

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Agency for International Development

U.S. Assistance Strategy in Iraq: Significant Events Surrounding USAID's Iraq Religious and Ethnic Minority Portfolio and Award Management Challenges

Report E-000-22-001-M

November 1, 2021



Inspections, Evaluations, and Special Projects Division



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL U.S. Agency for International Development

DATE: November 1, 2021

TO: USAID, Bureau for the Middle East, Acting Assistant Administrator, Andrew Plitt

FROM: Director, Inspections, Evaluations, and Special Projects Division, Alan MacMullin
/s/

SUBJECT: U.S. Assistance Strategy in Iraq: Significant Events Surrounding USAID's Iraq Religious and Ethnic Minority Portfolio and Award Management Challenges

This memorandum transmits the final report on our evaluation of USAID's religious and ethnic minority (REM) portfolio in Iraq. Our objective was to objectively report on significant events surrounding the development of USAID's Iraq REM portfolio from 2017 to 2019 and key challenges that related to the management of awards providing assistance to REM groups. In finalizing the report, we considered your comments on the draft and included them in their entirety in Appendix A. The report contains our findings and no recommendations.

We appreciate the assistance you and your staff provided to us during this engagement.

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Introduction

The genocide and war crimes committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) against religious and ethnic minorities in northern Iraq has made getting assistance to these groups a focus of significant attention by multiple administrations, members of Congress, and religious minority constituencies.

The objective of this engagement was to objectively report on significant events surrounding the development of USAID's Iraq REM portfolio from 2017 to 2019 and key challenges that related to the management of awards providing assistance to REM groups. Building on congressionally mandated quarterly reporting on overseas contingency operations,¹ we interviewed 20 key officials—including career and political USAID staff—who worked on the Iraq REM portfolio. Because we carried out this engagement during a transition between presidential administrations, we were unable to interview a number of political appointees who were involved in USAID's Iraq REM portfolio during the period under review, which we identified as a limitation to this engagement. We also reviewed relevant documentation, including USAID policies and guidance, award mechanisms, related awards, internal USAID notices and trip reports, appropriations language, interagency strategic objectives, and congressional testimony and notifications. We conducted our work from July 2020 to March 2021 using the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation from the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

USAID Sought to Revise Its Strategy in Iraq by Providing More Assistance to Religious and Ethnic Minority Groups Through Local Organizations and Various Implementing Mechanisms

Several events between 2017 and 2019 contributed to the development of USAID's Iraq REM portfolio. Beginning in October 2017, USAID shifted the priorities in its assistance strategy to focus on the unique needs of REM groups that were victims of genocide perpetuated by ISIS. This change shifted USAID's strategy in Iraq from delivering assistance through internationally led efforts focused on rehabilitation to direct partnerships with local Iraqi organizations. The initial mechanism, a Broad Agency Announcement (BAA), resulted in awards still going to large international organizations. By October 2019, USAID was able to increase the award mix of the REM portfolio and engage directly with local Iraqi organizations through a new implementing mechanism, the New Partnerships Initiative (NPI).

¹ As required by section 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Inspectors General for the Department of Defense, Department of State, and USAID work together to develop and execute a joint strategic plan for comprehensive oversight of each overseas contingency operation. We also report quarterly to Congress on every operation's progress and corresponding oversight activities.

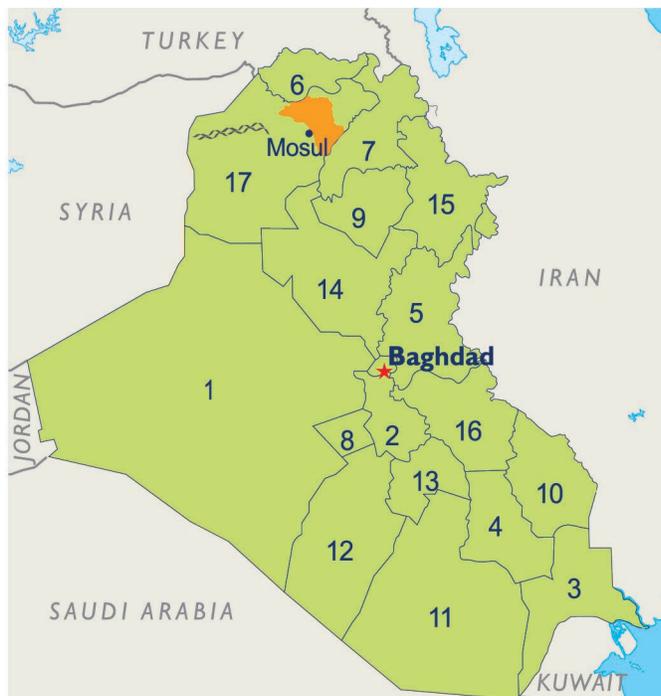
U.S. Government Revised Its Assistance Strategy in Iraq From Relying on the Established International Mechanism to Utilizing Local Iraqi Organizations to Meet the Needs of Religious and Ethnic Minority Groups

In August 2014, ISIS swept across the Sinjar Mountains and Ninewa Plains violently attacking REM groups, including Yazidis, Christians, ethnic Assyrians, Turkmen, and other ethno-religious minorities residing in northern Iraq.² In Ninewa province, over 120,000 people fled to escape murder, enslavement, imprisonment, torture, abduction, exploitation, abuse, rape, sexual violence, and forced marriage. Figure I depicts the provinces in Iraq and regions within Ninewa province specifically.

In December 2015, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the fiscal year 2016 appropriations bill (Public Law 114-113). The bill incorporated language that required the Secretary of State to report to Congress with an evaluation on whether ISIS had perpetuated genocide. On March 15, 2016, Congress unanimously passed a concurrent resolution condemning the atrocities perpetrated by ISIS against REM groups, including for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. On March 17, 2016, then Secretary of State John Kerry declared that ISIS had committed genocide. Under the Trump administration, then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reaffirmed the genocide declaration in his remarks included in the 2016 International Religious Freedom Annual Report published on August 15, 2017, stating that “ISIS is clearly responsible for genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims in areas it controlled.”

In 2017, the U.S. government revised its assistance strategy in Iraq to expand assistance to the REM groups targeted by

Figure I. Map of Iraq



1. Anbar	6. Dohuk	12. Najaf
2. Babil	7. Erbil	13. Qadisiya
3. Basrah	8. Karbala	14. Salah al-Din
4. Dhi Qar	9. Kirkuk	15. Sulaimaniya
5. Diyala	10. Maysan	16. Wasit
	11. Muthanna	17. Ninewa

Ninewa plains
 Sinjar mountains

Source: Map created by USAID OIG based on public sources.

Note: The depiction and use of boundaries and geographic names used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the U.S. government.

² Minority Rights Group International, “Without Justice and Recognition the Genocide by ISIS Continues,” July 17, 2020.

ISIS. Prior to 2017, the U.S. government's assistance strategy for Iraq was channeled through stabilization programming under the United Nations Development Programme's Funding Facility for Stabilization (UNDP FFS).³ In line with State Department guidance and the efforts of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS under the Obama administration, USAID limited U.S. government branding and provided assistance using the internationally led UNDP FFS model to ensure Iraqi ownership over the recovery effort.⁴ While components of UNDP FFS programming provided support to REM groups, the majority of programming was focused on the rebuilding of cities and towns in northern Iraq that had been destroyed by ISIS between 2014 and 2015. According to one USAID staff member, before 2015, Iraq assistance was scheduled to draw down because of lessening stabilization needs in the country. However, following the ISIS offense on Mosul and subsequent battle throughout the summer of 2014, there was recognition within the international community that stabilization needs had increased and UNDP FFS projects began expanding to support stabilization efforts in cities liberated from ISIS control that sustained heavy destruction in the battle between ISIS and coalition forces.

After President Trump took office in January 2017, Vice President Pence delivered a speech at the In Defense of Christians Solidarity Dinner in October 2017 that signaled the administration's intention to change the U.S. government's assistance strategy in Iraq. In his remarks, the Vice President announced a shift from funding the United Nations to providing support directly to persecuted communities through USAID. The policy shift was in part motivated by complaints from congressional stakeholders with large constituencies of Iraqi Christians that no visible evidence of U.S. assistance existed in northern Iraq. Later, in January 2018, USAID announced it had renegotiated the terms of its agreement with UNDP FFS so that a portion of funding would address the needs of vulnerable REM groups in Ninewa province, especially those who had been victims of atrocities by ISIS.

USAID's Broad Agency Announcement Provided Assistance to Religious and Ethnic Minority Groups but Did Not Result in Direct Partnerships with Local Iraqi Organizations

Following the Vice President's October 2017 speech, USAID political appointees requested that USAID staff provide award mechanisms that would meet the administration's priorities in Iraq. After being presented with several options, senior-level political appointees decided to use a Broad Agency Announcement (BAA),⁵ which USAID formally announced on October 31, 2017.

³ UNDP FFS is a public international organization grant established in July 2015 in response to a request from the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. It is a 28-donor, multilateral platform to which the U.S. government is the largest donor.

⁴ In September 2014, the United States announced the formation of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS with NATO partners and outlined five lines of effort: (1) providing military support to partners, (2) impeding the flow of foreign fighters, (3) stopping ISIS financing and funding, (4) addressing humanitarian crises in the region, and (5) exposing ISIS's true nature. In 2019, the coalition underscored a "collective commitment to ensure that the civilians who have suffered so terribly at the hands of ISIS receive the justice and enduring support and protection they deserve."

⁵ USAID guidance states that BAAs may be used by agencies to fulfill research and development requirements for scientific study and experimentation directed toward advancing the state of the art or increasing knowledge or understanding, rather than focusing on a specific system or hardware solution. The BAA technique will only be used when meaningful proposals with varying technical/scientific approaches can be reasonably anticipated.

According to USAID staff, the BAA was selected to streamline the award process, more quickly support religious and ethnic minorities affected by the genocide, and reduce barriers to direct partnerships with local Iraqi organizations.

The results of the BAA selection process were announced in June 2018. While several USAID staff and a political appointee said that the BAA provided assistance to REM groups and increased USAID engagement with local Iraqi organizations through its co-creation process,⁶ they also noted that it did not result in direct partnerships with local Iraqi organizations, instead resulting in awards to large international organizations. According to several USAID staff, this outcome was not surprising, and one USAID staff said it was because of the BAA's competitive approach that smaller, less experienced local Iraqi organizations had to compete against larger international organizations.

The outcome prompted media criticism that the BAA was not in line with Vice President Pence's direction to build relationships through local Iraqi organizations. Shortly after the articles were published, the Office of the Vice President (OVP) directed the USAID Administrator to travel to Iraq and "report back with an immediate comprehensive assessment addressing any issues that could delay the process of aid distribution."

USAID's New Partnerships Initiative Promotes Agency Engagement with Local Iraqi Organizations

In early July 2018, the USAID Administrator led a White House Special Mission to northern Iraq to assess impediments to delivering on the commitments made by the Vice President in his October 2017 speech. Observations from the USAID Administrator's trip provided Agency leadership with a renewed sense that USAID needed to change its approach to work more closely with REM communities in northern Iraq, in line with the direction from the Vice President. Accordingly, a series of events immediately followed the Administrator's return:

- The USAID Administrator dispatched a political appointee to Iraq. The Special Representative for Minority Assistance in Iraq (Special Representative) was sent to work directly with local organizations and members of the faith-based community in northern Iraq and to report observations and progress directly to the USAID Administrator and Vice President. According to USAID staff, while security constraints had previously limited USAID staff's ability to reach affected groups, the high level of engagement by the Special Representative with REM communities enabled the Agency to access REM communities in Ninewa and build relationships.
- The Vice President announced the Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Program. This program directed USAID and the State Department to partner closely with faith and community leaders to deliver rapid aid to persecuted communities in Iraq.

⁶ USAID defines co-creation as a design approach that brings people together to collectively produce a mutually valued outcome, using a participatory process that assumes some degree of shared power and decision making. Co-creation allows for a range of stakeholders—drawn from funders, implementers, supporting partners, and potential users or beneficiaries—to agree on a problem definition or jointly develop new solutions to a particular challenge.

- Congress demonstrated support for Iraq REM assistance. Congress passed the Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2018 that called on USAID and the State Department to ensure that assistance for humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery needs is directed toward those of greatest need, including religious and ethnic minorities targeted by the genocide.⁷ In addition, the act directed the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, the USAID Administrator, and the Director of National Intelligence, to identify assistance to address the humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery needs of REM communities, including USAID assistance provided through UNDP FFS. The act authorized the Secretary of State and USAID Administrator to provide assistance to support these groups as necessary and appropriate.

After the USAID Administrator's visit, USAID leadership and congressional stakeholders believed more needed to be done to reach REM communities and that while the UNDP FFS award served as an important part of the Iraq REM portfolio, a more comprehensive approach beyond the BAA awards was still needed to adequately address the needs of genocide victims through direct partnerships with local Iraqi organizations.

On April 30, 2019, USAID announced the New Partnerships Initiative⁸ to increase USAID's engagement with local organizations worldwide. Unlike the BAA, NPI was targeted toward new and underutilized USAID partners without significant previous experience working with the Agency.⁹ In addition, NPI was created so that it could be expanded to other countries through active addendums submitted by USAID missions. On May 1, 2019, the USAID Mission in Iraq (USAID/Iraq) became the first active addendum under NPI. On October 3, 2019, USAID issued a press release announcing that \$4 million in small grants under NPI had been awarded to six local Iraqi groups in northern Iraq in support of religious and ethnic minorities that had been victimized by ISIS.

USAID Staff Faced Challenges Executing and Managing Awards Under Increased Leadership Attention and Reduced Staffing

The Vice President's speech in 2017 and the actions following the Administrator's trip to Iraq in July 2018 prompted increased attention and focus from USAID leadership on the Agency's Iraq REM portfolio as it developed between 2017 and 2019. While attention toward REM assistance grew, USAID staff faced challenges during the BAA process and after the Special Representative arrived in Iraq as political appointees expressed more interest in the REM portfolio. At the same time, USAID/Iraq staff was reduced, creating challenges with award management as

⁷ The Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act, Title 22 of the United States Code, 2656 note, December 11, 2018.

⁸ The overarching goal of NPI is to empower new and underutilized partners, many of which are local and locally established organizations, to solve problems not adequately addressed by other USAID investments and that directly respond to the needs of conflict-affected communities. NPI aims to increase USAID's programmatic impact based on more collaborative and adaptive partnerships and improve measurable outcomes at the country level.

⁹ According to the program's announcement, a "new" or "underutilized" partner is an organization that has received less than \$25 million cumulatively in direct or indirect awards from USAID over the past 5 years.

monitoring requirements increased for REM programs and NPI was stood up. To mitigate the staffing challenges USAID/Iraq faced, NPI awards were managed from USAID headquarters in Washington, DC.

USAID Staff Carried Out the Broad Agency Announcement Process While Handling Significant Media Attention and Involvement of Senior Leadership

Media reporting criticized the attendance of two representatives from the OVP during the co-creation workshop for the BAA, highlighting staff concerns about whether the representatives should have been allowed to participate in the event. USAID guidance related to the BAA and co-creation process does not prevent political appointees from participating during the co-creation process. According to some USAID staff, the presence of these representatives was intended to demonstrate the U.S. government's support for the BAA and show how the process works. Even though the BAA process continued to move forward, one staff member in Iraq during the time of the workshop expressed that the representatives' presence may have contributed to an appearance of political involvement in the BAA process.¹⁰

As the review process was beginning, USAID/Iraq, the Middle East Bureau, and the contracting officer managing the BAA had identified the members for the BAA selection committee.¹¹ As the review process was progressing, a senior political appointee within USAID's leadership recommended that two individuals (both career staff) be added to the selection committee. According to USAID guidance, the selection committee should be composed of personnel familiar with the environment and operational requirements of the activities being considered. Additionally, members of a selection committee are to be determined by the agreement officer or contracting officer managing the award process. One USAID staff said this is so that the agreement officer or contracting officer can be sure the participants in the selection committee know the subject matter and will conduct their review based on the evaluation criteria.¹² Despite concerns raised by the contracting officer to USAID leadership that adding additional members to the BAA's selection committee would complicate the review process, both of the recommended individuals were permitted to join the BAA selection committee. To ensure review criteria was followed in accordance with USAID regulations, the contracting officer felt the need to incorporate an additional layer of oversight into the selection process.

In June 2018, around the same time of the negative publicity associated with the REM portfolio, USAID's Acting Administrator for the Middle East—who was involved in early conversations with political appointees about the BAA and suggested alternative options—was reassigned from her position within the Middle East Bureau. According to a political appointee involved in the Iraq REM portfolio and USAID staff working in Iraq at the time the event occurred, the

¹⁰ While USAID released new guidance on co-creation in June 2020, the Agency did not set guidelines around who can and cannot be involved at the co-creation stage.

¹¹ The BAA selection committee is responsible for reviewing concept notes and providing a list of applicants for further consideration by the agreement officer or contracting officer managing the award process.

¹² While USAID released an internal notice in December 2018 emphasizing the importance of agreement officer and contracting officer independence in award administration decisions, USAID's policies do not prohibit its staff from making recommendations to an agreement officer or contracting officer for selection committee members.

timing of her reassignment caused significant morale issues among USAID staff working on the Iraq REM portfolio. USAID staff in Iraq reported that they felt that they could be removed from their positions at any time, particularly if they raised concerns about the award process or provided alternative options.

USAID/Iraq Staffing Levels Were Reduced as Monitoring Requirements Increased

Against the backdrop of increasing attention on USAID's Iraq REM portfolio, based on instructions from the Office of the Secretary of State, the State Department conducted two staffing reviews to reduce U.S. mission personnel in Iraq by 30 percent. Ultimately, USAID staff were reduced from 26 to 5 expatriate staff following the reviews. To meet the State Department-mandated staffing reductions, the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance's (OFDA) Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) in Iraq—deployed since August 2014 to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the populations displaced by ISIS fighting throughout the country—was removed from the Embassy and directed by USAID/Iraq to work remotely from regional platforms and Washington, DC. At the time this occurred, OFDA¹³ was managing more than \$224 million in its humanitarian assistance portfolio. Remote management of programs resulted in the loss of in-person implementer and interagency meetings. OFDA staff also lost one workday per week because of the difference in operating hours between Baghdad (Sunday to Thursday) and the remote working locations (Monday to Friday).

After arriving in Iraq in July 2018, the Special Representative began conducting outreach to local religious and community leaders from REM groups. USAID staff reported that the Special Representative's regular conversations with the religious and community leaders in Erbil helped to identify needs and generate ideas to better meet the needs of REM groups. Around this time, USAID had received unsolicited proposals from REM groups. USAID policy states that unsolicited proposals must be submitted to the Agency without government supervision, endorsement, direction, or direct government involvement.¹⁴ When the Agency began receiving unsolicited proposals, USAID staff said that they spent time with the Special Representative making sure the political appointee understood the level of engagement that was considered appropriate under USAID policy. Ultimately, USAID staff said that the increased attention by leadership and outreach efforts by the Special Representative increased USAID's engagement with local Iraqi groups as intended.

OFDA staff said that some politically appointed staff expressed a desire to administer the allocation of OFDA international disaster assistance funding in an effort to direct more financial

¹³ In 2020, USAID's Offices of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace were combined to form the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.

¹⁴ USAID policy under Guidelines for Submitting Unsolicited Contract Proposals: A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 302 states that a valid unsolicited proposal must: 1) Be innovative and unique; 2) Be independently originated and developed by the offeror; 3) Be prepared without government supervision, endorsement, direction, or direct government involvement; 4) Include sufficient detail to permit a determination that USAID support could be worthwhile and the proposed work could benefit USAID's research and development or other responsibilities; 5) Not be an advance proposal for a known USAID requirement that can be acquired by competitive methods; and 6) Unsolicited proposals in response to a publicized general statement of Agency needs are considered to be independently originated.

resources toward REM populations. However, OFDA operates on a needs-based approach that considers demonstrated humanitarian needs throughout the country, thereby limiting what kind and how much can be directed without assessments. OFDA staff noted that OFDA assistance was already being delivered to northern Iraq, including to vulnerable REM communities, through ongoing multisector projects. According to OFDA staff, the political attention for REM assistance significantly increased requests for information from political appointees to show existing programs were providing assistance to REM groups.

In addition, USAID/Iraq had to increase monitoring on UNDP programs providing assistance to REM groups, to ensure the terms of the renegotiation of the UNDP award were being met. One USAID staff member working at the mission when the BAA began noted that while the size and complexity of the Iraq portfolio—in terms of funding resources and number of awards—increased after the BAA was introduced, staffing resources remained at the same levels as when U.S. assistance in Iraq was expected to wind down, leaving only one contracting officer to manage the portfolio. USAID/Iraq staff reported that the USAID Administrator began providing the OVP with monthly and quarterly reports, while at the mission level, staff began providing weekly monitoring reports to the Middle East Bureau. USAID/Iraq staff stated that in order to provide this detailed information on the UNDP programs in the Iraq REM portfolio, they needed to pull staff with monitoring responsibilities off of other projects managed by the mission.

Despite requests from USAID/Iraq, the mission was unable to maintain robust staffing levels to manage REM awards in Iraq due to competing political priorities. While USAID staff were told they were implementing one of the administration's top development priorities, USAID leadership's advocacy with both the State Department and OVP for maintaining a robust USAID staff presence in Iraq was not successful. One political appointee stated that this was because the conflict of Iranian influence in Iraq ultimately superseded the Administration's development priorities.

Staffing Limitations Impacted USAID/Iraq's Ability to Manage New Partnerships Initiative Awards, Resulting in Awards Being Managed from Headquarters

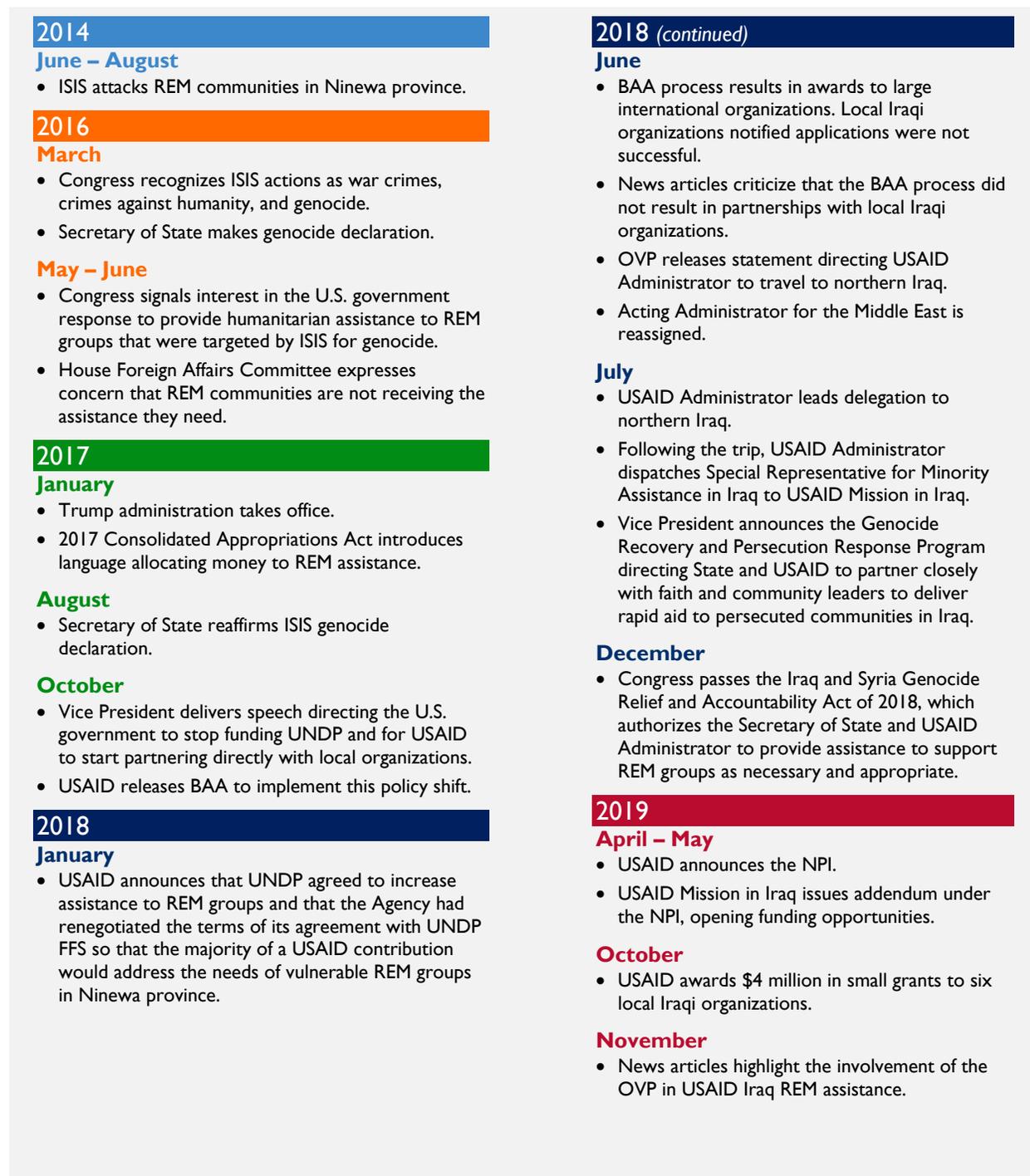
Throughout NPI's incorporation into the Iraq REM portfolio, USAID grappled with staffing reductions and ordered departures mandated by the State Department. One USAID staff member said that USAID/Iraq was poised to announce an initiative similar to NPI months before the NPI launched. However, instead of pursuing the initiative at the mission level, USAID leadership told USAID/Iraq to delay these efforts so that Iraq could be the first addendum under NPI. Shortly after the Iraq addendum became active in May 2019, USAID staff were evacuated from the country due to security concerns. According to the staff member, USAID/Iraq faced further staffing limitations after the ordered departure was lifted because of a staffing cap imposed by the State Department. The same USAID staff member said that because of the timing of the delay, USAID/Iraq was not able to make NPI awards before staff were evacuated, which delayed the process, made it difficult for USAID/Iraq to advocate for positions when staff were able to return in-country, and limited USAID/Iraq's ability to manage NPI awards.

With the reduced in-country staffing footprint, one USAID staff said the REM awards under the BAA had already put USAID/Iraq at its limits for responsible award management. When expectations mounted for USAID/Iraq to manage these additional NPI awards, mission staff raised concerns to USAID headquarters that the added oversight responsibilities would push USAID/Iraq beyond its capacity.

To execute the NPI awards in Iraq with limited resources, USAID leadership decided to have them managed from headquarters. A REM team was created within the Middle East Bureau, which established the procurement process surrounding NPI and managed the award process. According to USAID staff, agreement officer's representatives (AORs) managed relationships with the local implementers from Washington, DC. Several USAID staff cited support from USAID headquarters as a positive approach to deal with staffing constraints in Iraq, especially for the administrative requirements related to award management. At the same time, USAID staff told us they recognized that having a local connection in Iraq proved to be important when working with smaller organizations and said that one of the missed opportunities from this approach is that small local organizations would not be able to benefit from day-to-day contact and would not have mentors to help establish their operations. The same USAID staff added that the NPI awards alone may not contribute significantly to broader strategic objectives in Iraq and that challenges to adequately monitor awards still exist in the award management for the programs because of reductions in staffing levels of USAID/Iraq and the increased reporting requirements. Meanwhile, USAID/Iraq intends to directly manage the second iteration of NPI funds, one of which was announced in June 2021. Despite these challenges, multiple USAID staff expressed that the NPI awards overall have been a successful approach to reach local partners, and USAID has been able to partner directly with local organizations in Iraq.

Figure 2 below summarizes key events and challenges in USAID's modified approach to its Iraq REM portfolio.

Figure 2. Summary Timeline of Events Affecting USAID’s Iraq REM Portfolio



Source: USAID OIG analysis of Iraq REM portfolio.

Conclusion

The events outlined in this report surrounding USAID's management of its Iraq REM portfolio highlight the continued challenges the Agency faces to respond to shifts in policy that often come with changes in administrations. In this instance, USAID was directed to increase assistance to Iraq REM communities while being directed to reduce staff. Looking ahead, USAID will continue to face challenges with monitoring and overseeing awards as well as balancing priorities and direction from administrations, Congress, and other U.S. government stakeholders. While we are not making recommendations, this report is designed to inform Agency leadership and other congressional stakeholders who may be able to determine whether mitigation measures were effective and whether further actions are needed to help USAID better prepare for future policy shifts and any resulting challenges in award management. We will continue to monitor USAID's efforts in our quarterly reporting on overseas contingency operations for Operation Inherent Resolve.

OIG Response to Agency Comments

We provided our draft report to USAID on September 23, 2021. On October 25, 2021, we received the Agency's response, which is included as Appendix A of this report. The draft report did not include recommendations. The Agency did not provide technical comments in its response. The Agency acknowledged the limitations imposed on its staffing footprint in Iraq and stated it had augmented staffing support from regional missions and headquarters.

Appendix A. Agency Comments



Alan MacMullin
Director, Inspections, Evaluations, and Special Projects Division
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.

Re: U.S. Assistance Strategy in Iraq: Significant Events Surrounding USAID's Iraq Religious and Ethnic Minority Portfolio and Award Management Challenges (E-000-22-001-M)

Dear Mr. MacMullin:

I am pleased to provide the formal response of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to the draft report produced by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) titled, *U.S. Assistance Strategy in Iraq: Significant Events Surrounding USAID's Iraq Religious and Ethnic Minority Portfolio and Award Management Challenges* (E-000-22-001-M).

The U.S. Government and USAID continue their commitment to providing the necessary support to the religious and ethnic minority groups in northern Iraq that were targeted for genocide by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and who continue to rebuild their lives. USAID remains committed to effective oversight and management of U.S. assistance and adheres to quality standards of monitoring and evaluation. Despite limitations imposed on our staffing footprint in Iraq, we have successfully augmented staffing support from our regional missions and Washington.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft report, and for the courtesies extended by your staff while conducting this engagement. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this complete and thorough evaluation.

Sincerely,

Andrew Plitt
Acting Assistant Administrator
Bureau for the Middle East



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