

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO

IRAQ & SYRIA



OCTOBER 1, 2023–DECEMBER 31, 2023



On the cover: Members of Combined Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant install concertina wire to enhance base security.
(U.S. Army 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 (5 U.S.C. 419). 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 October 1 through December 31, 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.

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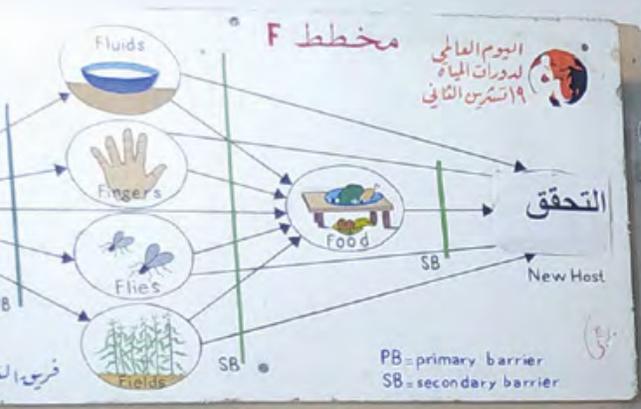
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Paul K. Martin
Inspector General
U.S. Agency for International
Development



وباء الكوليرا

مرض إسهالي حاد ينتج عن عدوى الأمعاء بكتيريا اسمها الضممة الكوليرية

فترة حضانة مرض الكوليرا
 من يوم إلى ثلاث أيام
 وقد تتراوح بين عدة ساعات إلى خمسة أيام

أعراض الإصابة بالمرض
 إسهال مائي - قيء - تشنجات
 غالباً ما تكون الصدوي خفيفة أو بدون أعراض

طرق انتقال المرض
 العياد والطعام الملوّثين بضمات الكوليرا
 (الانتقال يحدث بالسبيل البرازي الفموي فقط)

الوقاية
 - استخدام وشرب المياه النظيفة - طهي الطعام والتخزين المناسب
 - تجنب الطعام المكشوف والأمين وعدم تركه مكشوفاً - غسل اليدين مراراً بالماء والصابون
 - تجنب الصرف الصحي - الاهتمام بالنظافة الشخصية والصحية

العلاج
 لا تستخدم المضاد الحيوي لتسريع الشفاء لأن المضاد الحيوي يقتل البكتيريا التي تسبب المرض
 - يسهل التقليل من إسهال الطعام - إعطاء السوائل الجيدة - لا تشتر قطع الشح من السوق قدر





The recipients of cash assistance are verified by an implementing partner in northwestern Syria. (USAID photo)

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Iraqi soldiers receive instructions for the day's training at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army 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 diplomatic, humanitarian, and stabilization activities.²

Iran-aligned militia groups carried out at least 134 attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq and Syria during the quarter, injuring U.S. and Coalition personnel. The attacks were linked to the Israel-Hamas conflict that erupted in early October.³ Militias used a variety of one-way attack drones, rockets, and missiles in near-daily attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces.⁴ U.S. forces responded with strikes against Iran-aligned forces and their facilities in Syria and Iraq, warning that the United States would not tolerate attacks on its forces.⁵ The DoD deployed additional defensive capabilities to the region and significantly bolstered force protection measures and defensive capabilities in Iraq and Syria.⁶ Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) said that while the attacks created a more challenging operating environment, Coalition forces remained committed to the counter-ISIS mission and to advising, assisting, and enabling partner forces.⁷

ISIS continued to operate in a survival posture in both Iraq and Syria.⁸ ISIS continued to conduct attacks against civilians, Iraqi and Syrian partner forces, and regime forces in Syria.⁹ The group remained incapable of mounting large, complex attacks locally or externally, even as Coalition forces increased their focus on force protection due to the Iran-aligned militia attacks.¹⁰ In Iraq, due to counterterrorism pressure, the ISIS threat was largely contained, though ISIS continued to exploit security gaps between federal Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), and conducted sporadic attacks, mostly in Shia communities.¹¹ In Syria, ISIS concentrated attacks in the Syrian Desert, where it came under increased pressure from Syrian regime and Russian forces.¹² ISIS also increased

Lead IG Oversight Activities

Lead IG and partner agencies completed two oversight reports related to OIR during the quarter: the DoD's management of military units' use of biometrics to identify friendly forces during overseas operations, and State's construction of the central power plant at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. As of December 31, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 17 ongoing and planned projects related to OIR.

During this quarter, the investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies opened 8 new investigations and coordinated their work on 62 open investigations. In addition, each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. During the quarter, the DoD Hotline investigator referred 96 cases to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.

attacks on SDF checkpoints in Dayr az Zawr and Hasakah governorates as the SDF remained focused on clashes with Arab tribes and on Turkish attacks in the north.¹³

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) faced multiple security challenges, including from Iran-aligned groups, an Arab tribal uprising, and Turkish aerial bombardments.¹⁴

In Dayr az Zawr governorate, the SDF came under attack from and engaged in skirmishes with Arab tribal militia, who were backed by the Syrian regime and its Iranian allies.¹⁵ In northern Syria, Turkish bombardments forced the SDF to “split its attention between two possibly existential threats,” CJTF-OIR reported.¹⁶ The SDF continued to partner with Coalition forces in Syria on counter-ISIS operations, but paused operations and training in early October due to the Turkish strikes.¹⁷ Training of SDF guards for detention centers and displaced persons camps continued, but was behind schedule.¹⁸ In the al-Hol displaced persons camp, guard forces continued to lack professionalism despite training.¹⁹

The Coalition limited advising of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) due to the heightened security threat from Iran-aligned militias. Engagements with key Iraqi leaders were cancelled or delayed; some base operations were degraded; and advisory support to Coalition partners were adjusted.²⁰ Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani announced that his government was in the process of reorganizing its relationship with the Coalition.²¹ The ISF showed incremental improvements in warfighting capabilities and focused its efforts on providing security during provincial elections held in December.²²

Actions by other third parties—including Türkiye, the Syrian regime, and Russia—also impacted the OIR mission.²³ Türkiye continued to conduct strikes in northern Iraq and northern Syria targeting suspected members and affiliates of the designated terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).²⁴ Turkish attacks injured and killed dozens of people deliberately and damaged critical infrastructure, including water, electricity, schools and hospital services in Syria.²⁵ In October, U.S. forces shot down an armed Turkish drone operating less than half a kilometer from U.S. forces in Syria, prompting high-level U.S.-Turkish discussions to reinforce better communication and coordination.²⁶ The Russian military continued to violate deconfliction and safety protocols, presenting a risk to Coalition forces and equipment, particularly in the vicinity of the At Tanf Garrison.²⁷



Members of the InSF perform exercises during a Coalition led advanced skills training course. (U.S. Army photo)

The U.S. Government continued to support stabilization and humanitarian programming in Iraq and Syria.²⁸ In Iraq, a weak economy and insufficient public services continued to challenge the government, while an impending water crisis threatened social, economic, and political stability.²⁹ An ordered departure of eligible family members and other non-essential U.S. Government personnel and contractor staff from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil due to increased threats further diminished the capacity of the operations and management contractor to maintain facilities and equipment on the self-contained compounds.³⁰ In Syria, economic challenges, drought conditions, earthquake damage, an ongoing cholera outbreak, and continued conflict created increased risk and humanitarian needs.³¹ The U.S. Government also continued to urge the repatriation of displaced individuals from the al-Hol and Roj camps to their countries of origin. At least 1,690 individuals were repatriated during the quarter, bringing the total population of the camps to 47,000.³²

Emerging Topics and Events

Several events occurred after the quarter ended that could have an impact on the OIR mission and U.S. policy goals in Iraq and Syria:

Iran-aligned militias continued to target U.S. forces. A January 28 drone strike on a U.S. base in Jordan, near the At Tanf Garrison, killed 3 U.S. Soldiers and injured at least 34 others.³³ Following the attack, U.S. forces conducted strikes on more than 85 militia targets in Iraq and Syria.³⁴

U.S. Forces struck Houthi targets in Yemen, following Houthi attacks on international shipping and naval vessels.³⁵ On January 10, the United States and the United Kingdom shot down more than 20 drones over Red Sea that were launched by Houthis rebels in Yemen.³⁶

The United States and Iraq announced planned talks on transitioning the U.S. military presence in Iraq to a bilateral security cooperation relationship.³⁷ The DoD said the talks will determine a timeline for how the Coalition's military mission will evolve based on the ISIS threat, operational and environmental requirements, and the capabilities of Iraqi forces.³⁸





Members of Combined Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant install concertina wire to enhance base security. (U.S. Army photo)

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Iraqi army artillerymen during a joint artillery training exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. 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.³⁹

Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which comprises troops from 29 of the countries, executes the OIR campaign. CJTF-OIR is part of the 86-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, led by the United States.⁴⁰

The OIR campaign is organized around four lines of effort.⁴¹ (See Figure 1.) In June 2023, CJTF-OIR issued an amendment to its campaign plan that outlines decisive conditions and 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 activities to a long-term security framework.⁴²

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.

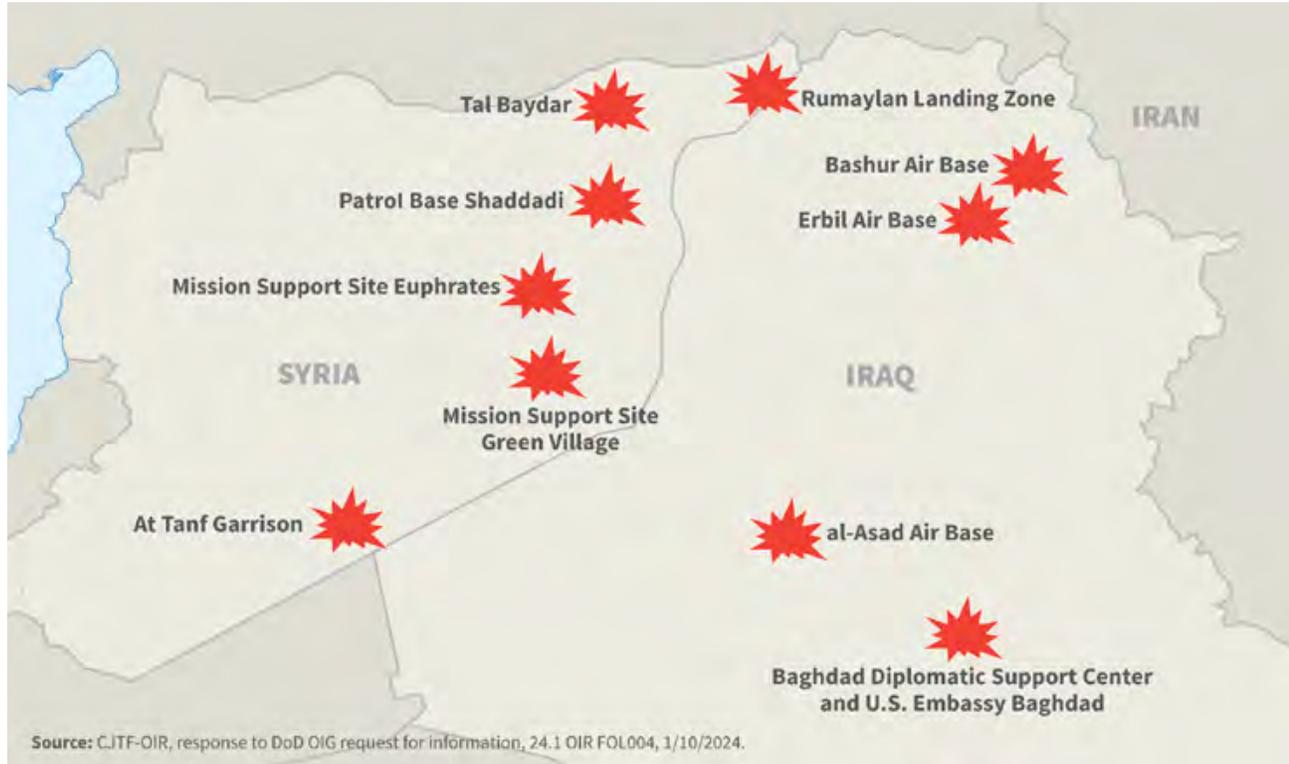
Militias Launch Sustained Attacks on U.S. Forces in Iraq and Syria

On October 18, Iran and Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq and Syria initiated sustained attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq and Syria, conducting at least 134 attacks during the quarter and injuring U.S. and Coalition personnel.⁴³ (See Figure 2.) Except for a brief period in January 2022, Iranian-aligned militia had not conducted sustained attacks on Coalition forces in Iraq since August 2021 and in Syria since March 2023.⁴⁴ CJTF-OIR said the attacks were linked to the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.⁴⁵

The militia groups, operating as a front called the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, claimed responsibility for the attacks.⁴⁶ CJTF-OIR said that the militias sought to exert pressure on U.S. and Coalition forces as tension rose in the region following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack in southern Israel and Israel's ongoing airstrikes and ground offensive in Gaza.⁴⁷ (See page 12.)

CJTF-OIR said that the militias used a variety of one-way attack drones and rockets against U.S. and Coalition forces in both countries, including ballistic missiles that targeted an airbase in Iraq where U.S. and Coalition forces are stationed.⁴⁸ The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that the attacks continued almost daily except during a brief halt coinciding with a "humanitarian pause" in fighting between Israel and Hamas at the end of November.⁴⁹ When the pause ended on December 1, the militias resumed their attacks on U.S. interests, the DIA said.⁵⁰

Figure 2.

Attacks on Key U.S. Interests by Iran-aligned Militias During the Quarter

The DIA reported that the militias publicly threatened to expand attacks to include U.S. forces based in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, but no such attacks occurred during the quarter.⁵¹ The militias also publicly announced a “more severe and broader” phase of attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria and militia leaders stepped up calls for a full withdrawal of Coalition forces from Iraq.⁵²

In addition to the militia attacks in Iraq and Syria, Iran-aligned Houthi forces in Yemen launched cruise missiles and drones from the Red Sea.⁵³ The attacks forced some tankers and cargo ships intending to transit via the Suez Canal to instead reroute around the continent of Africa.⁵⁴ U.S. warships repeatedly shot down the drones and missiles and on December 31, opened fire on Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.⁵⁵ A White House spokesman said the United States would continue to act in self-defense to protect national security interests in the region.⁵⁶

DoD Increases Force Protection

In response to the Israel-Hamas conflict, the DoD deployed additional defensive capabilities to the region, including: a second two carrier strike groups and a Marine Expeditionary Unit to the eastern Mediterranean, F-15 and F-16 fighter squadrons and A-10 attack squadrons, Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery capabilities, and additional Patriot battalions.⁵⁷

CJTF-OIR reported that, in response to the militia attacks against its forces that began later in October, it adopted a defensive posture, significantly bolstered measures to protect its forces and facilities, and adjusted the roles and locations of its personnel.⁵⁸

By October 20, the Secretary of Defense had placed about 2,000 personnel across a variety of units on a heightened state of readiness to be able to respond in the Middle East.⁵⁹ CJTF-OIR reported that additional forces were issued prepare-to-deploy orders.⁶⁰

U.S. Forces Conduct Strikes in Self Defense

On October 26, President Biden directed U.S. forces to strike two facilities in eastern Syria that the DoD said were used by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and affiliated groups. The “precision self-defense strikes” were ordered to demonstrate that the United States will not tolerate attacks on its forces.⁶¹ On November 8, U.S. forces targeted a weapons storage facility in eastern Syria used by the IRGC.⁶²

The DoD emphasized in October that the United States would continue to “focus on preventing regional escalation and a widening of [the] conflict.”⁶³ Despite many attacks, U.S. forces did not strike back at militia groups in Iraq until November 21, after the militias fired short-range ballistic missiles at U.S. and Coalition forces stationed at al-Asad Air Base in Anbar province. U.S. warplanes targeted a militia operations center and a command and control node in two separate strikes in Iraq.⁶⁴

On December 7 and 8, rockets targeted the U.S. Embassy in Iraq and nearby personnel compound, causing minor damage.⁶⁵ On December 25, U.S. forces carried out airstrikes targeting multiple facilities used by Kata’ib Hezbollah and affiliated Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq. The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) said U.S. forces launched the airstrikes in response to multiple attacks against Coalition forces in Iraq and Syria, including a drone attack on the Erbil Air Base that injured several U.S. Service members.⁶⁶

CJTF-OIR reported that the combined effects of the Israel-Hamas conflict and the increased militia group attacks have resulted in a more challenging operational environment for the OIR campaign.

Escalated Attacks on U.S. Forces Create “New Operating Paradigm” for the OIR Mission

CJTF-OIR reported that the combined effects of the Israel-Hamas conflict and the increased militia group attacks have resulted in a more challenging operational environment for the OIR campaign.⁶⁷

Coalition forces have had to balance addressing immediate regional security challenges with continuing to strengthen local partner capacities in the long run.⁶⁸ CJTF-OIR said that changes due to the “new operating paradigm” are primarily aimed at ensuring the safety and security of Coalition forces and maintaining stability in the region.⁶⁹

In addition, increased attacks have diverted resources and attention from pursuing the OIR campaign and hindered momentum, CJTF-OIR said.⁷⁰ Resources and capacity that would typically be devoted to providing equipment, supplies, and advisory support to its partners have been diverted towards addressing immediate threats.⁷¹ Key leader engagements have been cancelled or delayed.⁷²

WHO ARE THE IRAN-ALIGNED MILITIAS ATTACKING U.S. FORCES?

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) funds, equips, and trains militias in Iraq and Syria. The DIA reported that Iran calibrates operations to “avoid direct, unmanageable escalation with the United States.” The DIA assessed that Iran and Iran-aligned militias will continue to attack U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq and Syria as long as Iran does not direct a halt to these activities.

In Iraq, at least four Iran-aligned militias that attacked U.S. forces during the quarter operate under a front group called the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. The groups are also part of the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group of militias that receives funding from the Iraqi government. CJTF-OIR reported that the militias have increased recruiting efforts since October, and have moved volunteers, drones, and anti-tank missiles from Iraq to southwestern Syria in support of the Lebanese Hezbollah.

The United States has designated several militias as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and has designated those militias, other groups, and various leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224. Representatives and members of a designated FTO, if they are aliens, are inadmissible to the United States and provision of material support to an FTO is a criminal offense. The U.S. Government blocks assets of, and transactions with, SDGTs.

Militias of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq



KATA'IB HEZBOLLAH

- Described by some Iraq experts as the premier militia in Iraq.
- Has conducted numerous attacks against U.S. and Iraqi government targets.
- Group designation: FTO (2009).
- Group designation: SDGT (2009).
- Treasury designation of 6 senior leaders (November 17, 2023).



HARAKAT AL-NUJABA

- Created by the IRGC-QF and the Lebanese Hezbollah in 2013.
- Leader Akram al-Kabi designated an SDGT (2008).
- Group designation: SDGT (2019).



HARAKAT ANSAR ALLAH AL-AWFIYA

- A top IRGC-QF proxy founded in 2013.
- One of eight groups to threaten attacks against U.S. targets in 2020.
- Garrisons along Iraq's border with Syria; has targeted U.S. and Syrian partner forces in Syria.



KATA'IB SAYYID AL-SHUHADA

- Emerged from Kata'ib Hezbollah in 2013.
- Group designation: SDGT (2008).
- Group designation: FTO (November 17, 2023)

Sources: DIA, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 OIR 002 and 24.1 OIR 002, 12/11/2023; CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 OIR 055, 12/15/2023; State, website, “Individuals and Entities Designated by the State Department Under E.O. 13224,” undated; Treasury, “Office of Foreign Assets Control: Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List,” 1/23/2023; Michael Knights, Crispin Smith, and Hamdi Malik, “Profile: Kataib Hezbollah,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4/1/2021; Michael Knights, “Profile: Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 10/21/2023; Ameer al Kaabi, Michael Knights, and Hamdi Malik, “Profile: Ansar Allah al-Awfiya (19th PMF Brigade),” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 11/29/2023; Michael Knights, “Profile: Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 5/3/2021.

State said that it continued to “devote significant attention” to the counter-ISIS mission via multilateral engagement through the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

However, CJTF-OIR reported that even in this “degraded operational environment,” ISIS remains territorially defeated and Coalition forces remain committed to the counter-ISIS mission and to advising, assisting, and enabling partner forces.⁷³

State, International Community Continue Engagement to Support Counter-ISIS Mission

During the quarter, State said that it continued to “devote significant attention” to the counter-ISIS mission via multilateral engagement through the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.⁷⁴ State said its efforts emphasized the need for repatriations of third-country nationals for northeastern Syria and advocacy for international funding of stabilization assistance in both Iraq and northeastern Syria.⁷⁵ State noted that there has been no change to the U.S. counter-ISIS strategy during the quarter.⁷⁶

State reported that members of the counter-ISIS Coalition convened the following working groups during the quarter:

Foreign Terrorist Fighters Working Group: Convened in Istanbul on October 26-27 to discuss the need to reduce the presence of ISIS at, and alleviate the security and humanitarian conditions of the al-Hol displaced persons camp in northeastern Syria.⁷⁷

Communications Working Group: Met on October 31 in Abu Dhabi and discussed a threat assessment indicating that Israel’s airstrikes and ground invasion in Gaza has heightened the threat from ISIS around the world, especially in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Participants concurred that while terrorism is complex, media and propaganda play major roles. The group concluded that individuals and militias have been inspired often by online media to step up attacks.⁷⁸

Stabilization Working Group: Convened on November 3 in Washington, D.C., to review and assess priority stabilization needs in areas of Iraq and Syria liberated from ISIS, with particular focus on the challenges related to al-Hol displaced persons camp and reintegrating al-Hol returnees into Syrian and Iraqi communities.⁷⁹

The annual meeting of the Coalition’s Political Directors convened on December 5 in Rome where speakers and members warned of the threat of an ISIS resurgence in the region. Participants encouraged sustained repatriations, continued investments in stabilization despite competing regional priorities, and international support for justice and accountability for ISIS crimes.⁸⁰

FUNDING

In FY 2022 and FY 2023, Congress appropriated approximately \$12.5 billion to the DoD for OIR, of which nearly \$11.9 billion had been expended as of the end of November. The DoD requested nearly \$6.2 billion for OIR in FY 2024, but Congress has yet to provide an appropriation.⁸¹ (See page 14.) 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.⁸² Of the \$475.0 million CTEF appropriation for FY 2023, \$315.0 million was designated to support partner forces in Iraq, of which \$279.0 million had been expended as of the end of September. Of the \$160.0 million designated for Syrian partner forces, \$101.1 million had been expended as of the end of September.⁸³ For FY 2024, the DoD requested \$398 million for CTEF (\$242 million for Iraq, \$156 million for Syria.)⁸⁴

For FY 2024, the DoD requested \$398 million for CTEF (\$242 million for Iraq, \$156 million for Syria.)

EUM: End-use monitoring (EUM) is the process used to verify that defense articles or services transferred by the U.S. Government to foreign recipients are being used as agreed. In Iraq, an active-duty military member and one local staff member travel to each site where Enhanced EUM items are stored to visually inventory the equipment and ensure the facilities meet the agreed upon security requirements. The staff uses other methods, such as quarterly inventory reports from the Iraqi government, to ensure that the equipment has been accounted for. If monitoring staff find discrepancies in the inventories, they contact the Ministries of Defense and Interior so that the monitoring staff can initiate an investigation or inquiry into the items' whereabouts and ensure that the proper Iraqi government officials are on site during the inventory process.⁸⁵

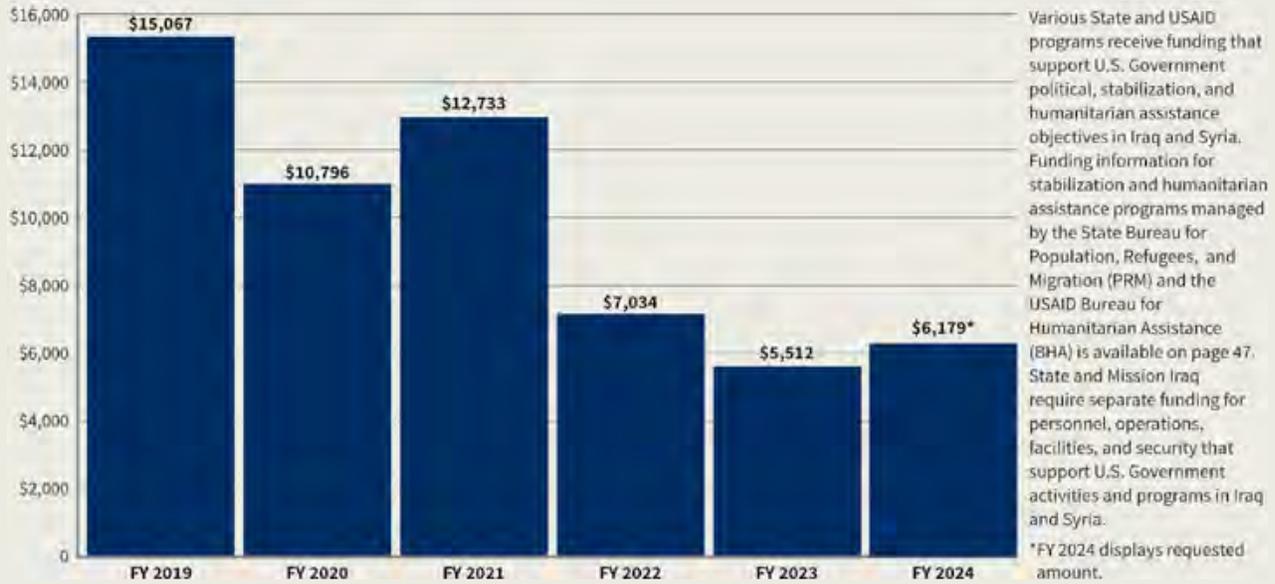
While the practice is for the EUM team to visually inspect each item, the embassy uses third-party contractors to collect additional information and facilitate access to items across Iraq. Mission Iraq's primary automation tool for EUM is the Hawkeye bar code scanner. This system compiles the data for all items that are digitally transferred to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's Security Cooperation Information Portal.⁸⁶

Leahy Vetting: State reported that it 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.⁸⁷

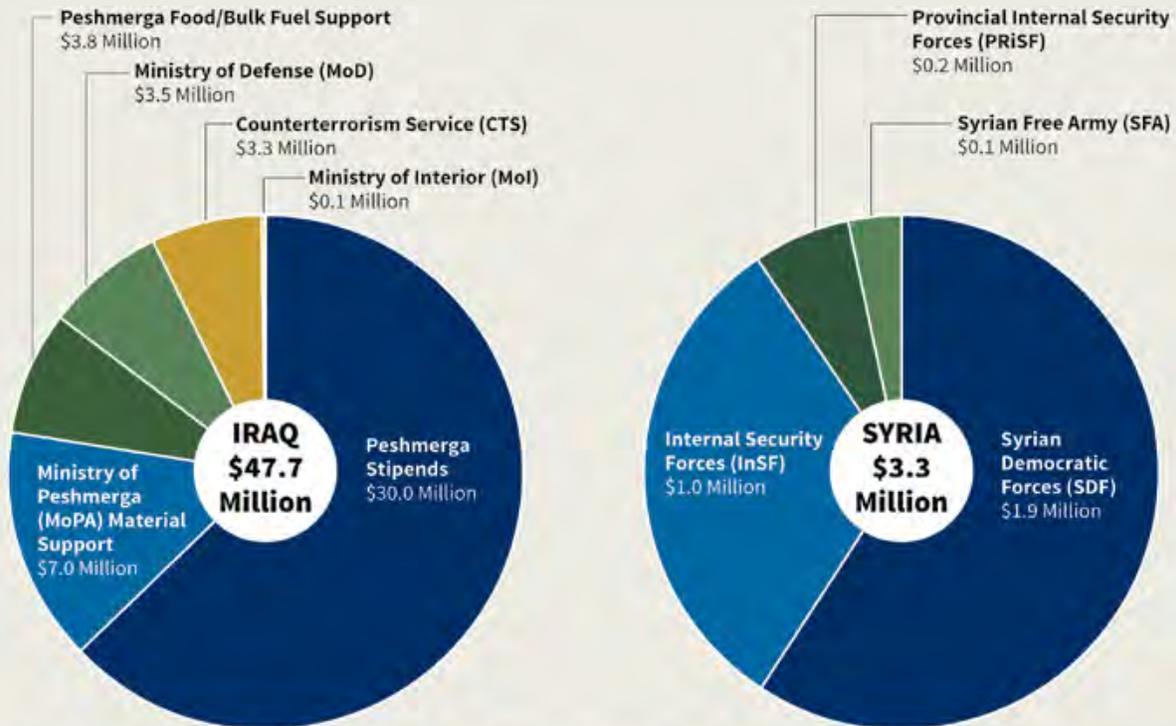
FMF: Congress approved \$1.25 billion for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Iraq (\$250 million annually) for FY 2019 through FY 2023. For FY 2024, State requested a reduced amount, \$75.5 million, for FMF because substantial funds appropriated in previous years for FMF remain available for immediate expenditure against cases developed with the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). As of the end of November, \$642.3 million (51 percent) of available FMF funds had been spent.⁸⁸ In addition, State continues to operate under a continuing resolution. FMF funds requested for FY 2024 had not been appropriated by Congress at the end of the quarter.⁸⁹

DOD FUNDING FOR OIR

DoD Enacted Funding for OIR FY 2019-FY 2024, in \$ Millions



CTEF-funded Support to Iraq and Syria During the Quarter.



Notes: Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. Syria funding numbers available for October and November 2023 only.
Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 OIR 013, 12/15/2023, and 24.1 OIR FOL013, 1/10/2024; OUSD(C), response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 OIR 012, 1/16/2024.

ISIS ACTIVITY AND CAPABILITY

Status of ISIS

During the quarter, ISIS continued to operate in a survival posture in both Iraq and Syria. The group remained **militarily defeated**, incapable of mounting large, complex attacks domestically or externally, even as Coalition forces increased their focus on force protection due to attacks by Iran-aligned militia group.

Ongoing Coalition and partner operations to kill and detain ISIS operatives further shrunk the group's cadre of experienced leaders and likely degraded its internal and external attack capabilities. On December 19, Türkiye said to have captured ISIS administrative and financial leader in Syria Huzeife Al Muri in Damascus, along with tens of thousands of dollars worth of U.S. dollars, British pounds and Euros.

State said that ISIS (and al-Qaeda) in Syria pose an **enduring threat** to U.S. national security interests, in particular through the thousands of ISIS detainees held in makeshift facilities in northeast Syria.

IRAQ

The pace of low-level leadership detentions and deaths—similar to previous quarters—continued to disrupt ISIS's insurgency posture. As of late November, the ISIS threat in federal Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) was largely contained, though ISIS continued to **exploit security gaps** between federal Iraq and the IKR, where political rifts in the Kurdish Security Forces created ongoing risks.

ISIS **prioritized its own security** in Iraq over executing frequent attacks. ISIS attacks against the ISF were concentrated primarily in Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din provinces, with increased activity in Anbar province.

ISF operations continued to **weaken** ISIS's ability to restore its insurgency's core capabilities and restricted its freedom of movement.

ISIS attacks targeted Sunni tribal fighters known as the **Tribal Mobilization Forces**. In November, ISIS claimed an attack that killed 4 Sunni fighters at a security checkpoint in the Anbar province.

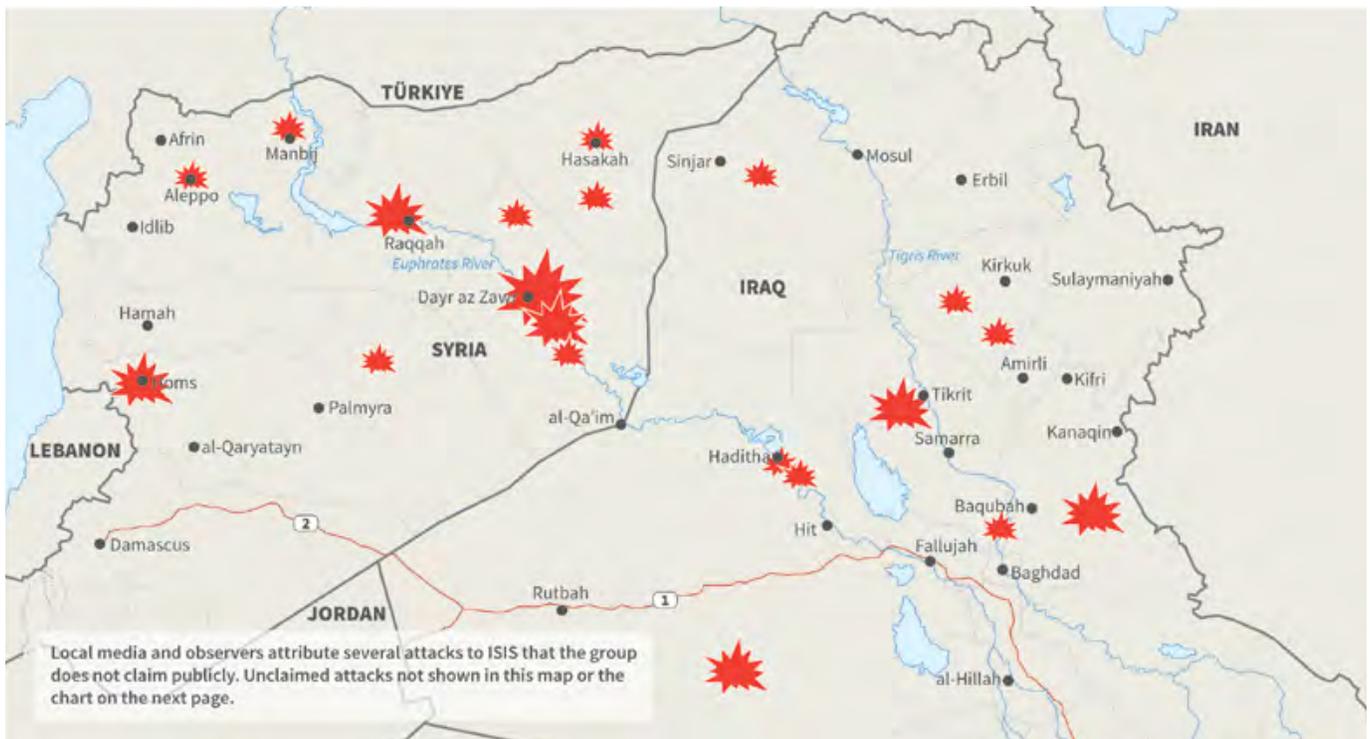
SYRIA

A weakened ISIS **posed little threat** to Coalition forces and U.S. interests, though the group remained a potentially destabilizing influence and its resurgence cannot be ruled out.

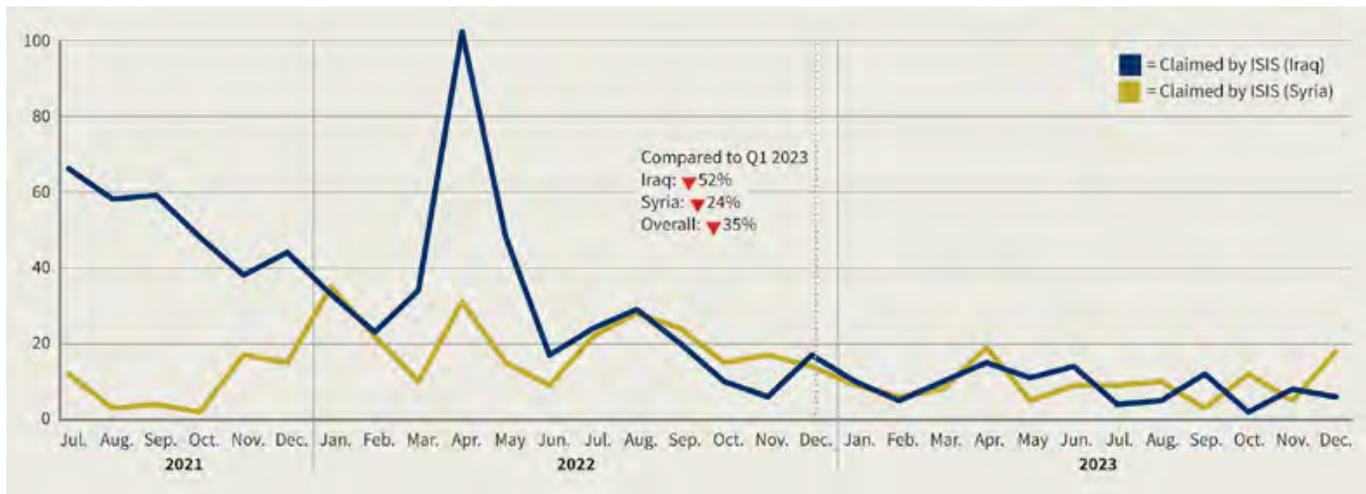
ISIS remained **concentrated in the Syrian Desert**, outside of the Coalition's operating area. ISIS conducted attacks but was unable to re-establish significant influence in the Syrian Sunni Arab population centers, and came under increased pressure from Syrian regime and Russian forces.

ISIS increased attacks on **SDF checkpoints** in Dayr az Zawr and Hasakah governorates, where the SDF remained focused on clashes with Arab tribes and Turkish attacks. Syrian social media indicated that ISIS also tried to increase zakat (forced donations), extortion, and information operations.

ISIS also conducted multiple attacks against **Syrian regime** targets. Suspected ISIS attacks killed more than 140 regime and pro-regime forces, according to a war monitor. In November, ISIS claimed a high-profile attack in the central Syrian Desert that killed more than 20 pro-regime forces.



ISIS Attacks by Month, July 2021–December 2023



ISIS Capability Assessment

CAPABILITIES: Under pressure from continued Coalition and partner force operations, ISIS’s capacity to conduct insurgent activities remained **severely degraded** in Iraq and Syria, and the group does not appear to have made measurable progress toward its ultimate strategic objective to restore the “caliphate.” Several key indicators of capability declined, including attack numbers, sophistication, and complexity; number of IED employments; target diversity; and activity near urban centers.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS: In Iraq, ISIS’s overall strategy for resurgence remains to **attrite local security forces** while attempting to **build popular support** by portraying the group as a defender of Sunni Muslims. The group seeks to govern these communities under its version of Sharia law. In Syria, ISIS continued to seek to resurge and **recruit from vulnerable communities**, particularly through indoctrination and training of youth from al-Hol and other displaced persons camps, while also seeking to free detainees from detention facilities. Poor conditions in al-Hol likely remained favorable for ISIS to exert a coercive influence on the camp population. ISIS narratives in the information environment remained heavily degraded, but the group still maintains **misinformation campaigns** on social media.

ISIS STRUCTURE: ISIS recorded no major changes in leadership or organization structure during the quarter, nor was there any change to its overall command and control. **ISIS leadership** is organized under its General Directorate of Provinces. In Iraq, the Bilad al-Rafidayn Office oversees ISIS in Iraq and Iran under emir Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rifayi. The ISIS Iraq province has about 10 sub-provinces. The al-Ard al-Mubarakah Office oversees ISIS-Syria. 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. This quarter, with the start of the **conflict in Gaza**, ISIS senior leaders sought to expand the group’s operational reach by publicly encouraging its branches and supports to conduct attacks against Israeli and Jewish interests, along with Western targets. However, ISIS branches probably **lack both intent and capability** to direct attacks against the U.S. homeland. In October, ISIS claimed responsibility for a shooting that killed two Swedes in Brussels, claiming to have targeted Sweden because of its membership in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. 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. 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 has held since late 2022 in buried physical caches that it digs up and smuggles across Iraq and Syria. ISIS also engages in **extortion and kidnapping** for ransom and some soliciting of donations via online platforms. 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 each—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 108.

IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

The Coalition’s Military Advisory Group continued to advise, enable, and assist the ISF—including the Iraqi Air Enterprise—and KSF in bases in Baghdad and Erbil. The Special Operations Advisory Group advised, enabled and assisted the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) from bases in Anbar province.⁹⁰ (See page 19.)

Additionally, Coalition advisors met with NATO Mission–Iraq and the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq to discuss progress made by the Iraqi government on security sector reform.⁹¹ The Iraqi government is drafting a security sector reform strategy, but the content has not been shared with CJTF-OIR for review.⁹²

Israel-Hamas Conflict Constrains Coalition Relations with the ISF

In Iraq, CJTF-OIR continued to operate at the invitation of the Iraqi government in an advise, assist, and enable role to support ISF and KSF operations to defeat ISIS.⁹³ (See page 19.) However, CJTF-OIR said that the increase in Iran-aligned militia attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq and subsequent U.S. strikes on those militias had a negative effect on relations between advisors and their Iraqi partners.⁹⁴

In particular, the attacks diverted CJTF-OIR’s resources and attention away from the OIR advisory mission.⁹⁵ CJTF-OIR cancelled or delayed engagements with key Iraqi leaders pending a reassessment of security conditions.⁹⁶

Additionally, the ordered departure of certain U.S. Embassy staff and the redeployment of many service contractors shared between the embassy and the Union III base in Baghdad degraded base operations systems, which affected the Coalition and the ISF, CJTF-OIR said.⁹⁷ Interrupted supply chains slowed or prevented the distribution of CTEF materiel distributed to Iraqi partners.⁹⁸

CJTF-OIR said that it scaled back Coalition engagements and logistical support for NATO Mission-Iraq and other entities supporting the Coalition’s objectives in Iraq. The resources and capacity that would typically have been devoted to providing equipment, supplies, and advisory support to these partners were instead diverted to address immediate threats.⁹⁹

Prime Minister Looks to Negotiations on the Future of Coalition Forces in Iraq

In December, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani announced that his government would begin negotiations with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS on the future of international Coalition forces in Iraq.¹⁰⁰ The move followed calls by some Iraqi lawmakers and militia leaders for the ouster of U.S. forces from Iraq.¹⁰¹ A Washington-based think tank reported that the developments threatened to up-end Prime Minister Sudani’s careful balancing of U.S. and Iranian interests in Iraq.¹⁰²

In the wake of the militia attacks, Prime Minister Sudani faced increased pressure to take action to protect U.S. forces.¹⁰³ According to a DoD press release, Secretary of Defense

CJTF-OIR said that the increase in Iran-aligned militia attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq and subsequent U.S. strikes on those militias had a negative effect on relations between advisors and their Iraqi partners.

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

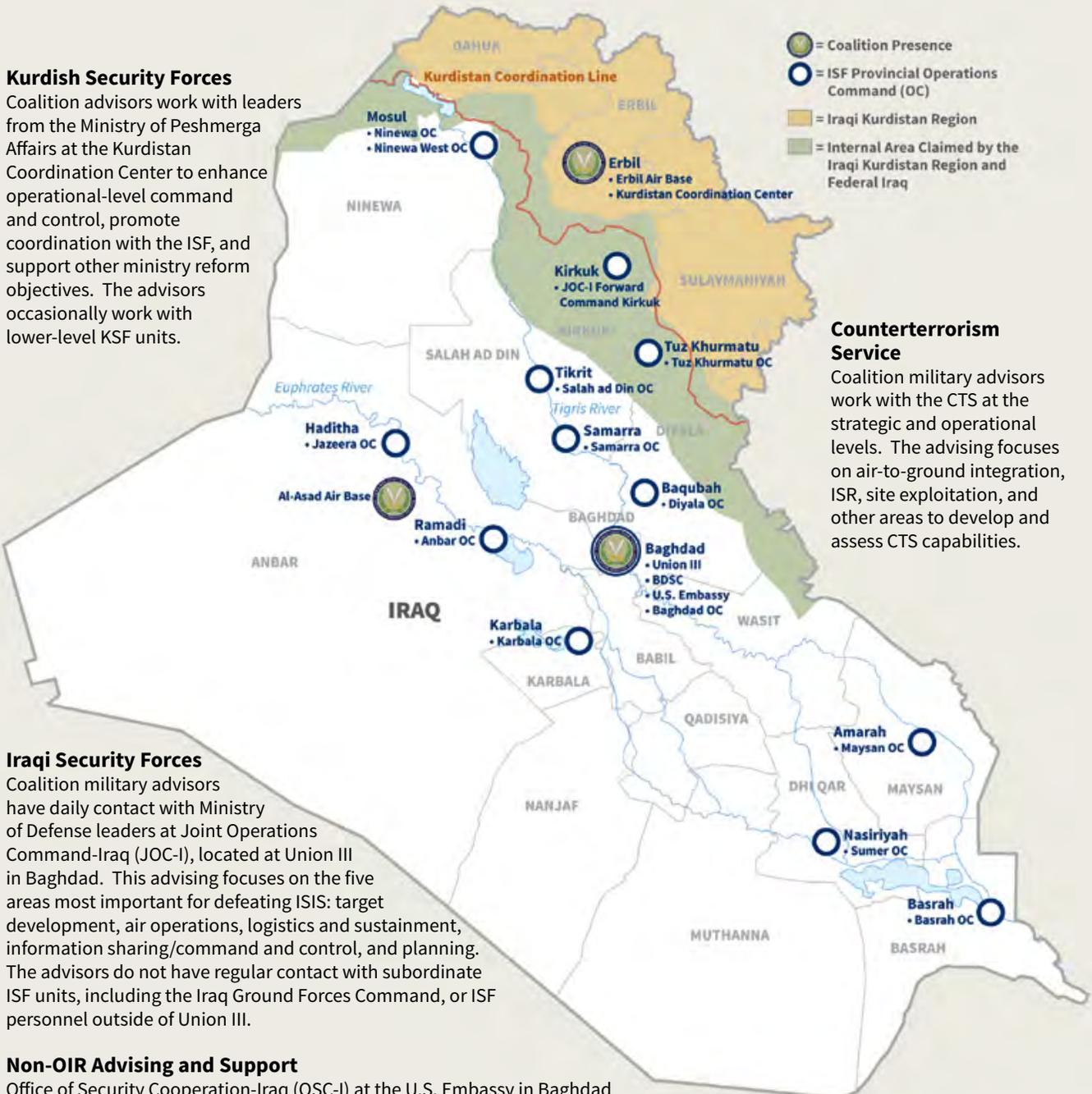
Coalition military advisors have daily contact with Ministry of Defense leaders at Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I), located at Union III in Baghdad. This advising focuses on the five areas most important for defeating ISIS: target development, air operations, logistics and sustainment, information 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.

Lloyd J. Austin III discussed with Prime Minister Sudani the obligation of the Iraqi government to protect diplomatic personnel and Coalition advisors and facilities following a December 8 attack on the U.S. embassy in Baghdad.¹⁰⁴ In response to the attack, Prime Minister Sudani issued a statement labeling the rocket attacks as “acts of terrorism” that “endanger Iraq’s internal security” and arrested several militant suspects.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, Prime Minister Sudani condemned U.S. retaliatory airstrikes on Iraqi militias as violations of Iraqi sovereignty, while Iraqi lawmakers affiliated with Iran-aligned militias advocated to cut diplomatic ties with the United States and remove U.S. forces from Iraq.¹⁰⁶ In October, the influential Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr called for severing diplomatic relations with the United States due to U.S. support for Israel.¹⁰⁷ The parliamentary bloc affiliated with Iran-aligned militia Kata’ib Hezbollah called for legislative efforts to oust U.S. forces, and the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee drafted a resolution to try to expel U.S. troops.¹⁰⁸

Iran-aligned Militias Continue to Influence the Iraqi Government

According to some Iraq experts, Iran-aligned politicians and militias heavily influence Iraq’s government. Despite losing many seats in the October 2021 parliamentary elections to nationalist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr’s party, Iran-aligned parties and militias subsequently maneuvered to halt the process of forming Iraq’s government for over a year and punish al-Sadr’s coalition partners through political violence, controversial judicial rulings, and external pressure, which caused al-Sadr to withdraw his members from parliament.¹⁰⁹ Iran-aligned parties and militias then shaped the composition of Iraq’s current government under Prime Minister al-Sudani in October 2022, according to a Washington D.C.-based think tank.¹¹⁰

Operating under the aegis of the Shia Coordination Framework political bloc comprised of Iran-aligned parties and more moderate Shia groups, the militias and their political allies then spent the next year solidifying control of the prime minister’s office, security services, judiciary, and parliament using a combination of legal and military means, according to analysts at the think tank.¹¹¹

A main avenue of influence is through the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella of more than 60 armed factions that operate separately from the ISF and nominally under the command of the Iraqi prime minister. Iran-aligned militias comprise the largest and most influential factions in the PMF, which also includes moderate Shia, Sunni, and Christian factions.¹¹²

Other Iraq experts said that despite Iran’s influence through the Coordination Framework, Sudani has positioned himself as an Iraqi nationalist and conveyed a message of capable government that would improve services, protect Iraq’s sovereignty, respond to popular demands, and cooperate regionally and internationally.¹¹³

USCENTCOM reported that under Sudani, Iraq’s budget calls for roughly doubling the PMF force strength from 122,000 to 238,000.¹¹⁴ Iraq experts noted that the most recent budget also provides long-term government benefits to PMF personnel, expands the PMF civil works and industrial base, and creates intelligence-gathering arrangements that are excluded from civilian oversight.¹¹⁵

The parliamentary bloc affiliated with Iran-aligned militia Kata’ib Hezbollah called for legislative efforts to oust U.S. forces, and the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee drafted a resolution to try to expel U.S. troops.



Iraqi Security Forces train to enhance their marksmanship capabilities at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

Additionally, the prime minister permitted an action that could create opportunities for the PMF to participate in Iraq’s economy by funneling nearly \$70 million from the Iraqi budget to the Muhandis General Company, an engineering company owned and operated by the PMF that could win government contracting bids.¹¹⁶ Previous attempts by the PMF to establish a contracting company--which emulates a similar company run by the IRGC in Iran—were blocked by former Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhimi amid intense international pressure.¹¹⁷

ISF Demonstrates Incremental Improvement in Warfighting Capabilities but Shifts Focus to Elections

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF continued to focus on operations against ISIS, and the Coalition’s advisory strike cell engaged with Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I) leaders on a number of warfighting functions.¹¹⁸

In addition, CJTF-OIR said that the ISF conducted a “snap review” of the rules of engagement for social disturbances in light of the potential for social destabilization as a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict and continued militia attacks on military bases hosting U.S. personnel.¹¹⁹

CJTF-OIR said that JOC-I commanders were tasked with securing the December 18 provincial elections, which resulted in a reduced focus on operations against ISIS.¹²⁰ CJTF-OIR reported incremental improvements in some of the JOC-I’s warfighting capabilities. (See Table 1.)

Additionally, the JOC-I made progress in implementing a Joint Civil Affairs Forum to create a common approach to civil affairs among the Ministry of Defense, the JOC-I, Operational Commands, and United Action Partners such as the United Nations, NATO Mission-Iraq, and CJTF-OIR.¹²¹

Table 1.

Status of JOC-I Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Status
Mission Planning	The JOC-I conducted limited planning for operations but is not yet able to plan combined operations. Most of the planning occurred between the Iraqi Ground Force Command and the provincial Operational Commands or the Division Command. Coalition advisors sought to increase the number of senior officers attending Joint Targeting Working Group meetings and to increase the cross-functional planning process. However, tensions between partners sometimes prevented them from sharing credit, which created an unwillingness to participate in follow-on meetings. Coalition efforts to adjust advising activity were “unsuccessful” because JOC-I commanders were focused on securing provincial elections in December.
Counter-ISIS Ground Operations	JOC-I “Operations Floor” has limited capacity to conduct live tracking of operations in progress. The JOC-I is more involved in daily civilian and other crisis issues than in conducting ground operations against ISIS. The ISF conducted a limited number of ground operations against ISIS. The main focus of Coalition advising was the review and drafting of the JOC-I 2024 campaign plan.
Counter-ISIS Air Strikes (targeting)	The JOC-I conducted some air strikes independently. However, the ISF remains heavily reliant on the Coalition for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and laser-designation of targets during every step of the strike process. The ISF’s dependence on Coalition ISR is due to ISF limitations in ISR collection and a lack of ground-to-air communications from the JOC-I. The JOC-I’s strike cell remains essential to the ISF’s ability to maintain the enduring defeat of ISIS. Coalition advisors witnessed improvement and interest from the JOC-I in the development of ISR and Joint Fires coordination. The advisors continued to advise the JOC-I Air Cell on intelligence, targeting, and current operations management and to advise and train Iraqi Terminal Air Controllers on the procedure and techniques required to conduct terminal guidance of munitions onto targets.
Intelligence	The ISF began using its own ISR assets in support of target development and providing overwatch of ground operations. The ISF uses human intelligence and its own ISR on a daily basis. During the quarter, JOC-I partially implemented Coalition advice for the preparation of operations and has actively contributed to operations planning by providing Intelligence. However, CJTF-OIR said that it could not assess the linkage between the JOC-I and the Iraqi Ground Forces Command, which appears to be responsible for planning and coordination of ground operations. The JOC-I has begun using the PUMA platform and SCAN EAGLES to enhance the collection of ISR, which CJTF-OIR described as a “significant capability increase.”
Command and Control	The ISF installed the Harris Command and Control radio system. The system was installed at the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and the Iraqi intelligence agencies, but is not yet fully utilized to maintain a common operating picture. While training began, the system is being used as an alternative to voice communication when mobile phones do not work. CJTF-OIR said that the biggest challenge in converting users to the Harris system lies in breaking the habit of relying on phones, messaging apps, and paper maps to begin using a digital Common Operating Picture.
Artillery	The ISF continued to integrate artillery into its echelons, including batteries, battalions, brigades, division, and operational commands. However, the ISF does not have permanent artillery personnel positions within the current structure approved by the Prime Minister. Currently, the artillery directorate intermittently provides 2 liaisons to the JOC-I. Coalition advisors meet with these liaisons weekly to coordinate training.
Sustainment and Logistics	Coalition advisors focused on improving the JOC-I’s situational awareness of the ISF’s combat readiness and capability gaps. The advisors participated in a capability gap assessment of the Joint ISF-KSF Brigades, and finalized a procurement proposal in cooperation with the Directory of Military Assistance.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 OIR 022 and 24.1 OIR 023, 12/15/2023; USCENCOM, response to DoD OIG request for information, 021, 12/15/2023; CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 OIR 021, 12/15/2023.

CJTF-OIR said that the CTS conducted two independent counter-ISIS operations during the quarter.

COUNTERTERRORISM FORCES

CTS Conducts Counter-ISIS Operations with Varying Levels of Capability

CJTF-OIR reported that the Counterterrorism Service (CTS) is capable of executing operations and maintaining counterterrorism pressure on ISIS relatively independently. However, CTS units exhibited varying levels of success across Iraq related to the level of Coalition partnership with the unit involved, the threat environment in each province, the capabilities of leaders manning the Iraqi Special Operations Forces headquarters, and the warfighting skills of each battalion.¹²²

Overall, the group's capabilities did not change significantly during the quarter. The CTS still relied on the Coalition for some ISR and intelligence.¹²³ The CTS continued to operate organic tactical ISR, and maintained the ability to request ISR assets through the JOC-I.¹²⁴

CJTF-OIR said that the CTS conducted two independent counter-ISIS operations during the quarter. The operations were shorter than previous ones and the results were not shared with the Coalition, CJTF-OIR said.¹²⁵

Additionally, the CTS executed some combined operations with Coalition forces, but other ISF units were not involved and did not offer support.¹²⁶ The CTS sometimes partners with the MoD, the KSF, and various other ISF units independently of Coalition forces during operations against ISIS.¹²⁷ The CTS has received support in previous quarters from other ISF units, including rotary wing air lift and close air support when requested in support of operations.¹²⁸

CJTF-OIR said that the CTS and the ISF will need to increase integration and interaction as the Coalition reduces its composition and disposition of forces and the ISF and CTS take on a more significant role in their security.¹²⁹

No Movement on CTS Force Generation Initiatives

Iraq's 2023 budget authorized the CTS to recruit 3,000 soldiers in federal Iraq and an additional 500 soldiers from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, but there was no movement toward generating these new forces during the quarter.¹³⁰ The new budgetary authorization will offset CTS personnel losses due to retirements, absences without leave, and casualties.¹³¹

CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advisors will be heavily involved in advising regarding CTS force generation as new recruits are selected and sent for training.¹³² Additionally, the advisors are working with the CTS leadership to assign 200 high-quality CTS non-commissioned officers and other officers to the Academia to offset training bottlenecks that may occur due to the expected high number of new recruits.¹³³

CJTF-OIR reported that the years that the CTS spent operating without a government-approved budget continued to negatively impact the organization's ability to man, train, and equip a force that is aging and has become rank top-heavy. While the CTS leadership is actively planning for the future, it needs funding to modernize the force, CJTF-OIR said.¹³⁴

U.S., Iraqi, and French Service members participate in an artillery live fire exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)



Coalition advisors worked with CTS senior leaders to develop their operations, activities, and investments with enough flexibility to respond to changes to the financial support that the CTS receives from the Iraqi government.¹³⁵

Pause in Funding for Forensics and Investigations Creates Capability Gap

CJTF-OIR reported that FMF funding for the CTS’s Special Forensics and Investigations Laboratory paused in September, leaving a “critical capability gap” in the CTS’s ability to collect evidence for prosecutions against ISIS members in court.¹³⁶ CJTF-OIR reported that it is working on a CTEF waiver to resume the funding.¹³⁷

Despite this setback, Coalition advisors trained CTS personnel on sensitive site exploitation and frequently met with the CTS judge to discuss the legal and investigative processes, areas for improvement, and warranting standards.¹³⁸ Advisors also worked with the CTS to enhance its ability to use captured enemy material for future targeting.¹³⁹

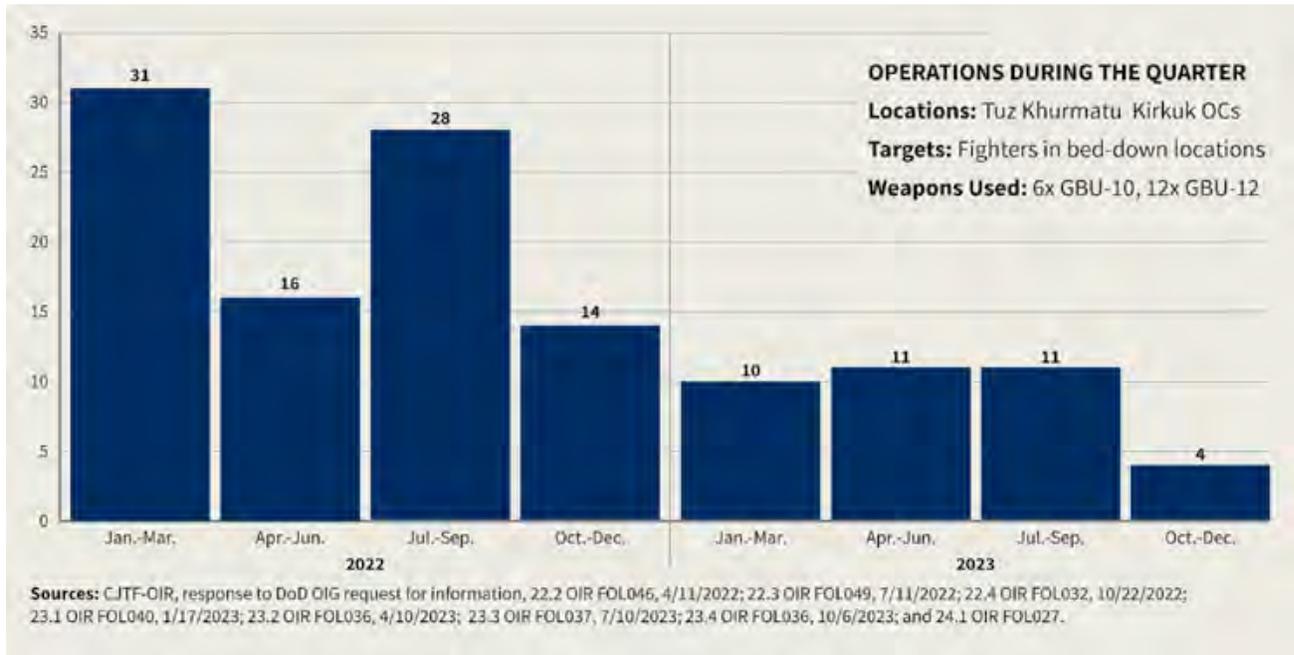
CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS’s ability to use these methods resulted in a conviction rate of more than 90 percent during the quarter.¹⁴⁰ To further enhance evidence collection, the CTS expected to update and complete installation of a CTEF-funded Automated Biometric Information System to improve fingerprint analysis and provide improved evidence for use during trials.¹⁴¹

ISF AIR SUPPORT

ISF Airstrikes Decrease

CJTF-OIR reported that the number of ISF airstrikes during the quarter decreased significantly due to a combination of factors, including poor weather conditions, a reduction in ISR resources allocated to airstrikes, and a decrease in JOC-I intelligence inputs.¹⁴² (See Figure 3.) The areas of focus for airstrikes remained the same and there were no significant changes in the type or location of the airstrikes.¹⁴³

Figure 3.

Counter-ISIS Airstrikes by Iraqi Aircraft, January 2022-December 2023

CJTF-OIR said that all ISF airstrikes were enabled by the Coalition.¹⁴⁴ The airstrike objectives were met but did not produce significant shifts in ISIS tactics, techniques, or procedures.¹⁴⁵ CJTF-OIR said that reports of the airstrikes were included in information campaigns to message to the Iraq population that the ISF remains committed to the defeat of ISIS.¹⁴⁶

KURDISH SECURITY FORCES

In September 2022, the United States revised and renewed a memorandum of understanding with the KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) to support reform measures that seek to create a unified, nonpartisan military that operates under its command.¹⁴⁷ The non-binding memorandum of understanding 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 for 4 years, subject to the availability of funds.¹⁴⁸

Kurdish Parties Take Steps toward Security Reform

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.¹⁴⁹ Most personnel transferred from these politically-affiliated forces to the MoPA have been organized into units known as Regional Guard Brigades (RGB).¹⁵⁰

CJTF-OIR reported that during the quarter, the KSF submitted plans to transfer units from politically-aligned security forces to the MoPA and initiated successful payments to 229 KSF personnel via electronic funds transfer in December as an initial test of the capability.¹⁵¹

However, State assessed political will is required for approval of a consolidated, KRG-endorsed plan for implementation.¹⁵²

The plans to transfer the units to the MoPA were steps toward security reform that CJTF-OIR previously reported had been “slowed” by an ongoing political divide between the Iraqi Kurdistan Region’s two biggest political parties, the KDP and the PUK.¹⁵³ (See page 56.)

Minister of Peshmerga Affairs Reinstated

Shoresh Ismail, Minister of Peshmerga Affairs, returned to his position on November 27 after more than a year out of office following a conflict with PUK President Bafel Talabani.¹⁵⁴ According to State, little progress was made during his absence on integration of the politically aligned 70s and 80s forces, a part of the Peshmerga reform effort.¹⁵⁵

CJTF-OIR reported that the re-appointment of the MoPA Minister “should significantly aid in the implementation of reform efforts.”¹⁵⁶ The next significant step in the reform process involves creating a single line of accounting for the 70s and 80s Forces that come under MoPA control, CJTF-OIR said.¹⁵⁷ Without this step, the politically-aligned forces that are transferred to the MoPA will remain reliant on their respective political parties.¹⁵⁸

CJTF-OIR Reports Incremental Progress in MoPA Warfighting Capabilities

CJTF-OIR reported no significant changes to Coalition advising efforts with the KSF due to the Israel-Hamas conflict other than a “very brief” pause in engagements with key leaders.¹⁵⁹ The battle rhythm, number of briefings, and level of advising remained unchanged.¹⁶⁰ Advisors continued to meet with the senior MoPA leadership to advance the Coalition’s Partner Force Development Plan.¹⁶¹

CJTF-OIR said that the ISIS threat in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) is “largely contained” and that ISIS activities in the IKR have been near non-existent for quite some time.¹⁶² However, the KSF continued to conduct operations against ISIS, including 36 operations conducted independently or in partnership with the CTS and various other ISF units independent of Coalition forces, CJTF-OIR said.¹⁶³

Additionally, efforts to create ISF-KSF Joint Brigades took a step forward during the quarter as one of the brigades began initial training in December, the DIA said, citing a press report.¹⁶⁴ The Joint Brigades, staffed by Iraqi Army and RGB personnel, are being created to eliminate security gaps between federal Iraq and the IKR, which ISIS exploits.¹⁶⁵

CJTF-OIR reported that the KSF is capable of executing operations and maintaining counterterrorism pressure on ISIS relatively independently with varying levels of success due to differences in capabilities between KSF forces.¹⁶⁶ (See Table 2.)

Shoresh Ismail, Minister of Peshmerga Affairs, returned to his position on November 27 after more than a year out of office following a conflict with PUK President Bafel Talabani.

Table 2.
Status of MoPA Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Capability
Mission Planning	The MoPA Operations Center (MoPOC) is developing the capability to plan limited combined arms operations. However, mission planning is largely executed at the Sector Commander level, with which Coalition advisors do not directly interface. The operations center was established to plan and coordinate operations for MoPA forces but it is not yet fully operational and does not possess the ability to plan operations. Elements of a U.S. Army Security Force Assistance Brigade trained MoPA staff on the military decision-making processes and operations planning.
KSF Ground Operations	MoPA units are effective in executing counterinsurgency operations in their areas of responsibility. Coalition advisors have focused on the development of ISF-KSF Joint Brigades that will be best placed to conduct counter-ISIS operations south of the Kurdistan Coordination Line.
Intelligence	Intelligence collection in the IKR is “efficient” but relies almost solely on human intelligence sources. Coalition Forces delivered a train-the-trainer advanced intelligence course to staff from the Directorate of Intelligence to improve intelligence gathering capabilities. Coalition advisor focused on creating the MoPA’s intelligence collection plan and on advising the MoPA on future integration of the PUMA Unmanned Aerial System (UAS).
Command and Control	The MoPOC has an elementary ability to exercise command and control over its subordinate formations. The MoPOC is expected to synchronize all military operations in the IKR in the future. Coalition advising focused on refining MoPOC command and control processes and procedures.
Fire Support	MoPA artillery units have not executed combined arms operations since 2017. Artillery regiments are distributed under the 1st and 2nd Support Force Commands, but their command and communication structure is unpracticed and their capabilities have not been verified. The regiments exercise twice a year with live ammunition, but only in battery-size units and without supported infantry units. In addition, the MoPA lacks the capability to counter unmanned aerial systems. Coalition advising has focused on helping the MoPA understand how best to employ artillery in support of its formations.
Logistics and Sustainment	The MoPA made steady progress in improving the logistics and sustainment of the force. CJTF-OIR assessed that the two regional logistic hubs have sufficient facilities, manpower, and equipment to achieve initial operating capability, however the hubs did not operate during the quarter due to a delay in awarding of the FMF funded contract to support training and equipping at the hubs. Coalition advising focused on starting the hubs’ basic operations. In 2024, the hubs will work toward full operating capacity status and Coalition advising will shift to inventory, accountability, and maintenance management.
Information Operations	KSF information operations publicize cooperation with the Coalition and KSF, not counter-ISIS operations. CJTF-OIR said that it will take some time before the KSF is capable of including information operations as an element of combat power. Information operations about ISIS are typically posted on social media sites, including Facebook, X, Telegram, and Instagram, at the conclusion of counter-ISIS operations, and not before or during those operations. The quality of photos varies. Coalition advisors advised the MoPA to create an assessment process for reviewing its own information activities, which it did for the months of September and October. Further advice has been given on how to link information operations into operations planning. Additionally, division media cells were advised to coordinate better with subordinate RGB media cells.

Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 OIR 021, 24.1 OIR 028, and 24.1 OIR 029, 12/15/2023; State, vetting comments, 1/24/2024.

SYRIAN PARTNER FORCES

To achieve its mission, CJTF-OIR works with vetted local partner forces in Syria, including the SDF in northeastern Syria and the Syrian Free Army (SFA), farther south along Syria’s southeastern border.¹⁶⁷

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.¹⁶⁸ The SFA secures a deconfliction zone within a 55-kilometer radius around the At Tanf Garrison, near the confluence of Syria’s border with Jordan and Iraq. (See page 29.) The SFA provides Coalition force protection against ISIS and Iran-aligned militia group positions surrounding the deconfliction zone.¹⁶⁹

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.¹⁷⁰ Coalition forces also support SDF operations in Raqqah governorate.¹⁷¹ CJTF-OIR works with the SFA on defensive military operations and to enable them to sustain themselves and the nearby Rukban displaced persons camp.¹⁷²

CJTF-OIR reported that in early October, tribal fighters launched a large scale attack against an SDF headquarters and several SDF checkpoints in the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV).

SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

SDF Faces Multi-pronged “Possibly Existential Threats”

During the quarter, the SDF continued to partner with Coalition forces in Syria on counter-ISIS operations and training despite security challenges posed by Iran-aligned groups, an Arab tribal uprising, and Turkish aerial bombardments.¹⁷³ Some training and partnered counter-ISIS operations were paused temporarily in October.¹⁷⁴

SDF Commander General Mazloum Kobane said in a newspaper interview in late November 2023 that Iran-aligned groups and the Syrian regime increased attacks not only against U.S. forces, but also against the SDF since October 7. He said a drone attack struck an SDF ammunition depot in Dayr az Zawr, injuring several SDF personnel and causing extensive damage.¹⁷⁵

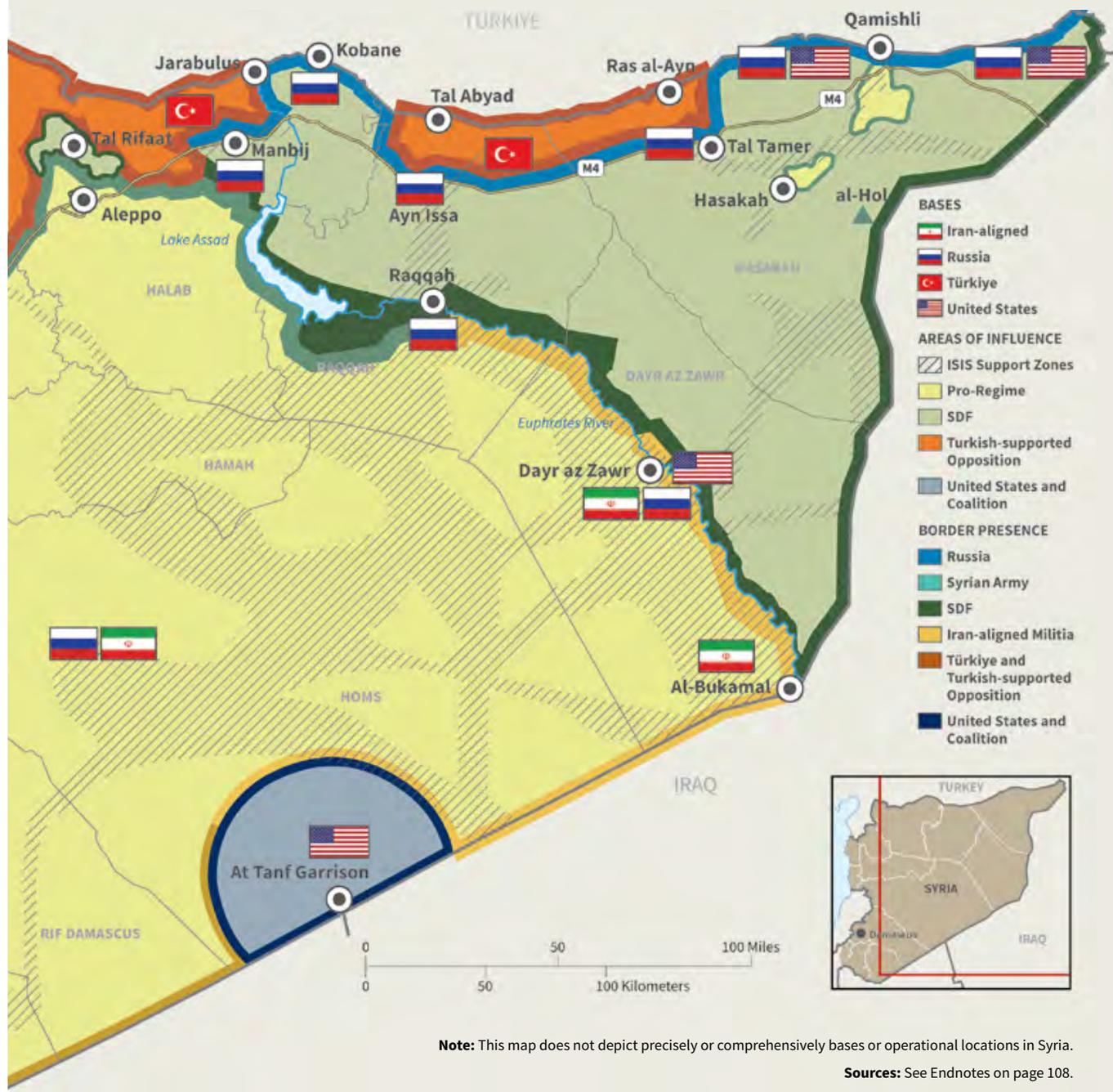
The SDF also remained embroiled in conflict with Arab tribal militia groups in Dayr az Zawr governorate. Tensions erupted in August 2023, when long-simmering grievances against Kurdish security force domination in the predominantly Arab region bubbled over after the SDF removed the commander of the Dayr az Zawr Military Council, accusing him of criminal activity and colluding with the Syrian regime.¹⁷⁶ CJTF-OIR reported that in early October, tribal fighters launched a large-scale attack against an SDF headquarters and several SDF checkpoints in the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV).¹⁷⁷

Though the heaviest fighting has since subsided, skirmishes continued during the quarter. CJTF-OIR reported that tribal fighters have emerged as a “full-fledged resistance movement” that is receiving explicit support from the Syrian regime and its Iranian allies on the western side of the Euphrates River, where resistance fighters resupply, rearm and launch attacks across the river in SDF-controlled villages on the eastern side.¹⁷⁸ CJTF-OIR said that while Arab militias are unlikely to gain control over areas held by the SDF, the fighting in

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 108.

September forced the SDF to shift a significant portion of its forces and military equipment into Dayr az Zawr governorate to counter the increasingly organized resistance movement.¹⁷⁹

At the same time, the SDF continued to face a robust aerial Turkish bombardment in northern portions of the ESSA in Hasakah governorate and in SDF-controlled areas of Raqqah and Aleppo governorates. The Turkish attacks degraded SDF financial resources and forced the SDF to “split its attention between two possibly existential threats,” CJTF-OIR reported.¹⁸⁰ The SDF has a core of Kurdish fighters from the Kurdish People’s Protection Units, which Türkiye views as indistinguishable from the PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that has waged a violent campaign in Türkiye.¹⁸¹

CJTF-OIR said with the escalation of Turkish strikes against SDF and PKK targets in northern Syria in early October, the SDF relocated some of its assets back from the MERV to the north, diluting security in the ESSA.¹⁸² The SDF reduced patrols in southern and eastern Dayr az Zawr where ISIS has traditionally had the most support and freedom of movement, allowing the group to escalate its attack levels on isolated checkpoints in Dayr as Zawr and Hasakah governorates in September, October, and November compared with the previous 90-day period.¹⁸³

CJTF-OIR said that Turkish strikes slowed in late October, allowing the SDF to reposition assets back in Dayr az Zawr and work with the Coalition on efforts to smooth relations with Arab tribal groups. CJTF-OIR said it continued to hold key leader engagements with the SDF and tribal leaders, and develop SDF capability through training programs to help calm the tensions.¹⁸⁴ CJTF-OIR did not assess that the resistance in Dayr az Zawr impacted the SDF’s ability to maintain security in the ESSA, notwithstanding the reduced patrols and increased ISIS attacks.¹⁸⁵

During the quarter, the SDF conducted a total of 37 partnered operations with Coalition forces, CJTF-OIR reported.

Coalition Continues to Partner with SDF on Counter-ISIS Train, Advise and Assist Mission

During the quarter, the SDF conducted a total of 37 partnered operations with Coalition forces, CJTF-OIR reported.¹⁸⁶ The SDF also announced multiple operations during in which they apprehended senior ISIS operatives, including a November 12 operation in which its

Table 3.

SDF and Coalition Operations Against ISIS During the Quarter

	September/October	November	December*
Partnered Operations	23	16	N/A
U.S. Only Operation	3	0	N/A
ISIS Operatives Captured	45	19	N/A
ISIS Operatives Killed	3	1	N/A

*December numbers not available.

Sources: USCENCOM, press release, “September/October 2023 Month in Review: The Defeat ISIS Mission in Iraq and Syria,” 11/20/2023; USCENCOM, press release, “November 2023 Month in Review: The Defeat ISIS Mission in Iraq and Syria,” 12/7/2023.



Partner force members demonstrate team infantry maneuvers during an advanced skills training course conducted by the Coalition. (U.S. Army photo)

forces captured Muhammad Sakr al-Bakr, who the SDF said served as the deputy military commander of ISIS in Syria and played a key role in planning the January 2022 Ghwayran Detention Facility attack.¹⁸⁷ In a separate operation on November 21, the SDF, supported by Coalition forces, captured Muhammed Mahmoud Homada, who the SDF said was responsible for smuggling children of ISIS-affiliated families from displaced persons camps to Turkish-held areas.¹⁸⁸

Combined Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant continued to train and advise the SDF in their operations to maintain the degradation and enduring defeat of ISIS.¹⁸⁹ CJTF-OIR said that through the training and advisement, the SDF continued to increase its ability to conduct conventional-type operations.¹⁹⁰

Coalition partnering included support for SDF operations to target ISIS across northeastern Syria, specialized training to security forces to guard detention facilities and displaced persons camps, and improvement of security at detention facilities.¹⁹¹

CJTF-OIR reported that there were no partnered SDF operations between October 1 and October 16.¹⁹² CJTF-OIR said the pause in operations could be attributed to the destabilization in security conditions due to increased Turkish military strikes on SDF positions in the north at that time.¹⁹³

The SDF guard force training program was also temporarily suspended due to the Turkish bombardments; the training resumed in November.¹⁹⁴ CJTF-OIR reported no other significant changes in its advisement of the SDF, despite the ongoing Iran-aligned militia attacks.¹⁹⁵

CJTF-OIR said that the SDF maintains the ability to successfully execute operations and maintain counterterrorism pressure on ISIS independently but continued to rely on some Coalition force capabilities, such as some sensitive site exploitation.¹⁹⁶

Some SDF Detention Facilities are at Risk of Attack and Breakout Attempts

The SDF operates 22 detention facilities holding an estimated 9,050 ISIS detainees, as of an August assessment. Of those facilities, CJTF-OIR reported that 8 facilities are at risk of attack and/or breakout attempts by ISIS detainees and require “immediate improvements.”¹⁹⁷ Plans are in place to provide the at-risk facilities with CTEF-funded barrier materials to address immediate security concerns in the coming quarter.¹⁹⁸ CJTF-OIR said that, according to the current assessment of their viability, the majority of detention facilities are “moderately” secure and sufficient to keep detainees from escaping and rejoining the ISIS fight.¹⁹⁹

CJTF-OIR said a longer-term plan for at risk facilities is to utilize the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to assess engineering projects required at four priority sites with consultation and site visits expected in the next 2 fiscal years. Construction and delivery is expected in FY 2025.²⁰⁰ CJTF-OIR said there is also a bio-enrollment plan to better account for detainees in the future.²⁰¹

CJTF-OIR said the plans to fortify existing detention facilities were developed in July 2023, after efforts to build new purpose-built detention facilities in northeastern Syria were deemed not viable.²⁰² Eight facilities were prioritized as needing immediate improvements.²⁰³ The remaining 14 facilities were assessed as sufficiently secure to keep detainees from escaping and rejoining the ISIS fight, though CJTF-OIR noted that threat vulnerability assessments at most of the facilities are out of date and may require subsequent visits and assessments.²⁰⁴

CJTF-OIR said that both general security at detention facilities and the SDF ability to provide physical security varies by facility.²⁰⁵ Overall, the SDF demonstrated proficiency in its ability to manage the facilities and in moving ISIS detainees.²⁰⁶ However, CJTF-OIR did identify some shortcomings in SDF professionalism, lack of engagement, and focus. CJTF-OIR said that there is no evidence of insider threats.²⁰⁷

Guard Force Training Behind Schedule Due to SDF Lack of Engagement

CJTF-OIR said that the training and improvement of physical security at SDF detention facilities continued in person. The training curriculum includes topics such as escalation of force; accountability protocols; proper detainee escort and transfer procedures and basic principles of the Law of Armed Conflict focusing on humane treatment of prisoners. However, the United States and the SDF continue to identify and train SDF instructors to supplement the U.S. personnel in order to create a sustainable indigenous training capability.²⁰⁸

CJTF-OIR added that while reports of inhumane treatment of detainees by SDF Asayish forces continued, those reports have decreased.²⁰⁹ CJTF-OIR reported that it runs two guard training programs: Spectre Castle, which trains detention facility guards, and Spectre Village, which trains guards for displaced persons camps. The training programs are held at different locations in eastern Syria.²¹⁰ CJTF-OIR said as of November, 2,991 guards had been trained under the two programs (2,471 Asayish and 520 SDF forces).²¹¹

CJTF-OIR reported that it runs two guard training programs: Spectre Castle, which trains detention facility guards, and Spectre Village, which trains guards for displaced persons camps.

During the quarter, 121 guards graduated from Spectre Village training, including 7 women, bringing the total number of guards trained through that program to 1,766. There were no guards trained under Spectre Castle and the total number trained remained at 1,225.

CJTF-OIR reported that the guard force training is currently behind scheduled, largely because of a lack of SDF engagement with the training.²¹² CJTF-OIR said that the SDF is comfortable with Coalition support and did not want to work independently. CJTF-OIR assessed that while it does not have concrete evidence, there may be a wider recruitment issue with SDF, due to recent conflicts with Türkiye.²¹³ In order to minimize adverse effect, the training pace will need to increase drastically, CJTF-OIR said.²¹⁴

During the quarter, 121 guards graduated from Spectre Village training, including 7 women, bringing the total number of guards trained through that program to 1,766. There were no guards trained under Spectre Castle and the total number trained remained at 1,225.²¹⁵

SYRIAN FREE ARMY

SFA Making Progress Through Coalition Training

Coalition forces also continued training the SFA, focusing on defensive tasks while promoting stability within the deconfliction zone around At Tanf Garrison.²¹⁶ During the quarter, the SFA, along with Coalition forces, conducted 53 partnered training operations focused on building proficiency in defensive operations.²¹⁷ The SFA also regularly patrols the deconfliction zone around At Tanf Garrison independently to curb smuggling into the nearby Rukban displaced persons camp.²¹⁸ CJTF-OIR said SFA operations ensure the local area is free of ISIS influence, while the SFA also conducts counter-drug smuggling operations. The SFA made two drug seizures this quarter.²¹⁹

Iran-aligned militias regularly targeted At Tanf Garrison during the quarter with rocket and drone strikes.²²⁰ During the quarter, the SFA engaged in one kinetic operation, on October 18, when it recovered the material from the crash site of a drone that was shot down.²²¹

CJTF-OIR said key to its mission of advising, assisting and enabling the SFA is the careful cultivation of the force through instruction on how to plan and execute defensive military and sustainment operations for both themselves and the Rukban camp.²²² CJTF-OIR said that the aim is teach the SFA to think like a proficient fighting force.²²³ Through extensive and frequent training, Coalition and SFA forces have built a trusting relationship, CJTF-OIR said.²²⁴

According to CJTF-OIR, the SFA demonstrated initiative in maintaining the integrity of the deconfliction zone by stifling smuggling and the influence of malign actors. The SFA have developed its own tactics, techniques, procedures and best practices for security operations and have been a stabilizing influence within both the deconfliction zone and the Rukban camp.²²⁵

During the quarter, SFA training continued to focus on building proficiency in individual and collective tasks. CJTF-OIR said the SFA made measured progress this quarter toward marksmanship, maneuver proficiency, and fires proficiency and continuing to demonstrate growth and development as a professional fighting force.²²⁶ Coalition forces provided live fire exercises, maneuver, and fires training to the SFA, focusing on building familiarity and proficiency with numerous weapon systems.²²⁷ CJTF-OIR said that the SFA continued to build task proficiency in maneuver operations (mounted and dismounted) while incorporating mortars, using communications equipment, medical tasks, planning defensive operations, messaging in the information environment (including on social media), and use of individual weapons.²²⁸

Coalition forces have started to take a more hands-off approach to training the SFA in order to encourage greater independence. The SFA still plans to conduct higher-echelon live fire exercises in the next quarter.²²⁹

Coalition forces also extensively trained the SFA to conduct its own internal training for new and current members.²³⁰ Training takes places at both the staff and fighting unit levels.²³¹

DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS

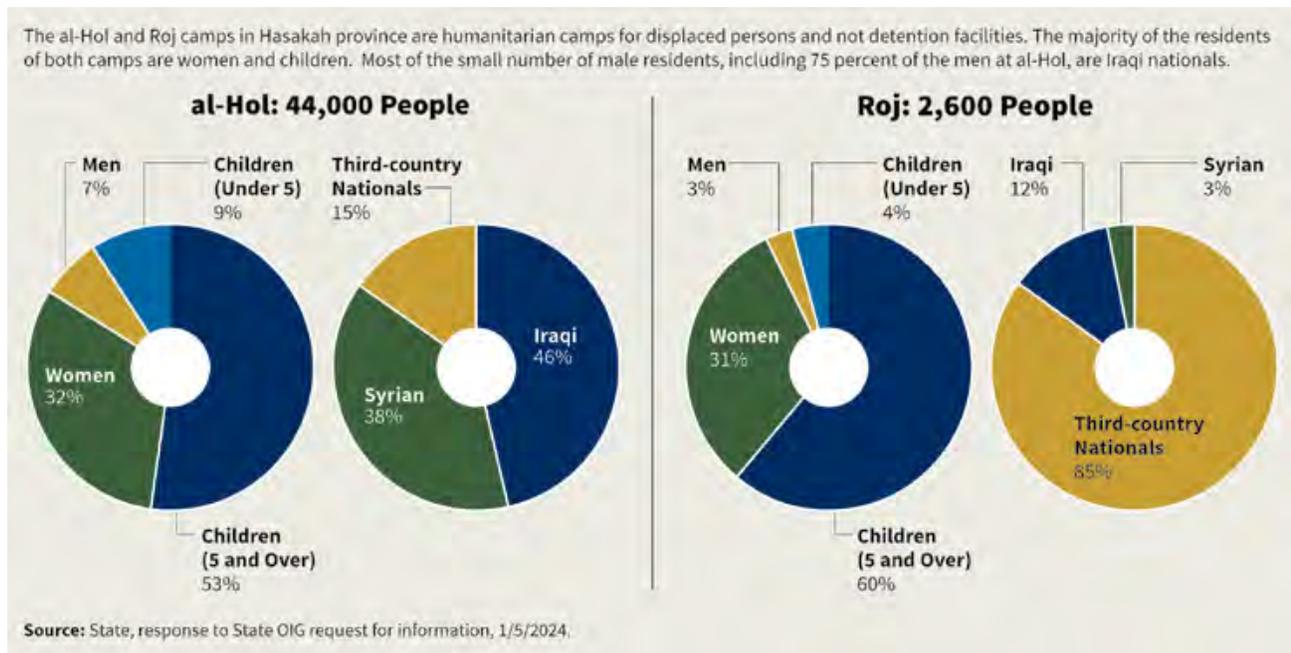
The United States continued to emphasize the ongoing need for multi-national efforts to repatriate, rehabilitate, or reintegrate displaced persons from Syria, particularly those residing in the al-Hol camp, where humanitarian and security concerns remained a priority.

State reported that the overall pace of repatriations from northeastern Syria in 2023 had increased by nearly a third compared to the previous year, easing the burden on humanitarian services and “reducing the risk of ISIS exploitation of this vulnerable population.”²³²

CJTF-OIR said that it continued to support the repatriation of foreign nationals from al-Hol as part of its key line of effort of preventing an ISIS resurgence, and that steady progress was being made to reduce the size of the camp’s population.²³³ During the 2023 calendar year, the population of al-Hol decreased by 17.2 percent, through bilateral and U.S.-coordinated repatriations. This included a 24 percent reduction of the Iraqi population.²³⁴

Figure 4.

Demographics of al-Hol and Roj Displaced Persons Camps



In both the al-Hol and Roj camps overall criminal activity decreased over the past year.

SECURITY

Violent Incidents Decrease in al-Hol and Roj Camps

State reported that the security situation in the al-Hol “remain[ed] a challenge for local security and humanitarian partners” despite the decrease in the number of violent incidents and no killings since November 2022.²³⁵ In both the al-Hol and Roj camps overall criminal activity decreased over the past year. State reported that “crimes against property” and “non-fatal violence” remained the two most common crimes reported.²³⁶

State reported that it continued to work with the DoD and USAID to coordinate with local security actors on security measures in al-Hol, including ensuring that humanitarian recommendations on security measures are considered in any ongoing efforts.²³⁷ State said that these humanitarian recommendations on security measures include ensuring that there is 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.²³⁸

SDF Continues Crackdown on ISIS Activity in Al-Hol

CJTF-OIR said that the reduction in population, along with other measures, such as better guard training and additional police stations, has helped improve the security and humanitarian situation in al-Hol, and made it more difficult for ISIS to exploit conditions to radicalize residents to violence.²³⁹ CJTF-OIR said that it also anticipated further transfers of security apparatuses for the camp, including entry control points and defense infrastructure.²⁴⁰

While violence has decreased, the DIA reported that ISIS continued to target youth from al-Hol and other displaced persons camps in Syria for indoctrination and training as part of its efforts at recruitment and resurgence.²⁴¹ The DIA assessed, based on open source reporting, that poor conditions in al-Hol likely remained favorable for ISIS to exert a coercive influence on the camp population.²⁴²

CJTF-OIR reported that both the SDF and Asayish internal security forces operate at al-Hol, with the SDF responsible for outside security for the camp and the Asayish responsible for security inside the camp.²⁴³ During the quarter, partner forces arrested suspected ISIS sympathizers and confiscated weapons and military equipment in an attempt to curb ISIS activities within the camp.²⁴⁴

On December 27, in a joint operation in al-Hol with Asayish forces and in cooperation with Coalition forces, the SDF killed a senior ISIS official believed to be responsible for planning ISIS attacks and operations in the camp.²⁴⁵ The SDF said that Abu Obeida al-Iraqi was an Iraqi national responsible for killings, smuggling children out of the camp for ISIS training, planning attacks targeting security and military points, and threatening the civilian associations and humanitarian groups operating in the camp.²⁴⁶

The SDF said that it took 18 months of monitoring and investigation within al-Hol to identify Abu Obeida as the mastermind behind the activities and where he was hiding. He was found wearing an explosives belt and was killed in fighting with SDF forces.²⁴⁷

Al-Hol Guards Lack Professionalism Despite Training

CJTF-OIR reported that guard forces at al-Hol continue to demonstrate a lack of professionalism despite having reportedly completed guard force training.²⁴⁸ In particular, the guards lack the discipline to conduct patrols around camp and the guard force is not effectively utilized.²⁴⁹ CJTF-OIR said there remains the risk of guards being susceptible to ISIS bribes.²⁵⁰ In addition, there are incidents of guards diverting or stealing assistance intended for camp residents.²⁵¹

CJTF-OIR said that partner forces have established patrols around the perimeter of al-Hol to attempt to put an end to ISIS smuggling within the camp. CJTF-OIR also said that while additional trained guards have increased the security force presence within the camp,²⁵² However, CJTF-OIR reported that the number of guards it observed during site visits to the camp were lower than the number of guards reported by the SDF.²⁵³

CJTF-OIR identified several problems with the ongoing guard training.²⁵⁴ CJTF-OIR said that following the pause in training in early October, the cohort of trainees was brought back to training and “summarily passed” the course without further training.²⁵⁵ CJTF-OIR said that it SDF/Asayish training is scheduled for specific times and dates but the training is disrupted at times due to Turkish military activity.²⁵⁶

CJTF-OIR reported that guard forces at al-Hol continue to demonstrate a lack of professionalism despite having reportedly completed guard force training.

HUMANITARIAN SERVICES

U.S. Government Funds Essential Services, Coordinates Closely with Donors

State reported that this quarter the U.S. Government continued to fund several humanitarian partners working at the al-Hol and Roj camps to provide life-saving and essential services to camp residents, including food, water and sanitation services, shelter, health, protection, and education services.²⁵⁷ State reported that priority actions included improving the sustainability of service provision, including upgrading the camp’s water infrastructure and shelter layout.²⁵⁸

State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) supports two international organizations to provide humanitarian response throughout Syria, across multiple sectors, including camp coordination and camp management. State PRM also funds three nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners in Syria, and some of this funding is for humanitarian programming in northeastern Syria.²⁵⁹

State reported that the al-Hol Working Group continued to coordinate U.S. Government efforts related to the al-Hol and Roj camps, including repatriations, returns, improvements to camp security, and service provision.²⁶⁰ State said that improving humanitarian assistance at the al-Hol camp is a priority for the United States. As with the humanitarian response throughout Syria, humanitarian needs for al-Hol vastly outpace the availability of funding from the international community. State said that because of this shortfall, donors including the United States, coordinate closely on funding priorities to ensure that the United States is meeting the most pressing short- and long-term needs of camp residents.²⁶¹

During the quarter, at least 1,690 individuals were repatriated from al-Hol to their countries of origin, including 1,356 Iraqis through the Iraqi government-led repatriation.

USAID and State also continued to implement efforts to support the return of Syrian displaced persons from the al-Hol camp to communities in Syria.²⁶² USAID's programming implementation of the plan focused on a case management system that provides referral services and monitors the reintegration of returnees in Syria.²⁶³ USAID provided tailored services based on needs assessments for each returnee household.²⁶⁴ Additionally, USAID is providing services to host communities in Syria to improve social cohesion and access to livelihoods and essential services.²⁶⁵

REPATRIATIONS

Countries Increase Willingness to Repatriate Nationals

State reported that the United States “continues to use bilateral and multilateral engagements to encourage host countries to repatriate their nationals, which has resulted in an increased willingness to repatriate among many partners.”²⁶⁶ During the quarter, at least 1,690 individuals were repatriated from al-Hol to their countries of origin, including 1,356 Iraqis through the Iraqi government-led repatriation.²⁶⁷

CJTF-OIR reported that at least 179 third-country nationals were repatriated from al-Hol and Roj.²⁶⁸ In October, the Kyrgyz Republic repatriated 83 women and children and, in early December, it repatriated 96 additional women and children from al-Hol.²⁶⁹ Russia repatriated 34 children and the United Kingdom repatriated 1 woman and 5 children. In addition, 100 Iraqi detainees were repatriated this quarter.²⁷⁰ CJTF-OIR said that Coalition forces facilitated and coordinated movement and transfer to host nations.²⁷¹

On October 26, Türkiye hosted a meeting of the Coalition's Foreign Terrorist Fighter Working Group. At the meeting, the State Bureau of Counterterrorism's Deputy Coordinator who oversees terrorist detentions and countering violent extremism gave remarks regarding the humanitarian, human rights, and security challenges posed by ISIS fighters detained in northeastern Syria, as well as their family members and other displaced persons at the al-Hol and Roj camps.²⁷²

State reported that it was not aware of any Syrians from al-Hol or Roj camps returning to their home communities in the quarter, and that it was not aware of any Syrian terrorist fighters being released from detention.²⁷³

Displaced Iraqi Families Continue to Arrive in Jeddah 1

Between September 25 and December 31, 355 households comprising 736 individuals were transferred from al-Hol to the Jeddah 1 camp in Iraq.²⁷⁴ According to a media report, returnees from al-Hol will likely stay in Jeddah 1 facility for at least 1 month for rehabilitation and security checks before they resettle either in their areas of origin or other areas.²⁷⁵ USAID reported that the majority of these households were headed by women.²⁷⁶

State PRM reported that as of the end of December, the total number of Iraqis repatriated from al-Hol had reached 1,901 households (7,553 individuals), and the total number of those who departed Jeddah 1 for resettlement in Iraq were 1,085 households (4,525 individuals).²⁷⁷ On December 21, the 13th convoy arrived at Jeddah 1 from al-Hol with 169 families

(620 individuals). This marked the second time the Iraqi government completed back-to-back monthly convoys. State PRM reported that since May 2021, a total of 7,553 Iraqis had been repatriated from al-Hol.²⁷⁸

Iraqi Families at Jeddah 1 Face Obstacles to Reintegration and Resettlement

The United Nations, in collaboration with the Iraqi government, developed One UN Plan for Iraqi Returns from Northeast Syria to guide ongoing reintegration and return efforts. Many displaced Iraqis have been unwilling or unable to leave Jeddah 1 due to the lack of civil documentation and obstacles in their areas of origin.²⁷⁹ State said that these obstacles include insufficient shelter, insecurity, a lack of assurance that they will be safe in their communities, a lack of livelihood, difficulty obtaining civil documentation, and a lack of basic services at their place of reintegration.²⁸⁰

Al-Hol returnees to Iraq face multiple challenges to reintegration into host communities, including a lengthy security and approval vetting process by the Iraqi government. Returnees receive limited rehabilitation services for al-Hol camp returnees in Jeddah 1 prior to their onward movement to host communities.²⁸¹ Returnees and host communities also lack sufficient information about reintegration.²⁸² In addition, unresolved grievances and conflicts in communities of return creates risks.²⁸³ Coordination for reintegration is also weak at both the local and national levels in Iraq, USAID said.²⁸⁴

Returnees also face perceptions by Iraqis that they are affiliated with ISIS.²⁸⁵ A large portion of the Iraqis that remain in al-Hol camp arrived in the camp after the 2019 Battle of Baghuz, when ISIS lost territorial control and surviving ISIS family members arrived at al-Hol along with other displaced persons. These Iraqis are perceived to have stronger ties to ISIS, which further complicates and delays the Iraqi government security screening process that is required to return to Iraq.²⁸⁶ In addition, female-headed households and children tend to 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.²⁸⁷

Jeddah 1 Facility Accommodates Families from al-Hol

According to State, the Iraqi government did not undertake any substantial efforts during the quarter to improve conditions at Jeddah 1. Most humanitarian assistance and services are supported by international donors, primarily State PRM.²⁸⁸ State said it continues to monitor the occupancy level at Jeddah 1, the rate of returns from al-Hol and the rate of departures from Jeddah 1 to communities of origin or other areas. Services, especially health services and education, would need to be scaled up if the Jeddah 1 population increases.²⁸⁹

Within Jeddah 1, State PRM supports camp management and support activities, such as infrastructure rehabilitation, care, and maintenance, tenting and physical site management; and protection services including mental health and psychosocial support, case management, and referrals for civil documentation.²⁹⁰ While State PRM funding supports the bulk of assistance inside Jeddah 1, as well as reintegration assistance in communities of return. USAID BHA assistance is limited to supporting some ancillary services within Jeddah 1.²⁹¹

State PRM reported that since May 2021, a total of 7,553 Iraqis had been repatriated from al-Hol.

During the quarter, Turkish forces arrested at least 150 suspected ISIS-affiliated individuals in at least 26 Turkish provinces in a series of counter-ISIS operations, the DIA said, citing media reports.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

This quarter's attacks by Iran-aligned militias in Iraq and Syria complicated an already complex operating environment for Coalition forces by increasing force protection needs, influencing and distracting partner forces and partner relationships, and escalating the risk of further conflict.²⁹² (See page 29.) Actions by other third parties—including Türkiye, the Syrian regime, and Russia—also affected the operating environment for CJTF-OIR and its partner forces.²⁹³

Russia, Türkiye, Conduct Counter-ISIS Operations

Syrian regime, Russian, and Turkish forces continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations during the quarter.²⁹⁴ Following an ISIS attack in November that killed at least 34 pro-regime forces, the Russian military conducted airstrikes on ISIS positions in the Homs governorate.²⁹⁵ The DIA reported that the positioning of pro-regime forces in the Syrian Desert is likely serving to partially constrain ISIS fighters concentrated in the area.²⁹⁶

During the quarter, Turkish forces arrested at least 150 suspected ISIS-affiliated individuals in at least 26 Turkish provinces in a series of counter-ISIS operations, the DIA said, citing media reports.²⁹⁷ Most of the arrests occurred in Ankara and Istanbul.²⁹⁸ On December 19, Türkiye announced that in an operation in southern Türkiye, it arrested Huzeye Al Muri, the top ISIS financial leader for Syria.²⁹⁹

SYRIAN REGIME

Syrian Regime Distances Itself from Israel-Hamas Conflict

The DIA noted that while the Syrian regime sharply condemned Israeli airstrikes on the Damascus and Aleppo airports in November, it has also distanced itself from Hamas.³⁰⁰ According to CJTF-OIR, the regime has tepid relations with Hamas.³⁰¹

CJTF-OIR said that while the regime has given rhetorical support to the Palestinian cause, Syrian leadership during the quarter maintained that Syria has no intention of engaging in the Israel-Hamas conflict. The Syrian regime informed Iran in October that Syria is facing economic challenges and would not be able to bear the consequence of a regional conflict spreading into Syrian territory.³⁰²

CJTF-OIR reported that because the Syrian regime is opposed to a larger regional conflict spreading to its territory, the Coalition expects the impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict on the operating environment in Syria to be “negligible.”³⁰³ On December 25, an Israeli strike killed a top Iranian commander in Syria outside Damascus, renewing concerns that the war in Gaza could escalate into a regional conflict.³⁰⁴

RUSSIA

Russian Forces Maintain Communication, Continue to Violate Deconfliction Protocols with Coalition Forces

The DIA reported that during the quarter, despite the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, Russian forces in Syria maintained deconfliction communications with Coalition forces, while Russia continued to tolerate Israeli airstrikes in Syria.³⁰⁵

Meanwhile Russian forces continued to violate deconfliction and safety protocols established with the Coalition.³⁰⁶ CJTF-OIR reported that Russian aircraft routinely flew in the vicinity of Coalition forces, presenting a risk to Coalition forces and equipment, and a potential for “unintended escalations through misunderstanding or misinterpretation of intent.”³⁰⁷

According to CJTF-OIR, At Tanf Garrison is the point of greatest tension over the safety arrangements, because while the protocols loosely cover the Coalition base, they are not enshrined there the way they are at other deconfliction zones.³⁰⁸ CJTF-OIR said that the Russian military takes advantage of the more dubious nature of the protocols at At Tanf to justify its overflights.³⁰⁹ Additionally, Russia uses Coalition flights in northern Syria that are not in the area covered by deconfliction protocols as grounds for its “unsafe and unprofessional” actions, CJTF-OIR said.³¹⁰

CJTF-OIR said that to a small extent, Russian military aircraft have interfered with the collection efforts of Coalition ISR assets and placed undue stress on CJTF-OIR units on the ground in vicinity of Russian overflights.³¹¹ Commanders on the ground in Syria often take additional force protection measures when Russian aircraft enter their deconfliction zone.³¹²

According to CJTF-OIR, the reasons for Russian military violations range from reciprocal actions in response to actual or perceived Coalition violations of protocols to a Russian military obligation to the Syrian regime, including by conducting regime-requested missions or portraying itself as protecting the sovereignty of Syria.³¹³ The Russian military routinely publishes information portraying Coalition forces as being solely responsible for all violations, and publishes near-daily statements of Coalition violations of the bilateral protocols and of Syrian sovereignty, and accusing the Coalition of intentionally destabilizing Syria.³¹⁴

Russian Military Bombards in Northwestern Syria

The Syrian regime continued to rely on its Russian allies to provide military support, particularly air support, for Syrian military operations targeting the opposition in northwest Syria.³¹⁵ The DIA said that during the quarter, Russian forces continued to support the regime by conducting airstrikes against remaining opposition forces in northwestern Syria’s Idlib governorate and conducting parachute and air assault training with regime special operations forces.³¹⁶

On October 5, the Syrian regime, with Russian assistance, launched a bombing campaign that hit civilian population centers in Idlib. The bombardment was in retaliation for an

CJTF-OIR reported that Russian aircraft routinely flew in the vicinity of Coalition forces, presenting a risk to Coalition forces and equipment, and a potential for “unintended escalations through misunderstanding or misinterpretation of intent.”

attack on the regime’s Homs Military Academy on October 5 that killed 70 personnel and wounded 350, the DIA said.³¹⁷

The DIA said did not observe any significant changes to Russia’s support for or cooperation with the regime. The DIA said that Russia cooperated with Iranian forces following Israeli airstrikes in mid-November that targeted both the Aleppo and Damascus airports, granting Iranian forces access to the Russian-controlled airfield in Latakia.³¹⁸

TÜRKIYE

Türkiye continued to conduct strikes in northern Iraq and northern Syria during the quarter, targeting those it said were suspected members of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that has waged a violent campaign against Türkiye.³¹⁹ Turkish strikes targeted those it said were PKK forces and high-priority PKK officials both in the mountains of northern Iraq, where the PKK maintains bases, and in northern and eastern Syria.³²⁰

Following a PKK suicide attack at the entrance to the Turkish Interior Ministry in the capital Ankara on October 1, Türkiye launched a days-long bombardment of targets in Iraq and Syria.³²¹ According to State, the PKK claimed responsibility for the attack and dedicated the attack to a PKK leader killed by the Turkish security forces in mid-September.³²² Türkiye publicly stated that all entities in target areas that it sees as affiliated with the PKK, including civilian infrastructure, were valid targets.³²³ Türkiye makes no distinction between the SDF and PKK.³²⁴

On December 27, Türkiye struck 71 sites it said were linked to the PKK and its affiliates in Syria and northern Iraq in retaliation for the deaths of 12 Turkish soldiers killed during fighting with the PKK in northern Iraq, according to news reports.³²⁵

Why is Türkiye active in Iraq and Syria?

The PKK, a Kurdish separatist group that has waged a violent campaign against Türkiye since the 1980s, is considered a terrorist group by Türkiye, the United States, and other Western governments.³²⁶ Türkiye makes no distinction between the PKK and either the SANES—the de facto authority in northeastern Syria—or the multiethnic SDF.³²⁷ The backbone of the SDF is the predominantly Kurdish People’s Protection Units, which Türkiye considers the PKK’s Syrian militia. Türkiye also considers the Democratic Union Party, which is affiliated with the People’s Protection Units and dominates politics in northeastern Syria, to be an element of the PKK.³²⁸

In Iraq, Türkiye regularly conducts operations against PKK strongholds in the mountainous Iraqi Kurdistan Region but also strikes civilian infrastructure.³²⁹ According to State, Türkiye’s Minister of Defense said Türkiye had carried out military operations in Iraq and Syria consistent with the UN Charter “while respecting the sovereign rights and territorial integrity of our neighbors.”³³⁰

Türkiye Strikes More than 150 Locations in Syria, Killing Dozens, Damaging Critical Infrastructure

CJTF-OIR reported that Turkish attacks on the SDF have resulted in tensions between the SDF and U.S. forces, in part because Türkiye and the United States are NATO allies.³³¹ CJTF-OIR said that given its potential to erode the relationship, this tension between U.S. and SDF forces could result in threatening the safety of U.S. personnel working in Syria alongside SDF partners to defeat ISIS and maintain custody of ISIS-affiliated detainees.³³² Additionally, continued strikes against the SDF in Syria will likely reduce their ability to conduct operations in support of the Coalition, CJTF-OIR said.³³³

Between October 5 and October 10, Türkiye struck more than 150 locations in Syria it claimed were affiliated with Kurdish militants, killing and injuring dozens of people and damaging critical infrastructure.³³⁴ Human Rights Watch reported that the strikes disrupted water and electricity for millions of people, aggravating the region’s already dire humanitarian crisis.³³⁵ The SDF countered with what it said were strikes against Turkish and Turkish-backed forces in Syria.³³⁶ The SANES reported that Turkish strikes in Syria in September and October obstructed its efforts to combat ISIS.³³⁷

On October 9, Türkiye struck an Asayish training center in the Hasakah countryside, killing at least 30 Asayish personnel and injuring dozens more, a war monitor reported.³³⁸ On October 27, Turkish forces killed a senior SDF commander in Hasakah, Syria.³³⁹ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that the commander worked as a coordinator with Coalition forces and had previously survived an attempt on his life by Turkish drones. A woman and child were also injured, the war monitor reported.³⁴⁰

On December 5, Turkish intelligence used a car bomb to kill a senior SDF officer in Dayr az Zawr, according to social media sources.³⁴¹ The Turkish defense ministry said that strikes in December destroyed 29 targets, including caves, bunkers, shelters, oil facilities and warehouses.³⁴² The SDF said at least 8 civilians were killed and responded with strikes on Turkish forces, while calling on civilians in northern Syria to join the ranks of the SDF to help defend the region.³⁴³

State said Türkiye’s attacks caused harm to northeastern Syria’s economy. State said the United States was “concerned about military activity in northern Syria, its impacts on the civilian population and infrastructure, and the impact of the effectiveness of our operations to ensure the lasting defeat” of ISIS.³⁴⁴

U.S. Forces Shoot Down Turkish UAS after Deeming it a “Potential Threat”

On October 5, amidst the escalated Turkish bombardment, U.S. forces shot down a Turkish UAS that was conducting airstrikes in a U.S.-restricted operating zone less than a mile from U.S. forces in Syria.³⁴⁵ USCENTCOM reported that U.S. commanders assessed the UAS to be a potential threat and U.S. F-16s shot it down. The DoD described the action as “regrettable” but “prudent.”³⁴⁶

Between October 5 and October 10, Türkiye struck more than 150 locations in Syria it claimed were affiliated with Kurdish militants, killing and injuring dozens of people and damaging critical infrastructure.

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Following the incident, officials highlighted the need to coordinate and deconflict activities.³⁴⁷ Secretary of Defense Austin engaged his Turkish counterpart to reinforce the imperative for clear communication to avoid further incidents and to stress that protecting U.S. forces “is paramount,” the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy reported. U.S. officials continued to hold meetings with Turkish officials, highlighting the importance of the U.S.-Türkiye bilateral relationship and the common goal of defeating violent extremist organizations.³⁴⁸

Turkish Forces Continue Airstrikes in Iraq

CJTF-OIR reported that Türkiye carried out multiple airstrikes in northern Iraq, targeting what Türkiye said were PKK strongholds.³⁴⁹ The airstrikes, conducted throughout the quarter, killed dozens of PKK militants and “high-value” targets, according to State and media reports citing Turkish officials.³⁵⁰

According to a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Ankara citing Turkish media, high-value targets included the PKK’s logistical ringleader, Cahit Aktay, who was on the Turkish Ministry of Interior’s most wanted terrorist list, and Remzi Avci, who was sought by Türkiye’s Ministry of Interior for his activities in Iraq, Syria, and Türkiye.³⁵¹

On December 22 and 23, the PKK killed 12 members of the Turkish military in clashes in northern Iraq, according to a State summary of open source information and media reports.³⁵² The incidents were the deadliest for Türkiye in northern Iraq since the PKK executed 13 Turkish military and police hostages nearly 3 years ago, according to media reports.³⁵³

Türkiye responded to the attacks by destroying 29 PKK targets in northern Iraq, according to news reports.³⁵⁴ The Turkish Interior Ministry, cited in news reports, said the targets included bases, shelters, and oil facilities believed to be used by PKK militants.³⁵⁵ The reports said that at least 16 PKK militants had been killed.³⁵⁶ The reports said that Türkiye planned to reinforce its military bases in northern Iraq in response to the attacks.³⁵⁷

State noted that there were several media reports of civilian deaths “due to Turkish military operations” in northern Iraq.³⁵⁸ The Iraqi government and the KRG often protest Turkish airstrikes in northern Iraq as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty.³⁵⁹







USAID's ongoing rubble removal project clears destroyed houses of explosive remnants, helping Iraqis return home safely in Mosul, Iraq. (USAID 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 4.) The U.S. Government, primarily through State and USAID, remains the largest donor for stabilization and humanitarian programming in Iraq and Syria.³⁶⁰ 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.

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.³⁶¹ 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 47.)

Table 4.

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 the Syrian people, as envisioned in UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254

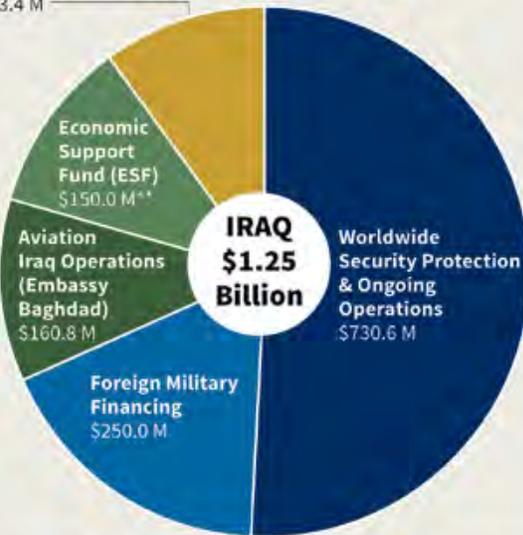
Source: State, "Integrated Country Strategy-Iraq," 5/30/2023; State, response to State OIG request for information, 12/20/2023.

STATE AND USAID FUNDING FOR IRAQ & SYRIA

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

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

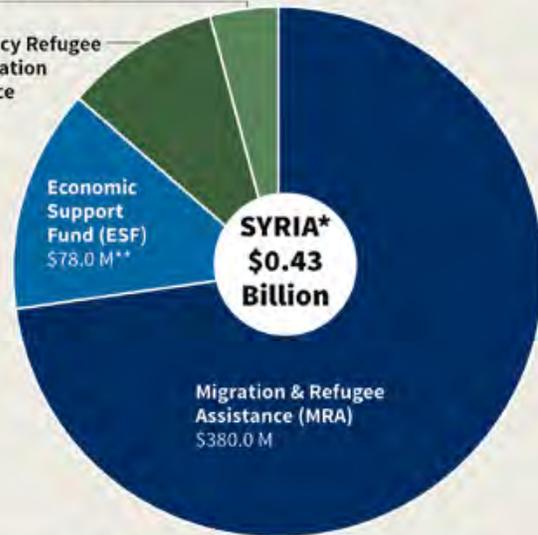
\$143.4 M



International Narcotics & Law Enforcement (INCLE); Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR); Diplomatic & Consular Programs & Operations; Worldwide Security Protection & Ongoing Operations

\$21.7 M

Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) \$50.0 M



Notes: *Includes funds for Syria regional response efforts. **Allocation of FY 2023 resources between offices is being finalized. Program allocations may not add to total due to rounding.

Enacted Funding for USAID Stabilization Programming in Iraq and Syria, FY 2020–FY 2023, in \$ Millions



Sources: State, response to State OIG request for information, 9/25/2023 and 10/13/2023; USAID, "Iraq-Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3," 9/30/2023; USAID, "Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #9," 9/30/2023 USAID, vetting comment, 1/23/2024.

Humanitarian Assistance Funding, FY 2023

IRAQ	Humanitarian Response	
	USAID BHA	\$22,858,226
	State PRM	\$91,418,801
TOTAL	\$114,277,027	
SYRIA	Regional Crisis Response	
	USAID BHA	\$561,931,619
	State PRM	\$142,208,974
	TOTAL	\$704,140,592
	Earthquake Response	
	USAID BHA	\$170,000,000
State PRM	\$77,000,000	
DoD	\$4,475,623	
TOTAL	\$251,475,623	

Note: Year of funding indicates the date of commitment or obligation, not appropriation, of funds. Funding figures reflect publicly announced funding as of September 30, 2023.

IRAQ

Iraq's Economy Rated Weak with Risks

In early December, Fitch Ratings, one of the big three American credit rating agencies, gave Iraq a “B-minus rating,” reaffirming its 2022 rating. The rating reflects Iraq’s high dependence on crude oil sales, weak governance, political risk, the absence of economic and fiscal reform, and an undeveloped banking sector. These weaknesses are offset in part by high currency reserves and a favorable debt profile, and high oil prices.³⁶²

Domestic tensions leading up to the 2025 parliamentary elections and escalating confrontations between Iran-aligned militias and the U.S. military could impact the Iraqi economy.³⁶³

Iraq Moves to Strengthen its Currency

In an effort to strengthen its economy, the Iraqi government announced a series of measures to elevate the use of the Iraqi dinar in the domestic economy and stabilize the value of the Iraqi dinar versus the U.S. dollar. Since 2003, the dollar has been used as a parallel currency in Iraq, and it is the de facto currency in international trade and payment of salaries by international companies and NGOs. Iraq’s new measures, which took effect in early January 2024, will generally require that foreign remittances disbursed in Iraq be paid in dinar, as well as require most domestic commercial transactions to be executed in dinar.³⁶⁴ However,

With USAID’s assistance, Al Jabery Industrial Company in Basrah, Iraq, acquired new modern equipment. The company has 4 new employees and is currently in the process of adding another 5 positions. (USAID photo)



the policy includes relatively broad exemptions for NGOs, international organizations, some embassy contracts, and domestic U.S. dollar deposits, as well as some larger contracts for international companies and banks with additional U.S. dollar cash on hand are permitted to disburse to customers.³⁶⁵

In mid-November, the Iraqi government became the 74th member of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, an international financial institution that invests in private enterprises together with commercial partners. The bank was established 32 years ago to invest in the ex-communist economies of Eastern Europe and currently operates in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and central Asia. Iraq has been trying to join the bank since 2018. As a member, Iraq is eligible for the bank’s finance and policy support.³⁶⁶

Oil-rich Nations Challenge UN Climate Summit

The Iraqi government sent a delegation to the 28th UN Conference on Climate and Change, held in December in Dubai. The delegation, headed by Iraqi President Abdulatif Jamal Rashid, stated, according to a press report, that Iraq’s goals were to reach zero gas flaring by 2028, significantly increase power generation from renewable resources, capture and detect methane emissions at oil and gas facilities, and establish a green bank for sustainable development.³⁶⁷ The delegation also included representatives from the Ministries of Oil, Water Resources, Foreign Affairs, Environment, Municipalities and Housing, the Commission of Investment, and the Central Bank. For the first time, Iraq sponsored a pavilion and hosted sessions on urgent climate change issues.³⁶⁸

The 12-day conference concluded with an historic outcome among the nearly 200 nations attending to “transition away” from fossil fuels. The outcome was reached only after Iraq and other countries with large oil reserves, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Uganda, objected to stronger language to phase out fossil fuels.³⁶⁹ More than 100 nations, including the United States and the United Kingdom, advocated for stronger language calling for a “phase out” of fossil fuels but in the end agreed to less emphatic language to “transition away” from fossil fuels.³⁷⁰

During the sometimes-heated discussions over the wording of the conference agreement, Iraq’s Minister of Oil, Hayyan Abd al-Ghani proclaimed, “fossil fuels will remain the major source of energy in the whole world.”³⁷¹ Directing comments at countries that rely on imported fossil fuels, Minister al-Ghani said, “we produce this energy, but we are not the producer of emissions... (t)he users (of fossil fuels) need to develop the technologies to reduce their emissions.”³⁷²

Daily Oil Revenues Exceed Budget Target

The last quarter of 2023 produced uneven but profitable results for Iraq’s oil exports. After oil export volume reached an 8-month high in October, it dropped in November, only to rebound in December. While oil exports did not reach 3.5 million barrels per day as anticipated by the 2023 budget, oil revenues exceeded the \$70 per barrel oil export target price, generating excess revenues above the budget target by \$42 million per day totaling \$3.85 billion during the quarter.³⁷³ (See Figure 5.)

After oil export volume reached an 8-month high in October, it dropped in November, only to rebound in December.

Figure 5.

Actual vs. Projected Daily Oil Revenue, in \$ Millions, October 2022–December 2023



Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline Remains Shut After 9 Months

Türkiye halted the flow of oil through the Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline (ITP) in March 2023, after an arbitral tribunal awarded Iraq damages for Türkiye’s participation in unauthorized oil exports from Iraq between 2014 and 2018.³⁷⁴ Since the March shutdown, the Iraqi government has managed to increase oil exports by over 200,000 barrels per day from its southern oil fields through Persian Gulf petroleum terminals. This increase in oil exports has made up for almost one-half of the lost exports resulting from the shutdown of the ITP.³⁷⁵

On October 2, an oil industry publication reported that Türkiye’s state pipeline company informed Iraq’s state oil marketing company that the ITP was functionally operational on October 4, effectively shifting the burden to Iraq to restart pumping 475,000 barrels per day that had been halted since the March shutdown.³⁷⁶

On November 8, Iraqi government oil officials, including representatives of Iraq’s state oil marketing company, met with the Association of the Petroleum Industry of Kurdistan to discuss resuming the flow of oil through the ITP, according to media reports. The association represents international oil and gas firms that have interests in oil and gas contracts in the IKR, and many reduced production when the pipeline was closed.³⁷⁷ State reported that meeting participants discussed how to convert the existing oil contracts negotiated with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) from production-sharing contracts, which the Iraqi government considers unconstitutional, into profit-sharing contracts with the Iraqi government. Although discussions continued, the two sides had not reached an agreement as of the end of the quarter.³⁷⁸

Embassy Operations Update

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad continues to be the largest U.S. embassy worldwide, and the soon-to-be completed new consulate compound in Erbil will be the largest U.S. consulate in the world. These two compounds combined with the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center make up Mission Iraq and, according to State, cost in excess of \$1 billion per year to operate. To maintain a diplomatic presence in Iraq, more than half of the expenditures go toward security and operating a fleet of helicopters and airplanes for movement within Iraq and to neighboring countries.³⁷⁹

MISSION IRAQ UNDER ORDERED DEPARTURE FOLLOWING SECURITY THREATS

On October 20, 2023, State ordered the departure of a large number of contract workers, eligible family members and non-emergency U.S. Government personnel from U.S. Embassy Baghdad and U.S. Consulate General Erbil due to increased security threats against U.S. Government personnel and interests.³⁸⁰ State reported that the number of Mission Iraq personnel decreased by 23 percent under the ordered departure; however, State said the vast majority of security personnel remained at the embassy and consulate.³⁸¹ State has extended the ordered departure to February 16, 2023.³⁸²

State said the ordered departure impacted life support personnel disproportionately, initially decreasing such personnel by 47 percent. This life support decrease represented almost two-thirds of Mission Iraq's departed personnel. According to State, approximately 90 percent of those evacuated were third-party contractors, 7 percent were U.S. direct hires, and the remaining 3 percent included personal service contractors, eligible family members, and third-country nationals. Locally employed staff continued to work with no drawdown. State said that the decrease in life support personnel was increasingly stressing Mission Iraq's ability to maintain adequate life support provisions, particularly in the areas of facilities maintenance, emergency services, and public health.³⁸³ The embassy subsequently requested, and received State permission in December, to return approximately 150 personnel, mostly focused on facilities management, to post.³⁸⁴

The ordered departure further diminished the capacity of the operations and management contractor to maintain facilities and equipment on the self-contained compounds. While emergency repairs can be performed in many cases, State said, before the return of the requested facility management employees, that Mission Iraq lacked sufficient staffing to meet preventive maintenance requirements, which could have long-term effects. Per their contracts, some third-party contractor staff who departed post on ordered departure have not been paid while away from work, and some have been released from employment in limited cases. Mission Iraq may face delays returning to normal staffing given the lengthy re-hiring processes.³⁸⁵

SECURITY THREATS SOAR DURING QUARTER

State reported that threats to Mission Iraq increased significantly after the Israel-Gaza conflict began following the October 7 Hamas attack. Unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and rocket and mortar attacks remained the most likely threat to Mission Iraq security. The Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, located at Baghdad International Airport, was hit by indirect fire in October. The embassy compound was hit by indirect fire in December. It was the first indirect fire attack on the embassy since January 2022. The attack caused no injuries and did not impact any chief of

(continued on next page)

Embassy Operations Update *(continued from previous page)*

mission operations. A neighboring Iraqi government facility, Al-Sijud Palace, also was the target of a rocket or mortar attack on the same day. Although U.S. Consulate General Erbil was not attacked this quarter, Erbil Air Base, which is located less than 1 kilometer from the consulate, was targeted multiple times by one-way UAS during the quarter.³⁸⁶

Civil unrest or political violence in Baghdad occurs frequently due to economic conditions, political turmoil, lack of basic services, and regional events inflaming tensions. During the quarter, there were anti-American and pro-Palestinian protests in the vicinity of the embassy following the Israeli military's incursion into Gaza; however, the protests remained peaceful and dispersed without incident.³⁸⁷

NEW ERBIL CONSULATE COMPOUND FACES DELAYS

Last quarter State reported that the Erbil New Consulate Compound project was 90 percent complete with an estimated completion date of October 2024 at a cost of \$795 million. When Mission Iraq moved to ordered departure status on October 20, State directed the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations to draw down personnel at the construction site. A partial suspension of work was issued for the project on October 23, and almost the entire third-country national workforce was evacuated.³⁸⁸

State extended the suspension until February 4, 2024. The project suspension has delayed completion of the project and will add costs, which are currently estimated to exceed the available project funding. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations is awaiting approval to remobilize the workforce. Unless it receives approval by February 4, the bureau will further demobilize the project, and the cost and schedule impacts will substantially increase.³⁸⁹

SYRIA

Economic Challenges in Northeastern Syria

State said that the economic situation in northeastern Syria faces ongoing challenges including high commodity price fluctuations, the continued devaluation of the Syrian pound, reduced agricultural yield due to drought conditions, the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake in northwest Syria and recent Turkish attacks on infrastructure.³⁹⁰

The attacks caused significant damage to civilian infrastructure related to power and fuel provision, State said. This reduced availability of power for Syrians across northeastern Syria and caused significant downstream effects, as power is needed to operate water pumps and other water infrastructure.³⁹¹

Water shortages in Hasakah also persisted due to the ongoing political stalemate over the Allouk water pumping station, State said.³⁹² The Self-Administration of North and East Syria (SANES) blames the Syrian National Army (SNA), which controls the station, for failing to operate it, whereas the SNA blames the SANES for failing to provide the station with the power required to operate it, according to media reporting.³⁹³ In Dayr az Zawr, reduced Euphrates water levels due to climatic changes and upstream damming in Türkiye similarly reduced water resources available for consumption and irrigation; State said U.S. stabilization programs in these areas helped to conduct preventive maintenance on priority water stations and water networks and maintain the vehicles that the SANES uses

to facilitate water trucking and emergency services, as well as heavy machinery used for the rehabilitation of water, electrical, and sanitation infrastructure.³⁹⁴

These conditions and the economic challenges have increased overall need for both stabilization and humanitarian assistance funding in Syria over the past 2 years, State said. Its projects supporting civil society and education continued efforts to support emerging small businesses/entrepreneurs and technical and vocational trainings, respectively.³⁹⁵

While ISIS continues to pose a threat to stability in northeastern Syria, ISIS attacks did not directly affect U.S. stabilization activities this quarter, according to State. However, attacks continued to target individuals affiliated with the SANES or SDF, posing a threat to immediate and longer-term stability in the area, along with program activities.³⁹⁶

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In Iraq, the U.S. Government encourages the development of an inclusive and responsive democracy that is transparent, accountable, and committed to international norms.³⁹⁷ In Syria, the U.S. Government seeks a political resolution to the ongoing conflict through the UN-facilitated, Syrian-led process laid out in UNSCR 2254.³⁹⁸

IRAQ

Low Voter Turnout in Provincial Elections

On December 18, Iraq held provincial council elections in 15 of its 18 provinces. The three remaining provinces in the IKR will hold elections in 2024. The provincial councils select the provincial governors and manage the budgets for health, transportation, education, and other provincial needs. This was the first provincial council election since April 2013.³⁹⁹

According to press accounts, the Independent High Election Commission reported that only 16 million out of 23 million eligible Iraqis had registered to cast ballots and received biometric voting cards required for voting. Only 41 percent of those 16 million Iraqis voted—less than 30 percent of eligible voters. The elections were generally peaceful.⁴⁰⁰ Media reported that turnout was particularly low in areas dominated by followers of Shia cleric and political leader Muqtada al-Sadr, who encouraged his supporters to boycott the polls. Turnout for Iraqi youth and other civic minded and independent voters—many of whom were the driving force behind the October 2019 demonstrations seeking changes in the political establishment—also stayed away from the polls.⁴⁰¹

In late December, the Independent High Electoral Commission reported that Iran-aligned Shia parties won the most provincial council seats, according to media reports.⁴⁰² In Shia-dominated southern provinces of Wasit, Maysan, Dhi Qar, Babil, and Basrah, voting favored the Hadi al-Ameri's Nabni Alliance, Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition, and Ammar al-Hakim's National Wisdom Movement.⁴⁰³ Media reported the coalition led by former parliamentary Speaker Mohammed al-Halbusi, a Sunni, won the largest number of seats in Baghdad, followed by the Iran-aligned parties of the Shia Coordination Framework, who saw success across southern Iraq.⁴⁰⁴

Kirkuk Elections Held for First Time Since 2005

Provincial council elections were held in Kirkuk province for the first time since 2005. Kirkuk, a diverse province comprised of Kurdish, Arab, Turkmen, and other ethnic and religious minorities had the highest voter turnout of all provinces in the December 18 elections, with 66 percent of eligible voters turning out to vote.

In 2009 and 2013, provincial elections were canceled in Kirkuk for practical and political reasons. A 2018 think tank analysis said that the Kurdish bloc in the Iraqi parliament repeatedly prevented the adoption of regulations to allow the elections in Kirkuk. The Kurds were opposed to dividing the provincial council along ethno-sectarian lines, which would have given the Arabs and Turkmen equal standing with the Kurds. This stalemate froze the make-up of the Kirkuk provincial council based on the results of the 2005 elections when the Kurdish coalition won 26 of 41 provincial council seats. The Independent High Election Commission decided that the Kirkuk provincial council would consist of 16 seats for the December 18 elections.⁴⁰⁵

Prime Minister Faces Regional Conflict

Prime Minister al-Sudani has continued to work to improve relations with Iraq's neighbors. However, the Israel-Hamas conflict has featured prominently in Iraqi public discourse and renewed attention to matters of regional conflict. The prime minister traveled to Egypt on October 20 to take part in the Cairo Summit for Peace. After the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict, Prime Minister al-Sudani gave a speech that supported the Palestinian cause and stressed that there was no solution other than the return of Palestinians to their lands. He also said in his remarks that this is a new test for the world order. At the summit, the prime minister met with numerous heads of delegations, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, Jordanian King Abdullah II, and President of the European Council Charles Michel.⁴⁰⁶

Iraq's relationship with Kuwait continued to face headwinds due to the lack of resolution of boundary discussions following the Federal Supreme Court's ruling in September that the 2013 law ratifying the Iraq-Kuwait maritime boundary treaty was not constitutional.⁴⁰⁷

Iraqi Government and KRG Remain at Odds Over Budget

The Iraqi government and the KRG were unable to resolve the disagreements over provisions of the 2023 federal budget during the quarter. According to State, the two sides remain on parallel negotiation tracks, with the KRG seeking a second round of bridge loans while it also pursues changes to the federal budget law that would ensure a longer-term solution. According to State, many of the KRG's financial needs, including payments to international oil companies and energy producers operating in the IKR, are not being met while budget negotiations continue.⁴⁰⁸

In advance of a budget agreement, the Iraqi government had been making loans (advances on future budget allocations) to the KRG to meet essential payroll needs. Funds from the latest loans were scheduled to be transferred November 25, though the KRG received the funds in two tranches later, on December 12 and 13. State said that it continues to urge all parties to find a mutually acceptable way forward.⁴⁰⁹

Prime Minister al-Sudani Completes First Year

State said that Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani has brought a degree of political stability to Iraq after the country experienced more than a year with an interim government.⁴¹⁰ Think-tank experts assessed that he is seen as a serious, pragmatic head of government who will work with all sides of the political establishment.⁴¹¹ One expert recognized Prime Minister al-Sudani for addressing the three most serious challenges facing the Iraqi government: he has been able to neutralize tensions with the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, reduce escalations in Iraq between the U.S. and Iran, and reduce public anger at poor governance.⁴¹² This analysis clearly changed when Iran-aligned militias resumed attacks on U.S. and other Coalition personnel. Where progress is seen as lacking, such as when there were delays in adopting a national oil and gas law, Kurds and Sunni Arabs tend to blame the lack of progress on the Shia Coordination Framework that brought Prime Minister al-Sudani to power rather than the prime minister himself, the analyst said.⁴¹³

State reported the prime minister has prioritized providing government services, increasing domestic energy production, creating jobs, and better integrating Iraq into the region. While the Iraqi government has made headway on energy self-sufficiency and prioritizing service delivery, there is still room for key economic and political reforms, including the enactment of a federal hydrocarbons law. State said that the government could also make significant improvements on the human rights situation by creating a culture of accountability and improving the rule of law, protecting the fundamental freedoms of all in Iraq, and promoting respect for human rights of members of vulnerable and marginalized populations.⁴¹⁴

State said there are still further reforms that Prime Minister al-Sudani's government could take to improve the investment climate and create jobs. Most of the jobs created during the past year have been in the public sector. The government has tried to alleviate poverty by waiving a 20 percent telecommunications tax and expanding the social safety net, State added. Further, the government has also prioritized the rehabilitation of health facilities and improving roads and highways throughout the country.⁴¹⁵

Scarcity of water for agriculture and human consumption, as well as difficulty providing public services, including electricity, remain significant challenges. State said the government has taken few steps to address them, though some progress has been made to improve the availability of electricity through grid interconnection, increased purchase of feeder fuels, and fee collection to offset generation costs. For example, the Ministry of Electricity piloted smart meters for 500,000 consumers and established a smart metering section in the ministry's distribution companies to oversee meter installation and use at provincial levels.⁴¹⁶

Prime Minister al-Sudani has been able to neutralize tensions with the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, reduce escalations in Iraq between the U.S. and Iran, and reduce public anger at poor governance.

Prime Minister al-Sudani Prioritizes Anti-Corruption Efforts

During the quarter, Prime Minister al-Sudani continued to prioritize anti-corruption initiatives and the recovery of stolen funds. According to State, the Iraqi government has recovered a fraction of funds from the so-called “Heist of the Century,” when \$2.5 billion was stolen from Rafadan Bank in 2021, reputedly facilitated by high-level government officials. The Iraqi courts have mostly pursued officials from former Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s government. In addition, the current government has undertaken an evaluation of nearly 450 directors general of the Iraqi government ministries and dismissed, demoted, or transferred more than 75 of them. In December, the Iraqi Commission of Integrity sent a 12-person delegation to the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption.⁴¹⁷

State said that it has stressed to the Iraqi government that corruption investigations should be impartial, apolitical, and respect the rule of law. The U.S. Department of Treasury said it partnered with Iraq’s financial authorities to improve the Iraqi financial sector’s compliance with international banking and finance standards.⁴¹⁸

Kurdish Leaders Struggle to Improve Relations

Relations between the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have been poor for years. Media reported their disagreements have hindered government and parliament’s functions. The failure of the KRG to reach an agreement with the Iraqi government over sharing the federal budget has meant that civil servants and teachers have gone months without pay. As a result, teachers in Sulaymaniyah went on strike.⁴¹⁹

One media source quoted the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq and Iran, during a visit to the IKR, as saying that the Kurdish political disputes “really undermine” the IKR in its dealings with the Iraqi government.⁴²⁰ The official said that it is important that the KDP and PUK present a united front as it deals with the central government on significant matters, including the IKR’s share of the federal budget and management and new laws governing Iraq’s enormous fossil fuel resources.⁴²¹ State said they have encouraged the parties to improve relations in order to strengthen the IKR.⁴²²

Senior leadership of the KDP and the PUK met on multiple occasions during the quarter working to improve relations, with contacts from both parties saying publicly and privately that the atmosphere between them has improved significantly.⁴²³ After a 5-hour meeting in November among IKR President Nechirvan Barzani (KDP), KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani (KDP), KRG Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani (PUK), and PUK President Bafel Talabani, the parties released a joint statement in which they agreed to coordinate their actions and work together in order to resolve the many challenges facing the IKR.⁴²⁴

KRG Parliamentary Elections Delayed

On January 2, 2024, Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) notified the IKR president that it will not be able to conduct the IKR parliamentary elections on February 25, as scheduled. According to media reports citing a statement by an IHEC spokesperson, the postponement was due to a delay in a Federal Supreme Court final decision on minority

quota seats in the Iraqi Kurdistan parliament. As of late December, and prior to the IHEC statement, the IKR president’s spokesperson had said they were aware of no issues that could delay the scheduled elections.⁴²⁵

The IKR parliamentary elections were originally scheduled for October 2022; however, political disagreements between KDP and PUK over the election law resulted in rescheduling the elections for November 2023. The elections were further postponed to February 2024, after the Federal Supreme Court ruled that the extension of the IKR parliament’s term, necessary because the elections were delayed, was unconstitutional.⁴²⁶

The UN Special Envoy and the UNSCR 2254 Process

The United States continues to support United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 and the efforts of UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen in advancing a political resolution to the Syrian crisis—bringing about stability—including through the convening of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva, State said.⁴²⁷ State noted that stability in Syria was important to ensuring that ISIS cannot resurge.⁴²⁸

Special Envoy Pedersen and other UN officials working on Syria briefed the Security Council on the stalemate monthly during the quarter. The U.S. delegation participated in discussions following the briefings, according to diplomatic cables. The delegation stated that the regime, aided by Russia, is responsible for the situation as a whole and the diplomatic stalemate.⁴²⁹

State said that a Syrian-led political solution that represents the will of all Syrians as outlined in UNSCR 2254 remains the only viable solution to the conflict. It continued to urge all parties to engage fully in this process and to support UN Envoy Pedersen’s efforts, but said it is clear the continuing crisis lies squarely with the regime.⁴³⁰

The United States continues to support the UNSCR 2254 process through State-managed programming that provides technical expertise and capacity building for select Constitutional Committee members, State said.⁴³¹ State said that the United States will not normalize or upgrade diplomatic relations with the regime absent irreversible progress on the political track, and that the United States will not support other countries’ efforts to normalize the Assad regime.⁴³²

Arab Engagement with Regime Has Meager Results

State said it did not believe Syria merited readmission to the Arab League but noted that the Arab League states that readmitted it say they intended to push for and demand progress toward a political solution to the ongoing conflict. State said it continues to stress to regional partners engaging with the Syrian regime that credible steps to improve the humanitarian, human rights, and security situation for Syrians should be the focus of that engagement and to push for progress in the UN-facilitated political process.⁴³³

State said that recent trends in Arab engagement with the Assad regime have not resulted in noticeable effects on stabilization efforts or stabilization assistance projects.⁴³⁴

The United States co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution adopted on December 20, by which the Assembly stated that it “deplores and condemns in the strongest possible terms” the continued violations of the rights of the Syrian people by its government.⁴³⁵

State said that U.S. support for Israel in the conflict between it and Hamas did not reduce the ability of the United States to gain support from local partners or its interlocutors in the Syrian opposition relative to counter-ISIS policy or a future settlement of the Syrian conflict. State said that it saw no evidence that U.S. strikes on Iran-aligned militia groups, made in response to militia attacks on U.S. targets, strengthened those groups politically (in that they would be seen as making sacrifices for the Hamas cause).⁴³⁶

Arab-SDF Tensions Increase

Arab-SDF relations in Dayr az Zawr have deteriorated over the past year. Arab residents of the Dayr az Zawr area consistently complain of marginalization of their community in matters of governance and the economy as well as widespread corruption.⁴³⁷

State said that the SDF retained the loyalty of the majority of the Arab population and successfully regained control over the Dayr az Zawr area, although that the fighting served to further entrench feelings of discontent.⁴³⁸

In its meetings with tribal leaders, civil society, local councils, and other stakeholders, State said it encouraged development of a series of recommendations for the reform of Dayr az Zawr’s civilian and military authorities. Senior U.S. officials continue to urge senior SANES and SDF officials to take up these reforms. State said that the SANES and the SDF convened a Dayr az Zawr conference on October 22. The conference developed clear steps that aggrieved communities in Dayr az Zawr expected the SANES and SDF to take to re-stabilize the region. State said its Syria Regional Platform team has initiated additional stabilization programming to help the SANES prioritize the steps and track their implementation.⁴³⁹

While some U.S. stabilization projects paused briefly as a result of the violence in Dayr az Zawr, programming rapidly resumed in all areas and was ongoing throughout the quarter, State said.⁴⁴⁰

A New “Social Contract” and New Leadership for Northeastern Syria

Northeastern Syrian institutions reorganized and changed top personnel during the quarter as the SANES adopted a new “social contract,” or constitution. According to a media report, a new inspection body and a new court were to be established and preparations would begin for general elections.⁴⁴¹

The most prominent civilian leader in northeastern Syria, Ilhan Ahmed, lost her position as head of the executive council of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) when the executive council was abolished by the new social contract, according to a press report.⁴⁴² Ahmed routinely spoke for and visited abroad on behalf of the SDC. She testified before Congress in 2019.⁴⁴³

State said that U.S. support for Israel in the conflict between it and Hamas did not reduce the ability of the United States to gain support from local partners or its interlocutors in the Syrian opposition relative to counter-ISIS policy or a future settlement of the Syrian conflict.

Ahmed’s downfall was anticipated in Turkish-aligned press coverage, which portrayed it as the outcome of a struggle within the PKK (widely seen as influential in the SDC) between a hard-core faction on the one hand, and elements which were closely tied to the United States and in particular to the SDF’s General Mazloum Abdi, on the other.⁴⁴⁴

The SDC will be led, according to media reports, by Laila Karaman, a Kurd identified in Turkish-aligned press coverage as a member of the PKK, and Mahmoud al-Meslet, who holds both Syrian and U.S. citizenship and was identified in the same coverage as a member of a prominent Arab family from Hasakah.⁴⁴⁵ Al-Meslet, according to the media accounts, had no prior involvement with the SDC; he was deemed acceptable to Türkiye.⁴⁴⁶

The SDC stressed that it wanted to offer a road map for a political solution in Syria as a whole, a press service stated.⁴⁴⁷ The SDC, the story continued, proposed forming a transitional government with broad powers...aimed at justice reconciliation, civil peace, and the achievement of transitional justice.”⁴⁴⁸

In December, local media reported that a member of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (which BBC monitoring characterized as a “Damascus-based left-wing political coalition”) favored forming a coalition between the SDC and the Syrian opposition.⁴⁴⁹

Intra-Kurdish Dialogue Remains Stalled

State said that 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. It said that the Syrian intra-Kurdish dialogue remained stalled this quarter as leadership of the Kurdish National Council and Kurdish National Unity Parties have yet to return to the table convened by the U.S. Senior Representative to Northeast Syria.⁴⁵⁰

The Kurdish National Union Parties is a group linked to the Democratic Union Party, the dominant party in northeastern Syria, a monitoring service said.⁴⁵¹ The Kurdish National Council is linked to the Kurdish Democratic Party, dominant in large portions of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region adjacent to Syria. The Kurdish National Council was largely (and violently) ejected from northeastern Syria by the Democratic Union Party after the latter seized control of northeastern Syria in 2012, academic analysis said.⁴⁵²

Human Rights Abuses Continue in Areas Controlled by Allies or Coalition Partners

State reported that there were continued, credible allegations of human rights abuses against both the SDF/SANES and Turkish-supported opposition (TSO) groups, including the Syrian National Army. (See Figure 6.) State said that human rights abuses by the SDF, the U.S. counter-ISIS partner, could increase grievances in the population of northeastern Syria under SDF influence and exacerbate vulnerability to ISIS recruitment. TSO abuses add to instability in areas under TSO influence and could do the same.⁴⁵³

State also reported alleged abuses by the “Revolutionary Youth,” which it says is not a part of the SDF.⁴⁵⁴ However, the Revolutionary Youth has been linked to the PYD, which is aligned with the SDF, according to a media report.⁴⁵⁵

Allegations of Humans Rights Abuses in Syria

Local media and activists reported several cases of human rights abuses by the SDF, TSOs, and other Kurdish groups.

SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

October 10: Seized a school in Dayr az Zawr and arrested a teacher during clashes with Arab tribal fighters.

November 1: Detained a 14-year-old boy for forced conscription at a checkpoint near Manbij.

November 4: Arrested 20 young men from various areas in Raqqa during a compulsory conscription campaign.

November 17: A civilian reportedly died in an SDF prison in Dayr az Zawr after suffering an injury during his arrest.

November 26: Four civilians, including a 9-year-old child, were injured by SDF bullets shot “heavily and indiscriminately” in Hasakah.

November 27: A civilian died due to torture in an SDF prison in Hasakah 4 months after his arrest.

November 30: Called for security studies on journalists, photographers, and others who own cameras, amounting to about 65 people.

December 1: Two men in Kasra were killed during SDF raids. Violent clashes reportedly erupted between the SDF and tribal fighters as well as the residents of the town following the killings.

December 1: Five human rights organizations condemned arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances taking place in SDF-controlled areas, describing them as flagrant and intimidating violations and pointing to the kidnapping of a young woman in al-Malikiyah on October 8.

December 3: Opened fire without warning on a motorcycle, killing the woman on board and injuring a 13-year-old boy in eastern Dayr az Zawr.

REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH

October 29: Kidnapped a 16-year-old boy in Hasakah for recruitment in its forces.

November 2: Kidnapped a 16-year-old boy in Hasakah for recruitment in its forces.

November 16: Kidnapped a 14-year-old girl for the purposes of forced recruitment and prevented her from communicating with her family or allowing them to visit her.

TURKISH-SUPPORTED OPPOSITION

November 12: Members of al-Amshat faction attacked a displaced person’s camp in Afrin, shooting and injuring three residents, to seize residential blocks for use by its members.

November 20: Syrian National Army factions reportedly shelled the countryside of Manbij, seriously injuring 20 civilians.

November 24: The Sultan Murad faction reportedly arrested two Christian men from Ras al-Ain after demanding their property, which the faction turned into security and military headquarters.

December 1: The al-Amshat faction assaulted a woman and child and arrested her husband and three others in Afrin, accusing them of collaborating with hostile foreign parties.

December 1: A member of the Sultan Murad faction died due to torture one week after his detention in a Sultan Murad run-detention center.

December 2: Turkish-supported armed factions shelled with mortars and artillery two villages near Manbij.

December 2: A Syrian National Army faction in coordination with Turkish forces unjustly detained 22 civilians, including two children, in Tal Abyad on charges they were involved in an attack on Turkish forces.

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 12/20/2023.

An estimated 2.5 million people in Iraq continue to be in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly the 1.1 million people who have been displaced for a decade and are unable or unwilling to return to their areas of origin due to damaged housing, insecurity, a lack of basic services and livelihood opportunities, and social tensions.

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.⁴⁵⁶

IRAQ

In November, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski renewed a Declaration of Humanitarian Need for the complex emergency in Iraq. She said the U.S. Government has determined that 1) there is evidence of significant unmet humanitarian needs; 2) humanitarian assistance will save lives, reduce human suffering, and mitigate the impact of the humanitarian emergency on the most vulnerable; 3) the Iraqi government will accept international assistance; and 4) responding aligns with U.S. Government interests and humanitarian objectives.⁴⁵⁷

An estimated 2.5 million people in Iraq continue to be in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly the 1.1 million people who have been displaced for a decade and are unable or unwilling to return to their areas of origin due to damaged housing, insecurity, a lack of basic services and livelihood opportunities, and social tensions.⁴⁵⁸ USAID reported that, overall, the humanitarian situation in Iraq has been stable.⁴⁵⁹ However, this core caseload, and a growing number of returnees from al-Hol camp in Syria, will continue to need humanitarian assistance in FY 2024 despite an overall reduction in humanitarian needs in Iraq.⁴⁶⁰

Since FY 2017, State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) has provided nearly \$1.4 billion in humanitarian assistance for Iraq. USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance has provided over \$1.2 billion. In all, State said it had provided roughly \$7.1 billion in foreign assistance for Iraq from the following: Economic Support Funds; International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funds; Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining and Related Programs; International Military Education and Training; Transition Initiatives; and Foreign Military Financing accounts.⁴⁶¹

Efforts to Transition Services Ongoing but Slow

Iraq and the international community are working to fully transition services currently provided by donor-funded humanitarian organizations to the Iraqi government. However, this transition will not occur by the end of the quarter, USAID said.⁴⁶² In FY 2024, international funding, including those of the 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.⁴⁶³ State/PRM humanitarian funding will continue in FY 2024 throughout Iraq for both Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees.⁴⁶⁴

Decentralized coordination groups remain in the beginning stage. Joint Coordination Forums—which include humanitarian, development, and stabilization actors and should be chaired by governor-level officials—remain a hopeful prospect but are not yet finalized.⁴⁶⁵ Sector coordination is still largely led largely by international partners, and it is doubtful that the coordination forums will improve local-level coordination and encourage government leadership.⁴⁶⁶

Services provided to IDP camps and informal settlements deteriorated after the United Nations deactivated its humanitarian coordination system at the end of 2022, according to State. The Iraqi government and the KRG lack the technical capacity to respond to remaining humanitarian needs of IDPs and have not allocated adequate funding.⁴⁶⁷

The IKR General Directorate of Water and Sewerage has taken over service provision for some water, sanitation, and hygiene activities in many IDP camps, specifically desludging and trash collection, but services are not delivered with the same frequency or to the same standards as when delivered by humanitarian partners.⁴⁶⁸ There has been some progress in expanding the mandate of IKR Department of Labour and Social Affairs caseworkers to include child protection, and capacity building efforts are ongoing to handover protection, health, and other services.⁴⁶⁹

Currency and Liquidity Issues Continue to Impact Banking Operations

USAID reported that its implementers were in the process of re-aligning their procurement actions to conduct all their financial transactions in the Iraqi dinar, including paying local employee salaries, due to new policies restricting the use of U.S. dollar banknotes inside the Iraqi banking system.⁴⁷⁰ Private banks have limited liquidity and technical capacity, which hampers their ability to lend to small businesses.⁴⁷¹ Small businesses suffer from a lack of formal registration and record keeping, leaving banks unwilling to deal with risky clients unable to explain their source of funding, State said.⁴⁷² These issues contribute to banks' limited capacity to assess the creditworthiness of businesses contributed to excessive collateral requirements, insufficient risk-sharing, and higher cost of finance for businesses.⁴⁷³

In addition, foreign currency restrictions imposed by the Central Bank of Iraq were expected to impact USAID humanitarian assistance implementers in federal Iraq and the IKR, as the bank released fewer U.S. dollars to banks than required for daily operations, according to USAID.⁴⁷⁴ The Iraqi government issued new regulations in December 2023 requiring the use of the Iraqi dinar for most internal transactions. Further central bank guidance issued effective January 2, 2024, included broad exemptions for NGOs registered in Iraq, State said.⁴⁷⁵ The central bank also said that it would allow private Iraqi banks to import U.S. dollars to be accessed by all clients (including NGOs) at the discretion of the importing banks.⁴⁷⁶ However, these banks may charge fees of 3 to 4 percent on all withdrawals of foreign currency, but this is in line with fees for foreign currency in most other countries, according to State.⁴⁷⁷ In addition, the registration requirements for organizations to demonstrate eligibility to access these funds are unclear. Previously, NGOs only needed to demonstrate to banks were a valid NGO; now they must demonstrate that they are

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which provide 98 percent of Iraq's water supply, originate in Türkiye, and their flow is determined by Türkiye's upstream control.

registered with the Iraqi government.⁴⁷⁸ USAID humanitarian assistance implementers reported varying success in withdrawing funds from banks in order to pay salaries.⁴⁷⁹

USAID said it supported the central bank's effort to promote financial inclusion and increase private bank financing for micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises.⁴⁸⁰ USAID also supported the bank's effort to modify microfinance institutional regulations to address micro and small businesses' financing gaps.⁴⁸¹ In the previous quarter, USAID subsidized a \$50 million loan to a local Iraqi bank enabling it to increase its lending portfolio to small- and medium-sized enterprises by 300 percent and offer more favorable interest rates for borrowers.⁴⁸² USAID said it continues building the capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises to plan and budget effectively to mitigate the impact of high prices of raw materials on production costs.⁴⁸³

Water Crisis Threatens Iraq's Stability, Increases Humanitarian Needs

At the end of the quarter, Iraq was facing an impending water crisis that threatened its social, political, and economic stability. During the summer and fall of 2023, Iraq experienced record water shortages. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which provide 98 percent of Iraq's water supply, originate in Türkiye, and their flow is determined by Türkiye's upstream control. Iraqis see Türkiye's hydropower projects on the rivers as the main cause of the reduced availability of water for irrigation, drinking and industrial purposes. According to State, the Iraqi government blamed Türkiye's water-flow control for causing Iraq's two main reservoirs, Mosul Dam and Haditha Dam, to reach critically low water levels during the quarter.⁴⁸⁴

State said that the Iraqi government must address the crisis by adopting structural and legislative changes, and the government cannot rely only on the involvement of its international partners. The prime minister's office and the Iraqi parliament will need to commit to significant and sustained engagement to repair and invest in Iraq's water infrastructure and to implement market reforms, such as new tariff structures, to pay for sufficient water for Iraqis over the long term. State assessed it is unlikely the Iraqi government will be able to implement all necessary investments in a timely manner, and the central government should expand its involvement with the private sector to address solutions to meet the impending crisis.⁴⁸⁵

Climate change and the resultant water scarcity continues to drive displacement and exacerbate humanitarian needs in Iraq, according to a November report from the Norwegian Refugee Council.⁴⁸⁶ An estimated 60 percent of surveyed farmers across Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salahaddin provinces were forced to cultivate less land or use less water during the 2023 farming season.⁴⁸⁷ Additionally, 80 percent of respondents surveyed in farming communities in Kirkuk and Ninewa reported reducing their food expenditure over the past 12 months, due to reduced incomes.⁴⁸⁸ Furthermore, 15 percent of female farmers reported not earning an income in 2023, compared with 6 percent of female farmer respondents in 2022.⁴⁸⁹ The lack of water and other agricultural resources also impacted humanitarian conditions in Iraq, as economic conditions for agricultural communities continue to decline.⁴⁹⁰

Support for climate adaptation has been a cross-cutting component across the USAID Iraq’s ongoing activities.⁴⁹¹ As many as 131,000 people across southern Iraq remain displaced due to climatic shocks, including drought, increased water salinity, and land degradation.⁴⁹² Over the past quarter USAID supported the Iraqi government to develop its environmental strategies, and adopt mitigation plans across government institutions to combat the negative impact of climate change.⁴⁹³ USAID continued to promote climate friendly techniques in the agriculture sector to conserve water and energy resources.⁴⁹⁴ USAID’s recently launched a governance activity (Ma’an) that is intended to support local governments to improve public service delivery and become more responsive to citizen demands.⁴⁹⁵ It will focus on residential water delivery, solid waste management, and sanitation, for example, through increased fee collection and service utilization.⁴⁹⁶ USAID anticipates awarding two new programs in FY 2024 that support climate adaptation.⁴⁹⁷

An estimated
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people in Syria
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insecurity.

SYRIA

Ongoing State stabilization programs in non-regime areas of Syria efforts work with local governance entities, civil society, and Syrian communities to support education, community security, independent media, civil society, reintegration, reconciliation, removal of explosive remnants of war, restoration of essential services, and a political resolution to the Syrian conflict in line with UNSCR 2254.⁴⁹⁸ USAID-supported stabilization programs supported conflict mitigation, private sector productivity, economic recovery, livelihoods, and growth in northeastern Syria.⁴⁹⁹ (See pages 84 to 89.) This stabilization assistance, as well as the U.S. Government’s broader stabilization efforts, is “vital to helping to accelerate inclusive economic recovery” in areas liberated from ISIS, State reported.⁵⁰⁰

Economic Challenges, Earthquake, Drought Increased Stabilization and Humanitarian Needs

The economic situation in northeastern Syria faced ongoing challenges this quarter including high commodity price fluctuations, the continued devaluation of the Syrian pound, reduced agriculture yields due to drought conditions, and the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake in northwestern Syria.⁵⁰¹ These conditions and the economic challenges have increased the overall need for both stabilization and humanitarian assistance funding in Syria during the last 2 years, State reported.⁵⁰²

In particular, an estimated 12.1 million people in Syria suffer from food insecurity.⁵⁰³ USAID partners continued to provide monthly food assistance and daily bread rations, mental health and psychosocial support, nutrition, and access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities to the residents of the al-Hol camp.⁵⁰⁴ In response to increasing unmet protection and water, sanitation, and hygiene needs, BHA and its partners scaled up activities in these sectors in FY 2023, supporting water network rehabilitation for piped domestic water, and expanding child protection, gender-based violence, and psychosocial support programming and services in the camp.⁵⁰⁵ The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that funding for the World Food Programme and partners dropped by more than 50 percent this year and the number of people reached with food assistance per month halved in northwestern Syria.⁵⁰⁶

During the quarter, the Syrian regime extended United Nations access to the Bab al-Salama and al-Ra'ee border crossing points from Türkiye into northwestern Syria for 3 months through February 13, 2024.

A cholera outbreak that began in August 2022 and has since affected all 14 governorates of Syria continued to generate new humanitarian needs.⁵⁰⁷ Relief actors reported that the February earthquakes, new displacements, the ongoing water crisis, and recent damage to water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure caused by ongoing airstrikes across northern Syria increase the risk of all waterborne diseases, including acute watery diarrhea and cholera.⁵⁰⁸ USAID BHA is supporting NGOs to strengthen cholera response activities by distributing soap and other water, sanitation, and hygiene commodities, increasing water trucking frequency to internally displaced person sites, and providing additional water for handwashing and cleaning.⁵⁰⁹

Syria Extends UN Access to Border Crossings for Humanitarian Assistance

During the quarter, the Syrian regime extended United Nations access to the Bab al-Salama and al-Ra'ee border crossing points from Türkiye into northwestern Syria for 3 months through February 13, 2024.⁵¹⁰ This approval marked the third border access extension since Syrian regime President Bashar al-Assad first agreed to temporarily open these borders for aid into Idlib governorate, following the February 2023 earthquakes in northern Syria and southern Türkiye.⁵¹¹ In addition, transportation of relief commodities via the Bab al-Hawa crossing point resumed on September 19 and continued through the quarter.⁵¹²

The renewed humanitarian access across the three crossing points enables the United Nations and its partners to provide life-saving assistance to approximately 2.5 million people in need each month.⁵¹³ Between January and mid-November, more than 4,200 trucks carrying critical UN assistance crossed from Türkiye into northwestern Syria.⁵¹⁴

Clashes Between the SDF and Local Tribes Reduces Access for USAID Operations

The tribal uprising in Dayr az Zawr governorate against the SDF threatens to further destabilize Dayr az Zawr, according to USAID.⁵¹⁵ (See page 58.) Associated changes in the security situation in Dayr az Zawr have had some impacts on USAID programming in the region. USAID reported looking for ways to address tribal and community grievances in Dayr az Zawr to help stabilize the situation.⁵¹⁶

All USAID stabilization partners and staff remain accounted for, although most activities temporarily stopped in August and early September due to the unrest.⁵¹⁷ In November and December, USAID stabilization activities were mostly unaffected by the ongoing clashes though there was limited access to parts of the region by both humanitarian and stabilization actors.⁵¹⁸ According to OCHA, since hostilities escalated on October 5, at least 99 civilians have been killed and more than 400 others injured, based on reports of local health authorities.⁵¹⁹

Significantly increased attacks by the Assad regime on Idlib city and other areas far from the front lines resulted in increased for emergency services by the White Helmets starting in early October.⁵²⁰

Aftermath of February Earthquakes Continues to Impact Infrastructure

The White Helmets, a volunteer first-responder organization funded in part by USAID, continued providing various services in the areas of emergency response, ambulance services, health and awareness services, and rehabilitation work to areas of northwestern Syria affected by the February earthquake.⁵²¹ They supported the opening of roads and the rehabilitation of schools and public facilities, and provided logistical support to the other community services working on the earthquake response.⁵²²

Demand for White Helmets services increased due to the aftermath of the earthquake and the increased attacks by the Assad regime.⁵²³ This led to an increased burn rate of financial resources, which increased the need for funding from the donor community, according to USAID.⁵²⁴ Until additional donor funds are secured, the White Helmets expected a potential shortfall in available funds in early 2024.⁵²⁵

Turkish Attacks Damage Critical Infrastructure, Worsening Water Crisis in Syria

Turkish airstrikes and attacks on farms, oil infrastructure and refineries, and power and water stations across northeastern Syria adversely affected approximately 4.3 million people in October.⁵²⁶ In particular, the strikes damaged critical infrastructure in northeastern Syria, rendering at least 18 water pumping stations and 11 power stations non-operational, severely disrupting access to electricity and safe drinking water for people in conflict-affected areas.⁵²⁷

Attacks targeting electrical plants—including the Swadiyah power station—northeastern Syria’s sole domestic source of gas and the supplier of electricity for more than 1 million people—had resulted in the closure of the Alouk, Amuda, and Qamishli water stations, affecting an estimated 700,000 individuals.⁵²⁸ The Northeast Syria Nongovernmental Organization Forum reported that the loss of electricity has resulted in several health care-related challenges, and humanitarian actors have raised concerns that a lack of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in the region could force people to turn to unsafe water sources, increasing water-borne health risks, such as cholera.⁵²⁹

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.⁵³⁰ 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.⁵³¹

In addition, State reported that water shortages in Hasakah persisted due to the ongoing political stalemate on the Allouk groundwater station.⁵³² State reported that in Dayr az Zawr, reduced Euphrates water levels due to climatic changes and upstream damming in Turkiye similarly reduced water resources available for consumption and irrigation.⁵³³ State reported that stabilization programs in these areas helped to conduct preventive maintenance on priority water stations and water networks and to maintain the vehicles that the SANES

Turkish air strikes and attacks on farms, oil infrastructure and refineries, and power and water stations across northeastern Syria adversely affected approximately 4.3 million people in October.

More than 70 deaths, including three humanitarian workers, and approximately 350 injured people including 77 children, were reported since October 5, at the start of the escalation.

uses to facilitate water trucking, emergency services (e.g. fire engines and ambulances), as well as heavy machinery used for the rehabilitation of water, electrical, and sanitation infrastructure.⁵³⁴

USAID supported 12 NGO partners, as well as the International Organization for Migration and UNICEF, to provide water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance in Syria.⁵³⁵ USAID reported that its implementers distributed essential hygiene items to vulnerable populations and enhance water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities by rehabilitating small-scale sanitation and water systems—such as handwashing stations and latrines—in displacement camps and informal settlements.⁵³⁶ In northern Syria, USAID implementers continued to increase access to safe drinking water through emergency water trucking and the distribution of water storage tanks and water treatment devices.⁵³⁷

Increased Hostilities in Northwestern Syria Create New Needs

October also saw an increase of hostilities centered across Idlib and western Aleppo governorates – the most significant escalation in northwest Syria since 2019.⁵³⁸ More than 70 deaths, including 3 humanitarian workers, and approximately 350 injured people including 77 children, were reported since 5 October at the start of the escalation.⁵³⁹ Hostilities affected more than 2,300 locations, including critical infrastructure, including 43 health facilities, 27 schools, and more than 20 water systems, and prompted the displacement of more than 120,000 people in 2 weeks.⁵⁴⁰

The United Nations and its partners continue to respond to growing needs in northwestern Syria: more than 42,000 people received food assistance, nearly 26,000 people receiving protection and psychosocial support, and 4,000 people receiving shelter assistance across northwestern Syria during the quarter.⁵⁴¹ UN partners also distributed more than 21,500 family hygiene kits to conflict-affected populations.⁵⁴² Additionally, more than 140 trucks carrying UN-provided medicine, nutrition supplements, shelter, and water, sanitation, and hygiene items provided by the UN had crossed into northwest Syria via the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam crossing points.⁵⁴³

In response to the emerging hostilities, the United Nations completed more than 300 missions to northwestern Syria, reaching 34 out of 45 sub-districts, including all sub-districts in northern Aleppo, and new frontline areas.⁵⁴⁴

Türkiye Accelerates Deportation of Syrians

Relief actors estimated that Turkish authorities deport 1,000 Syrians from Türkiye each week on average, representing a notable increase compared to deportation rates prior to the February 2023 earthquakes.⁵⁴⁵ Many Syrian refugees deported by the Turkish government are transported to parts of the northern Aleppo governorate, despite not being originally from the area, and face limited access to basic infrastructure and services for new arrivals, according to relief actors.⁵⁴⁶ USAID BHA partners provide support to the most vulnerable populations in Syria.⁵⁴⁷

Agriculture Sector Remains Volatile

As a result of conflict driven infrastructure deterioration and climate change, agriculture in Syria is in a very volatile state.⁵⁴⁸ Increased rain precipitation during the 2022-2023 winter season bolstered the 2023 wheat harvest.⁵⁴⁹ The SANES purchased more than 1 million metric tons of wheat from farmers in northeastern Syria in 2023.⁵⁵⁰ However, the agricultural sector remains vulnerable, especially with erratic climate patterns and recurrent droughts.⁵⁵¹ The Euphrates River, the source of some of the major sources of surface water in northeastern Syria, has experienced a reduction in water flows to Syria due to low rainfall and increased consumption on the Turkish side.⁵⁵²

Prices of agricultural inputs increased globally due to supply chain issues, which combined with increasing prices of fuel and the depreciation of Syrian currency, led to Syrian farmers resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as using lower quality inputs (seeds, fertilizer, pesticides) or refraining from planting parts or their whole lands, or selling their productive assets such as lands and equipment.⁵⁵³

USAID, through the Syria Recovery Trust Fund, supported around 1,000 potato farmers in Aleppo.⁵⁵⁴ Each farmer produced an average of 40.81 metric tons of potatoes, significantly contributing to the revival of regional potato production.⁵⁵⁵ USAID also funded the provision of high-quality fertilizer and insecticides to farmers to help control pests and diseases.⁵⁵⁶ According to USAID, the project provided climate sensitive agriculture training to potato farmers to help address issues with drought and water availability.⁵⁵⁷ The cultivation of potato crops is set to provide a source of income for vulnerable groups, including women, offering them employment opportunities in a range of services such as weeding, irrigation, and harvesting.⁵⁵⁸ This will address challenges related to social cohesion in the targeted areas, thus helping to mitigate the effects of poverty and inequality, according to USAID.⁵⁵⁹

USAID launched its Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria in September 2023, which seeks to improve agricultural production, increase food security, and increase incomes for farmers and agribusiness in non-regime areas of Syria.⁵⁶⁰ In addition, the USAID Economic Management for Stabilization program provided technical assistance to the Agriculture Authority and Financial Authority to reduce agricultural subsidies over time in favor of alternative, more direct ways to increase agricultural production and efficiency.⁵⁶¹ Wasteful agricultural subsidies to the grain sector contribute to fewer private sector incentives for improved productivity in the northeastern Syria agricultural sector, according to USAID.⁵⁶² This quarter, the program continued to advocate with the local authorities for a medium-term agricultural strategy that will focus technical expertise and budget toward raising productivity, improving food security, increasing sustainability, and better supporting low-income and disadvantaged groups.⁵⁶³ The experts also explored reform options and investigated how these could be integrated into an efficient, equitable and practical agricultural policy and budget reform framework and process.⁵⁶⁴ USAID reported that by phasing out subsidies, introducing positive policy actions, and establishing a sound sectoral agricultural framework, the strategy is intended to help deliver agricultural growth, improved food security, and a fiscally sound budget.⁵⁶⁵

The Euphrates River, the source of some of the major sources of surface water in northeastern Syria, has experienced a reduction in water flows to Syria due to low rainfall and increased consumption on the Turkish side.

Since 2014, the Department of Justice has charged more than 240 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS and obtained more than 200 convictions.

PROSECUTIONS AND SANCTIONS OF ISIS ACTIVITY

Several other U.S. 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.⁵⁶⁶

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 200 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.⁵⁶⁷ (See Table 5.)

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 2014.⁵⁶⁸

The DoJ's National Security Division provides a full-time, in-country attorney to support a range of matters related to facilitating appropriate civilian prosecutorial dispositions for foreign terrorist fighters and other terrorists, including efforts to counter the financing of terrorism.⁵⁶⁹ The attorney assists in assembling available information for use by international partners in foreign investigations and prosecutions and in navigating complex legal issues associated with the use of intelligence in criminal investigations and court proceedings.⁵⁷⁰

The FBI Fly Team provided sensitive site exploitation training, crime scene management, interview, and post-blast investigation training to the SDF in conjunction with U.S. military partners. All of the training is intended to develop skillsets pursuant to countering ISIS operations within Syria.⁵⁷¹ The DoJ also aided in the repatriation process by attempting to obtain biometrics of all individuals prior to them leaving the conflict zone.⁵⁷²

The DOJ's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training continued to provide support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia in their efforts to prosecute ISIS suspects repatriated from Syria to their respective countries.⁵⁷³

Table 5.

Department of Justice Prosecutions and Activities against Terrorism, October–December 2023

Date and Jurisdiction	Description
October 17 Eastern District of New York	Ruslan Maratovich Asainov was sentenced to life in prison for providing material support to ISIS that resulted in death. Between December 2013 and March 2019, Asainov provided and conspired to provide material support, personnel, training, and expert advice and assistance to ISIS.
October 19 Eastern District of Tennessee	Benjamin Carpenter was convicted of attempting to provide material support to ISIS. For years, Carpenter, using the alias “Abu Hamza,” published a large body of ISIS media, including his weekly newsletter “From Dabiq to Rome.” In 2020 and 2021, Carpenter contacted an individual he believed to be affiliated with ISIS’s central media bureau and provided translation services for a project intended to relaunch Al-Hayat Media Center, ISIS’s official foreign-language media arm.
November 6 District of Maine	Xavier Pelkey was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison followed by 20 years of supervised release for conspiring to provide material support to terrorists. Beginning in November 2021, Pelkey conspired with two minors located in Chicago and Canada to conduct a mass shooting at a Shia Mosque in the Chicago area.
December 6 Northern District of Illinois	Jason Brown pled guilty to one count of attempting to provide material support to ISIS, one count of distributing fentanyl, and one count of possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. Brown admitted that on three occasions in 2019 he provided \$500 in cash to an individual with the understanding that the money would be wired to an ISIS fighter in Syria.
December 13 Southern District of Indiana	Moyad Dannon was sentenced to 200 months in prison followed by a lifetime of supervised release. In 2018, Dannon and his brother sold a number of illegally obtained firearms to a cooperating individual and began manufacturing untraceable “ghost guns” by purchasing firearms parts online and assembling those parts into fully-functioning .223 caliber semi-automatic rifles. Moyad Dannon tried to market the rifles to a potential buyer who intended to transfer them to ISIS. The buyer was cooperating with the FBI. The Dannon brothers agreed to manufacture and sell at least 55 additional fully automatic “ghost guns” to the buyer/cooperator, believing those weapons would be shipped to ISIS.

Source: DoJ OIG, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.1 WOG DOJ 01B, 1/11/2024.

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 2014.⁵⁷⁴ Treasury reported that it did not sanction any individuals or organizations for providing support to ISIS during the quarter.⁵⁷⁵ Additionally, no individuals or organizations were removed from the sanctions list during the quarter.⁵⁷⁶

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.⁵⁷⁷

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

During the quarter, the Secretary of State sanctioned 1 group and 2 individuals with connections to Iraq or Syria, pursuant to Executive Order 13224, as amended:

Akram al-Ajouri, for being the Deputy Secretary General for Palestinian Islamic Jihad and leading group's militant wing, the al-Quds Brigade.⁵⁷⁸

Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, an Iran-aligned militia group whose activity has threatened the lives of U.S. and Coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria.⁵⁷⁹

Hashim Finyan Rahim al-Saraji, the Secretary General of Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada.⁵⁸⁰

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Immigration and Customs Enforcement 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. The Homeland Security Initiative 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, Iraq, and Lebanon. These efforts are synchronized with OIR to ensure that ISIS does not launch attacks against the United States.⁵⁸¹

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, continue to engage with supporters online to solicit funds, create and share media, and encourage attacks while their affiliates in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East prioritize local goals.⁵⁸²

DHS noted that individuals with terrorism connections continue to be interested in using established travel routes and permissive environments to facilitate access to the United States. DHS worked with the broader U.S. Government to counter these threats by sharing information and strategic intelligence on these threats, as well as broader trends and activities.⁵⁸³







A partner force member leaps over a wall during an advanced skills class on traversing danger areas taught by the Coalition. (U.S. Army photo)

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

74 Strategic Planning

74 Audits, Inspections, and Evaluations

77 Investigations

79 Hotline Activity

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

Under the Lead IG framework, the DoD OIG, State OIG, USAID OIG, and partner agencies conduct audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations related to Operation Inherent Resolve and other related U.S. Government activities in Iraq and Syria.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

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.

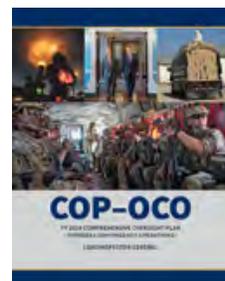
Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR*, published on September 26, 2023, as part of the *FY 2024 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*, is organized by three strategic oversight areas: Military Operations and Security Cooperation; Diplomacy, Governance, Stabilization, and Humanitarian Assistance; and Support to Mission.

AUDITS, INSPECTIONS, AND EVALUATIONS

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 oversight and investigative staff maintained their presence in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain during the quarter. State OIG staff assigned to Baghdad, Iraq, and Frankfurt, Germany conducted oversight work of State 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.



**FY 2024
Comprehensive
Oversight Plan
for Overseas
Contingency
Operations.**

COMPLETED PROJECTS

Between October 1 and December 31, 2023, the DoD and State OIGs issued two oversight reports related to OIR, as detailed below. Completed reports by Lead IG agencies are available on their respective web pages.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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

DODIG-2024-016; November 8, 2023

The DoD OIG evaluated 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.

Military units conducting overseas operations use biometrics to identify friendly forces, and other individuals assisting the United States, and share this information with other units and other Federal agencies.

The DoD OIG determined that the Services and combatant commands followed DoD policy and their own command-specific guidance and procedures to maintain property accountability for biometric devices. However, some combatant command Service Components had biometric devices that did not have data encryption capabilities. This occurred because current DoD biometrics policy does not specify information security standards or require encryption for biometric devices.

The DoD OIG made recommendations to the Services and combatant commands, intended to improve adherence DoD policy and property accountability for biometric devices. Management agreed with the recommendations, which remain resolved but open until appropriate actions are taken.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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

AUD-GEER-24-02; November 21, 2023

State OIG conducted this 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, Iraq.

In January 2009, State opened the Baghdad Embassy Compound at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq. The compound included a power plant to generate all the compound's electrical power. However, the plant had deficiencies, and State took actions to replace the plant with a new central power plant. In 2012, State's Office of Acquisitions Management (AQM) awarded a contract and State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) constructed the power plant. The power plant came online in 2018 and has since experienced significant performance issues.

State OIG found that State did not always follow Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, and commissioning of the new central power plant at Embassy Baghdad and missed opportunities to correct identified deficiencies at each project phase, even during the construction phase when the deficiencies became apparent. Deficiencies included AQM not complying with Federal regulations regarding fair and reasonable pricing during awards processes; and OBO and AQM not complying with requirements for selecting the most highly qualified architect-engineer to design the power plant at a fair and reasonable price. Additionally, OBO concluded the commissioning process without resolving outstanding concerns regarding inadequate ventilation and airflow and ignored results of power plant performance testing and recommendations to conduct further testing.

State OIG made 13 recommendations to AQM and OBO to improve planning processes, contract administration, design review, record retention, and management of future OBO projects involving power plants. The relevant State bureaus and offices concurred with 11 recommendations and did not concur with 2 recommendations. At the time the report was issued, State OIG considered 11 recommendations which remain resolved but open until appropriate actions are taken. Two recommendations remained unresolved.

ONGOING AND PLANNED OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

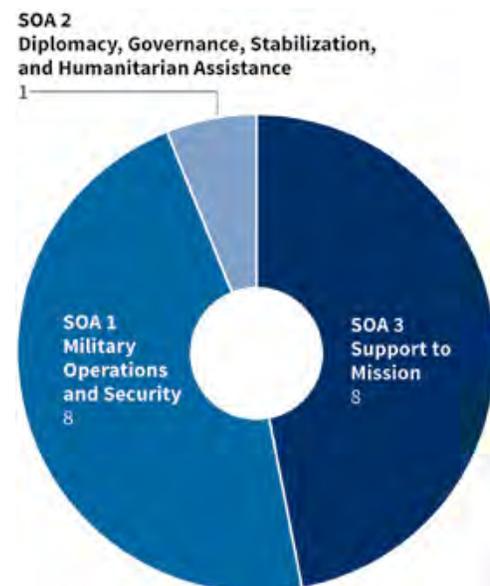
As of December 31, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 17 ongoing and planned projects related to OIR, including those summarized below. Tables 6 and 7 in Appendix F list the titles and objectives for all ongoing projects. Tables 8 and 9 contained in Appendix G list the titles and objectives for all planned projects.

Military Operations and Security Cooperation

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD properly stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, which includes OIR.
- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct a follow up to a previous audit related to accountability of equipment provided to Iraqi security and vetted Syrian opposition forces through the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund.
- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an evaluation to determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception planning in support of ongoing OIR operations.
- **State OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether State's Bureau of Counterterrorism effectively managed programs to counter Iranian-sponsored militias.

Figure 6.

Ongoing and Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



Diplomacy, Governance, Stabilization, and Humanitarian Assistance

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

Support to Mission

- **State OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether State planned and designed the power plant at the new consulate compound in Erbil, Iraq, in accordance with Federal and State requirements and guidelines.
- **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.

INVESTIGATIONS

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.

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 Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 17 fraud awareness briefings for 370 participants.

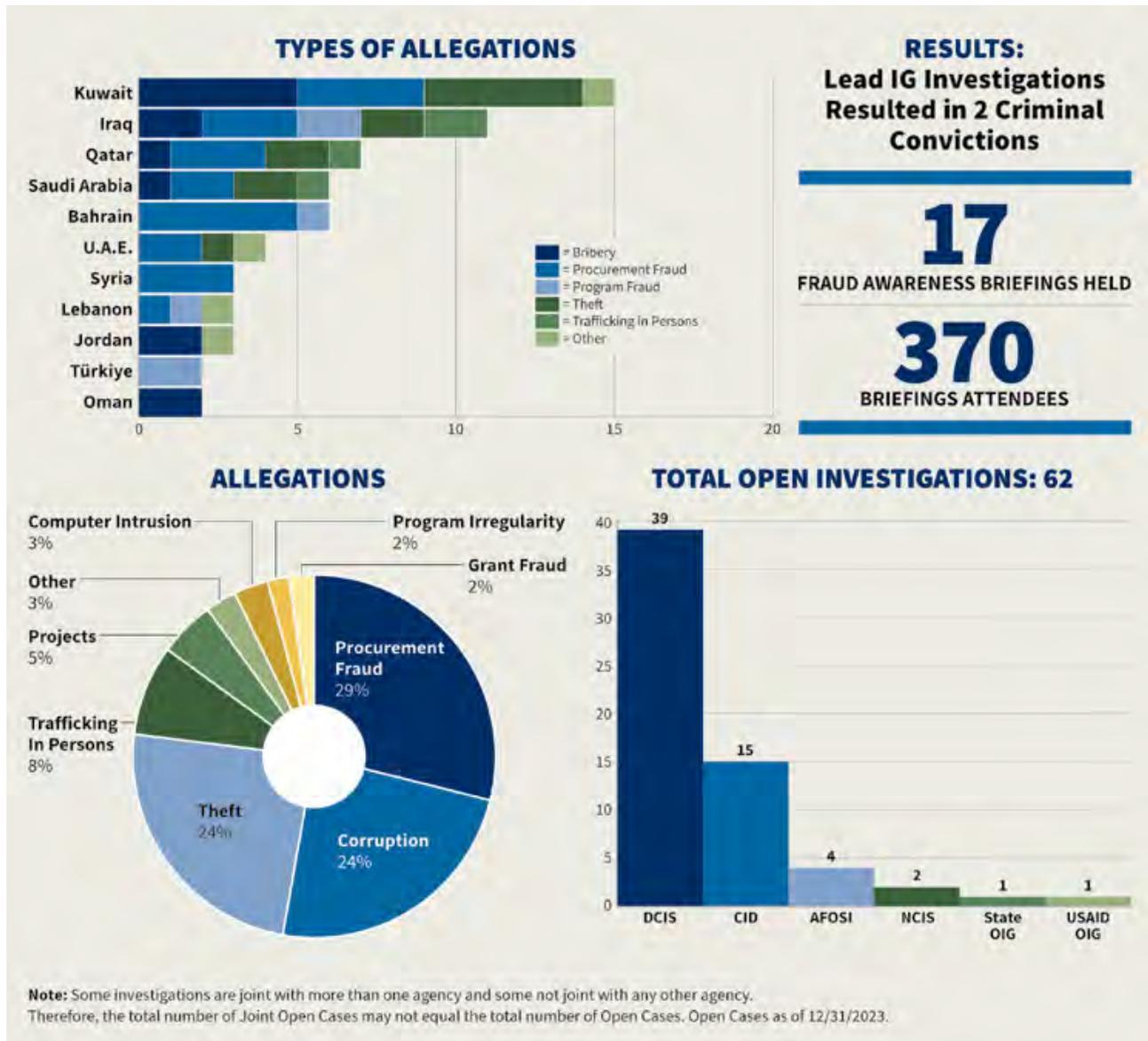
During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in two criminal investigations based on a separate, multi-agency investigations. In the first case, a federal judge in the District of Columbia on November 9 sentenced defense contractor Frank Rafaraci to a year in prison, 12 months of supervised release, a \$33,500 fine, and a special assessment fee of \$100, following an earlier guilty plea to one count of bribery of a public official. According to the joint DCIS, Internal Revenue Service, Army CID and NCIS investigation, Rafaraci offered money to a Marine Liaison Officer for the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet in Manama, Bahrain, in exchange for opportunities benefitting Rafaraci's company.

In the second case, a federal judge in the District of Columbia on November 13 sentenced defense contractor Roy George Varkey to three months incarceration and a special assessment fee of \$200. According to the joint DCIS and Army CID investigation, Varkey was indicted for offering and paying multiple bribes to a DoD employee at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 9 investigations, initiated 8 investigations, and coordinated on 62 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations. DCIS has three ongoing “legacy” investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the formal designation of OIR. Figure 7 displays the primary offense locations, allegations, and other data on investigations related to OIR.

Figure 7.

OIR Related Investigation Activities, October 1–December 31, 2023



HOTLINE ACTIVITY

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 96 allegations and referred 72 cases related to OIR to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple subjects and allegations. The majority of allegations during the reporting period related to personal misconduct, procurement and contract administration, personnel matters, and security. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 8.

Hotline Activities







Ships from the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group, the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group, and Hellenic Navy frigate HS Navarinon sail in formation in the Mediterranean Sea, December 31, 2023. (U.S. Navy 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 (U.S.C. title 5, section 419, previously found at title 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 chair of 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 October 1 through December 31, 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

Implementer	Activity Highlights
<p>Various mine action non-government organizations and a U.S.-based commercial company.</p> <p>\$40 million for FY 2024</p>	<p>Humanitarian Mine Action: Supported the survey, marking, and clearance of landmines, unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices, and other explosive remnants of war as well as the delivery of explosive ordnance risk education across Iraq.</p> <p>Displacement Tracking Matrix: Collected data on displacement, conditions in areas of return, and main barriers to return for IDPs and returnees.</p>
<p>UNITAD</p> <p>October 2023–March 2025</p> <p>\$2 million award</p>	<p>Seeks to leverage the judicial investigator status of two key stakeholders within the GOI—namely the Mass Graves Directorate and Medico-Legal Directorate—to “close the loop” on mass grave investigations by enhancing their ability to collect ante mortem data, exploit digital data, and process all associated crime scene evidence collected from mass grave sites. This project will enable UNITAD to accelerate the development of an Iraqi-led process to establish scientifically robust forensic identification procedures in affected communities.</p>

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 12/20/2023.

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
<p>Funding Facility for Stabilization</p> <p>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 homes.</p> <p>July 2015–December 2025</p> <p>\$457 million award</p>	<p>USAID is the largest contributor to this 29-donor, multilateral program.</p>
<p>Durable Communities and Economic Opportunities</p> <p>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)</p> <p>\$24.5 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</p> <p>Supports the durable return for IDPs from the Ninewa Plain, focusing on religious and ethnic minority communities.</p> <p>June 2018–September 2025</p> <p>\$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>

Program	Activity Highlights
<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 \$16.3 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 \$4 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>
<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.</p> <p>September 2019–November 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.</p> <p>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. The committee provides cash support to small entrepreneurs to establish/improve their small businesses.</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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Created digitally documented collections as databases, built for portability, interoperability, and accessibility.</p>

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Program	Activity Highlights
<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.</p> <p>September 2021–September 2025 \$18 million award</p>	<p>Established partnerships with local government authorities, civil society organizations, media, and community groups in an inclusive manner to quickly implement activities that strengthen community resilience.</p> <p>Encouraged collaborative action across diverse segments of Iraqi society to tackle common issues, such as climate change impacts, lack of essential services, and challenges related to hosting returns of displaced Iraqis, while empowering initiatives and platforms that aid communities in responding to these stressors.</p>

Source: USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 12/22/2023.

State-funded Stabilization Programs in Syria During the Quarter

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Essential Services and Local Governance Seeks to build trust in local governance entities, making target communities less susceptible to ISIS influence.</p>	<p>Provided operational and infrastructure assistance to municipal vehicle mechanics, firefighters, and emergency response drivers to enhance local council effectiveness in providing essential services across multiple sectors.</p> <p>Conducted capacity building needs assessments of local councils to help determine data driven decisions and enhance overall governance.</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 deliver 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>Supported an internal management unit that coordinated with al-Hol camp management and administration to facilitate the return of over 500 individuals from al-Hol camp to communities of return, including a data collection dashboard on individual and family demographic data, needs assessments, and follow-up response upon return.</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>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>

Program	Activities During the Quarter
<p>Support to Independent Media Seeks to promote unbiased, professional and relevant reporting.</p>	<p>Provided capacity building and operational support to 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. 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>
<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 and IEDs from key critical infrastructure sites and areas liberated from ISIS.</p> <p>Delivered explosive ordnance risk education to displaced persons and at-risk communities.</p> <p>Provided local capacity building support.</p>

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 12/20/2023.

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. Duration: 4 years (ends August 2025) \$12 million award</p>	<p>Peace Building: Leveraged connections with tribal and religious leaders to understand local community demands and address immediate drivers of tension. Held six dialogues with civil society organizations and influential civic figures to reduce hate speech, negative media mobilization and incitement.</p> <p>Training and Capacity Building: Provided training and capacity building to 40 local actors trained in best practices for transparent, accountable, and effective local governance.</p> <p>Community Dialogue: Sustained engagement with Syrian stakeholders resulted in tangible action by civil society organizations to hold authorities accountable in northeastern Syria. Facilitated 29 dialogues and roundtables to date on issue identification, effective communications, conflict analysis, and negotiations and mediation for local communities.</p> <p>Advocacy Campaign: Assisted 16 civil society organizations to implement advocacy campaigns that are intended to constructively engage local authorities on citizens’ needs and interests.</p> <p>Support for al-Hol Returnees: Worked with local citizen-based organizations to develop five public outreach campaigns in Raqqa to address issues related to al-Hol returnees, such as destigmatization, social cohesion, and positive engagement between local women and women returnees. Met with the Raqqa Civil Council to discuss how it can facilitate access to legal documentation to returnees and others in the region and provided direct support to al-Hol returnees and members of their host communities on how to secure proper identification and public services from local authorities.</p> <p>Worked with the Dayr az Zawr, Tabqa, and Raqqa Women’s Committees to provide critical livelihood support services to women returnees from al-Hol and women in communities of return. Subawards made this quarter will establish a women’s center for economic empowerment in each of the Women’s Committee premises, will support paid internships and financial support for small business start-up or expansion, and will build the capacity of the Women’s Committee staff to provide career counseling, job readiness, and small business management training.</p>
<p>Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria (GROW) Seeks to improve agricultural production, increase food security, and increase incomes for farmers and agribusiness in non-regime areas of Syria. Duration: 3 years base with 2 option years (ends August 2028) \$42 million award</p>	<p>Program Start-Up: The GROW program was awarded on Sept 27, 2023, and is in its start-up phase.</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)</p> <p>\$14.55 million award</p>	<p>Career Opportunities: Placed 250 job seekers with disabilities in vacant positions; 93 have completed their 6-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 NES, 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)</p> <p>\$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>Policy and Regulatory Reforms: Provided technical assistance to the SANES to improve their transparency and accountability and increase their ability to induce economic growth through working on reforms and regulatory frameworks for macro-fiscal policies, banking regulations and compliance, accounting, payments system, agriculture and budget reform.</p> <p>Agricultural Markets and Food Security: Provided targeted technical training and outreach to farmers/producers including supporting 372 farmers to apply modern cultivation techniques and 105 small-holder livestock breeders; for purposes of supporting enhanced livestock breeding practices. These have generated significant cost savings, while helping improve food security. Farmers have earned higher incomes through enhanced market engagement and heightened climate resilience. Provided technical assistance to the Agriculture Authority and Financial Authority to reduce agricultural subsidies over time in favor of alternative, more direct ways to increase agricultural production and efficiency.</p>

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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: The program is tracking and monitoring returnees through an established case management system (CMS) and is linking the returnees to a suite of social, economic, and property services to facilitate reintegration. Since the start of the CMS, the program has made 747 total referrals for services for approximately 85 returnee families. Currently, 77 returnee families continue to be active and engaged in the CMS and in regular communication with the program.</p> <p>Awarded a grant to the Dayr az Zawr Civil Council Social Affairs and Labor Committee that will provide assistance for the local authority to receive returnees, equip their newly established Community Care Center sub-committee, participate in a comprehensive case management system capacity needs assessment, and coordinate with service providers to develop a referral network.</p> <p>Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from al-Hol in Raqqa–Service Provision: Provided transitional shelter support for returnees through two grants, as well as enhancing electricity provision in Raqqa city. Supported a local organization to rehabilitate 10 host residences that are housing returnee families. Supported another organization to provide transitional shelter for nine months for an additional 23 returnee families in Raqqa. Supported the Raqqa Civil Council Energy Committee to install 10 new electrical transformers at existing transformation centers, neighborhood-level utility facilities that provide usable electricity to homes and other users.</p> <p>Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from al-Hol in Dayr az Zawr–Case Management System and Capacity Building: Coordinated with the Dayr az Zawr Civil Council Social Affairs and Labor Committee to prepare for al-Hol returnees that are anticipated to return to the governorate. There are approximately 150 Syrian families registered for release from al-Hol whose security clearances are in process. While there is no release date yet, the release is expected in the upcoming month.</p> <p>Awarded a grant to the committee to provide assistance for the local authority to receive returnees, equip their newly established Community Care Center sub-committee, participate in a comprehensive case management system capacity needs assessment, and coordinate with service providers to develop a referral network.</p> <p>Establishment of Oxygen Bottling Plants: With program support, the Health Committees of the Raqqa and Dayr az Zawr Civil Councils completed the implementation works and are now operating the medical-grade oxygen bottling plants. The plants address health facility oxygen demands to treat COVID-19 and other medical issues. The plant in Dayr az Zawr has a capacity of 100 cylinders per day, while the Raqqa plant has a capacity of 300 cylinders per day.</p> <p>Establishment of Hasakah Table Eggs and Fertilized Eggs Production Farms: Supported the General Directorate of Agriculture and Animal Welfare in Hasakah to rehabilitate farm facilities. These two activities will strengthen food security and promote economic recovery by ensuring consistent supplies of high-quality table eggs as a nutritional food source and high-quality fertilized eggs for use in the chick hatchery facility (that was previously established with support from the program). The establishment of the egg production farms will also reduce dependence on imports, promote self-sufficiency, and foster resilience and stability.</p> <p>Establishment of Pasta Factory in Hasakah: Awarded a grant to the Department of Community Projects and Cooperatives in Hasakah for the establishment of a pasta factory that will strengthen food security, promote economic recovery, and reduce reliance on imports.</p> <p>Institutional Capacity Development for Local Essential Services and Livelihoods Partners: Completed direct technical assistance training and capacity building for 12 civil society organizations in Raqqa, Dayr az Zawr, and Jazeera. The training sessions focused on strategic planning, fixed assets, financial policies, communications, internal auditing, proposal writing, advocacy, succession management, human resources, and gender inclusion policies. These activities foster resilience and stability and promote accountability and inclusion.</p>

APPENDIX E

State and USAID Humanitarian Assistance Programs

State-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Implementer	Activity Highlights
<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>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>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 and 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, 12/20/2023.

USAID-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene	Provided water, sanitation, and hygiene services in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Anbar provinces. This included solid waste management, desludging and de-blocking services, and hygiene promotion activities, benefiting 5,403 individuals in the targeted camps and collective centers.
Shelter and Settlements	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.
Protection	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.
Humanitarian Coordination, Information Management, and Assessments	Conducted a Nationwide Cross-Cutting Needs Assessment among out-of-camp IDP and returnee households. Through in-person surveys covering key provinces across the country including Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Sulaymaniyah.

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, 12/22/2023.



APPENDIX F

Ongoing Oversight Projects

Table 6 and 7 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 6.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of December 31, 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 (MILDEC) 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.

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 (ISF).

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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 the Worldwide Protective Services III Initial Training Consolidation Initiative

To determine whether the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's efforts to consolidate initial WPS III training have improved training quality, enhanced oversight, and achieved the envisioned cost savings.

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

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.

Table 7.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of December 31, 2023

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Audit of International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) Program

To determine whether International Cooperative Administrative Support Services ICASS payments were appropriate and supported.



APPENDIX G

Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 8 and 9 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 8.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of December 31, 2023

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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.

Audit of DoD Reimbursement from a Country in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility in Accordance with the Defense Cooperation Agreement

To determine whether the DoD requested and received reimbursement from a country in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility for services provided by DoD in accordance with the Defense Cooperation Agreement.

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 the State 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 9.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of December 31, 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	
AQM	State Office of Acquisitions Management
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CID	U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
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
ESSA	Eastern Syria Security Area
EUM	end-use monitoring
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HSI	Homeland Security Investigations
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ITP	Iraq–Türkiye Pipeline
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KSF	Kurdish Security Forces

Acronym	
MERV	Middle Euphrates River Valley
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MoPA	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs
MoPOC	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs Operations Center
NCIS	Naval Criminal Investigative Service
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OBO	State Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RGB	Regional Guard Brigade
SANES	Self Administration of North East Syria
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SDGT	Specially Designated Global Terrorist
SFA	Syrian Free Army
State	Department of State
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
TSO	Turkish-supported opposition
UAS	Unmanned Aerial System
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
YPG	People's Protection Units

ENDNOTES

1. CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 7/18/2023.
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