six overseas posts, including some high threat posts.

State OIG found that State was not adequately managing its use of temporary structures at overseas posts in accordance with applicable security standards and procedures. State could not provide an accurate or complete inventory of temporary structures at posts, and some structures were not consistently named and categorized in State's database. In addition, State OIG identified temporary structures that did not have required waivers or exceptions to physical security standards. Finally, State OIG determined that overseas posts were not complying with State guidance regarding the unauthorized use of shipping containers as temporary structures at overseas posts.

State OIG made eight recommendations to address the deficiencies identified. The relevant State entities concurred with two recommendations and did not concur with six recommendations. At the time the report was issued, State OIG considered two recommendations resolved, pending further action, and six recommendations unresolved.

Audit of Selected Cooperative Agreements Supporting Department of State Refugee Resettlement Support Centers

AUD-SI-23-28; September 14, 2023

State OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the organizations operating selected refugee support centers adhered to the terms and conditions set forth in award agreements, including meeting performance goals, properly expended funds and accurately reported financial performance.

Individuals outside the United States seeking admission as refugees are typically processed through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which is managed by State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). PRM funds organizations to manage overseas refugee Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) that assist in the processing of refugee applications. State OIG conducted this audit to determine whether selected recipients of cooperative agreement funds supporting RSCs adhered to applicable Federal requirements, State policies and guidance, and award terms and conditions. The audit team performed fieldwork at three RSCs, including Istanbul, Turkey.

State OIG found that the recipients of cooperative agreement funds supporting RSCs did not always adhere to Federal requirements, State guidance, and award terms and conditions. Of the 60 refugee applications reviewed, 39 had deficiencies primarily related to administrative requirements. State OIG found that 12 of 36 cases reviewed had differences

between the case management system and the physical case file. In addition, State OIG found that none of the 12 RSC caseworkers observed conducted prescreening interviews in accordance with requirements. State OIG also found that selected award recipients did not always submit accurate performance reports. Finally, State OIG found that selected award recipients did not always spend funds in accordance with Federal requirements and award terms and conditions. Of the 144 expenditures tested, totaling to approximately \$2 million, State OIG found 24 expenditures to be unallowable and State OIG questioned \$759,000 in costs considered unsupported or unallowable.

State OIG made 13 recommendations to address the deficiencies identified and to determine the allowability of costs claimed. PRM concurred with all 13 recommendations. At the time the report was issued, State OIG considered all 13 recommendations resolved, pending further action.

ONGOING OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of September 30, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 12 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 7 categorizes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Table 8 contained in Appendix F, lists the titles and objectives for each of these projects. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

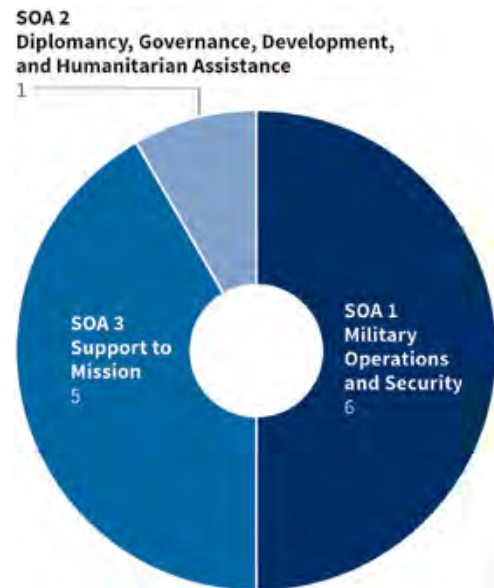
Military Operations and Security Cooperation

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD properly stores and secures munitions in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility, which includes OIR.

Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance

- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has adequately strengthened Iraqi business capacity through economic development activities.

Figure 7.
Ongoing Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



Support to Mission

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception planning in support of ongoing OIR operations.
- **State OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, construction, and commissioning of the central power plant at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.
- **State OIG** is evaluating the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil.
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has effectively implemented its New Partnerships Initiative, which includes support for religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that were victimized by ISIS.

PLANNED OVERSIGHT PROJECTS

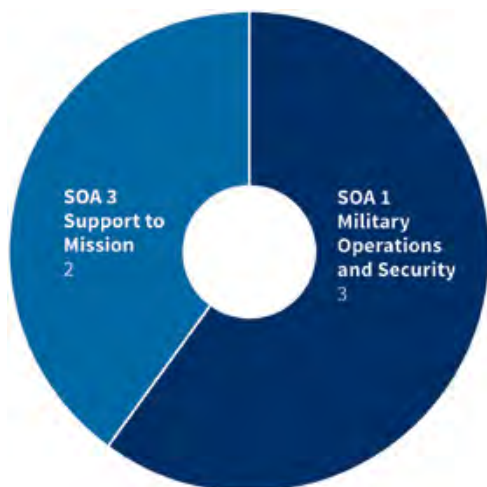
As of September 30, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had five planned projects related to OIR, which are also listed in Appendix G. The following sections highlight some of these planned projects by strategic oversight area.

Military Operations and Security Cooperation

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoD has properly accounted for U.S. military equipment retrograded from Iraq during FYs 2020-2022.

Figure 8.

Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



- **State OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether State's Bureau of Counterterrorism appropriately managed programs to counter Iranian-sponsored Foreign Terrorist organizations.

Support to Mission

- **State OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning and design of the power plant at the New Consulate Compound in Erbil, Iraq.

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 DoD OIG’s criminal investigative component, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), maintained investigative personnel in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, where they worked on cases related to OIR. DCIS agents also worked on OIR-related cases from offices in the United States. State OIG and USAID OIG investigators worked on cases related to OIR from Washington, D.C., El Salvador, Germany, Israel, South Africa, and Thailand.

Investigative Activity Related To OIR

During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in a \$108.75 million settlement resulting from a legacy case initiated before the designation of OIR, which is discussed below.

The investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 9 investigations, and coordinated on 61 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations. As noted in Figure 9, the majority of primary offense locations and allegations related to OIR originated in Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar.

The Lead IG agencies and partners continued to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from DCIS, State OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

Figure 9.

Types of Allegations and Primary Offense Locations, July 1–September 30, 2023

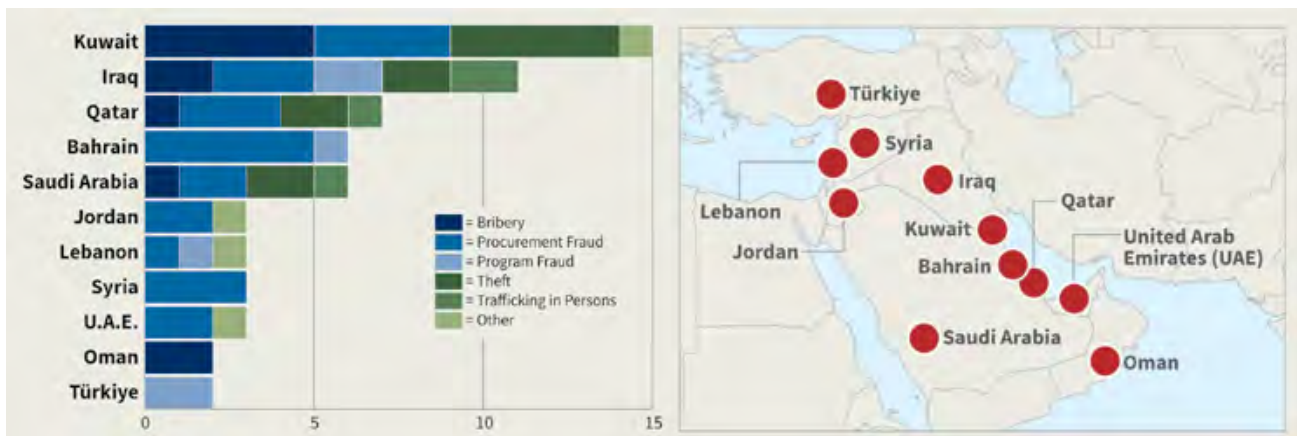


Figure 10.

Open Investigations and Sources of Allegations, July 1–September 30, 2023

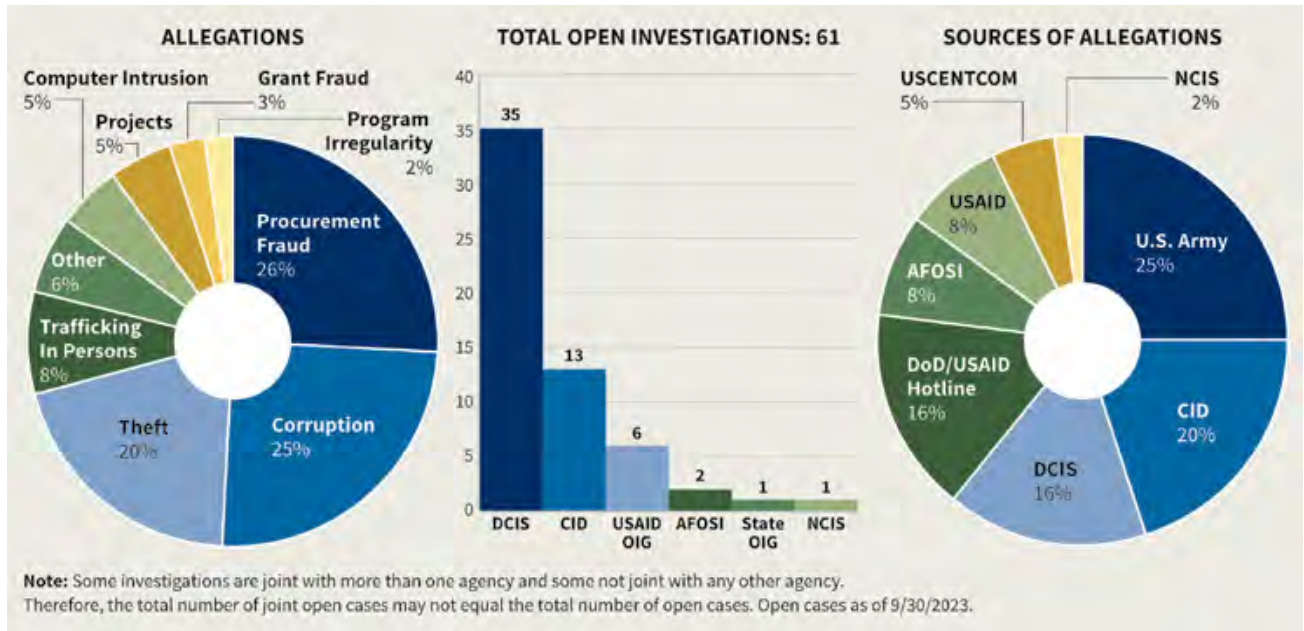


Figure 10 describes open investigations related to OIR and sources of allegations. During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 25 fraud awareness briefings for 726 participants.

Investigative Activity Related to Legacy Cases

DCIS has 3 ongoing “legacy” investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the formal designation of OIR.

KBR Agrees to \$108.75 million Settlement in OIR Legacy Case

Defense contractor KBR agreed to resolve a case related to the cross-leveling of materials and equipment procurement and inventory management under the LOGCAP III contract in Iraq from 2007 to 2011. The case was originally filed in 2011 and is the result of a joint DCIS and CID investigation.

KBR agreed to resolve the case to avoid the expense, risk and distraction of a trial, but denied violating any laws, including the False Claims Act, or any rules and regulations for government contracting. KBR claimed it met its contractual requirements while operating in a dangerous war-zone environment.

Under the terms of the settlement, KBR denied any liability or wrongful conduct. KBR will pay \$108.75 million, approximately half of which was restitution damages, plus interest to the U.S. Government. The Department of Justice intervened for the purposes of settling and dismissing the lawsuit with prejudice.

HOTLINE

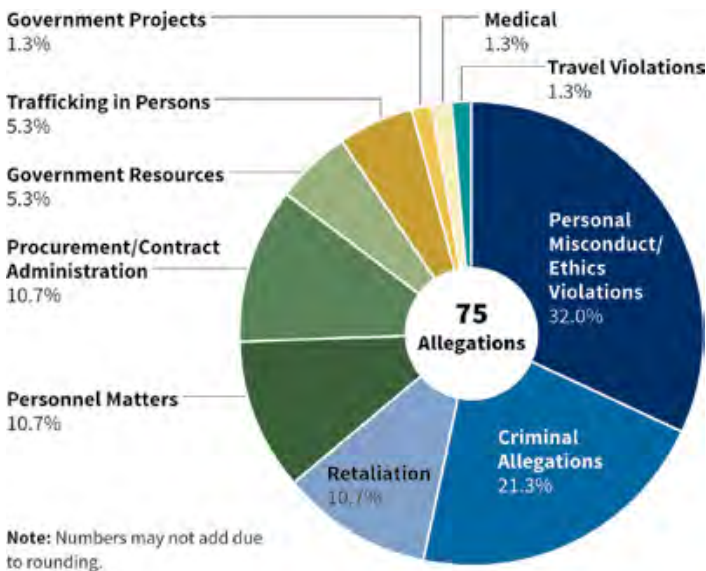
Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority. A DoD OIG Hotline investigator coordinates among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate.

During the quarter, the DoD OIG Hotline investigator received 75 allegations and referred 58 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple subjects and allegations.

As noted in Figure 11, the majority of allegations during the reporting period related to personal misconduct and criminal matters.

Figure 11.

Hotline Activities









U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II aircraft parked at al-Udeid Air Base, Qatar. (U.S. Air Force photo)

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APPENDIX A

Classified Appendix to this Report

A classified appendix to this report provides additional information on Operation Inherent Resolve, as noted in several sections of this report. The appendix will be delivered to relevant agencies and congressional committees.

APPENDIX B

About the Lead Inspector General

The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. Section 419, previously found at 5 U.S.C. App, Section 8L) established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. The primary Lead IG agencies are the Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Section 419 requires the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to appoint a Lead Inspector General from among the inspectors general of the primary Lead IG agencies upon the commencement or designation of a military operation that exceeds 60 days as an overseas contingency operation; or receipt of notification thereof.

Lead IG oversight of the operation “sunset” at the end of the first fiscal year after commencement or designation in which the total amount appropriated for the operation is less than \$100,000,000.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out the Lead IG statutory responsibilities to:

- Submit to Congress on a quarterly basis a report on the contingency operation and to make that report available to the public.
- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.

APPENDIX C

Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

This report complies with section the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. Section 419), which requires that the designated Lead IG provide a quarterly report, available to the public, on each overseas contingency operation, and is consistent with the requirement that a biannual report be published by the Lead IG on the activities of the Inspectors General with respect to that overseas contingency operation. The Chair of the Council of the Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve. State IG is the Associate IG for the operation.

This report covers the period from July 1 through September 30, 2023. The three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG—and partner oversight agencies contributed the content of this report.

To fulfill the congressional mandate to 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 audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or from Federal agencies, and the information provided represents the view of the source cited in each instance.

INFORMATION COLLECTION FROM AGENCIES AND OPEN SOURCES

Each quarter, the Lead IG agencies gather information from the DoD, State, 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.

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

- U.S. Government statements, press conferences, and reports
- Reports issued by international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and think tanks
- Media reports

The Lead IG agencies use open-source information to assess information obtained through their agency information collection process and provide additional detail about the operation.

REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD IG, as the Lead IG for this operation, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies and then participate in editing the entire report. Once assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process of the report within its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask relevant offices within their agencies to comment, 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 prior to publication. The final report reflects the editorial view of the DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.

APPENDIX D

State and USAID Stabilization Programs

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
<p>Funding Facility for Stabilization Aims to stabilize areas recently liberated from ISIS by restoring damaged or destroyed essential services and providing the conditions for a dignified, safe, and voluntary return of IDPs to their home.</p> <p>July 2015–December 2025 \$469 million award</p>	<p>USAID is the largest contributor to this 29-donor, multilateral program.</p>
<p>Durable Communities and Economic Opportunities Aims to build resilient, adaptive communities and advance economic well-being in target communities in Iraq by addressing underlying drivers of conflict and increasing community leadership of inclusive local development.</p> <p>June 2020–September 2025 (including two option years) \$40 million award</p>	<p>Engaged selected communities impacted by conflict and their leadership to identify and resolve conflict sustainably and peacefully through inclusive dialogue and practical solutions.</p> <p>Provided training and networking services to Iraqi victims of war to help them gain high-quality and sustainable sources of livelihood.</p>
<p>Shared Future Supports the durable return for IDPs from the Ninewa Plain, focusing on religious and ethnic minority communities.</p> <p>June 2018–September 2023 \$29 million award</p>	<p>Worked with youth, community, and religious leaders to increase mutual understanding, tolerance, and trust both within their communities and with other communities.</p> <p>Improved vocational and leadership skills and youth livelihood opportunities through targeted vocational training.</p>
<p>Iraq Response and Resilience Program Supports vulnerable people in areas suffering from limited resources as a result of natural or other disasters, such as acute pollution, to ensure every Iraqi has safe access to water, electricity, health, education, free movement on sealed roads and civil/municipal services, and the opportunity to support their family financially.</p> <p>September 2019–December 2023 \$11 million award</p>	<p>Rehabilitated nine water treatment units in Basrah that will provide over 640,000 beneficiaries with potable water.</p>
<p>Supporting the Vulnerable Populations in Iraq September 2018–September 2024 \$49 million award</p>	<p>Supported the return of displaced populations from ethnic and religious minorities in Ninewa Plain and western Ninewa through activities related to livelihoods, housing, community peacebuilding, education, and psychosocial services.</p>

Program	Activity Highlights
<p>Transitional Assistance to IDPs in Erbil, Iraq Assists vulnerable IDP families with immediate household needs, such as shelter and food, and ease their return home when possible. September 2019–September 2023 \$7.4 million award</p>	<p>Provided cash assistance to support the IDPs from Ninewa province in protracted displacement in Erbil and assisted beneficiaries to prepare for durable solutions for their families through targeted information and planning sessions.</p>
<p>Strengthening the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee to Response to Communities in Crisis Supports building the capacity of the committee while responding to the ongoing needs of IDPs in Iraq through institutional capacity-building and organizational development. October 2020–September 2024 \$3.5 million award</p>	<p>Strengthened the capacity of the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee and prepared it to fully engage with USAID on future development initiatives through strengthened capacity and commitment.</p>
<p>Building Resilience in Children Leverages Ahlan Simsim’s unique approach that combines locally driven, crisis-sensitive and age-appropriate interventions to increase resilience capacities among children, families, and communities impacted by conflict and violence. July 2021–June 2024 \$11 million award</p>	<p>Engaged families and communities impacted by conflict and violence using a combination of original multimedia, direct services, and youth engagement programming to increase resilience capacities that help to counter malign influences and prevent radicalization to violence and violent extremism.</p>
<p>Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Minority Communities in Iraq Aims to contribute to communal healing, intercommunal understanding, and appreciation of the diversity of Iraq, a fundamental step toward the promotion and actualization of democracy. May 2021–May 2024 \$2 million award</p>	<p>Partnered with local Iraqi organizations to describe and document the tangible and intangible heritage of religious and ethnic minority communities in Iraq. Created digitally documented collections as databases, built for portability, interoperability, and accessibility.</p>
<p>Iraq Community Resilience Initiative II ICRI Phase II provides direct assistance to Iraqi partners to empower inclusive civic action with the goal of supporting a prosperous and inclusive Iraq. This is achieved by improving positive perceptions of civic engagement among Iraqis and increasing community mobilization around national causes. September 2021–September 2024 \$48.5 million award</p>	<p>Supporting increased positive perceptions of civic engagement Supporting increased community mobilization around national causes Supporting dialogue between citizens and elected officials, as well as cultural and social spaces that foster engagement and interaction among diverse community members. Highlighted commonalities that foster unity and a shared identity across Iraq, including in new community spaces south of Baghdad such as Nasiriya, Basra Center, Islah, and al-Madina.</p>

Source: USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/20/2023.

State-funded Stabilization Programs in Syria During the Quarter

Program Goals	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Essential Services and Local Governance Seeks to build capacity of local governance entities to provide essential services, making target communities less susceptible to ISIS influence.</p>	<p>Rehabilitated water infrastructure, trained technical teams that operate water stations, and built local authorities' capacity to collect and share water quality information with humanitarian assistance providers to combat a cholera outbreak in northeastern Syria.</p> <p>Provided operational and infrastructure assistance to emergency medical teams, municipal vehicle mechanics, trash collection workers, firefighters, emergency response drivers, body exhumation teams, documentation/forensics specialists and rubble removal teams.</p>
<p>Civil Society Seeks to help civil society organizations restore essential services and livelihoods in areas liberated from ISIS.</p>	<p>Supported Syrian civil society organizations to restore essential services, improve livelihoods, represent Syrians, and strengthen social cohesion in communities liberated from ISIS and in communities with members of religious minority groups.</p>
<p>Education Seeks to build the capacity of local councils, their education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial numeracy, primary education, and psychosocial support for children.</p>	<p>Built the capacity of civil councils, education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial literacy and numeracy, technical and vocational training, psychosocial support, teacher training, and rehabilitation/winterization of schools.</p> <p>Rehabilitated and equipped schools in Raqqah.</p> <p>Provided training in computer skills, solar panel repair, carpentry, and other vocations.</p> <p>Worked with families recently returned from displaced persons camps through a social reintegration program focused on building cohesion in the communities.</p>
<p>Support to Independent Media Seeks to promote unbiased, professional and relevant reporting.</p>	<p>Provided capacity building and operational support to 10 independent northern Syrian media outlets that improved access to accurate, unbiased information and countered violent extremism and disinformation perpetuated by Iran-backed militias, Russia, the Assad regime, and other malign actors.</p> <p>Expanded news programs, gender programming, and programming discussing community issues.</p>
<p>Community Security Seeks to build the capacity of internal security forces to provide security that supports, and is supported by, the communities they serve.</p>	<p>Supported the InSF and the governance bodies that oversee them to deliver community policing services that serves, and are supported by, the population.</p> <p>Rehabilitated InSF stations; held engagements between InSF officers and local community members; and rehabilitated streetlights in under-served areas to address a primary security concern of local communities.</p> <p>Provided a holistic approach to community security, supporting officer trainings, building the capacity of civilian authorities, promoting community engagement, and supporting public safety initiatives.</p>

Program Goals	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Syrian Political Process Seeks to strengthen the capabilities of stakeholders to participate in the Constitutional Committee and work with other UN-convened negotiations in support of UNSCR 2254.</p>	<p>Supported workshops and dialogue sessions to help bridge the gap between local community-based organizations and their local constituents by facilitating initiatives to ensure political inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and outreach.</p>
<p>Humanitarian Mine Action Seeks to clear explosive hazards contamination from areas liberated from ISIS to allow for broader stabilization efforts.</p>	<p>Surveyed, marked, and cleared explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) from key critical infrastructure sites and areas liberated from ISIS.</p> <p>Delivered explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) to displaced persons and at-risk communities to teach them about the hazards of explosives.</p> <p>Provided local capacity building support.</p>

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 9/18/2023.

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Syria During the Quarter

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Elections and Political Processes Seeks to enhance participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in transitional or electoral processes in Syria and improve inclusive citizen-governance relationships in northeastern Syria.</p> <p>Duration: 4 years (ends August 2025) \$12 million award</p>	<p>Capacity Building and Training: Provided consultation and support to 9 advocacy campaigns and conducted 27 online capacity building training sessions for 131 activists, CSO representatives and community members on the topic of grassroots advocacy campaign development, public policy engagement and coalition building.</p> <p>Trained 19 women from the Peace Circle on effective communication and awareness campaign development, as well as conducted a virtual training on anti-corruption measures for 8 participants.</p> <p>Community Dialogue: Organized 4 roundtable discussions convening CSOs in Hassakeh, Qamishli, Deir Ezzor and Raqqa on the topic of the reinstatement of Syria's membership in the Arab League. 78 participants developed a set of recommendations addressing normalization efforts.</p> <p>Following previous quarter's rapid needs assessment and focus groups, conducted 37 key informant interviews and 4 roundtable discussions to assess the support of returnees' reintegration.</p>
<p>Supporting Livelihoods in Syria (wheat and livestock program) Seeks to address critical quality wheat seed shortages and input gaps, and to make farmers, agro-service providers, and cooperatives more resilient to price and market shocks.</p> <p>Duration: 5 years (ended September 2023) \$16 million award</p>	<p>Wheat Seed Program: Completed the provision and planting of 1,750 metric tons of locally sourced high-quality, certified and registered wheat seed with 4,700 farmers in Amouda, Hasakah, and Dayr az Zawr.</p> <p>Agricultural Mechanization Equipment and Alternate Sources of Agricultural Livelihoods: Prepared for the provision of 8 tractors, 8 mechanical seeding and fertilizing tractor attachments, 8 portable seed sorting machines, and 14 threshing machines. This supports mechanized agriculture in 14 villages in Dayr az Zawr governorate, which will increase production and produce a byproduct with useful straw, salts, and minerals used to make animal feed and build homes, generating alternative income sources for farmers.</p> <p>Products Ready for Market: Prepared for the provision of over 90,000 100 kg wheat seed bags and over 67,000 200 kg wheat bags which will allow over 4,000 farmers in Dayr az Zawr governorate to get a better price in the market for their crops.</p> <p>This project will be replaced by a similar award, USAID's Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria activity.</p>

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Syria Livelihoods Project Increases equitable income generation and access to services for women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, and creates an inclusive enabling environment for economic recovery.</p> <p>Duration is 5 years (July 2020–July 2025) \$14.55 million award</p>	<p>Career Opportunities: Placed 250 job seekers with disabilities in vacant positions; 93 have completed their six-month, part-paid internships and are now permanently employed. Provided training to a local NGO on entrepreneurship and business plan development to 316 beneficiaries.</p> <p>Case Management: Worked with local authorities to support to more than 18,000 persons with disabilities. Launched a case management system that registers, assesses and refers persons with disabilities, channeling individuals to support services that meet their economic, health and social assistance needs both within SANES and to external specialist service providers. As of the quarter, the program has registered 2,671 beneficiaries with disabilities and referred 126 to requested service providers.</p> <p>Career Guidance: Delivered employment readiness sessions and career guidance to 1,996 persons with disabilities through a local disabled persons organization. The beneficiaries can also receive financial support for their businesses, job placements, or referrals to other specialist service providers.</p> <p>Technical support to North Syria Network’s Job-Matching Website (NSjobs.net): This is an ongoing activity aimed at improving the NSjobs.net website, a job-matching platform operating in northeastern Syria, to serve new users and give vulnerable populations access to employment opportunities. During this period, SLP held the kick-off meeting for the subcontract supporting the delivery of technical assistance to improve the NSJobs website.</p> <p>Accelerating Inclusive Economic Recovery: This activity is implemented by a local partner to support increased resilience for persons with disabilities in Hasakah and Qamishli to the impacts of climate change, supports internships in green jobs, and expansion of green MSMEs owned by or employing persons with disabilities.</p>
<p>Economic Management for Stability in Northeast Syria Aims to stimulate private sector-led growth and investment for job creation, reduce corruption, and improve the transparency of regional governing authorities, and ultimately reduce the dependency on foreign assistance in non-regime held areas. The program enlists senior advisors to initiate policy dialogue and advisory support in critical economic governance and private sector-led growth areas.</p> <p>Duration: 3 years (ends September 2024) \$14 million award</p>	<p>Private Sector Engagement: Continued to provide technical assistance to 70 enterprises with 1,620 sustainable job opportunities, a third of which are held by women. Two thirds of the partnerships were in the agro-processing and food production sectors.</p> <p>Agricultural Markets and Food Security: Provided technical assistance to 237 farmers in Amouda and 76 farmers in Qana, where farmers reportedly witnessed a 20 percent increase in production and 10 percent reduction in wastage. Provided training to farmers raising chicken and cows in Raqqa with the aim to increase the availability of eggs and milk in the local market through increasing the beneficiaries production by 20 percent. Continued to partner with cold storage and feed producers to increase capacity, raise standards, improve quality assurance, quality, and food safety standards, as well as lower costs. Partnered with 14 livestock and animal feed producers to create new, high-quality feed formulas and adopt modern poultry breeding methods aiming to increase feed production from 100 to 400 tons per day and decrease the number of days to raise healthy broilers from 40 to 33.</p> <p>Climate-smart Agriculture Technology: Through the training provided to farmers and livestock breeders, the program worked with them to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices including integrated pest management, the use of natural fertilizers, balanced feeding, and water preservation which will contribute to improved crop quality, higher market value, and sound environmental practices.</p> <p>Access to Finance: In collaboration with the Near East Foundation’s SIRAJ microfinance institution, the program is worked with farmers to provide them with the needed training to access micro loans provided by the SIRAJ Foundation. Approximately 100 farmers were able to access loans with an average of \$1,200 per loan. The program aims to reach between 300 to 400 by the end of 2023.</p>

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Essential Services, Good Governance, and Economic Recovery Aims to restore essential services, including power, water, and health in non-regime held areas in northeastern Syria.</p> <p>Duration: 5 years (May 2020–May 2025)</p> <p>\$49.9 million award</p>	<p>Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from al-Hol: Tracked and monitored returnees that arrived to Raqqa on September 3 with intentions to link the returnees to a suite of social, economic, and property services to facilitate reintegration. Established a case management and completed registration site visits with 86 of the 90 families that returned to Raqqa.</p> <p>Enhancing Provision of Electricity in Izbeh and Moazilieh: Rehabilitated the Izbeh abd Moazilieh power stations and the activity is operational under the management of the DCC Energy Office. This activity is benefitting an estimated 8,500 households and 59 registered businesses (46 commercial, 13 industrial). This activity fosters resilience and stability in Northeast Syria (NES), empowers community and IDP integration, supports the defeat of ISIS, and promotes accountability in Dayr az Zawr governorate.</p> <p>Establishment of Oxygen Bottling Plants: Rehabilitated existing buildings in Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah and established medical-grade oxygen bottling facilities to address health facility oxygen demands to treat COVID-19 and other medical issues. The plant in Dayr az Zawr will have a capacity of 100 cylinders per day, while the Raqqa plant will be the first in the governorate and have a capacity of 300 cylinders per day.</p>

Source: USAID Middle East Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/20/2023.



APPENDIX E

State and USAID Humanitarian Assistance Programs

State-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Implementer	Activity Highlights
<p>UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) Promotes and protects the rights of refugees and other displaced persons, provides assistance, and seek durable solutions.</p>	<p>Led the humanitarian response for Syrian refugees in Iraq in close coordination with humanitarian actors and government authorities, to protect and assist refugees and asylum-seekers.</p> <p>Supported activities for refugees, IDPs, and persons at risk of statelessness related to registration and civil documentation; protection monitoring and advocacy; legal aid; health; shelter and camp management; psychosocial support; child protection; prevention, risk mitigation, and response to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse; among other services.</p>
<p>International Organization for Migration Provides a comprehensive response to the humanitarian needs of migrants, IDPs, returnees, and host communities.</p>	<p>Worked to improve the conditions for dignified and voluntary returns to areas of origin, local integration, and settlement in new locations, with assistance on civil documentation and legal issues, social cohesion support, financial assistance, health consultations, and protection monitoring and advocacy.</p> <p>Through the Displacement Tracking Matrix, collected data on displacement, conditions in areas of return, and main barriers to return for IDPs and returnees.</p>
<p>Other International Organizations Support refugees, IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable communities in Iraq with a range of humanitarian assistance and services.</p>	<p>Provided services to refugees, IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable communities including support for health, mental health & psychosocial support, legal assistance, shelter, prevention and response to gender-based violence and child protection issues, among other services.</p>
<p>NGOs–Education Increases access to education for displaced children.</p>	<p>Supported education services for displaced school-aged children, which is a key need for refugee, IDP, and returnee families. Provided educational kits and materials, incentivized volunteer teachers, conducted service referrals, implemented trainings for teachers, and led targeted, evidence-based advocacy around inclusive education.</p>
<p>NGOs–Livelihoods and Economic Empowerments Helps refugees, IDPs and returnees develop or restore income-generating and livelihoods opportunities.</p>	<p>Supported the restoration of income-generating and livelihoods opportunities, including building the capacity of the local government and institutions to provide services in the agricultural sector, trainings to develop key business knowledge and skills, cash grants for enterprise start-ups, and legal assistance services with livelihoods interventions to support beneficiaries’ access to income.</p>
<p>NGOs–Protection Reduces risks for refugees and IDPs and promote their empowerment to exercise rights and access services.</p>	<p>Supported protection activities to reduce risk for refugees and IDPs, including gender-based violence prevention and response activities, legal assistance and awareness-raising to remove legal barriers to durable solutions for displacement-affected individuals, case management, mental health and psychosocial support services, child protection and child safeguarding training, and support for community centers and Women & Girls Safe Spaces.</p>

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 9/15/2023.

USAID-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene	<p>Supplied an IDP camp with water sourced through camp boreholes; provided solid waste management and desludging services; provided water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion and awareness raising sessions; distributed non-food items; and maintained water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in IDP camps.</p> <p>In August, a BHA implementer provided water trucking services, benefiting a total of 3,288 individuals; and solid waste management services to 20,298 individuals in camps and collective centers; desludging and de-blocking services provided benefiting 79,189 individuals; distributed hygiene kits, reaching a total of 5,574 individuals.</p>
Shelter and Settlements	<p>Provided critical shelter upgrades and a distribution of non-food item kits to vulnerable internally displaced person households in Diyala province. The critical shelter upgrades included rehabilitations to windows, doors, ceilings, locks, corridors, hand-rails on stairs, and hand-washing basins. In addition, families received a distribution of a kit that included blankets, bedsheets, mattresses, a stove, jerry cans, a kerosene heater, an electrical heater, a kitchen set and a carpet.</p>
Protection	<p>Provided awareness sessions on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation; case management services; and referrals through a protection center in Ninewa province and other organizations.</p>

Note: Activity highlights are illustrative examples and do not represent the full spectrum of USAID BHA activities conducted during the quarter. As a part of the U.S. Government response, USAID BHA funding also supports health, protection, and shelter and settlements programs for vulnerable populations in conflict-affected areas of Iraq.

Source: USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/22/2023.



APPENDIX F

Ongoing Oversight Projects

Table 8 lists the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 8.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of September 30, 2023

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Army's Management of Army Prepositioned Stock-5 Equipment

To determine whether the Army accurately maintained and accounted for Army Prepositioned Stock- 5 equipment, to include at facilities that support the OIR mission, in accordance with Federal and DoD policies.

Audit of Army Oversight of the Department of Defense Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II Contract

To determine whether the Army provided oversight of and appropriately staffed the DoD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II contract in the U.S. Central Command and OIR area of responsibility to ensure the contractors fulfilled requirements.

Evaluation of Combatant Command Military Deception Planning

To determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception planning in support of ongoing OIR operations.

Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities in the U.S. Central Command

To determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

Evaluation of the Control and Accountability of DoD Biometric Data Collection Technologies

To determine the extent to which the DoD has ensured adequate control and accountability over technologies used to collect, store, and transmit biometric data to higher-level databases in overseas contingency operations.

Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities at Al Udeid Air Base

To determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities at Camp Arifjan

To determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

Evaluation of DoD Support to the Development of the Iraqi Security Forces' Operational Logistics and Sustainment Capabilities

To assess the effectiveness of the DoD's support for the development of operational logistics and sustainment capabilities for the Iraqi Security Forces.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Planning, Design, Construction, and Commissioning of the Power Plant at U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Iraq

To determine whether the Department of State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, construction, and commissioning of the central power plant at Embassy Baghdad.

Inspection of Embassy Baghdad and Consulate General Erbil, Iraq

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil. This inspection will also produce a report with classified findings.

Audit of USAID's New Partnerships Initiative

To determine the extent to which USAID has established a framework for effectively implementing the New Partnerships Initiative as well as processes for measuring the initiative's performance and results, which has included support for religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that were victimized by ISIS.

Audit of USAID/Iraq's Economic Development Activities

To determine the extent to which USAID has generated employment among poor households and communities, strengthened economic capacity, and improved the Iraq business environment through economic development activities.

APPENDIX G

Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 9 and 10 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 9.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of September 30, 2023

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of U.S Military Equipment Retrograded from Iraq

To determine whether the DoD has properly accounted for U.S. military equipment retrograded from Iraq during FYs 2020-2022 in accordance with DoD guidance.

Followup Audit of the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) for Iraq and Syria

To determine whether the actions taken by the DoD in response to the recommendations in Report No. DODIG-2020-061, "Audit of the DoD's Accountability of Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund Equipment Designated for Syria," February 13, 2020, improved the accountability and safeguarding of equipment provided to Iraqi Security and Vetted Syrian Opposition forces through the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Design of the Power Plant at the New Consulate Compound in Erbil, Iraq

To determine whether State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations planned and designed the power plant at the new consulate compound in Erbil, Iraq, in accordance with Federal and State requirements and guidelines.

Audit of the Department of State's Efforts to Counter Iranian-Backed Militias

To determine whether State's Bureau of Counterterrorism: 1) aligned programs to counter Iranian-sponsored Foreign Terrorist organizations with its strategic goals and objectives, 2) monitored those programs in accordance with Federal and State requirements, and 3) coordinated with other relevant State bureaus and offices related to its efforts.

Table 10.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of September 30, 2023

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Army's Operational Contract Support Plans

To determine if the Army's Operational Contracting Support packages supported joint contingency operations planning.

ACRONYMS

Acronym	
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CID	U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Division
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
CTG	Counterterrorism Group
CTS	Counterterrorism Service
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
EEUM	enhanced end-use monitoring
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FY	fiscal year
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HSI	Homeland Security Investigations
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
IqAAC	Iraqi Army Aviation Command
IqAF	Iraqi Army Air Force
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
ITAC	Iraqi Tactical Air Controller
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KSF	Kurdish Security Forces
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MoPA	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs
MoPOC	Ministry of Peshmerga Operations Center

Acronym	
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OC	operations command
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OSC-I	Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq
PKK	Kurdistan Workers’ Party
PMC	Popular Mobilization Committee
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PUD	Democratic Unity Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RSC	Resettlement Support Center
SANES	Self-Administration of North East Syria
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SFA	Syrian Free Army
SNA	Syrian National Army
State	Department of State
TBI	traumatic brain injury
TSO	Turkish-supported Armed Opposition
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAS	unmanned aerial system
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAFCENT	U.S. Air Forces Central
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command
WASH	water, sanitation, and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
YBS	Shingal Resistance Units
YPG	People’s Protection Units
YPJ	Women’s Protection Units

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