

**LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS**



# **OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE**

**AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO**

# **IRAQ & SYRIA**



**OCTOBER 1, 2024–DECEMBER 31, 2024**



**On the cover:** A Syrian Free Army soldier stands atop a watchtower at a combat outpost in the deconfliction zone at At Tanf Garrison, Syria. (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 as amended under 5 U.S.C. 419.

The United States launched OIR in 2014 to defeat the Islamic State in 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 and 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. 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.

This report covers the period October 1–December 31, 2024. In January 2025, the President issued an Executive Order on Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid. In response, the Secretary of State subsequently paused most U.S. foreign assistance funded by or through State and USAID for review.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven A. Stebbins".

**Steven A. Stebbins**  
Acting Lead Inspector General  
for OIR  
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandra J. Lewis".

**Sandra J. Lewis**  
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**Marc A. Meyer**  
Acting Deputy Inspector General  
Performing the Duties of  
the Inspector General  
U.S. Agency for International  
Development







A U.S. Army Soldier speaks to a local sheikh about security concerns in the area during a dismounted patrol with Syrian Democratic Forces in northeastern Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

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**A member of the Syrian Free Army poses for a photo during a training mission in support of CJTF-OIR, near At Tanf Garrison, Syria. (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 and to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks.<sup>1</sup> The broader counter-ISIS campaign includes supporting the Iraqi government and local Syrian partners with civilian-led stabilization activities.<sup>2</sup>

**On December 8, an alliance of rebel groups led by the formerly al-Qaeda-aligned Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), advanced on Damascus, toppling longtime Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.<sup>3</sup>**

As regime forces, along with their Russian and Iran-aligned militia allies, retreated from positions across Syria, various internal and external factions jockeyed to fill security vacuums.<sup>4</sup> These factions included former Syrian rebel and opposition groups, the Coalition's Syrian partner forces, and bordering nations, particularly Türkiye and Israel.<sup>5</sup> The United States conducted dozens of airstrikes against ISIS to counter the group's ability to exploit any vacuums or seize abandoned weapons.<sup>6</sup> Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) encouraged its partner forces in Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the northeast and the Syrian Free Army (SFA) in the southeast, to work out agreements with the new interim authorities.<sup>7</sup>

**U.S. diplomats held talks with HTS-led interim authorities on December 20.<sup>8</sup>** A U.S. Government delegation, including then-Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf and incoming Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad Daniel Rubinstein, visited Damascus to engage with members of Syrian civil society and other communities about their vision for Syria's future and how the United States can support them.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. delegation also met with the HTS authorities, including its leader, Ahmed al-Shara'a, to discuss the set of principles agreed upon by the United States and its regional partners in Aqaba, Jordan.<sup>10</sup> The visit was the first U.S. diplomatic engagement with Syrian officials since 2012.<sup>11</sup>

Local children watch U.S. Army Soldiers depart after a joint dismounted patrol with the SDF in northeastern Syria. (U.S. Army photo)



**Fighting intensified between Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) forces and the SDF in northern Syria.**<sup>12</sup> The SNA advance into Tal Rifaat and Manbij drove thousands of Kurdish fighters and civilians east across the Euphrates River and into SDF-controlled Raqqah governorate, while heavy fighting continued around the Tishreen Dam, which previously powered much of northeastern Syria.<sup>13</sup> The fighting challenged the SDF's ability to maintain internal stability while also conducting counter-ISIS operations.<sup>14</sup> The United States brokered an understanding between the SDF and the SNA in Manbij.<sup>15</sup> The United States continued to talk to Türkiye and others in the region about a path forward to de-escalate tensions, address Turkish security concerns, and increase stability.<sup>16</sup>

**The SDF also faced challenges to its control in eastern Syria, where dissent from some tribal factions in the Dayr az Zawr governorate grew.**<sup>17</sup> As regime-aligned forces retreated from the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV), the SDF—with U.S. planning support—launched operations intended to temporarily secure territory on both the west and east banks of the Euphrates, to help prevent ISIS gains.<sup>18</sup> The SDF military commander General Mazloun Abdi held preliminary talks with HTS leadership at the end of December.<sup>19</sup>

**The Syrian Free Army (SFA) expanded beyond the deconfliction zone around At Tanf Garrison.** The SFA, which partnered with U.S. forces, reached northwest to Palmyra, and about 50 kilometers west toward Damascus.<sup>20</sup> The SFA secured weapons and heavy equipment that retreating forces left behind as it seeks to find its role in the new Syrian security forces.<sup>21</sup> SFA engagements with the HTS during the quarter were limited to tactical level coordination with local HTS forces to deconflict movements of security forces in the vicinity of Palmyra and in the At Tanf Garrison deconfliction zone.<sup>22</sup>

**The fall of the Assad regime increased concerns about ISIS's goal to break its fighters out of SDF-run detention facilities and to exploit conditions in the al-Hol displaced persons camp.**<sup>23</sup> Then-Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said in late December that U.S. forces were still needed in Syria to prevent ISIS from reconstituting and to support the SDF, particularly in maintaining security in the detention facilities holding ISIS fighters



and the displaced persons in the al-Hol camp.<sup>24</sup> In November, the SDF led a multi-day Coalition-supported security and clearance operation in al-Hol to remove ISIS operatives and clear their hideouts and equipment.<sup>25</sup>

**Fueled by an ongoing drought, food insecurity and conflict, the humanitarian crisis in Syria worsened during the quarter.**<sup>26</sup> An estimated 1 million Syrians were displaced following the opposition advance on Damascus on November 27 and most remained displaced as of the end of the quarter.<sup>27</sup> Humanitarian organizations reported increased pressure on limited food stocks due to looting, disrupted supply chains, and border closures.<sup>28</sup>

**The Iraqi Kurdistan Region held parliamentary elections on October 20.** The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) won 39 and 23 seats, respectively, out of the 100-member parliament. A growing new party, the New Generation Movement, won 15 seats. Islamist groups won 10 seats.<sup>29</sup> Federal Iraq has begun planning for national parliamentary elections, which must be held before November 25, 2025, per constitutional requirements, though an official date had not been set as of the end of the quarter.<sup>30</sup>

**Iraqi oil production fell by 200,000 barrels per day during the quarter.** Iraq's Ministry of Oil continued to make cuts under pressure from OPEC+ to improve compliance with quota agreements and to make extra reductions to compensate for past over-production.<sup>31</sup> OPEC+ announced its decision on December 10 to extend the voluntary reduction in oil production by its members, including Iraq, through March.<sup>32</sup> Iraq's decreased oil production this quarter has put pressure on its federal budget.<sup>33</sup>

**U.S. Army Soldiers conclude a training exercise in support of CJTF-OIR in western Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)**









Peshmerga soldiers showcase their weapon skills by demonstrating how to disassemble and reassemble their weapons, near Erbil, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

## MISSION UPDATE

- 8 Introduction
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# MISSION UPDATE

## INTRODUCTION

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 and to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks.<sup>34</sup>

The Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which comprises troops from 23 countries, executes the OIR campaign.<sup>35</sup> CJTF-OIR is part of the 88-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, led by the United States.<sup>36</sup>

The OIR campaign is organized around four lines of effort.<sup>37</sup> (See Figure 1.) The campaign plan outlines decisive conditions and conditions-based milestones against which to measure progress of the mission. Specifically, this assessment framework contains milestones to transition OIR activities to a long-term security framework.<sup>38</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that it is in the process of updating the Campaign Plan and expected to publish a revised version next quarter.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 1.

### CJTF-OIR Lines of Effort

**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. ESTABLISH AN ENDURING SECURITY COOPERATION FRAMEWORK IN IRAQ** This complements parallel efforts at the institutional level by Unified Action Partners (including NATO Mission-Iraq and Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq) 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.

Table 1.

**State Policy Objectives in Iraq and Syria**

Iraq	Syria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote inclusive, economic reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A unified, stable Syria that is governed through a Syrian-led political solution, with accountability and justice for the Syrian people, while contributing to regional stability</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support an Iraqi democracy that delivers for all citizens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support efforts to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS and al-Qaeda</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support a resilient Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce violence, including through the observance of ceasefires across the country</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bolster Iraqi independence and advance regional integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce suffering by improving humanitarian access throughout Syria</li> <li>Promote accountability for atrocities and the protection of and respect for human rights</li> <li>Advance an inclusive, Syrian-led political transition in the spirit of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254</li> </ul>

**Source:** State, “Integrated Country Strategy-Iraq,” 5/30/2023; State, response to State OIG request for information, 4/8/2024; State, vetting comment, 2/3/2025.

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 1.)

The U.S. Government, primarily through State and USAID, remains the largest donor for stabilization and humanitarian assistance programming in Iraq and Syria.<sup>40</sup> Other U.S. Government agencies, including the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) and the Department of Justice (DoJ), also contribute to the counter-ISIS mission through sanctions, prosecutions, and technical assistance programs.<sup>41</sup>

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, including the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), and in Syria. Of the \$398.0 million CTEF appropriation for FY 2024, \$242.0 million was designated to support partner forces in Iraq, of which \$214.1 million had been expended as of the end of September. Of the \$156.0 million designated for Syrian partner forces, \$21.3 million had been expended as of the end of September.<sup>42</sup> During the quarter, the DoD also expended FY 2025 CTEF funding: \$5.7 million for Iraq and \$81.3 million for Syria across both the FY 2024/2025 and FY 2025/2026 account periods of availability.<sup>43</sup>

Congress appropriated \$1.18 billion for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Iraq from FY 2020 through FY 2024. Congress appropriated \$175 million for FY 2024, even though State requested a reduced amount of \$75.5 million because previously appropriated FMF funds remained available. State requested \$90 million for FY 2025. At the end of the quarter, \$702.1 million (59.5 percent of available funds) had been spent. State reported that the allocation of FY 2024 FMF funds is under review and is not finalized or obligated.<sup>44</sup>

## FALL OF THE ASSAD REGIME

### Islamist Opposition Leads Offensive that Topples Syria's Assad Regime

After 14 years of civil war in Syria, a loose alliance of rebel groups spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and led by former al-Qaeda militia leader Ahmed al-Shara'a, advanced against Syrian regime-controlled cities, forcing regime forces into retreat. In early December, southern rebel groups entered the Syrian capital Damascus, ousting longtime Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and changing the landscape of the U.S.-supported fight against ISIS.<sup>45</sup> The collapse of the Assad regime, and the end of nearly 60 years of Ba'athist authoritarian rule, led to celebrations throughout the Syrian community, but the momentous turn also created uncertainty for Syria and for CJTF-OIR and its partners.<sup>46</sup>

As rebels captured Damascus on December 8, the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) reported that its forces conducted dozens of strikes against ISIS to counter the group's ability to "take advantage of the current situation to reconstitute."<sup>47</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that U.S. forces continued to defend Coalition and partner personnel and installations from a range of threats in a tenuous security environment.<sup>48</sup> U.S. officials maintained that the U.S. mission in Syria to defeat ISIS was necessary to contain ISIS, and that U.S. forces would remain in Syria to carry out that mission.<sup>49</sup>

Iran fully withdrew its forces from Syria, while Russia withdrew some of its forces from the country. This, along with the collapse of the regime, left security vacuums that various Syrian factions and external actors have sought to fill.<sup>50</sup> These include former Syrian rebel and opposition groups, the Coalition's Syrian partner forces, and bordering nations, particularly Türkiye and Israel.<sup>51</sup>

The events impacted Coalition partner forces in Syria. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the primary Coalition partner in the fight against ISIS, conducted operations on both sides of the Euphrates River with U.S. advisement to prevent a security vacuum after the collapse of regime and allied forces.<sup>52</sup> In addition to what it views as an existential fight with Turkish-backed forces in the north, the Kurdish-dominated SDF also faced an

As rebels captured Damascus on December 8, USCENTCOM reported that its forces conducted dozens of strikes against ISIS to counter the group's ability to "take advantage of the current situation to reconstitute."

### FALL OF THE ASSAD REGIME AND ITS AFTERMATH, NOVEMBER 1, 2024–DECEMBER 31, 2024

#### NOVEMBER 27

Syrian opposition coalition led by HTS launches a surprise advance from Idlib.

#### DECEMBER 1

Turkish-backed SNA seizes Tal Rafat, drives SDF forces and thousands of civilians east.

#### DECEMBER 6

Opposition groups south of Damascus begin seizing towns and regime bases. As regime forces retreat, SDF enters Dayr az Zawr city and border city of Abu Kamal.

#### NOV

#### NOVEMBER 30

Opposition offensive seizes Aleppo as regime forces withdraw south toward Hama.

#### DECEMBER 5

HTS-led offensive seizes Hama and continues advance south toward Homs.

#### DECEMBER 7

Regime forces begin to collapse across Syria as HTS-led offensive seizes Homs. SFA and opposition forces expand from At Tanf deconfliction zone to Palmyra.



**CJTF-OIR said that the capture or killing of multiple ISIS leaders in October and November had diminished the group's effectiveness in planning and executing coordinated attacks.**

uncertain future under the HTS-led interim authorities, as well as tribal dissent in the Dayr az Zawr governorate.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, the Syrian Free Army (SFA), a Coalition partner that has operated in the deconfliction zone around the U.S. military's At Tanf Garrison further south, expanded west from the deconfliction zone toward Damascus and north into the Tadmur region, including the city of Palmyra after the fall of Assad's government. The SFA movements filled a vacuum left by the Syrian regime military and Russian- and Iranian-aligned forces.<sup>54</sup>

## STATUS OF ISIS

### ISIS Exploits the Security Vacuum in Syria, Maintains Capabilities and Intent

CJTF-OIR said that following the collapse of the Assad regime, ISIS fighters in Syria exploited the chaos to acquire some quantities of weapons and supplies from supply depots abandoned by regime forces.<sup>55</sup> ISIS fighters captured and killed 54 Syrian regime soldiers who fled to the desert in Homs governorate, CJTF-OIR said, citing media reports.<sup>56</sup>

ISIS probably will take advantage of the reduced security situation to expand its presence beyond the safe havens it has established in the central Syrian desert to try to increase its influence in Syria, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>57</sup> ISIS will leverage the ongoing political instability to expand recruitment from among disenfranchised local communities.<sup>58</sup> Members of extremist groups could move into Syria and establish a presence, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>59</sup>

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that in recent months, ISIS operatives in Iraq had demonstrated limited operational capability, while in Syria, ISIS had shown no significant improvement in operational capabilities or attack sophistication.<sup>60</sup> CJTF-OIR said that the capture or killing of multiple ISIS leaders in October and November had diminished the group's effectiveness in planning and executing coordinated attacks.<sup>61</sup>

Citing media sources, the DIA assessed that senior ISIS leaders in Syria and Iraq almost certainly remain committed to enabling international operations, noting that media reported the October arrest in Germany of an alleged ISIS member from Libya for allegedly planning

#### DECEMBER 8

The regime surrenders to HTS as Assad flees Syria.

#### DECEMBER 16

HTS leader Ahmed al Shara'a meets with UN Special Envoy to discuss a Syrian political transition within the framework of UNSCR 2254.

#### DECEMBER 20

U.S. delegation meets with al-Shara'a in Damascus.

#### DECEMBER 9

As regime collapses, Israeli forces cross southwest Syrian border to create buffer zone. SNA forces in the north seize Manbij and battle SDF for Tishreen Dam.

#### DECEMBER 17

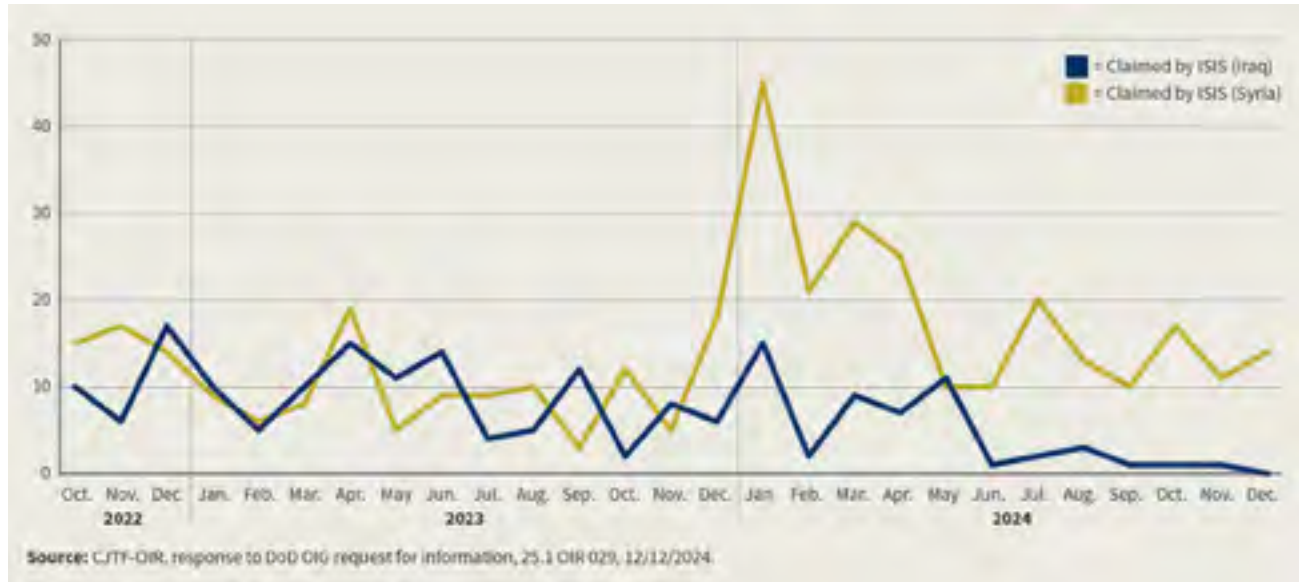
HTS announces all armed opposition groups will dissolve into a new Defense Ministry.

#### LATE DECEMBER

SDF commander meets HTS leadership, no agreement reached.

DEC

Figure 2.

**ISIS-claimed Attacks by Month, October 2022-December 2024**

to conduct a terrorist attack against the Israeli Embassy in Berlin.<sup>62</sup> ISIS elements in Türkiye and Afghanistan remain pivotal nodes in ISIS’s external attack network, and ISIS has exploited weak governance in Africa to establish growing affiliates.<sup>63</sup>

In the United States, an apparently ISIS-inspired U.S. military veteran from Texas drove a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year’s Eve revelers in New Orleans, killing 15 people.<sup>64</sup> The FBI said in a statement that the suspect had weapons, an IED, and an ISIS flag in his vehicle.<sup>65</sup>

Treasury reported that ISIS operatives in Iraq and Syria maintain access to nearly \$10 million in reserves while continuing to extort and rob local populations and employ international fundraising and recruitment networks.<sup>66</sup> Treasury said that these sources of revenue largely reside outside the formal economy, allowing ISIS to sustain its terrorist insurgency.<sup>67</sup>

## Coalition and Partner Forces Increase Counter-ISIS Operations

CJTF-OIR attributed the decrease in ISIS-claimed attacks in the second half of 2024 to significant counter-ISIS pressure since late August.<sup>68</sup> CJTF-OIR said that these operations also degraded the group’s attempts to resurge following the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>69</sup>

**Syria:** CJTF-OIR forces conducted six targeted strikes that killed 102 ISIS fighters and eliminated key logistics nodes, communications equipment, and weapons. The SDF conducted 17 counter-ISIS operations.<sup>70</sup> Precision strikes on ISIS camps and operatives in Syria on December 16 in former regime and Russian-controlled areas killed 12 ISIS militants, and another strike on December 20 killed the ISIS leader of the Dayr az Zawr

governorate.<sup>71</sup> USCENTCOM said that the strikes were conducted to degrade ISIS and prevent the group from taking advantage of the situation in Syria to resurge.<sup>72</sup>

**Iraq:** The Joint Operations Center-Iraq (JOC-I) and the Iraqi Air Force (IqAF) increased counter-ISIS strikes during the quarter, conducting 104 counter-ISIS operations. The JOC-I conducted 18 strikes against 18 targets, killing 54 ISIS fighters and capturing significant enemy material for exploitation.<sup>73</sup> In November, Peshmerga and Iraqi Army soldiers conducted a coordinated counter-ISIS operation south of Kirkuk.<sup>74</sup>

CJTF-OIR noted that in mid-November, the Iraqi Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee estimated that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) had eliminated 90 percent of the most extreme and dangerous elements of ISIS.<sup>75</sup> The DIA assessed that the operations likely will constrain ISIS's ability to operate and plan attacks in Iraq.<sup>76</sup>


State reported that it continued to devote attention to the Defeat-ISIS mission via bilateral and multilateral engagements through the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and emphasized the need for repatriations of third-country nationals from northeastern Syria and advocacy for international funding toward stabilization assistance in northeast Syria.<sup>77</sup>

**U.S. Army Soldiers fire a 120mm mortar during a training mission in support of CJTF-OIR, At Tanf Garrison, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)**









A Syrian Free Army soldier stands atop a watchtower at a combat outpost in the deconfliction zone at At Tanf Garrison, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

## SYRIA

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# SYRIA

## OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

### Multiple Parties Vie for Position in New Syrian Order

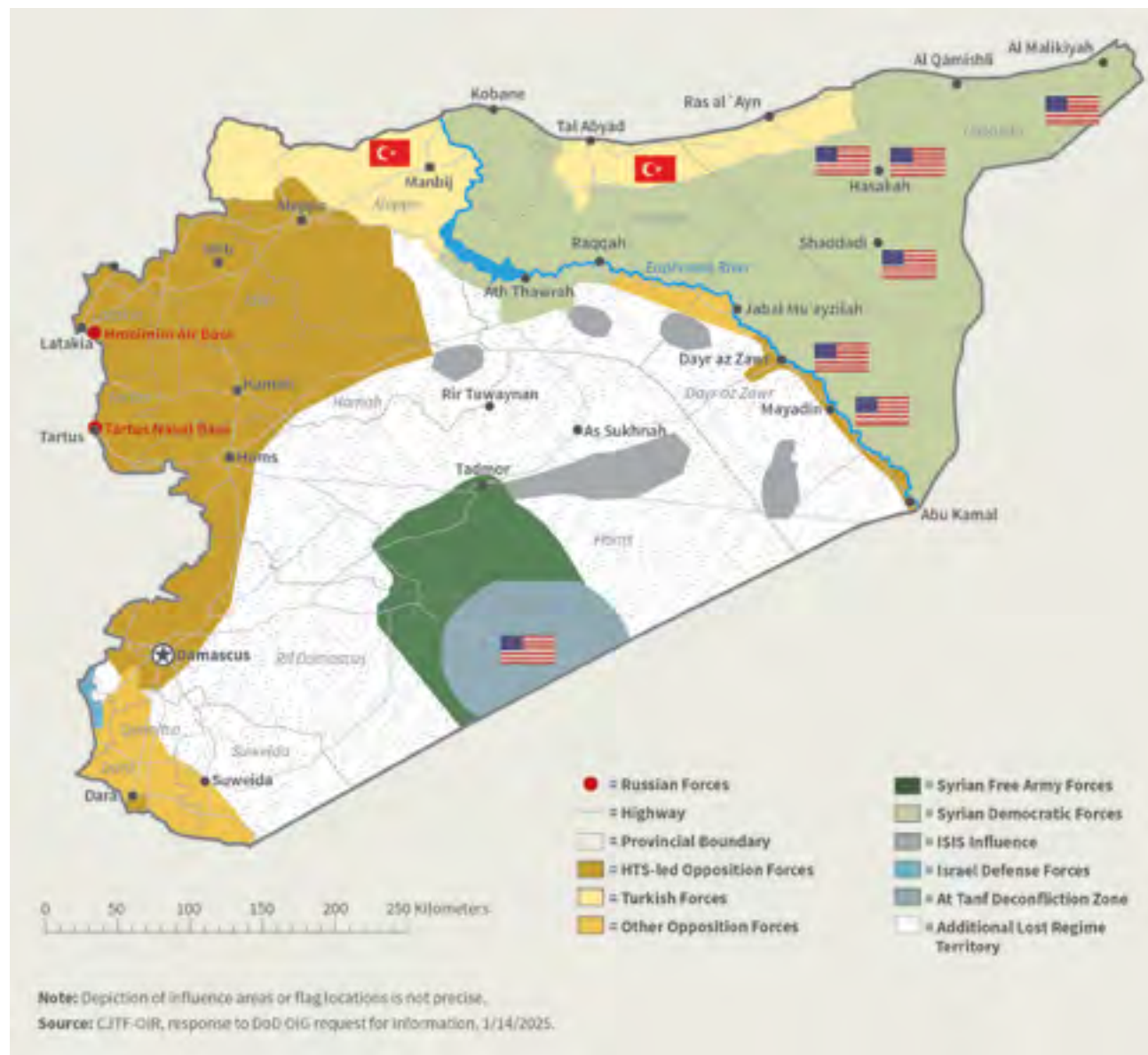
Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) reported that the rapid fall of the Assad regime has been a catalyst for radical and lasting change to the status quo throughout the region.<sup>78</sup> In the span of 10 days, the Syrian regime fell, its ally Iran withdrew all its forces, and Russia withdrew many of its forces.<sup>79</sup> Internal and external parties jockeyed for a place in the new order. Israeli forces struck hundreds of targets in Syria and moved forces across Syria's southern border.<sup>80</sup> Türkiye-supported opposition groups increased pressure on the SDF and the Kurdish fighters in northern Syria, seeking to remove them from its border.<sup>81</sup> Coalition partners were under pressure to negotiate with the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)-led interim authorities for role in a unified Syria.<sup>82</sup>

**An SFA commander conducts a combined arms rehearsal at a terrain model during a partnered training mission near At Tanf Garrison, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)**





Figure 3.  
The Operating Environment in Syria, as of December 2024



The U.S. Government has not yet recognized a new government in Syria. Absent formal U.S. diplomatic relations with the new Syrian leadership, CJTF-OIR reported that it actively leveraged military-to-military relationships with its current partners in Syria to help advance U.S. Government interests in the region.<sup>83</sup> CJTF-OIR also encouraged its partners to reach arrangements with the interim authorities, and said that connection with Syria’s new military leadership will position the United States to better shape the future security environment while also preventing Russia, Iran, and others from regaining influence.<sup>84</sup>

Figure 4.

**New Syrian Government Under HTS****AHMED AL-SHARA'A, HTS LEADER, DE-FACTO SYRIA LEADER**

*(also known as Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani)*

Al-Shara'a formed the Islamist-leaning opposition coalition Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in 2017 and has led the group since. Originally a member of the Islamic State of Iraq, and later the commander of the al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, al-Shara'a opposed the formation of ISIS. By 2017, he had broken away from al-Qaeda to develop HTS in Idlib. He developed a reputation for effective governance in Idlib, a focus on opposition to the Assad regime, strong-handed rule, and moderated his previous Salafist-jihadist views. The United States and the UN Security Council designated him as a terrorist for his actions as leader of Jabhat al-Nusra.

**MOHAMMED AL-BASHIR, PRIME MINISTER**

Shortly after toppling the Assad regime, HTS appointed Mohammed al-Bashir, who headed the HTS-led Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) in Idlib, to run the interim Syrian authorities until March 1, 2025. An Idlib native, al-Bashir was trained in electrical engineering and later earned a degree in Shariah and Law from Idlib University. He served for two years as SSG minister of development in SSG before being named prime minister of the SSG in 2024.

**MURHAF ABU QASRA, DEFENSE MINISTER**

*(also known as Abu Hassan al-Hamawi)*

Murhaf Abu Qasra commanded the armed wing of HTS for 5 years and played a key role in the offensive that ousted the Assad regime. A former agronomist, al-Shara'a gave him the rank of general in December. Abu Qasra vowed to dissolve HTS' armed wing and integrate the group into the national forces. He has said the new administration will seek to integrate Kurdish-held areas of Syria.

**ASAAD HASSAN AL-SHAIBANI, FOREIGN MINISTER**

*(also known as Zaid al-Attar)*

A close associate of al-Shara'a and former Head of Political Affairs in the SSG, al-Shaibani was one of the founding members of Jabhat al-Nusra alongside al-Shara'a. He was responsible for managing foreign relations and overseeing the group's transition into HTS. He was an active participant in the 2011 Syria uprising. Originally from Hasakah governorate in northeastern Syria, he graduated from Damasus University with a degree in English literature and later earned a master's degree in political science and international relations. He lived in Türkiye until 2024.



**Sources:** See endnotes on page 104.

**INTERIM SYRIAN AUTHORITIES**

As of the end of the quarter, the U.S. military had not yet directly engaged or coordinated with HTS or the interim authorities, but has encouraged the SDF and SFA to do so.<sup>85</sup> In a single exchange in mid-December, HTS forces drove to the At Tanf Garrison, a U.S. base in southeastern Syria, to transfer custody of American citizen Travis Timmerman who had been freed from a regime prison after the Assad regime's fall. U.S. forces then flew Timmerman by helicopter into Jordan.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV), SDF engagements with HTS forces were limited to tactical-level coordination to deconflict movements of security forces along territorial boundaries. Similar communications have occurred between the SFA and HTS in the vicinity of Palmyra and the deconfliction zone around the At Tanf Garrison, in southeastern Syria.<sup>87</sup>

**HTS remains a U.S.-designated terrorist organization with Islamist roots in al-Qaeda.**

## HTS Seeks to Consolidate Power in Factionalized Syria

HTS, which spearheaded the rebel sweep across northern Syria, has since consolidated control in Damascus. It remains a U.S.-designated terrorist organization with Islamist roots in al-Qaeda.<sup>88</sup> While now an enemy of ISIS, it once had ties to the Islamic State when it was still part of al-Qaeda.<sup>89</sup> (See page 21.) The group, which administered a rebel enclave in northwestern Syria’s Idlib governorate for several years, was credited with building up civil infrastructure.<sup>90</sup> But human rights organizations have accused the group of authoritarian tactics and cracking down on dissent.<sup>91</sup> State has documented the wide range of abuses reportedly committed by HTS in this enclave, including killings, kidnappings, physical abuse, and recruitment or use of child soldiers.<sup>92</sup> HTS leader Ahmed al-Shara’a stated that he has no intention to expand military activities beyond the Syrian border and intends to end persecution of minority groups in Syria while sustaining Syria’s Islamic identity and forming an interim Syrian government and constitution based on conservative Sunni Islamic principles.<sup>93</sup>

Following a meeting with al-Shara’a in December, then-U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf said that al-Shara’a came across as very pragmatic, but the United States “will judge by deeds, not just words.”<sup>94</sup> Leaf said that the United States was lifting the \$10 million bounty for al-Shara’a’s arrest.<sup>95</sup> Some minority factions within Syria, along with Syria experts, are skeptical about whether the HTS-led interim authorities truly intend to follow through on promises of equity and inclusivity or will ultimately create its own form of authoritarianism, pointing to a pattern of detentions and human rights abuses in HTS-governed areas of Syria’s northwest.<sup>96</sup> Others question whether the group has the capacity and nationwide influence to create a strong government as it takes over a nation impoverished by decades of oppressive corruption and other abuses, and 14 years of civil war, displacement, and regional divisions.<sup>97</sup>

Analysts have noted that while opposition factions were largely united in the drive to oust Assad, they are geographically and ideologically diverse groups with their own demands for a stake in the future of Syria.<sup>98</sup> Factions now maintaining de facto security and governance authority in various parts of Syria include:

The **Southern Operations Room**, a consortium of diverse factions that came together to oust the Assad regime and includes the Druze community of southern Syria centered in Suweida which has doubts that HTS can restrain the more extremist elements in its coalition.<sup>99</sup>

**U.S. partners**, including the SDF, which has enjoyed regional autonomy in northeastern Syria with U.S.-backing, and the SFA, which is expanding its outreach in central Syria.<sup>100</sup>

**The Syrian National Army**, a loosely formed umbrella group of opposition militias, including Turkmen groups, in northern Syria backed and directed by Türkiye.<sup>101</sup>

**Other actors**, such as the Christian militias in Homs and the Alawite minority along the western coast, which provided a base of support to the Assad regime, including senior leadership.<sup>102</sup>





Since the fall of the regime, reports have emerged of roundups of Assad associates and former regime military members. The Assad family’s Alawite minority are facing threats and fear retribution, according to a media report.<sup>103</sup> A war monitor reported in early January that HTS forces arrested at least 25 former regime members and people who had protested against the interim authorities in the city of Homs.<sup>104</sup>

Al-Shara’a said that Syria must be united and called for a social contract between the state and all sects “to ensure social justice.”<sup>105</sup> In late December, the interim authority in Damascus stated its intentions to dissolve the different rebel factions and unite them under a new Syrian army.<sup>106</sup> The SDF stated that while it was not opposed to joining the HTS-led interim authorities, the matter required negotiation.<sup>107</sup> Both Turkish and SDF leadership met separately in late December with al-Shara’a and leaders of Syria’s interim authorities in Damascus. During a meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister, al-Shara’a said he would not allow any weapons to remain outside of the control of the interim authorities, including from revolutionary factions or factions present in the SDF region.<sup>108</sup>

In late December, SDF Commander General Mazloun Abdi also met with the interim authorities. The SDF has said it is willing to integrate into the new Syria on the condition it retains its autonomy over northeastern Syria, and a demilitarized zone is established along the Turkish border.<sup>109</sup> While no agreements were reached by the end of the quarter, in early January, General Mazloun described the meeting with the HTS leadership in Damascus as “positive” and said they agreed on unity and the integrity of the Syrian territory.<sup>110</sup> CJTF-OIR said that the SDF must work to connect with the interim authorities and develop arrangements regarding oil revenue sharing and local control of SDF areas.<sup>111</sup>

**An SFA officer meets with U.S. Soldiers during a Coalition patrol of the Deconfliction Zone at a combat outpost near At Tanf, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)**

## HTS: From al-Qaeda to Present

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the opposition group with al-Qaeda roots, now leads interim authorities in Syria.<sup>112</sup> As HTS assumes a central role in the formation of a new government in Syria, questions about the sincerity of their separation from al-Qaeda and extremist ideologies must be answered to clarify future U.S. relations with the interim authorities and coordination on counter-terrorism operations.

Attempts by HTS to separate itself from its prior identity as an al-Qaeda affiliate have not been internationally recognized. The United States and the UN Security Council have declared Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and HTS to be terrorist organizations and have maintained those sanctions.<sup>113</sup> As recently as 2023, the U.S. and Turkish governments designated HTS financial leader, Abu Ahmed Zakur as a terrorist financing facilitator, although he publicly claimed in December 2023 to have left HTS.<sup>114</sup>

**Jabhat al-Nusra (2011-2016)** Al-Shara'a established JN at the direction of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), then an al-Qaeda affiliate.<sup>115</sup> Al-Baghdadi dispatched al-Shara'a to Syria to organize an al-Qaeda-affiliated opposition group as the Syrian Civil War had begun to consume the country. JN quickly distinguished itself as an effective fighting group within the Syrian opposition with an experienced cadre of al-Qaeda leaders and fighters. They took advantage of al-Qaeda's well-established network of safehouses and foreign fighter facilitators, as well as the recent release of Islamist prisoners from Syria's prisons, to build a formidable opposition group with influence throughout Syria.<sup>116</sup>

However, the link between the Islamic State and JN soon began to fray. In 2012, al-Baghdadi directed al-Shara'a to announce a more formal link between JN and the ISI as he believed the group was becoming too independent. JN leadership feared such a move would compromise their relationships with other Syrian opposition groups and rejected the order, while maintaining allegiance to al-Qaeda.<sup>117</sup>

This schism coincided with ISIS' growing rift from al-Qaeda. A group of core al-Qaeda leaders from outside of Syria, known as the 'Khorasan Group,' arrived to bolster the JN leadership and credibility, but ISIS had become the ascendant opposition group in Syria.<sup>118</sup> In 2014 U.S. forces began airstrikes against ISIS and JN, focused on the foreign 'Khorasan Group' that the U.S. assessed to be plotting external terrorist operations.<sup>119</sup>

**Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (2016-2017)** Since the rise of ISIS in 2014, JN increasingly emphasized its orientation as a domestic opposition group. JN developed a reputation for being more cooperative with other Syrian opposition fighting groups, less prone to poor discipline and dishonest dealings with other opposition, and highly effective on the battlefield.<sup>120</sup> In 2016, JN leaders determined that its affiliation with al-Qaeda was discouraging other Syrian opposition groups from merging or aligning with them.<sup>121</sup>

Al-Shara'a publicly announced the dissolution of JN and the founding of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (JFS) as an Islamist opposition movement without external ties in August 2016.<sup>122</sup> Many members of the more extremist wings of JN then left the organization to join breakaway groups that later fell under the umbrella of ISIS.<sup>123</sup>

*(continued on next page)*

## HTS: From al-Qaeda to Present *(continued from previous page)*

**Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (2017-present)** JFS gradually expanded to include smaller opposition groups in northwestern Syria and in 2017, it rebranded as HTS. HTS consolidated its authority over the Idlib area and the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Türkiye while maintaining a Syrian national focus.<sup>124</sup> Some HTS fighters defected, including Sami al-Oraydi, who became a commander in the new al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, Hurras al-Din (HaD). HTS responded with a series of arrests of al-Qaeda leaders and jihadist critics in late 2017 and has suppressed them ever since. In 2018, it initiated an intense anti-ISIS campaign around Idlib, with raids on suspected sleeper cells and a complete ban on ISIS propaganda.<sup>125</sup>

Meanwhile in October 2017, HTS was developing stronger relations with Türkiye and allowed Turkish troops into the Idlib area. Türkiye helped HTS fight off an Assad regime offensive on Idlib in February 2020 and HTS has displayed significant quantities of Turkish, and sometimes U.S.-made, military equipment since that time.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, Türkiye declared HTS to be a terrorist group in 2018, although it has recently suggested it may remove this designation and encouraged the UN to do so.<sup>127</sup>

HTS also appears to have offered sanctuary to designated terrorist groups, including the formerly al-Qaeda-aligned Ansar al-Islam that originated in Iraq, the Afghan Taliban-aligned Katibat Imam al-Bukhari, and Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, which is responsible for terrorist attacks in Russia and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>128</sup> The status of these three other groups in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime is unclear.

## THIRD-PARTY ACTORS

### Türkiye and Militias it Supports Escalate Attacks on SDF, Hindering Counter-ISIS Mission

Within days of the fall of the Assad regime, Türkiye-supported Syrian opposition factions escalated fighting with the SDF in northern Syria, seizing previously SDF-controlled cities in northwestern Syria and driving the SDF east. CJTF-OIR said that these actions are creating an unprecedented challenge to the SDF's ability to maintain internal stability and defend its territory.<sup>129</sup> On December 12, SDF Commander Mazloum Abdi said that the Turkish-backed SNA advance into SDF-held territory prompted him to suspend all counter-ISIS activity.<sup>130</sup> The Office for the Undersecretary of Defense of Policy (OUSDP) reported that the SDF resumed counter-ISIS activity after a brief pause.<sup>131</sup> CJTF-OIR said that these developments risk setting back the counter-ISIS mission as they threaten the security of SDF-run detention facilities holding ISIS fighters and displaced persons camps where the families of ISIS fighters reside.<sup>132</sup>

Even before the fall of the Assad regime, Turkish bombardments of Kurdish areas in northern Syria during the quarter were impacting the SDF fight against ISIS.<sup>133</sup> Turkish warplanes and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) targeted nearly 100 northern Syria sites controlled by the SDF, including SDF training centers, administrative buildings, and communications towers. The SDF responded with retaliatory rocket strikes.<sup>134</sup> The SDF also engaged in armed clashes with the Turkish-backed forces.<sup>135</sup>



Türkiye views the SDF, particularly its main Kurdish element the People’s Protection Units, as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. In December, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Kurdish militia groups that they “will either bid farewell to their weapons or they will be buried.”<sup>136</sup> Türkiye has also continued to threaten a full-scale ground assault on northern Syria and Kobane if the SDF remains in place.<sup>137</sup> While U.S. forces partnered with SDF forces in eastern Syria, General Mazloum acknowledged in early December that SDF forces in the northwestern Aleppo governorate, particularly in the town of Tal Rifaat, had come under intense SNA attack.<sup>138</sup>

With the fall of the regime, the SNA increased its assault on the SDF, capturing Tal Rifaat and other areas west of the Euphrates River including the SDF-controlled city of Manbij. The SDF withdrew many of its forces east of the river, while heavy fighting continued in pockets around Manbij, at strategic points along the Euphrates—including the Tishreen Dam and the Qara Qazak Bridge—and near the strategic northern Kurdish city of Kobane.<sup>139</sup> The U.S. and Türkiye reportedly negotiated an agreement for the safe withdrawal of SDF forces from Manbij following clashes. However, heavy fighting has continued on the outskirts, with reports of the SNA taking control of the city. Negotiations continued for a ceasefire to enable the safe withdrawal of remaining fighters in Manbij to leave.<sup>140</sup>

## What is the SNA?

The Türkiye-controlled and -supplied SNA has had a tense rivalry with HTS in northern Syria.<sup>141</sup> In addition, fighting among SNA factions has at times been so intense that HTS and Türkiye have been forced to intervene to de-escalate.<sup>142</sup> A 2022 report by a research institute described the SNA as consumed by infighting and unable to discipline groups involved in human rights abuses and criminality.<sup>143</sup>

Several SNA elements, such as the Suleiman Shah and Hamza Brigades, have been sanctioned by the United States for committing serious human rights abuses against Kurdish populations. CJTF-OIR cited reporting by a war monitor in early December that said SNA factions executed dozens of wounded SDF soldiers receiving treatment in a military hospital north of Manbij, killed Kurdish civilians, and looted or burned the homes of Kurdish residents. The group has also been accused by a human rights organization of abducting, detaining unlawfully, violating sexually, torturing, and engaging in the looting and extortion of Kurdish populations with little accountability, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>144</sup>

The Sultan Murad Division of the SNA that has been fighting the SDF in the Manbij area has been used as mercenaries in conflicts in Niger (after the Nigerien junta ordered U.S. forces to leave in March 2024), Libya, and in Azerbaijan’s war against Armenia.<sup>145</sup> Additionally, a 2021 report by a Syrian civil rights group identified 65 former ISIS members who had been incorporated into the ranks of the SNA, including military commanders in Ahrar al-Sharqiya, the Sultan Murad Division, the Hamza Division, and Jaish al-Sharqiya.<sup>146</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that to halt the hostilities, General Mazloum offered to make Kobane a demilitarized zone and promised that non-Syrian Kurdish fighters, which would include PKK fighters, would leave northeastern Syria under a total ceasefire. Turkish officials stated that the SDF should seek a settlement with the interim Syrian authorities in Damascus, and that Türkiye would do “whatever it takes” to ensure its own security if negotiations with the interim authorities fail.<sup>147</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that detention facilities remained on high alert due to substantial risk of a potential attempt by ISIS to break its fighters free from detention.<sup>148</sup> General Mazloum said in interviews in December that if Turkish attacks in the north continue to draw SDF fighters away from their posts, the risk of ISIS detainees being set free will grow.<sup>149</sup>

HTS has said the interim Syrian authorities should take over the role of guarding ISIS detainees and family members in camps in eastern Syria. However, experts have questioned how HTS, which once had links to the Islamic State before a bitter split, would succeed in suppressing it.<sup>150</sup>

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## Iran and Its Proxies Rapidly Depart Syria as Assad’s Regime Falls

Before the fall of the Assad regime, Iran held outsized influence in Syria, providing support to Assad as part of its “axis of resistance” that opposes the United States and Israel across the region. Iran’s network included the Palestinian militant group Hamas, Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, Houthis in Yemen, aligned militias in Iraq—including many under the Popular Mobilization Forces umbrella—and militia forces in Syria. These groups established military and weapons facilities, sustained transit and supply routes from Iran to Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, and expanded Shia influence in Syria.<sup>151</sup>

As the Assad regime fell in December, Iran-aligned militia groups (IAMG) rapidly evacuated military personnel from Syria.<sup>152</sup> CJTF-OIR said that Iran transferred “limited” equipment from Syria to Iraq and Lebanon.<sup>153</sup> The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that IAMGs in Iraq that had deployed some forces to Syria to support the Assad regime in early December withdrew at Iran’s direction.<sup>154</sup>

The DIA assessed that following Assad’s departure, IAMGs probably will try to expand collaboration with other Iran-aligned groups to preserve “resistance” organizations.<sup>155</sup> The DIA assessed that the militias remained capable of maintaining steady attacks against U.S. forces in Syria from Iraq and probably will intensify attacks if U.S. support to the SDF or former Syrian opposition endangers their core interests.<sup>156</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that prior to the fall of the Assad regime, Iranian and IAMG attacks against U.S. personnel in Syria had been on an “upward trend.”<sup>157</sup> The DIA assessed that militia attacks were probably intended to coerce the Coalition to withdraw from Iraq and Syria following the U.S. announcement in September of the transition of the CJTF-OIR mission in Iraq.<sup>158</sup> The attacks were also probably in response to U.S. support for Israel against Iran.<sup>159</sup> The DIA said that the Iran-aligned militias had threatened to retaliate against

**CJTF-OIR reported that Israeli fighter jets conducted roughly 500 strikes on Syrian military assets since December 18, targeting warehouses, aircraft, radar systems and military signal stations, scientific research centers, weapons, and ammunition warehouses.**

the United States for Israel's alleged use of Iraqi airspace during Israel's airstrikes on Iran in October. Al-Thawriyun, a front group almost certainly affiliated with Kataib Hezbollah, subsequently claimed an attack against on the At Tanf Garrison in Syria.<sup>160</sup>

During the quarter, there were at least 15 attacks against Coalition forces in Syria by an IAMG front group in Iraq, CJTF-OIR reported.<sup>161</sup> The DIA said that there were no confirmed IAMG attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq during the quarter.<sup>162</sup>

### **Israel Conducts Hundreds of Strikes, Moves Forces to Bolster Security**

CJTF-OIR reported that Israel has long set a precedent for targeting Iranian-aligned interests in Syria.<sup>163</sup> The OUSD(P) reported that after the fall of the Assad regime, Israel unilaterally occupied the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force demilitarized zone as well as further Syrian territory along the border with the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, in violation of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement. Israel claimed a further buffer zone was needed due to the security vacuum in Syria. Israeli defense forces steadily targeted military assets in Syria that could pose a threat to its security.<sup>164</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that Israeli fighter jets conducted roughly 500 strikes on Syrian military assets since December 18, targeting warehouses, aircraft, radar systems and military signal stations, scientific research centers, weapons, and ammunition depots.<sup>165</sup>

### **Russia Reduces Forces in Syria, Retains Bases in Western Syria**

Russia was a longtime supporter of the Assad regime, sending troops to Syria since 2015 to provide Assad military assistance against opposition forces. When the regime fell, Russia began withdrawing forces and equipment from Syria and consolidating the rest to its two main bases on the Mediterranean coast, the Hmeimim Airbase and Tartus Naval Base.<sup>166</sup>

Russia does not intend to leave Hmeimim and Tartus, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>167</sup> According to media reporting, Russia is currently negotiating with the interim authorities, led by opposition forces Russia once bombed, to try to remain in the two bases.<sup>168</sup> According to media reporting, Russia appeared to be increasing its military presence in Libya and other African ports, and satellite imagery suggested Russia was transferring some of its military assets from Syria to facilities in Africa.<sup>169</sup>

Prior to the fall of the regime, Russia participated in a deconfliction cell to avoid the chance of escalating tensions between forces or a mishap of forces colliding on ground or in the air. Russia frequently violated established deconfliction protocols and had continued to do so during the quarter. CJTF-OIR said those violations posed a significant risk of miscalculations or escalation.<sup>170</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that after the fall of the regime, Russia continued to participate in the deconfliction cell, and continued deconfliction violations.<sup>171</sup>



## SECURITY

CJTF-OIR reported that it has enjoyed greater freedom of movement in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime and has been able to operate in the west zone of Syria more freely. CJTF-OIR designated operating areas in Syria have not changed. CJTF-OIR has also supported visits by State personnel to Damascus.<sup>172</sup>

In December, a Pentagon spokesperson stated that approximately 2,000 U.S. troops were deployed to Syria, clarifying that the 900 troops that the Pentagon had been publicly citing were “core deployers” who are augmented by temporary rotational forces.<sup>173</sup>

Immediately after the fall of the regime, the Commander of the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), Michael “Erik” Kurilla, visited Syria to assess force protection measures, the rapidly evolving situation, and ongoing efforts to prevent ISIS from exploiting the fall of the Assad regime, according to a Pentagon press release.<sup>174</sup> Then-Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said that the United States needs to keep troops deployed in Syria to prevent ISIS from reconstituting.<sup>175</sup>

### SDF Pulled on Multiple Fronts Following Regime Fall

As regime-aligned forces began retreating across Syria, the SDF—with U.S. planning support—launched operations to temporarily secure territory on both the west and east banks of the Euphrates, successfully barring ISIS gains.<sup>176</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF is under pressure across its area of control. In addition to the assault on the SDF from Türkiye-supported opposition groups in northern Syria, the SDF faces dissent from some tribal factions in the Dayr az Zawr governorate in the MERV.<sup>177</sup>

At the start of the quarter, ongoing tensions between the SDF and Arab tribes in the MERV had evolved into more clearly defined lines. CJTF-OIR reported that most Arab tribal leaders and members on the eastern side of the river continued to support the SDF, while those fighting the SDF on the western side had explicitly joined Iran-aligned militias or signed up as paid militia fighters.<sup>178</sup>

However, tensions remained. Tribal grievances on the SDF side of the river largely remained rooted in dissatisfaction with Kurdish-dominated SDF governance over a perceived exclusion of Arab tribal perspective and dismissal of tribal needs. On October 21, the SDF restructured the Dayr az Zawr Military Council, the SDF’s main security partner in the area and one of the organizations with which Arab tribes have been discontented.<sup>179</sup>

In regime-held areas along the Euphrates River—west of the river, and in a swathe of villages on the east bank where the regime held control, Iran and IAMGs had provided local Arab tribal fighters with direct orders as well as training, equipment, and payment. CJTF-OIR cited media reporting stating that Iran and its militias used threats and extortion to recruit and retain fighters. Prior to the regime’s fall, some media reports noted diverging interests between the Iranian-aligned militias, who wanted to attack the SDF, and the Syrian military, which objected to attacks on the SDF. CJTF-OIR said that according to media reporting, increased tensions had emerged between Iran or Iranian-aligned militias and Arab fighters under their command over issues of pay, safety and unfulfilled promises.<sup>180</sup> There

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was also reporting on residents expelling Arab militia fighters attempting to set up a rocket and drone launch location in their neighborhood for fear of retaliation.<sup>181</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that on December 11, HTS-aligned rebel factions announced control over the city of Dayr az Zawr, west of the Euphrates in the MERV, and several groups along the Euphrates realigned to support the HTS-led interim Syrian authorities, including members of the Dayr az Zawr Military Council, the Hajin Military Council and the Kasrah Military Council. In addition, with the reduction in the presence and activity of Iran-aligned militias and the Russian military, some tribes previously aligned with the SDF are demonstrating increased independence and a desire to align with the interim authorities in Damascus.<sup>182</sup>

### **SFA Secures Abandoned Regime-controlled Areas and Weapons**

Like the SDF in northern Syria, the SFA—a small former opposition partner force that the U.S. military funds, trains, and equips to provide security and stability in the hostile area around the At Tanf Garrison—is also seeking to find its role with the interim authorities.<sup>183</sup> The force has been based in the deconfliction zone around At Tanf. But as the Assad regime began to collapse in early December, the SFA seized the opportunity to expand from the deconfliction zone and fill some of the vacuum left by retreating regime-aligned forces.<sup>184</sup>

According to news reports, the SFA helped topple the Assad regime in December, although the group was not part of the main HTS-led offensive.<sup>185</sup> The SFA commander, Colonel Salim Turki al-Anteri, a former regime soldier who defected to the Syrian opposition after the start of the civil war and began partnering with Coalition forces in 2016, said in a news interview that his forces chased out his own former regime tank unit on December 7 and captured the tanks.<sup>186</sup>

According to CJTF-OIR, the SFA expanded its footprint well beyond the deconfliction zone, reaching northwest to Palmyra in the Tadmur region, and about 50 kilometers west toward Damascus.<sup>187</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that SFA engagements with HTS have so far been limited to tactical level coordination with local HTS forces to deconflict movements of security forces in the vicinity of Palmyra and in the deconfliction zone.<sup>188</sup>

In addition to training with U.S. forces and conducting defensive patrols in the deconfliction zone, the SFA had assisted the U.S. military, working alongside a non-governmental organization (NGO), to provide humanitarian assistance to residents of the Rukban displaced persons camp. SFA family members live in Rukban among other residents who had just fled Syrian regime forces and ISIS attacks.<sup>189</sup> Rukban had been under a blockade by regime forces who had blocked supplies from reaching the camp. According to a news report from the camp, the road to Rukban opened up after the fall of the regime.<sup>190</sup> Since early December, nearly half of all residents have departed the camp just as more resources have become available locally for those who have remained.<sup>191</sup>

## ISIS Threat in Detention Facilities and Displaced Persons Camps Remains: U.S. Officials

A key concern in the fight against ISIS in Syria has been the group's goals to break ISIS fighters out of SDF-run detention facilities and the ongoing exploitation of conditions in the al-Hol camp, where ISIS family members and supporters have resided alongside other displaced persons in Syria.<sup>192</sup> According to a news report, ISIS renewed its media campaign in December encouraging detained fighters in eastern Syria to break out of detention and free their families.<sup>193</sup>

Then-Secretary Austin said in early January that the United States awaits a potential future time when the SDF are absorbed into a national security apparatus in Syria that would “hopefully” maintain security at detention facilities holding ISIS detainees and displaced persons camps.<sup>194</sup> “For now, I think we have to protect our interests there,” then-Secretary Austin said.<sup>195</sup>

USCENTCOM Commander General Kurilla visited al-Hol in January. He reiterated that more than 9,000 ISIS detainees from more than 50 countries remain in SDF-guarded detention facilities in Syria, a “literal and figurative ‘ISIS Army’ in detention.”<sup>196</sup> He also said that without international repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of residents at al-Hol and the smaller Roj camp, the camps risk creating the next generation of ISIS.<sup>197</sup>

## SDF Briefly Resumes Guard Force Training for Detention Facilities

After a long pause due to SDF security concerns elsewhere, the SDF and Asayish returned in November to guard force training for detention facilities holding ISIS detainees. CJTF-OIR said that 13 detention facility managers graduated from a 5-day warden course on November 13, while 20 personnel graduated from a 2-week detention facility guard course at the end of November. CJTF-OIR said course participants were enthusiastic and chose to work on rest days to complete the training more quickly.<sup>198</sup>

However, after the fall of the Assad regime, training paused. CJTF-OIR reported that the uncertainty and the threat caused by the HTS advance and the subsequent offensive by Turkish-aligned forces prompted the SDF to halt training until January, when it would review the situation. Prior to the pause, the intention was to have regular iterations of two consecutive detention facility guard courses followed by two consecutive security forces courses for displaced persons camps and finally a warden course.<sup>199</sup>

A key concern in the fight against ISIS in Syria has been the group's goals to break ISIS fighters out of SDF-run detention facilities and the ongoing exploitation of conditions in the al-Hol camp.

## DIPLOMACY

### U.S. Delegation Visits Damascus

On December 20, a U.S. delegation, including then-Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf and the incoming Chargé d’Affaires of Embassy Baghdad Daniel Rubinstein, visited Damascus to engage and hear from members of Syrian civil society and other communities about their vision for Syria’s future and how the United States can support them, according to State.<sup>200</sup> The U.S. delegation also met with representatives of the interim authorities, including Ahmed al-Shara’a, to discuss the set of principles agreed upon by the United States and its regional partners in Aqaba.<sup>201</sup> The visit was the first U.S. diplomatic engagement in Syria since 2012.<sup>202</sup>

The U.S. delegation underscored inclusion and broad consultation during the transition and that Syrians have an opportunity to forge a new, freer society that occupies its place regionally and on the world stage.<sup>203</sup> The United States committed to working with the Syrian people to help seize this historic opportunity.<sup>204</sup>

**Rewards for Justice:** State reported that the U.S. delegation discussed the need to ensure terrorist groups cannot pose a threat inside of Syria or externally, including to the United States and its partners in the region.<sup>205</sup> Ahmed al-Shara’a committed to these principles, and, as a result, the United States will not be pursuing the Rewards for Justice reward offer.<sup>206</sup>

**American citizens:** The U.S. delegation discussed increased efforts to engage with Syrians about the fate of American citizens, including Austin Tice and Majd Kamalmaz, who disappeared under the Assad regime, according to State.<sup>207</sup> The United States was working to get additional U.S. officials into Damascus to help direct the search, and it will be working with the interim authorities to jointly search locations of interest.<sup>208</sup> U.S. civil society partners in Syria worked to document and preserve evidence at unsecured crime sites such as detention centers and mass graves in support of these efforts.<sup>209</sup>

Czechia, through its embassy in Damascus, remained the protecting power for U.S. interests in Syria, and will remain so until conditions are met to resume operations of the U.S. Embassy in Damascus.<sup>210</sup>

State said that the United States will not allow ISIS to use this period of transition to regroup and relaunch terrorist attacks that threaten the interests of the United States or to re-establish its capabilities and create safe havens.<sup>211</sup> The United States has a clear interest to avoid the fragmentation of Syria, mass migrations from Syria, and the export of terrorism and extremism.<sup>212</sup>

The United States engaged with its partners in the region on the situation in northeastern Syria, underscoring to all parties the need to de-escalate and protect civilian populations.<sup>213</sup> State was working with counterparts on how the United States can help support the Syrian people, as they decide their own path for the future that includes providing humanitarian assistance directly to people, particularly those who have been displaced, and help them begin to recover.<sup>214</sup> In addition, State said that the United States will continue to support Syria’s neighbors—including Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Türkiye—should any threats arise from within Syria during this period of transition.<sup>215</sup>



**Then-U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken attends a meeting with the foreign ministers of the Arab Contact Group on Syria in Aqaba, Jordan, December 14, 2024. (State photo)**



## International Community Reaffirm Commitment to Syrian People

On December 12, the Group of Seven (G7)—the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom—reaffirmed its commitment to the people of Syria to lend full support for an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process based on principles of the UNSCR 2254, according to State.<sup>216</sup> The G7 will support a transition process under this framework that leads to credible, inclusive, and non-sectarian governance that ensures respect for the rule of law; universal human rights, including women’s rights; and the protection of all Syrians, including religious and ethnic minorities, transparency, and accountability.<sup>217</sup> The G7 will work with and fully support a future Syrian government that abides by those standards and results from that process.<sup>218</sup>

On December 14, at the Aqaba Joint Contact Group ministerial meeting in Jordan, the United States and its partners announced a set of core principles and a call for a cessation of military operations within Syria.<sup>219</sup> (See Table 2.) These principles were critical to restarting international support that Syria needs after decades of dictatorship, conflict, corruption, and isolation, according to State.<sup>220</sup> The group agreed on the need for a unified approach to advance these ideas.<sup>221</sup> The group emphasized its support for the UN Special Envoy mandate and requested that the UN Secretary General expand the UN presence on the ground, according to State.<sup>222</sup>

## Continued U.S. Engagement De-Escalates Tensions in Northern Syria

The United States continued to focus on de-escalating conflict in northeastern Syria.<sup>223</sup> These efforts included brokering an extended ceasefire between the SDF and the SNA in Manbij.<sup>224</sup> Additionally, the United States monitored the situation around Kobane; while the situation was fluid, there was no large-scale fighting.<sup>225</sup> The United States continued to talk with Türkiye and others in the region about a path forward to de-escalate tensions and

Table 2.

### Aqaba Joint Contact Group Core Principles Regarding Syria

- A **transition process** that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and produces an inclusive, representative government formed through a transparent process based on principles of the UNSCR 2254.
- The **rights of all Syrians**, including minorities and women, should be respected; **humanitarian aid** should be able to reach people who need it; and state institutions should deliver **essential services** to the Syrian people.
- Syria should **not be used as a base for terrorist groups** or others who threaten Syria's people, its neighbors, or the world; **chemical weapons stockpiles should be secured** and safely destroyed; Syria should have **peaceful relations with its neighbors**; and relevant organizations should have access to facilities that can help determine the fate of missing Syrians and foreign nationals and, eventually, **hold abusers accountable**.

**Source:** State, cable, "USUN: Talking Points for the December 17 UN Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Syria," 24 STATE 131070, 12/16/2024.

increase stability.<sup>226</sup> State said that given that ISIS exploits instability, it was incumbent on all countries with influence on the ground, including Türkiye, to promote stability, dialogue, and restraint.<sup>227</sup>

State said that the United States will continue to consult Türkiye on Syria policy and seek areas for cooperation while working with Türkiye and local Syrian partners to ensure the safety and security of U.S. forces, partner forces, and civilians.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, State said that the United States was working to engage Türkiye and the SDF to find a managed transition in terms of the SDF's role in northeastern Syria, according to then-Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf at a December 20 briefing.<sup>229</sup>

### Syria's Chemical Weapons Continue to be Cause for Concern

The United States has a clear interest in ensuring that whatever weapons of mass destruction or their components are left in Syria do not fall into the wrong hands, State said, and that Syria's chemical weapons program is completely and verifiably destroyed, consistent with the Chemical Weapons Convention and UNSCR 2118.<sup>230</sup> The United States and other G7 nations continued to work with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and other partners to secure, declare, and destroy Syria's remaining chemical weapons stockpiles.<sup>231</sup>

In December, the Syrian Network for Human Rights released a statement calling on the interim authorities to cooperate with the OPCW to reveal chemical weapons sites in Syria and ensure that these weapons are properly and conclusively destroyed to ensure that they can never again be used.<sup>232</sup>

The OPCW will send a team of experts to Syria once it establishes communication with the new interlocutors in Syria and as soon as the security situation allows.<sup>233</sup> This will allow the OPCW to collect information regarding chemical weapons-related sites and assess the work necessary as it moves forward.<sup>234</sup>

## DISPLACED PERSONS

State said that the only long-term, durable solution to the challenges of the al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps in Syria is the repatriation or return of individuals to their areas or countries of origin.<sup>235</sup> Only there can they effectively rehabilitate and reintegrate into their communities.<sup>236</sup>

As of the end of the quarter, there were approximately 40,000 residents at al-Hol (most of them children) and 2,600 residents at Roj, according to State.<sup>237</sup> (See Figure 5.)

### Al-Hol Remains a Haven for ISIS Activity

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS almost certainly continued seeking to extend its influence and recruit new members within the al-Hol camp, especially ISIS loyalists within the women and adolescent population of the foreigners' annex. Women in the annex have maintained connections with ISIS members located outside the camp, leading to continued membership in and support for the group, and their ability to receive financial support from ISIS. This has allowed them to continue to recruit for ISIS from within the camp.<sup>238</sup>

Smuggling of money, materials, weapons, and people into and out of the camp is also a major security concern in al-Hol because it can facilitate connection with ISIS cells outside the camp and increase the risk of violence within the camp. CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF

Figure 5.

### Demographics of al-Hol and Roj Displaced Persons Camps

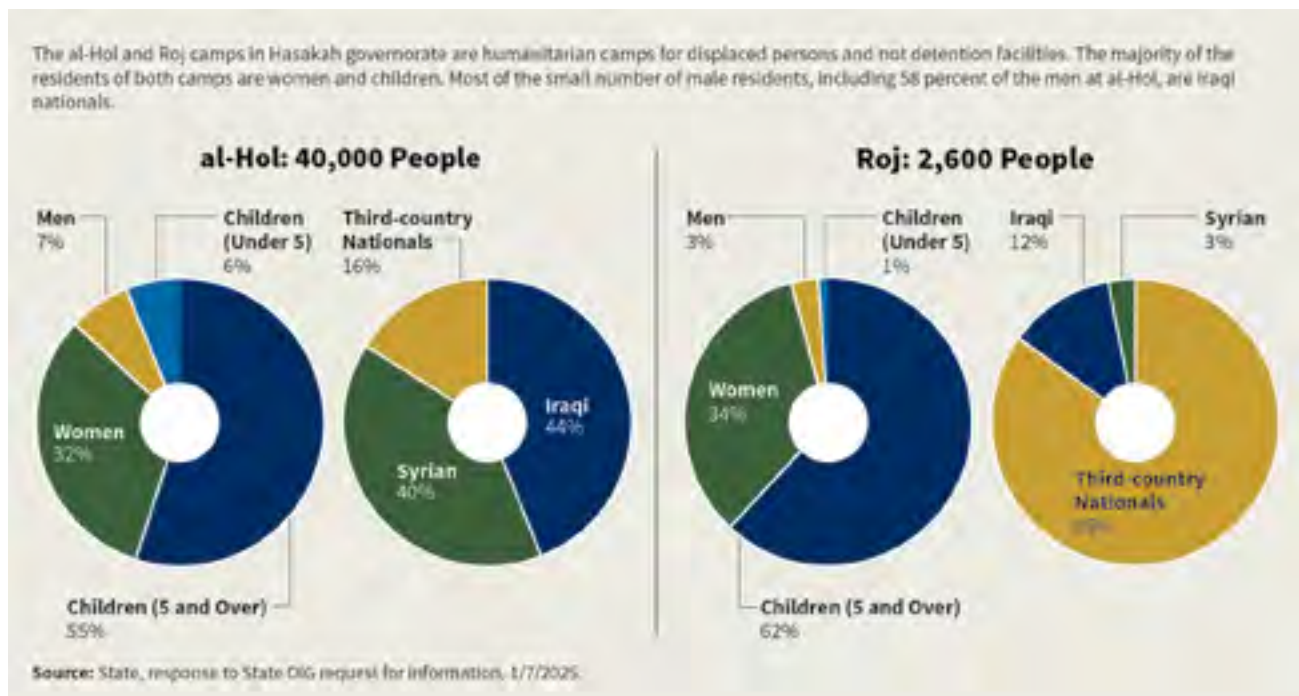
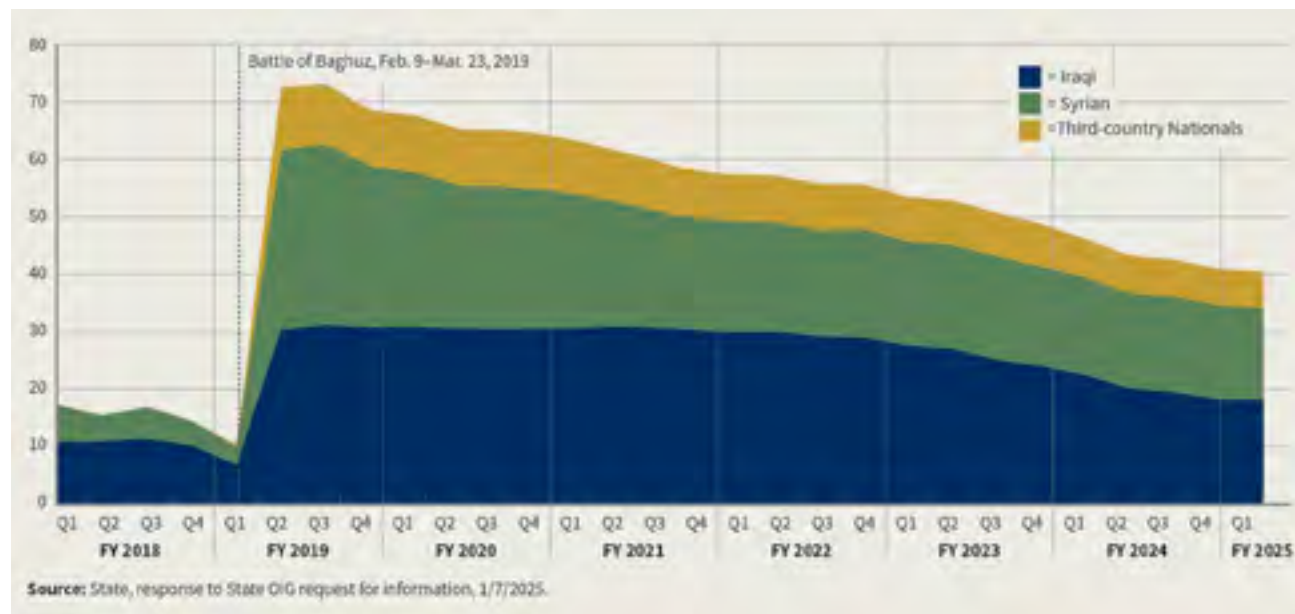


Figure 6.

**Changes Over Time in al-Hol Population, in Thousands**

largely restricts freedom of movement in the camp, but as a result of the camp's large size and limited Asayish and SDF force presence, the annex's security perimeter is porous and conducive to smuggling.<sup>239</sup>

### SDF Conducts Multi-day Clearance Operation in al-Hol

The SDF led a multi-day Coalition-supported security and clearance operation in al-Hol in November, to locate and remove ISIS operatives and their hideouts and equipment.<sup>240</sup> The SDF identified a number of tunnels, including one containing suspected radicalized youth being concealed from the registration process. The SDF also found the remains of a deceased individual, who they assess ISIS operatives executed for failure to participate in ISIS activities in the foreigners' annex.<sup>241</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that in meetings with humanitarian, State, SDF, and Coalition partners following the clearance operation, the SDF received praise for its communication and its ability to maintain essential camp services and security throughout the operation.<sup>242</sup> Coalition forces assisted the SDF by liaising with the humanitarian community to ensure the SDF adhered to humanitarian principles when searching for ISIS and malign activity. The SDF took added precautions during the operation to ensure residents retained unimpeded access to essential services, although some delays and interruptions were reported. Additionally, CJTF-OIR said the SDF provided care to residents with medical emergencies, and used non-violent means to address residents who reacted violently to the sweep, enabling the security operation to continue.<sup>243</sup> CJTF-OIR said the SDF demonstrated a good level of command and control, and its ability to multitask and clear multiple areas simultaneously highlighted its capabilities as a force and desire to complete the clearance as quickly as possible.<sup>244</sup>



## Cholera Spreads in al-Hol and Northeastern Syria

As of mid-December, there were around 200 identified cases of acute watery diarrhea/suspected cholera with one cholera death in al-Hol, according to State.<sup>245</sup> This was part of a region-wide increase in acute watery diarrhea/suspected cholera cases.<sup>246</sup>

The cholera outbreak has been exacerbated by overcrowded conditions in al-Hol and insufficient water, sanitation, and hygiene services across the region. An estimated 70 percent of communities in northeastern Syria lack adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene services.<sup>247</sup> Limited cholera testing capacity inhibits the ability of humanitarian assistance organizations to confirm cases.<sup>248</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Northeast Syria Health Working Group coordinated the response to the outbreak.<sup>249</sup> The WHO and other USAID health implementers conducted assessments and water testing in al-Hol, in addition to expanding response activities to stem the transmission of the disease.<sup>250</sup> In addition, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross mobilized for possible donations of supplies and medical consumables.<sup>251</sup> Despite ongoing efforts to set up cholera treatment units and humanitarian response, including isolation and case management units, the need to ensure treatment units were operational persisted.<sup>252</sup>

Table 3.

### Consistent Services for al-Hol and Roj Residents and Returnees

<b>Water and Electricity</b>	Water trucking efforts for al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps continued consistently. Roj was the only camp at risk of electricity loss because of airstrikes, but camp management reported emergency generators were in place in the event of a loss of electricity.
<b>Humanitarian Assistance</b>	Various NGOs provided humanitarian support at al-Hol. One NGO had the role of camp manager and coordinator for humanitarian activities.
<b>Host Community Support Returnees</b>	State-provided support included repair and rehabilitation of essential service infrastructure, repair and rehabilitation of schools, and programming available to community members and returnees, including vocational training, remedial learning, and psychosocial support for children and their caretakers, according to State. Assistance also included support for civilian security forces to maintain stability and provide security services that serves, and is supported by, the population.
<b>Youth Services</b>	Implementing partners provide services to youth, including child protection, informal education, recreational activities, and mental health and psychosocial support. While not necessarily targeting children exposed to extremist ideology, the education programs funded by the United States at al-Hol continued to provide psychosocial support, remedial literacy and numeracy courses, and Self-Learning Program classes to children.
<b>Camp Administration</b>	Camp administration is part of local governance in northeastern Syria. Administrative oversight includes non-humanitarian aid vetting and record keeping and excludes humanitarian activities and coordination.
<b>Security</b>	The internal civilian security forces operating in northeastern Syria, provided camp security services. State supported civilian security providers operating in al-Hol to improve security for residents and reduce ISIS’s ability to exploit the camp.

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 1/3/2025.

**On October 9, Iraq repatriated 181 households (706 individuals) from al-Hol in northeastern Syria to Jeddah 1 Rehabilitation Center.**

During the quarter, USAID funded 13 implementers, including 10 NGOs, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, and WHO, to provide health assistance in Syria, including delivering medical supplies, deploying mobile medical units, and surgical teams to treat trauma-related injuries and provide mental health and psychosocial support services at temporary shelters housing displaced populations.<sup>253</sup> Humanitarian assistance organizations also provide community-based health education and training for Syrian medical workers.<sup>254</sup> State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) supports UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, and 17 NGO implementers to provide health assistance for vulnerable populations inside Syria and Syrian refugees in neighboring countries.<sup>255</sup>

### Repatriations to Iraq Continue

On October 9, Iraq repatriated 181 households (706 individuals) from al-Hol in northeastern Syria to Jeddah 1 Rehabilitation Center.<sup>256</sup> State said that four countries repatriated individuals since October, two with direct U.S. support.<sup>257</sup>

In addition, a total of 68 foreign terrorist fighters were repatriated from detention facilities in northeastern Syria this quarter.<sup>258</sup> Foreign fighters comprise approximately 2,000 of the detainees in SDF prisons.<sup>259</sup> Some countries have repatriated foreign fighters for prosecution or reintegration, but other countries have resisted pressure to do so.<sup>260</sup> Attacks against the SDF regularly draw attention and resources away from repatriation efforts.<sup>261</sup>

State continued to encourage countries of origin to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and where appropriate prosecute their detained or displaced nationals in northeastern Syria.<sup>262</sup> State supports and facilitates repatriations in a variety of ways, including by providing military airlift to countries of origin on a case-by-case basis.<sup>263</sup> State's Counter Terrorism Bureau also funds an effort to collect, collate, and store information voluntarily provided by nationals in al-Hol and Roj camps to support their repatriations.<sup>264</sup>

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund's pilot deradicalization effort in Roj provided predeparture support for third-country nationals identified for repatriation by their home countries.<sup>265</sup>

### United States Supports the Return and Reintegration of Syrians from al-Hol

Approximately 16,000 Syrians remain in al-Hol, including approximately 2,000 from SDF-controlled areas, 11,000 from previously regime-controlled areas, and 3,000 from previously opposition-controlled areas (Aleppo and Idlib).<sup>266</sup>

There were no returns of Syrians from al-Hol during the quarter.<sup>267</sup> Meanwhile, State and USAID continued to support the reintegration of previously returned Syrians into their new communities. Activities during the quarter included rehabilitation of a drinking water station and agricultural complex/irrigation pumping station in Dayr az Zawr and issuance of new credit via its revolving credit fund.<sup>268</sup>

**Case management system (CMS):** Since 2023, the United States has supported the information management unit and case management system to facilitate the return of 941 Syrians from al-Hol to Raqqah and Dayr az Zawr.<sup>269</sup> The CMS support includes referrals to service providers to link returnees to a suite of social, economic, and property services to facilitate reintegration.<sup>270</sup>

The returnees are divided into three groups: a group that returned to Raqqah in September 2023, a group that returned to Dayr az Zawr in May 2024, and a group that returned to Dayr az Zawr in July 2024.<sup>271</sup>

The CMS includes routine engagement (on average site visit once every 2 weeks) between the case management coordinators and returnees.<sup>272</sup> Since the fall of the Syrian regime, CMS operations have continued through remote communication (phones calls, text messages) with the returnees.<sup>273</sup> During the quarter the CMS program made nearly 700 service referrals (including food security, non-food items, livelihoods, and social cohesion) for returnees in Raqqah and Dayr az Zawr.<sup>274</sup>

**Electrical grid:** USAID supported the rehabilitation of the electrical grid in Raqqah city with the installation of 23 new transformers and restoration of grid electricity to a public wheat mill in Dayr az Zawr. This activity reduced operating costs for the mill and strengthened food security, as flour from the mill is now available for public bakeries to make bread.<sup>275</sup>

**Women's empowerment:** More than 200 female al-Hol returnees and host community women were registered with a USAID-supported program to receive career guidance and job readiness training.<sup>276</sup>

**Reduce stigma:** USAID supported six advocacy campaigns (in Raqqah, Hasakah, Dayr az Zawr, Qamishli, Manbij, and Tel Brak) to foster reintegration of returnees while addressing stigma and promoting solidarity.<sup>277</sup> The campaigns included health workshops, exhibitions, and a petition for improved psychosocial support; creation of a reintegration guide, TED-style talks and film screenings to address legal, economic, and social challenges returnees face. They also included cultural events, service mapping, resources tailored for women returnees with disabilities, job-readiness workshops, resume-building sessions, and job fairs.<sup>278</sup>

**Children's reintegration:** A USAID program addressed reintegration barriers for children in schools through support for murals, theater performances, and surveys.<sup>279</sup> In October, the Dayr az Zawr education authority decided to allow returnee children to enroll in all schools in the governorate, ensuring their right to education and setting a precedent for future policies.<sup>280</sup>

**Elections:** A USAID-supported local organization hosted dialogues and roundtables in Dayr az Zawr that led to increased engagement between citizens from a variety of backgrounds and government officials. The dialogues strengthened the role and legitimacy of the Peace Committee, which has since been requested by officials of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) to host a conference to discuss several policy matters with citizens.<sup>281</sup>

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## GEC Terminates Operations

On December 23, State’s Global Engagement Center terminated “by operation of law,” according to State. The center was responsible for coordinating U.S. efforts to counter foreign disinformation.<sup>282</sup>

The GEC had two programs designed to raise public awareness and increase resilience to foreign malign information manipulation, specifically violent extremist organizations such as ISIS.<sup>283</sup> The first program sought to counter ISIS ideology and propaganda in al-Hol through providing alternative sources of information, exposing tactics that ISIS uses to manipulate the information environment, and empowering locals with accurate and factual information.<sup>284</sup> This program also provided information on repatriation from al-Hol.<sup>285</sup> The second program was an educational and entertainment program directed at children to teach prosocial values, including non-violence, inclusion, tolerance of out groups, and gender equality using engaging multimedia content to build resilience to extremist narratives.<sup>286</sup> The program sought to counter ISIS propaganda in children and increased successful reintegration in return communities.<sup>287</sup> State’s Counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Hub was overseeing the two programs.<sup>288</sup>

## STABILIZATION

### United States Renews National Emergency Declaration in Syria

The economic situation in northeastern Syria faced ongoing challenges, including high commodity price fluctuations, the continued devaluation of the Syrian pound, and reduced agriculture yields because of drought conditions, according to State.<sup>289</sup> These conditions and the economic challenges have increased the overall need for stabilization and humanitarian assistance funding in Syria.<sup>290</sup>

Instability following the fall of the Assad regime produced displacement and return movements across the region back into Syria.<sup>291</sup> Shortages and disruptions of inconsistent essential services in northeastern Syria worsened during the escalation of SNA-SDF hostilities, according to State.<sup>292</sup> For example, SNA-SDF fighting badly damaged the Tishreen Dam, depriving at least 413,000 people in Manbij and Kobane of water and electricity since December 10.<sup>293</sup> Looting was reported in many parts of the previously regime-controlled areas; however, the reports indicate a decrease in such activities as those areas are stabilizing.<sup>294</sup>

In October, then-President Joseph R. Biden continued for one year the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13894 with respect to the situation in and in relation to Syria.<sup>295</sup> The White House said that the situation in and in relation to Syria undermines the campaign to defeat ISIS, endangers civilians, further threatens to undermine the peace, security, and stability in the region, and continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.<sup>296</sup>



## Security, Disinformation Challenges Increase Following the Fall of the Assad Regime

As the security situation in northeastern Syria devolved into clashes, local authorities responded with curfews, checkpoints and closures of local offices and businesses. USAID operations temporarily paused some activities during the quarter to reassess the security situation. Similarly, the U.S. Syria Regional Platform noted that ongoing violence in Syria and conflict spillover from Lebanon hindered successful implementation of projects since September.<sup>297</sup>

The Elections and Political Process program temporarily suspended activities on November 30 due to heightened military activity in Manbij and Aleppo but the program was able to restart activities in Manbij after a week.<sup>298</sup> USAID's third-party monitoring efforts, which USAID uses to supplement other monitoring efforts in non-permissive environments, paused activities temporarily in early December due to enforced curfews, but normal operations resumed in later that month.<sup>299</sup>

One White Helmets–Syria Civil Defense–volunteer was killed in December during the increased military activity in regime-held areas that eventually led to the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>300</sup> No other violence against stabilization aid workers was reported during the quarter.<sup>301</sup>

In addition to security challenges, USAID and the U.S. Government have also faced disinformation campaigns, including those led by Russian and regime-backed sources. For example, Russian and regime-affiliated outlets like TASS, Sputnik, and SANA have spread false claims about a staged chemical attack in eastern Idlib and western Aleppo involving the White Helmets, Western countries, and Ukraine. These disinformation efforts often aim to deflect attention from potential actions by the regime or Russia, such as actual chemical attacks. In response, USAID issued positive messaging by commemorating the 10th anniversary of the White Helmets, emphasizing their humanitarian contributions and USAID's support to their life-saving work.<sup>302</sup>

## The D-ISIS Coalition Stabilization Working Group Restructures for More Efficient Coordination

During the quarter, the D-ISIS Coalition Stabilization Working Group began consolidating its Stabilization Working Group and Foreign Terrorist Fighter Working Group into a new Core Working Group that will allow for more efficient coordination of assistance and triaging/cooperation on policy priorities.<sup>303</sup> The Coalition will reconfigure working groups by theme—Communications, Finance, Terrorist Travel—and by region—Core, Central Asia, Africa.<sup>304</sup> This reconfiguration advances the Coalition's three overriding objectives: preventing and disrupting terrorist travel; detecting and dismantling ISIS financial networks; and confronting ISIS's use of the internet for propaganda purposes.<sup>305</sup>

On November 25, the group met in Berlin, Germany, to discuss updates on stabilization efforts and the mission to defeat ISIS, according to State.<sup>306</sup> The group noted that civilian lines of effort will continue through and beyond the transition of Operation Inherent Resolve.<sup>307</sup> The D-ISIS Coalition's secretariat received \$218 million worth of pledges after September's D-ISIS Ministerial, according to a U.S. co-lead in the Stabilization Working Group.<sup>308</sup> The

USAID operations temporarily paused some activities during the quarter to reassess the security situation.

Coalition secretariat aims to track the implementation of stabilization programs funded by Coalition members so that co-leads can better deconflict programming and identify gaps.<sup>309</sup>

## U.S. Stabilization Efforts Focus on Essential Services, Economic Recovery, and Supporting Local Actors

Prior to the collapse of the Assad regime, USAID-supported stabilization activities occurred in non-regime held areas.<sup>310</sup> Activities include helping local businesses improve and expand their operations to revive key economic sectors; creating employment opportunities; providing skills development training, career counseling opportunities, and entrepreneurship training to vulnerable populations, including women and persons with disabilities; and supporting the rehabilitation of essential services such as clean water, electricity, and healthcare in northeast Syria.<sup>311</sup> USAID also works with civil society organizations to aggregate community needs and advocate for community interests with relevant governance actors to promote stability and encourage the participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders at the local level.<sup>312</sup>

State stabilization programming continued along all existing lines of effort, supporting community security, access to education, local governance and essential service provision, independent media, and civil society.<sup>313</sup> (See Table 4.)

State captured performance monitoring data via implementer quarterly reporting and independent third-party monitors.<sup>314</sup> Every line of effort had award-level objectives, outcomes, outputs, and associated indicators to track progress toward targets.<sup>315</sup>

Third-party monitors visited activities to independently verify activities and to talk with beneficiaries to learn more about the effectiveness of the activities.<sup>316</sup> State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs received a detailed readout of every monitoring visit.<sup>317</sup> State also contracted third-party firms to conduct evaluations at the portfolio and project levels to assess effectiveness of its activities.<sup>318</sup> Several evaluations have included surveys among program participants and communities at large.<sup>319</sup>

Table 4.

### Examples of State-supported Stabilization Activities During the Quarter

- The FURAT III activity **restored a vital sanitation machine** in the city of Raqqah, which has transformed the health and sanitation of the city after years of disrepair. This machine is now clearing 12 tons of debris daily, removing illegal dump sites, and maintaining public spaces, benefiting around 350,000 residents.
- The Wiaam III project **rehabilitated the Shanan Drinking Water Station** in eastern Dayr az Zawr governorate to provide clean drinking water to approximately 16,000 residents.
- The Wiaam III activity **restored electricity to five water stations** along Dayr az Zawr-Khabour Canal. The project, completed in December, increased the availability of water to several villages with a population of about 99,000 residents.
- The al-Rashad III project supported the **restoration of street lighting** in populated areas of Dayr az Zawr, contributing to a greater sense of safety and security reported by residents.

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 1/3/2025.

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that in 2024 more than 70 percent of the Syrian population were in need of assistance (16.7 million Syrians out of a population of 23.5 million).<sup>320</sup> In northern Syria, the humanitarian situation remains challenging because of ongoing conflict, especially in Manbij, where NGOs are unable to access the area, and critical infrastructure, including markets, electricity, and health facilities, need urgent repairs, according to State.<sup>321</sup>

Additionally, fluctuations in the Syrian pound's value have led to price hikes, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis at a time when temperatures are expected soon to drop below freezing, according to State.<sup>322</sup>

### UN Syria Launches Early Recovery Strategy and Trust Fund

On October 9, the UN announced the launch of its long-awaited 2024-2028 Early Recovery Strategy for Syria.<sup>323</sup> State said that the multi-year, medium-term framework focuses on four strategic priorities—health and nutrition; education; water, sanitation, and hygiene; and sustainable livelihoods—while also ensuring reliable electricity as a key enabler for these activities.<sup>324</sup> To support this strategy, the UN also launched a dedicated Early Recovery Trust Fund to allow international donors to fund medium-term recovery efforts.<sup>325</sup>

To date, the United States has not funded the Early Recovery Trust Fund, according to State.<sup>326</sup> Following the fall of the Assad regime, the United States will continue to assess the best way to address the vast humanitarian and early recovery challenges facing Syria.<sup>327</sup>

### 1 Million Syrians Displaced After Fall of Assad Regime

Since the beginning of the rebels' advance on November 27, approximately 1 million Syrians, mostly women and children, have been displaced from communities in Syria, including the Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Idlib governorates.<sup>328</sup> As of mid-December, more than 882,000 people remained displaced (with at least 150,000 people having been displaced more than once) while 250,000 IDPs returned, mostly to the Hama and Aleppo governorates.<sup>329</sup> Some displaced families who returned to their areas of origin subsequently returned to former camps due to a lack of essential services or damage infrastructure in their hometowns, according to the UN.<sup>330</sup>

In northeastern Syria, a total of 263 sites, including municipal buildings, schools, mosques, and residential areas, are serving as reception sites and emergency collective centers for 44,395 displaced individuals, as of December 17, according to State.<sup>331</sup> NGOs were assessing these locations to verify numbers and to provide assistance, although critical needs persist, with reports suggesting up to 50,000 more people might require aid.<sup>332</sup>

**The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that in 2024 more than 70 percent of the Syrian population were in need of assistance (16.7 million Syrians out of a population of 23.5 million).**

**Between September 23 and November 15, an estimated 557,000 individuals crossed from Lebanon into Syria, as Israeli military action against Hezbollah intensified.**

## **More than 550,000 People Cross into Syria from Lebanon, Following Israeli Air Strikes**

Between September 23 and November 15, an estimated 557,000 individuals crossed from Lebanon into Syria, as Israeli military action against Hezbollah intensified.<sup>333</sup> The Israeli military struck multiple Syria-Lebanon border crossing points, particularly those adjacent to Homs governorate.<sup>334</sup> In response, the UNHCR, which receives incoming individuals and assists with onward transport, temporarily suspended some missions.<sup>335</sup> Despite the attacks, daily buses supported by UNHCR and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent transported more than 46,700 individuals from border points to their intended destinations between September 24 and November 17.<sup>336</sup>

An estimated 63 percent of the returnees are Syrian nationals and the remaining 37 percent are Lebanese and other third-country nationals.<sup>337</sup> A small number of Lebanese nationals returned to Lebanon as of November 17, primarily because of the availability of rental accommodations in unaffected areas of northern Lebanon, the desire to stay with family members planning to cross from Lebanon to Syria, economic difficulties in Syria, limited available humanitarian support, and the need to resume livelihoods.<sup>338</sup>

As of November 11, nearly 50 percent of Syrian households crossing back into Lebanon from Syria were headed by females and have faced severe challenges accessing essential health services, safe shelter, emergency relief items, legal support, and nutritious food, according to a USAID implementer.<sup>339</sup> Female-headed households reportedly also struggled to secure incomes for livelihoods.<sup>340</sup> Humanitarian assistance organizations distributed food baskets, non-food items, and winterization kits, in addition to providing maternal health care, mental health and psychosocial support, and gender-based violence prevention, response, and risk mitigation services to new arrivals in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>341</sup>

The SDF allowed families arriving to northeastern Syria to enter in batches to register their personal information.<sup>342</sup> Once registered, the families split into two groups: 1) those wishing to remain in SDF-controlled areas, which required them to have a local sponsor; and 2) those wishing to move to SDF-controlled areas, where a military detachment escorted them to ensure they arrived safely.<sup>343</sup>

The DAANES established a crisis cell tasked to monitor the situation, facilitate people's passage through or arrival into northeastern Syria, and coordinate with the humanitarian community, according to State.<sup>344</sup> The arrival of Syrians and Lebanese displaced from Lebanon to northeastern Syria strained an already resource-strapped DAANES, host communities, and humanitarian-aid organizations, State said.<sup>345</sup>

## **Food Insecurity Increases in Wake of Assad Regime Fall**

Approximately 9.1 million Syrians were food insecure during the quarter, according to an estimate released prior to the fall of the Assad regime. An additional 5.4 million were at risk of hunger, according to the UN 2024 Food Security Assessment.<sup>346</sup> Humanitarian assistance organizations reported that since the start of the HTS offensive, their commodities have been either consumed or looted, increasing the pressure on already limited stocks and capacity to sustain food assistance beyond the initial three weeks of the renewed conflict.<sup>347</sup>



Supply chain routes were disrupted as control of areas shifted, including the M5 and M4 highways, major routes that connect key cities in Syria, including Raqqah, Aleppo, and Damascus.<sup>348</sup> The closures of border crossings between Syria and Lebanon worsened supply and increased pressure on prices.<sup>349</sup> In northeastern Syria, typically dependent on importing goods from Türkiye, changes in the areas of influence disrupted the reliability of supply chain routes into the DAANES controlled areas.<sup>350</sup>

The lack of available transport vehicles to move commodities between warehouses has also been a challenge, although the UN Whole of Syria Food Security Sector noted that the situation has become more stable as the security situation improved in many parts of Syria.<sup>351</sup> Shops increasingly reopened and shortages of essential food items, especially in oil, sugar, and rice, had declined.<sup>352</sup> The lack of transportation, increase in demand, supply shortage, and the ongoing conflict continued to be the main obstacles for retail operations.<sup>353</sup>

Although 800 tons of flour are baked daily by approximately 160 public and private bakeries, the bread crisis in Aleppo continued with long queues and crowding at bakeries.<sup>354</sup> Some areas of Aleppo and Homs did not have working bakeries.<sup>355</sup> The new Syrian authorities set the official price of a bundle of 12 loaves of bread at 4,000 Syrian pounds, nearly 10 times the previously subsidized price.<sup>356</sup> This price for a bread bundle may increase to as much as 10,000 Syrian pounds when purchased from vendors in some rural areas of Homs and Hama due to transportation costs.<sup>357</sup>

During the quarter, USAID funded 19 implementers, including the UNICEF, WFP, WHO, and 16 non-governmental organizations (NGO), to provide emergency food and nutrition assistance within Syria and to Syrian refugees in neighboring countries.<sup>358</sup> In Syria, USAID reported that its implementers provide vulnerable populations with cash transfers for supplemental emergency nutrition assistance, food vouchers, and monthly in-kind food rations, while also distributing wheat flour and yeast to bakeries.<sup>359</sup> USAID-funded WFP and other NGO implementers also provide monthly food assistance to people inside of Syria and Syrian refugees across Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye.<sup>360</sup> With State PRM support, UNICEF provides child nutrition assistance in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye.<sup>361</sup>

## Water Crisis in Syria Continues

The water crisis in Syria continued during the quarter, caused by insufficient and poorly distributed rainfall, severe drought conditions, combined with low water levels in the Euphrates River and damaged water infrastructure, according to USAID.<sup>362</sup> The destruction of key infrastructure in late 2023 and early 2024 reduced the availability of electricity, undermining water pumping and supply across the northern Hasakah governorate.<sup>363</sup> The Alouk water station, located in the Hasakah governate and previously serving access to water to up to one million people, remained offline since the attacks in October 2023 on the power infrastructure supplying the station.<sup>364</sup>

The Tishreen Dam in Manbij was damaged during hostilities on December 10 and rendered non-operational, creating power outages in water stations.<sup>365</sup> At least two million people in Aleppo and the eastern countryside faced severe water shortages due to the suspension of operations of the Babiri and al Khafsa pumping stations.<sup>366</sup> Damage to the dam also disrupted water access for over 413,000 people in Manbij and Kobane sub-districts.<sup>367</sup> On December 14,

The closures of border crossings between Syria and Lebanon worsened supply and increased pressure on prices.

**Aleppo’s Ain al-Bayda water station reportedly resumed flowing water on December 25 after being nonoperational since 2017, restoring water services for approximately 300,000 IDPs and host community residents.**

the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross, in collaboration with UNICEF, conducted a joint mission to the Tishreen Dam’s technical management facility to facilitate repairs.<sup>368</sup> To ensure the continued operation of the dam, UNICEF secured fuel to power the backup generator, enabling the safe drainage of the dam and safeguarding water supplies, according to OCHA.<sup>369</sup>

After several months of testing and repairs, Aleppo’s Ain al-Bayda water station reportedly resumed flowing water on December 25 after being nonoperational since 2017, restoring water services for approximately 300,000 IDPs and host community residents.<sup>370</sup> While the water station remained operational as of December 31, UNICEF identified a leak and began undertaking repairs.<sup>371</sup>

USAID funds 15 implementers to provide water, sanitation, and health assistance in Syria. These implementers distribute hygiene items to vulnerable populations and rehabilitate small-scale sanitation and water systems, such as handwashing stations and latrines, in displacement camps and informal settlements.<sup>372</sup>

In northern Syria, USAID reported that its implementers increased access to safe drinking water through emergency water trucking and the distribution of water storage tanks and water treatment devices.<sup>373</sup> USAID reported that one of its implementers delivered approximately 13.7 million gallons of potable chlorinated water across 62 IDP sites and two informal settlements in the Aleppo governate, reaching an estimated 11,500 households.<sup>374</sup> The implementer also conducted solid waste management activities for 11,700 households across 63 IDP sites, including constructing 6 latrine blocks, including 2 single latrines for persons with disabilities, for 1,100 households at 5 IDP sites in October.<sup>375</sup> The implementer provided more than 540 information sessions to 26 IDP sites, which included delivering education on hygiene practices to nearly 2,700 IDPs and the distribution of nearly 3,600 educational materials and brochures, according to USAID.<sup>376</sup>









With support and training from USAID, fixed irrigation systems on the Qablan Farm in Iraq produced an additional 180 tons of wheat, a 60 percent increase. (USAID photo)

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# IRAQ

## SECURITY

The Coalition’s Military Advisory Group continued to advise, enable, and assist components of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)—including the Iraqi Air Force (IqAF), Iraqi Army Aviation Command, and the Iraqi Ground Forces Command—and Kurdish Peshmerga in bases in Baghdad and Erbil.<sup>377</sup> The Special Operations Advisory Group advised, enabled and assisted the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) from bases in Anbar province.<sup>378</sup> (See page 47.)

## TRANSITION

### CJTF-OIR and ISF Continue to Discuss Transition of U.S. Forces in Iraq

Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) reported that it continued to discuss with Iraqi security leaders how to execute re-posturing of U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq as part of a planned two-phased transition to a U.S.-Iraqi bilateral security partnership. During the transition announced in September 2024, the Coalition will conclude its counter-ISIS military mission in Federal Iraq by the end of September 2025 and continue supporting operations against ISIS in northeastern Syria from bases in Iraq until September 2026, subject to conditions on the ground and consultations among Iraq, the United States, and Coalition members.<sup>379</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that the Coalition will continue to advise partner forces and to sustain force protection while warfighters and capabilities are relocated within Iraq, Syria, and other countries.<sup>380</sup> There will be a small increase in the number of U.S. troops currently stationed at a base in Jordan and one capability that supports the OIR mission in Iraq will relocate to Jordan.<sup>381</sup>

CJTF-OIR said that the “biggest change” to its logistical footprint in Iraq will be the movement of Coalition forces from the Al-Asad Airbase in Anbar province, which is used for refueling, storage, and the divestiture of equipment to Iraqi partner forces.<sup>382</sup> CJTF-OIR also reported that it was receiving updated counter-unmanned aerial systems to enhance layered defenses at all locations.<sup>383</sup>

During the quarter, Coalition and Iraqi military leaders met multiple times to discuss details of the planned posture changes in four Iraqi areas: Greater Baghdad, the Al-Asad Airbase in Anbar Province, the Erbil Airbase in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, and at Union III in Baghdad.<sup>384</sup>

In November the two sides discussed details of the planned transfer of the Al-Asad Airbase to full ISF operational control no later than September 2025.<sup>385</sup> In November and December, they discussed Coalition assets remaining at the Erbil Airbase and at Union III.<sup>386</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that discussions focused on increasing Coalition assets and multinational personnel at Erbil Air Base while also maintaining advising and support to the ISF in operations against ISIS.<sup>387</sup>

There will be a small increase in the number of U.S. troops currently stationed at a base in Jordan and one capability that supports the OIR mission in Iraq will relocate to Jordan.

# COALITION ADVISING IN IRAQ

## Kurdish Peshmerga

Within the Iraqi Kurdistan region, Coalition advisors work with the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) to implement a 4-year reform plan established between the DoD and the Kurdistan Regional Government. The reform plan seeks to unify partisan Peshmerga forces under the MoPA, which is responsible for maintaining the territorial integrity of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and coordinating with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense in Baghdad.

## Counter Terrorism Service (CTS)

Coalition military advisors work with the CTS at the strategic and operational levels. Coalition advisement focuses on air-to-ground integration; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; site exploitation; and other areas to develop and assess CTS capabilities.

## Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)

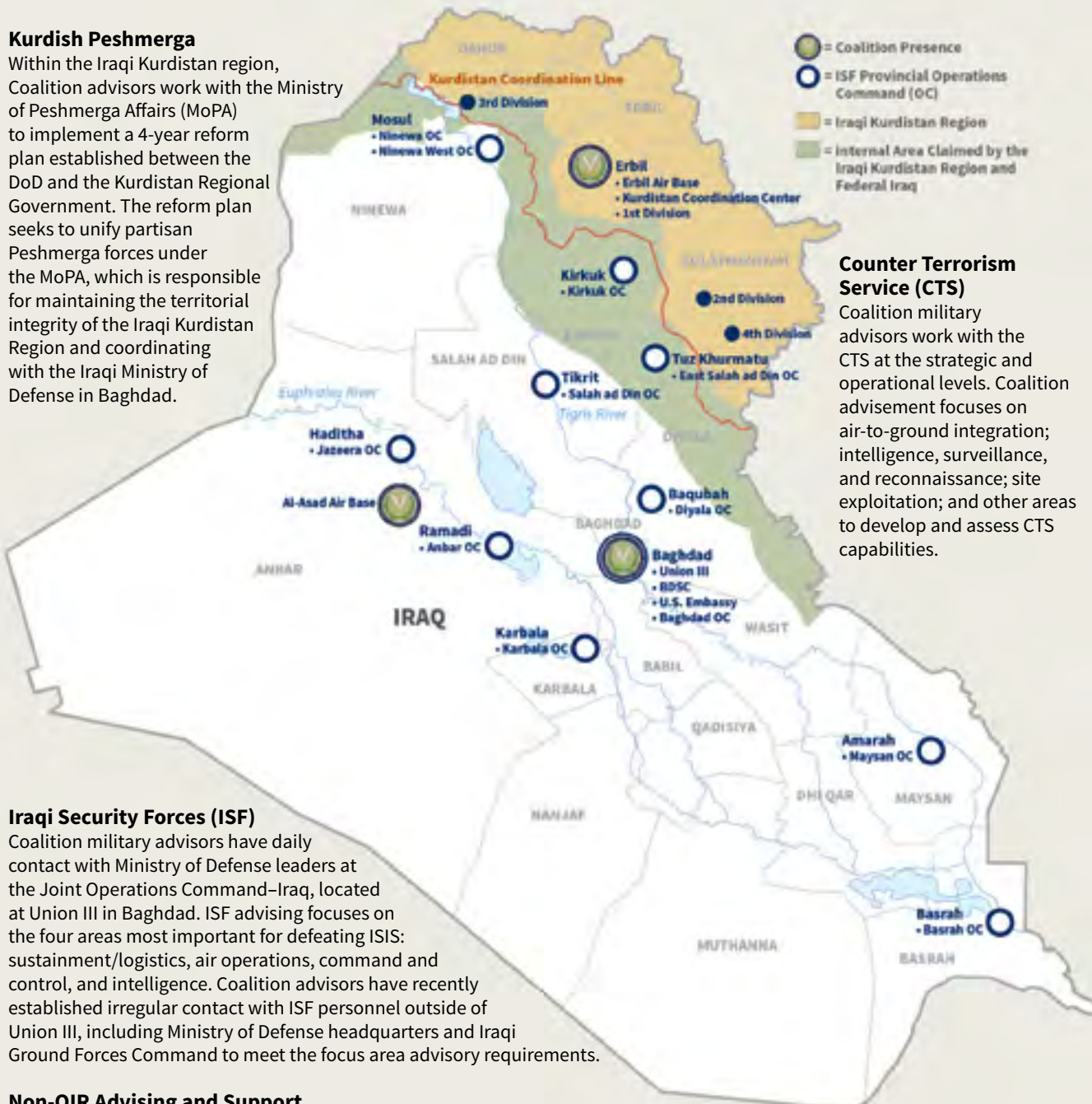
Coalition military advisors have daily contact with Ministry of Defense leaders at the Joint Operations Command–Iraq, located at Union III in Baghdad. ISF advising focuses on the four areas most important for defeating ISIS: sustainment/logistics, air operations, command and control, and intelligence. Coalition advisors have recently established irregular contact with ISF personnel outside of Union III, including Ministry of Defense headquarters and Iraqi Ground Forces Command to meet the focus area advisory requirements.

## Non-OIR Advising and Support

The Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq 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 may not be shown in their actual location within each province.

**Source:** CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 7/16/2024; DIA, vetting comment, 10/24/2024.



**U.S. Army Soldiers conduct a training exercise alongside members of the Asayish in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. (U.S. Army photo)**



According to CJTF-OIR, ISF and CTS leaders asked the Coalition to continue advising them on intelligence, command and control, mobility, and sustainment, and to continue providing materiel through the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF).<sup>388</sup> Iraqi defense officials asked the Coalition to help inventory equipment its leaves behind after completing the re-posture and to provide training on its uses.<sup>389</sup>

CJTF-OIR said that Coalition and Iraqi military leaders continued to use three criteria to inform the transition process: the ISIS threat, the operational threat environment, and the capabilities of the ISF to conduct independent operations against ISIS throughout their operational commands.<sup>390</sup> CJTF-OIR said that nothing had developed regarding these criteria that might alter the re-posturing timeline.<sup>391</sup>

## IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

### ISF Increases Security Along Border with Syria After Fall of Assad’s Regime

CJTF-OIR reported that ISF leaders expressed “deep” security-related concerns in the wake of the regime change in Syria in December, specifically about Iraq’s border security and the possibility of a resurgent ISIS threat from the fighters already present in Iraq.<sup>392</sup>

To address these concerns, Iraq bolstered border security along Iraq’s western border with Syria, augmenting more than 600 border guard outposts by deploying 6 Iraqi Army infantry brigades, 1 mechanized brigade, and 4 Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Brigades about 5 kilometers from the border.<sup>393</sup> The DIA reported that the ISF remained postured at the border to prevent ISIS operatives in Syria from moving into Iraq as of December.<sup>394</sup> The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) reported that PMF reinforcement of the border will likely help with blocking ISIS infiltration, but could also enable Iranian-Aligned Militia Group (IAMG) infiltration and smuggling into Syria.<sup>395</sup>

Additionally, four ISF divisions from operations commands in Ninewa and Jazeera provinces were placed on alert status as reserve forces.<sup>396</sup> The ISF also moved a unit of Scan Eagles to Anbar province and began conducting intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations at the al-Qaim border crossing with Syria.<sup>397</sup> The Coalition supported these efforts with ISR to detect potential ISIS activity along the 340 mile stretch between al-Qaim and the Sinjar district.<sup>398</sup> CJTF-OIR said that Iraq’s CTS assisted to maintain stability, protect Coalition advisers, and share intelligence.<sup>399</sup>

CJTF-OIR described the ISF as “very cooperative” with the Coalition in the days prior to and after the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>400</sup> The ISF requested support to publicly message its intent to work with the Coalition to protect borders and maintain pressure on ISIS within Iraq.<sup>401</sup>

Meanwhile, the OUSD(P) reported that the Iraqi government allowed some Syrian soldiers and officers who fled Syria as the Assad regime was collapsing to enter Iraq temporarily.<sup>402</sup> According to the reports, roughly 2,000 Syrian soldiers sought refuge in al-Qaim, a border town in Anbar province, and were initially hosted by local tribes until they were moved to a nearby military base.<sup>403</sup> Most of them subsequently returned to Syria voluntarily after submitting requests for amnesty, while 90 officers refused to return to Syria, according to news reports.<sup>404</sup>

## Coalition Advising of ISF Continues

**Joint Operations Command-Iraq:** Coalition advisers continued to advise the Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I), a cross-functional organization based in Baghdad that operates using Ministry of Defense assets and reports to the prime minister.<sup>405</sup> CJTF-OIR described the JOC-I as an “interface” between the prime minister and multiple government agencies, including the ISF.<sup>406</sup> As such, the JOC-I directs operations on behalf of the prime minister, provides reports on security concerns to the prime minister, and is the central authority for coordination and security of civil-military operations, such as pilgrimages, civil unrest, and responses to natural or man-made disasters.<sup>407</sup>

Table 5.

### Coalition Advising of JOC-I During the Quarter

Warfighting Function	Advising and Results
<b>Command and Control</b>	Coalition advisors facilitated training in command and control, intelligence, joint fires, and sustainment. The JOC-I exercised Command and Control over airstrikes (joint fires) and coordinated, observed, and reported on operations that are not jointly executed.
<b>Fires</b>	JOC-I airstrikes against ISIS increased significantly during the quarter. The JOC-I relied on organic ISR, the IqAF, and Iraqi Tactical Air Controllers to conduct counter-ISIS airstrikes during the quarter.
<b>Information Operations</b>	The JOC-I directed the Iraqi Security Media Cell to conduct information operations after strikes against ISIS. CJTF-OIR reported that the cell posted video of strikes and messaging on social media platforms within 12 hours of counter-ISIS airstrikes.

**Source:** CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.4 OIR 036 and 24.4 OIR 037, 9/11/2024.



CJTF-OIR said that while the JOC-I does not command operations, it still maintains a “critical role” in the intelligence fusion, public affairs and information operations, and deliberate targeting processes that culminate in air-to-ground strikes.<sup>408</sup> During the quarter, the JOC-I demonstrated incremental increases in functional capability and operations, primarily through the Strike Cell, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>409</sup> (See Table 5.)

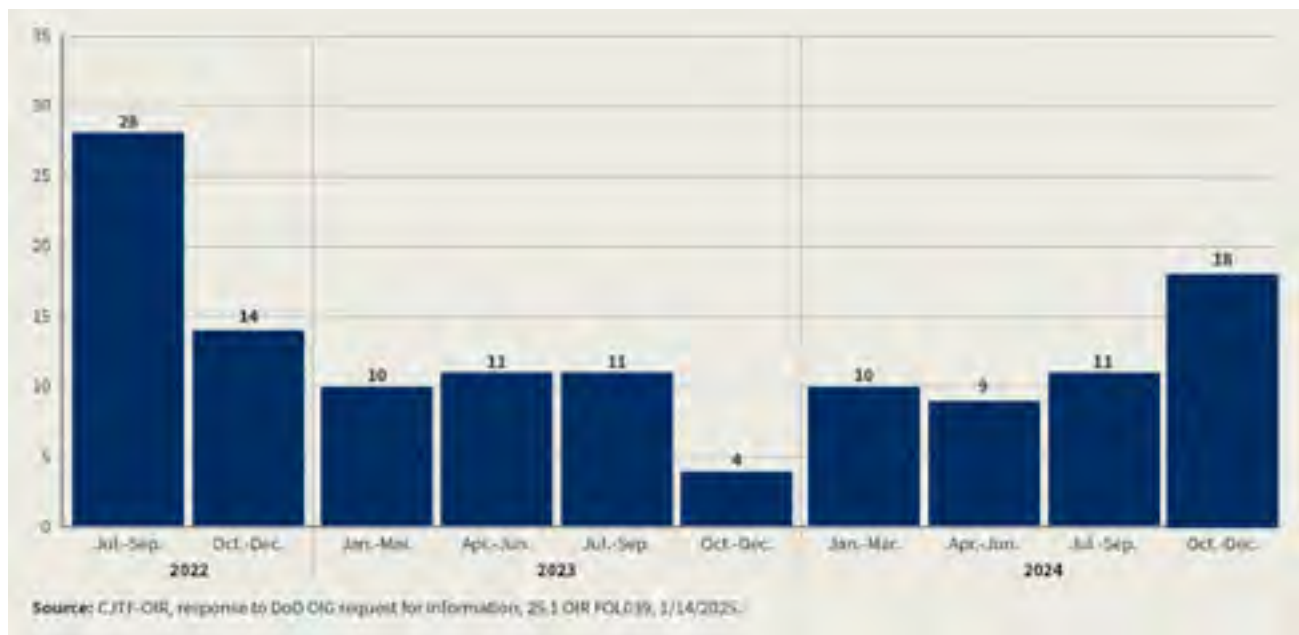
**Counter Terrorism Service:** In October, the CTS executed two operations in the Hamrin Mountains in northern Iraq that targeted several ISIS hideouts and leadership. During a joint operation with the Iraqi National Security Service, the CTS killed nine ISIS fighters. Large quantities of weapons, ammunition, and equipment were seized and eight hideouts, including a “large manufacturing workshop,” were destroyed. In a separate operation, the CTS coordinated a strike with the IqAF during which eight ISIS leaders were killed, and several weapons, ammunition, explosive materials, and equipment were recovered.<sup>410</sup>

**Iraqi Air Force:** CJTF-OIR reported that the IqAF continued to make incremental gains in capability, providing accurate and timely strikes against ISIS targets.<sup>411</sup> (See Figure 7.)

CJTF-OIR reported progress in employing tactical air controllers, who facilitate strikes planned by the JOC-I Strike Cell.<sup>412</sup> CJTF-OIR said that Iraqi F-16s are “highly capable and effective” against ISIS. However, Iraq’s Chinese-made CH4s and CH5s armed UAVs are ineffective, which causes the IqAF to rely on CTEF- and Foreign Military Sales (FMS)-divested tactical ISR aircraft to find and track targets. The Coalition visited the IqAF headquarters for the first time in 2 years, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>413</sup>

Figure 7.

**Counter-ISIS Airstrikes by Iraqi Aircraft, July 2022-December 2024**



**Other Units:** Coalition advisers continued to work with the ISF outside of the JOC-I headquarters in Baghdad. Specifically, Coalition personnel advised the Iraqi Ground Forces Command, the Baghdad Operations Command, the Ninewa Operations Command, ISF Artillery training at Taji, Iraqi Desert Battalions, and the Joint ISF-Peshmerga brigades.<sup>414</sup>

Advising outside of the JOC-I began last quarter, with engagements at IqAF bases and the Air Defense Command in Baghdad.<sup>415</sup> Advisors also began meeting with Ministry of Defense staff directly.<sup>416</sup> CJTF-OIR described the visits as a “significant change” in Coalition advising efforts as advisors sought to expand advising to the agencies most responsible for each warfighting function.<sup>417</sup>

## End-use Monitoring

Military materiel provided to Iraq under the authorities of the Arms Export Control Act is, as set forth in the agreements that govern these transfers, subject to end-use monitoring (EUM) to ensure that the appropriate units are using them consistent with the requirements of those agreements. EUM is routinely performed by the United States, but because the DoD considers Iraq a “hostile environment,” security restrictions limit the ability of U.S. personnel to conduct mandated monitoring. Therefore, the Iraqi government routinely provides EUM reports to the DoD to supplement direct observations by U.S. personnel. State said the DoD and State accept this approach as the only feasible mechanism available to meet EUM requirements.<sup>418</sup>

Monitors from the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq, under Chief of Mission authority, use both routine and enhanced methods to conduct EUM. Routine EUM is required for all such defense articles and services provided and occur at every available opportunity in conjunction with other security cooperation events. The most consistent method of routine EUM is via quarterly reports from the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, MoPA, and the CTS. Thousands of defense articles are detailed in these reports, alongside additional reporting of defense articles from the 32 individual routine EUM visits by Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq monitors since their return from Ordered Departure in April.<sup>419</sup>

Conversely, enhanced EUM is required for specific defense articles – in Iraq, night vision devices and Stinger missiles comprise 95% of the nearly 5,900 enhanced EUM articles. Monitors must verify annually accountability of these articles in person by serial number. Since the return from Ordered Departure in April 2024, security cooperation personnel verified 3,300 defense articles across 22 physical inspection visits. When bar codes are not used on items such as night vision devices, monitors instead check serial numbers.<sup>420</sup>

## Leahy Law

State reported it was not aware of any instances during the quarter in which the United States provided assistance to the ISF or Kurdish Peshmerga in violation of the Leahy laws. The Leahy laws refer 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.<sup>421</sup>

Peshmerga instructors of Ranya Staff College attend a class on the military decision making process near Erbil, Iraq, December 11, 2024. (U.S. Army photo)



## KURDISH PESHMERGA

In September 2022, the United States revised and renewed through 2026 a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG's) Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) to support reform measures that seek to create a unified, nonpartisan military organization that operates under MoPA command. The non-binding MoU serves as an organizing framework for DoD counter-ISIS support to the MoPA since 2016 and encourages continued MoPA reform. The MoU will remain in effect until the end of September 2026, subject to the availability of funds.<sup>422</sup>

### The KRG Achieves Key MoPA Reform Milestone

In October, KRG President Nechirvan Barzani approved the Peshmerga Forces Operating Concept, a key MoPA reform milestone that outlines MoPA operational mechanisms and command and control responsibilities.<sup>423</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that according to the operating concept, the MoPA is responsible for higher-level operational planning and issuing orders to subordinate divisions, which then will develop mission plans at the tactical level.<sup>424</sup> However, the MoPA will only plan MoPA-led operations, not joint operations that include units operating under the KRG Ministry of Interior or attached to partisan forces belonging to the two biggest political parties—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), known as the 70s and 80s Forces, respectively. Planning for joint operations will continue to be led by those other units.<sup>425</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that the MoPA reform remained on track, noting areas of progress and ongoing challenges during the quarter.<sup>426</sup>

**Transfer of politically affiliated forces:** A key element of the MoPA reform plan is the transfer to the MoPA of personnel belonging to the 70s and 80s Forces. Specifically, the MoU calls for the transfer of the PUK's 70s Units and the KDP's 80s Units to the command of the MoPA by September 2026.<sup>427</sup>

The MoPA reorganization will leave several forces outside of the MoPA's command, including partisan counterterrorism and police forces, an oil protection forces, and military police.<sup>428</sup> CJTF-OIR reported last quarter that at least four brigades and likely more will remain outside of the MoPA's control and under the command of the partisan 70s and 80s

**The DoD seeks to establish joint ISF-Peshmerga brigades to build rapport and enable an enhanced security presence in areas along an administrative boundary that separates the IKR from the rest of Iraq.**

units.<sup>429</sup> In addition, CJTF-OIR said that there were no plans to move counterterrorism forces under the command of the MoPA while it is undergoing structural reforms.<sup>430</sup>

**Standing up MoPA divisions:** Personnel transferred to the MoPA are organized into units known as Regional Guard Brigades (RGB) assigned to MoPA divisions.<sup>431</sup> The MoPA plans to create 11 divisions by 2026 organized under two area commands with a total personnel end strength of 138,000, though this plan is still pending the approval of the KRG prime minister and Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) president.<sup>432</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported previously that the 1st and 2nd Divisions have been operational since March, while the 4th division began receiving Coalition advising in mid-July. The 3rd and 4th Divisions experienced some delays due to disagreements between the 70s Unit and the MoPA, but have received funds from the MoPA for equipment, weapons, and to improve headquarters infrastructure.<sup>433</sup> CJTF-OIR reported this quarter that the 3rd Division became fully operational in December and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was expected to become fully operational in early 2025.<sup>434</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that the MoPA transferred 8,500 80s Forces personnel to the 5th division during the quarter, though the division remains aligned to the 80s Forces to receive salaries. CJTF-OIR said that the 6th division started receiving personnel in December and was expected to be operational by February 2025 but may be delayed as the MoPA continues efforts to bring the 4th division into full operation.<sup>435</sup> The 6th Division will be formed using RGBs already aligned to the MoPA, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>436</sup>

**Joint ISF-Peshmerga brigades:** The DoD seeks to establish joint ISF-Peshmerga brigades to build rapport and enable an enhanced security presence in areas along an administrative boundary that separates the IKR from the rest of Iraq.<sup>437</sup> As of November, two joint brigades were fully manned but not yet operational as ISF and Peshmerga leaders continued to negotiate the final positioning of the brigades in these areas, known as the Kurdistan Coordination Line (KCL).<sup>438</sup>

CJTF-OIR said that building infrastructure in the austere locations where the joint brigades would patrol has progressed slowly due to the lack of availability of construction materials and explosive disposal experts to confirm locations are clear of unexploded ordnance.<sup>439</sup> The DIA previously reported that the formation of the Joint Brigades, which has been ongoing since 2021, has been slowed by a lack of funding and longstanding distrust between the two forces.<sup>440</sup>

**Electronic payment of salaries:** The MoPA also continued to expand an electronic funds transfer system for the disbursement of Peshmerga salaries, which is also a key element of the MoPA reforms as it reduces opportunities for fraud.<sup>441</sup> This quarter, all but 16 personnel of the nearly 70,000 Peshmerga under the MoPA's command had been enrolled in the system to enable future electronic salary payments.<sup>442</sup> Just under 17,000 personnel still receive their salaries in cash, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>443</sup>

**Retirement of excess personnel:** As part of the MoPA reform plan, the MoPA will retire 100 percent of excess forces by October 2026.<sup>444</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that the MoPA had retired approximately 18,000 of the 36,000 personnel eligible for retirement as of the end of the quarter, including 5,000 personnel from the 80s Forces and 13,000 from the 70s Forces. The remaining 18,000, all from the 70s Forces, should be retired by September 2025, ahead of the milestone completion date, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>445</sup>



## Coalition Advising to the MoPA Remained on Track

The Coalition maintains two advisory groups to advise the Peshmerga. The Joint Operations Command Advisor Team—North works with the MoPA Headquarters to develop its mission planning capability and the Support Forces Command, (SFCs), MoPA warehouses, and regional logistics hubs. (See Table 6.) The Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) advises at the MoPA division level.<sup>446</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that the focus of the Coalition’s advising efforts did not change during the quarter. Concerns that advising might be affected by the IKR parliamentary elections did not materialize. CJTF-OIR said it remained to be seen whether advising might be affected by a prolonged government formation process that could affect several political and military positions.<sup>447</sup>

Table 6.

### Status of MoPA Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Description
<b>Mission Planning</b>	Coalition advisers continued to advise the 3rd and 4th Divisions and provide after-action reviews. <b>Planning skills have advanced.</b> The four functioning MoPA Divisions can produce operational orders to varying standards. Train-the-trainer programs were ongoing. Challenges include a lack of a formal doctrine and a professional military education pathway within MoPA.
<b>Peshmerga Ground Operations</b>	Regional Guard Brigades under MoPA command demonstrate <b>capacity to conduct counter-ISIS military operations</b> and have begun developing area defense plans along the Kurdistan Coordination Line, an area that divides the Iraqi Kurdistan Region from the rest of Iraq.
<b>Intelligence</b>	The MoPA intelligence unit communicates with the RGBs and maintains situational awareness. <b>It does not yet conduct full intelligence assessments</b> , although they have a very good understanding of intelligence unit locations and reported ISIS locations. The unit <b>has improved its understanding of the intelligence cycle</b> , intelligence gathering, and how to analyze enemy courses of action to inform ISR requirements.
<b>Command and Control (C2)</b>	The new operating concept lays out MoPA and Divisional C2 structures and a draft Area Command structure. At the divisional level, C2 is managed with sufficient radios and satellite-based systems to enable orders to be issued and received by the RGBs.
<b>Artillery</b>	Two Support Force Commands provide indirect fire support with U.S.-provided 105mm Howitzers and 120mm mortars. During the quarter, the 1st SFC conducted their first live-fire exercise, while the 2nd SFC is awaiting approval by the MoPA to conduct its <b>first live-fire exercise</b> . However, the commands are not yet able to deliver indirect fire in support of offensive or defensive combined arms maneuver operations. Instead, they are likely to support static defensive positions. Ammunition stocks have increased, but stocks are limited by the <b>lack of availability of suitable storage locations</b> and a well-managed usage plan.
<b>Logistics and Sustainment</b>	MoPA is making slow but steady progress in improving the logistics and sustainment of its force. The two regional logistic hubs have sufficient facilities, workforce, and equipment for basic operations. Each Division is <b>capable of planning and coordinating sustainment support</b> to their headquarters and subordinate regional guard brigades. However, sustainment capacity at this level is extremely limited with only one basic warehouse capable of securing and storing limited supplies. <b>Transportation is also in short supply</b> , forcing the divisions to rely on improvised or contracted vehicles.
<b>Information Operations</b>	The General Directorate for Media and National Awareness is chiefly responsible for MoPA information operations. Messaging <b>does not directly counter ISIS’s narrative</b> , however, the directorate <b>advertises cooperation between Coalition and MoPA forces</b> , which acts as a strong messaging tool. Divisional personnel have been trained to detect, report, and react to propaganda.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 25.1 OIR 040 and 25.1 OIR 041, 12/12/2024; CJTF-OIR, vetting comment 2/4/2025.

## Removal of Explosive Remnants of War

State's Humanitarian Mine Action program continued to support the removal of explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive devices through a variety of ways, including surveying, marking, and clearing U.S.-origin munitions in southern Iraq; removing residual contamination from ERW in northern Iraq and the IKR; addressing contamination from explosive hazards in ISIS-liberated areas; and providing explosive ordnance risk education.<sup>448</sup>

This quarter, the program provided information management programs to enable Iraqi authorities to support local and international NGOs and contractors to operate in areas of greatest need.<sup>449</sup> The office continued to encourage the Coalition to contribute to ERW removal programs.<sup>450</sup>

## DIPLOMACY

### Iraq Takes Active Role After Assad Downfall

During a call on December 3, in the days leading up to the downfall of the Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani told Turkish President Recep Erdogan that Iraq would exert all efforts to preserve the security of Iraq and Syria, according to media reports.<sup>451</sup> In addition, Prime Minister al-Sudani pushed for international leaders in to meet in Baghdad to create a comprehensive regional dialogue.<sup>452</sup> Iraq Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein attended a December meeting in Jordan and a January meeting in Saudi Arabia convened to support a peaceful transition process in Syria and discuss regional support to the country.<sup>453</sup>

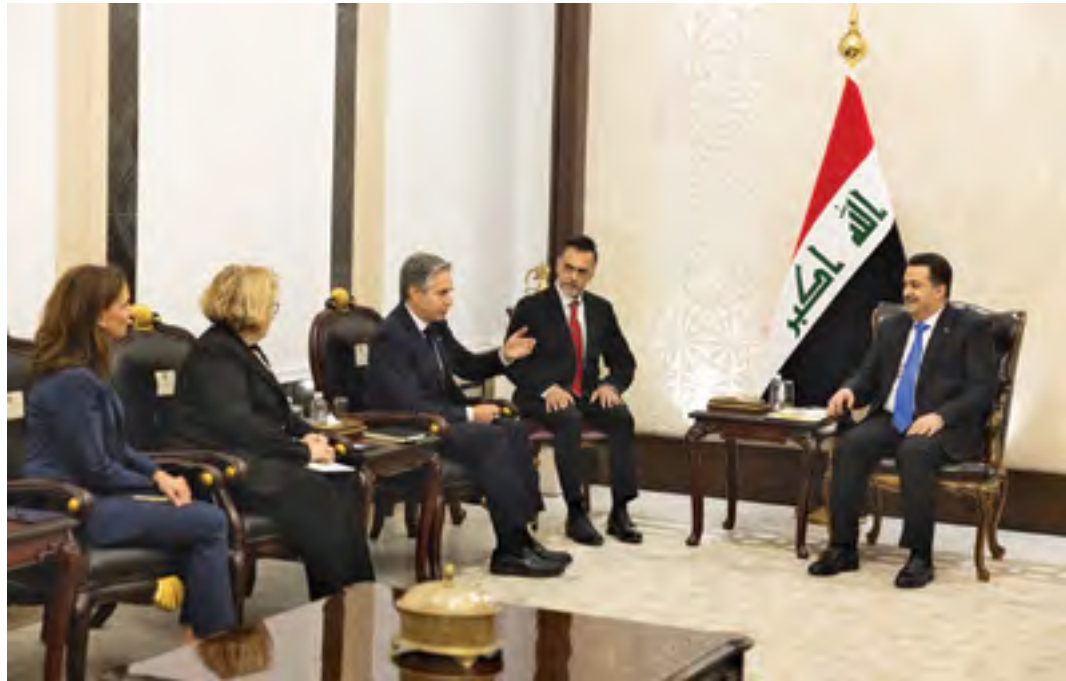
On December 26, Prime Minister al-Sudani sent the newly appointed National Intelligence Service Director Hamid al-Shatri to meet with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, the leader of the interim authorities in Syria, for security-related discussions focused on securing the 372-mile Iraq-Syria border and the threat of a resurgent ISIS, according to a government spokesperson. Despite the concerns of Iraqi leaders who view HTS with skepticism and trepidation due to its members previous affiliations and history in the region, media reported there are indications that steps toward consistent dialogue with HTS are already under way in Baghdad.<sup>454</sup>

On January 8, Prime Minister al-Sudani embarked on a high-profile visit to Iran for in-person discussions with President Masoud Pezeshkian, as Iran sought to shore up its ties with Iraq following Assad's downfall and Hezbollah's heavy losses against Israel. The visit came amid shared concerns over HTS, which engineered Assad's downfall. According to a media report, the prime minister "reiterated his call for a regional dialogue to build trust and ensure security and peace for all."<sup>455</sup>

During the visit, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei urged Iraq to expel U.S. troops and called on the prime minister to support the Popular Mobilization Units, which include Iran-aligned militia groups, according to a report attributed to Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency.<sup>456</sup>

According to a media report, then-Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs John Bass and then-Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf met with

**Then-Secretary Antony J. Blinken meets with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in Baghdad, Iraq, December 13, 2024. (State photo)**



Prime Minister al-Sudani in Baghdad to discuss coordination regarding the situation in Syria and the importance of creating a transition period during which the rights of all Syrians are respected while maintaining stability.<sup>457</sup>

## **Iraq Continues Efforts to Expand Influence in Middle East**

State reported that the United States supports Iraqi government efforts to strengthen the country's standing in the Middle East, promote regional stability, and spur economic growth, including recent outreach to regional partners focused on the situation in Syria. Throughout the quarter, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein, and other Iraqi officials engaged their counterparts throughout the region to strengthen and expand Iraq's regional relations.<sup>458</sup>

On November 5, Iraqi Defense Minister Thabit al-Abbasi and Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman Al Saud signed a military cooperation agreement that signaled Iraq's interest in building regional partnerships, according to a media report.<sup>459</sup> State said the agreement is a welcome sign of improved relations between the two countries.<sup>460</sup>

On November 11, Prime Minister al-Sudani participated in the Arab-Islamic summit in Riyadh. The purpose of the summit was to discuss the continuation of Israeli aggression in the Palestine and Lebanese territories. According to a media report, the prime minister promoted his initiative to establish an Arab-Islamic fund to rebuild the Gaza Strip and Lebanon and to prevent Israel from removing people from these areas.<sup>461</sup>

Iraq continues to take an active role with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries, negotiating deals to provide much needed electricity for Iraqi citizens, although it is not part of the GCC. Iraq is the only Persian Gulf country that is not a GCC member. After the GCC was formed in 1988, Iraq invaded Kuwait, leading to a break in diplomatic relations between Iraq and several GCC countries. Following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, Iraq has reestablished diplomatic relations with the GCC countries and has attended several GCC meetings in recent years as relations have improved.<sup>462</sup>

## Mission Iraq Security Posture

Security threats to U.S. Mission Iraq facilities persisted during the quarter as IAMGs threatened to resume attacks against U.S. interests in Iraq due to Israeli military activity in Lebanon and other factors.<sup>463</sup> State reported that the embassy’s physical security posture was sufficient to mitigate the threats to U.S. Mission Iraq this quarter and required no additional actions.<sup>464</sup>

Planning for the OIR transition is still in the early stages, but the embassy has requested the continued support of the DoD through its Security Augmentation Forces to U.S. Mission Iraq facilities which include counter rocket and mortar support.<sup>465</sup>

## Consulate General Erbil New Consulate Compound

After delays due to a personnel drawdown and partial suspension of work, the contractor remobilized the workforce to continue construction of the New Consulate Compound in February 2024. The construction contractor has completed start-up of all major equipment and will continue systems commissioning through the end of March 2025.<sup>466</sup> State’s Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations conducted fire, electrical, security, and building automation system compliance inspections in December and January preparing the project for final accreditation in May 2025. At the end of the quarter, State said the New Consulate Compound was 97.8 percent complete, and the consulate plans to take occupancy in July 2025.<sup>467</sup>

# GOVERNANCE

## Iraq Completes First Census in 37 Years

Iraq’s nationwide census, conducted on November 20 and 21, its first since 1987. (See Table 7.) The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) supported the census through technical assistance and advice, according to the United Nations.<sup>468</sup>

The census results underscored the increasing urbanization of the Iraqi population. Since the U.S. invasion in 2003, a media report estimated the Iraqi population has grown 40 percent with Baghdad posting the fastest growth making it the world’s fourth densest metropolitan area. It is estimated the population could reach 50 million by 2030.<sup>469</sup>

Table 7.

### Preliminary Results of Iraq’s 2024 Census

<b>Total Population</b>	45,407,895
<b>Average household size</b>	5.3 persons
<b>Gender</b>	50.1% male, 49.8% female
<b>Age</b>	36.1% under 15 years, 60.2% working age (15-64 years, 3.7% 65 years and older)
<b>Urban-Rural</b>	70.3% urban, 29.7% rural

**Source:** Iraqi News Agency, “PM Al-Sudani Announces Preliminary Results of the 2024 Census of Population and Housing in Iraq,” 11/25/2024.



## Iraqi Kurdistan Region Elects New Parliament, Government Formation Ongoing

On October 30, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) announced the results of the October 20 IKR parliamentary election. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) won 39 and 23 seats, respectively, out of the 100-member parliament. A growing new party, the New Generation Movement, won 15 seats. Islamist groups won 10 seats.<sup>470</sup>

For the first time, the IHEC administered elections in the IKR. State said volunteers from Mission Iraq and representatives from other diplomatic missions were present at the polling stations accompanied by international election experts.<sup>471</sup> State said the IKR elections were carried out freely and fairly.<sup>472</sup>

Following the elections, the KDP and the PUK met to negotiate a potential government formation agreement. Neither party has sufficient seats to independently form a government. Even if the New Generation Movement joined forces with the PUK, the two parties do not have sufficient seats to independently form a government. According to State, Iraqi political analysts assess that parties must work together to form a coalition government, which will require compromise between leaders from the KDP, the PUK, and other parties.<sup>473</sup>

Then-U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski and Consul General in Erbil Steven Bitner met with Kurdish political leaders following the October elections. They encouraged leaders from all political parties to work together to form a government to allow the next Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to address the needs of IKR residents, continue to negotiate with the Iraqi government on topics of mutual importance, and to resume addressing legislative issues.<sup>474</sup>

Unresolved issues between the Iraqi government and the KRG persist, such as closure of the Iraq-Türkiye pipeline and the Iraqi government's delayed payment of KRG public employees' salaries. Prime Minister al-Sudani visited the IKR in November to encourage the political parties to form a government.<sup>475</sup>

## Iraq Prepares for Parliamentary Elections

Iraq is required to hold national parliamentary elections before November 25, 2025, per constitutional requirements, though an official date has not been set. The last parliamentary elections in Iraq took place on October 10, 2021.<sup>476</sup>

The Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council took an initial step in preparing for the elections when it approved an extension of the term of the IHEC from January 2025 through January 2027. This extension was subsequently approved by the Iraqi parliament, thus ensuring IHEC authority to administer national elections in the fall, according to a news report.<sup>477</sup>

Under Iraq's Constitution, the parliament votes to dissolve itself prior to holding elections, according to State. Iraq must hold elections within 60 days from the date of its dissolution. Once dissolved, parliament is deemed to have resigned; however, it continues to conduct everyday business.<sup>478</sup>

On October 30, the Independent High Electoral Commission announced the results of the October 20 IKR parliamentary election.

During the quarter, Iraq continued to work with neighboring countries and international partners to meet Iraqi citizens growing need for electricity.

## Iraq Looks to Neighbors, International Partners to Meet Electricity Demand

Iraq currently faces a 25-gigawatt (GW) power shortfall, according to State. During the quarter, Iraq continued to work with neighboring countries and international partners to meet Iraqi citizens growing need for electricity.<sup>479</sup>

**Jordan:** Electricity from Jordan to Iraq travels through the small town of Rutbah in Anbar province. However, since Rutbah is not connected to the national power grid, it can handle only 40 megawatts (MW) of electricity. General Electric Vernova is building additional towers from Rutbah to al-Qaim, 250 miles northwest of Baghdad near the Euphrates River, with plans to complete the work by the end of 2025. Once completed, up to 250 MW can be transmitted from Jordan to Iraq's grid. Greater power transmission will be possible once Jordan builds an additional substation in Risha to transmit up to a total of 800 MW to Iraq.<sup>480</sup>

The interconnection with GCC Interconnection Authority is expected to be functional in March 2025 providing 500MW of electricity to Iraq. According to State, once fully functional, these interconnections will provide over 2 GW of electric power to the national grid.<sup>481</sup>

**Iran:** Iraq continues to obtain natural gas and electricity from Iran. On November 8, State renewed its waiver, for the 23rd time, to enable Iraq to obtain electricity from Iran for an additional 120 days until March.<sup>482</sup> Over the course of the waivers, Iranian energy supplied to Iraq has decreased from contributing 40 percent of total Iraqi power in 2019 to an average of 20 percent in 2024.<sup>483</sup>

**Domestic power generation:** The Ministry of Electricity (MoE) has agreed with General Electric Vernova on a 24-GW project to construct 10 new power plants beginning in 2025. The MoE has also moved forward on a smart meter pilot project with U.S.-based Itron, a company specializing in management of electricity consumption. This project aims to manage electricity from the demand side which is not done in Iraq. Using Itron's technology, the MoE expects to not only control the use of electricity but also have the power to enforce payment of electrical bills, a major issue in Iraq.<sup>484</sup>

The MoE continued its work with the Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and a State-funded program analyzing Iraq's electrical grid, looking to ways to finance new power projects, including solar power. This project is being coordinated with General Electric's 24-GW power project to help identify grid locations for the new power plants.<sup>485</sup>

## ECONOMIC GROWTH

### Iraqi Oil Production Declines

Iraq oil production fell by 200,000 barrels per day during the quarter, as the Ministry of Oil continued to make cuts under pressure from OPEC+ to improve compliance with quota agreements and to make extra reductions to compensate for past over-production.<sup>486</sup> OPEC+ announced its decision on December 10 to extend the voluntary reduction in oil production by its members, including Iraq, through March.<sup>487</sup> The U.S. Government is not a member of OPEC and cannot comment on OPEC-Iraq discussions, but in general, the U.S. Government supports a well-supplied oil market. Iraq’s decreased oil production this quarter has put pressure on the Iraqi federal budget, according to State.<sup>488</sup> (Figure 8.)

Iraq derives 85 percent of its budget and 42 percent of its GDP from oil revenue, which leaves the country open to shocks from fluctuating oil prices, according to State. The bloated public sector accounts for 40 percent of the country’s workforce compared to 0.6 percent in the United States, according to State. Consequently, the Iraqi government routinely pays salaries for public employees in both federal Iraq and the KRG 1-month in arrears. State said this delay is raising levels of distrust in the government and could exacerbate insecurity accordingly.<sup>489</sup>

Iraq’s parliament completed its first reading of the federal budget amendment on November 26 to resolve the impasse between federal Iraq and the KRG over oil exports, reimbursement to KRG for oil production expenses, and allowing the Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline

Figure 8.

**Iraq’s Actual vs. Projected Daily Oil Revenue, in \$ Millions, September 2023–November 2024**



**According to information obtained by the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, a second dormant oil pipeline between Kirkuk and Türkiye has been repaired.**

(ITP) to resume operations.<sup>490</sup> Discussions continued during the quarter to reopen the ITP. State has regularly engaged with high level Iraqi officials as well as publicly to stress the importance of reopening the ITP.<sup>491</sup>

Under the amendment, initially proposed by Prime Minister al-Sudani’s cabinet, the central government would pay the KRG \$16 per barrel for oil production and transportation costs. The Iraqi government and the KRG would work together to select an independent consultant to evaluate production costs on a field-by-field basis in the IKR that could change the reimbursement amount.<sup>492</sup>

During the second reading of the amendment in mid-January, one change was adopted allowing production reimbursement to the KRG, so long as 400,000 barrels per day minimum are provided to Iraq’s oil marketing arm, SOMO.<sup>493</sup>

Parliament has set no timeline to vote on final passage. According to a representative of the Finance Committee, there is sufficient support within the committee to pass the amendment. Once approved, the KRG’s Council of Ministers will establish procedures to compensate international oil companies.<sup>494</sup>

According to information obtained by the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, a second dormant oil pipeline between Kirkuk and Türkiye has been repaired. To verify the repairs, a specialized testing unit must be inserted inside the pipeline that analyzes seals and joints to ensure there will be no leaks once oil begins flowing. No estimate was provided on when the verification would be completed.<sup>495</sup>

## **Iraq Sends Delegation to COP29**

The Iraqi government and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) sent a high-level delegation led by Iraqi President Abdulatif Jamal Rashid and IKR President Nechirvan Barzani to the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) climate summit in Baku, Azerbaijan. Nearly all Iraqi government environmental, climate change mitigation, and water resource management programs are funded by international partners. State noted that while Iraq has made limited efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change – for example, Iraq now captures 65 percent of methane emissions – Iraq rejected COP29 fossil fuel phaseout proposals and showed little commitment to renewable energy transition.<sup>496</sup>

The Iraqi government advanced its Climate Investment Plan, with support from USAID, which bolsters Iraq’s 2025–2030 economic investment framework and commits to achieving 90 percent of voluntary targets with domestic funding.<sup>497</sup> USAID also supported the development of national and local climate-induced risk mitigation action frameworks that shaped Iraq’s clean energy transition negotiations.<sup>498</sup> These efforts seek to strengthen Iraq’s environmental protection capacity, complementing climate adaptation initiatives that address water scarcity and extreme weather, which have the potential to reduce economic instability and social tensions.<sup>499</sup>



Table 8.

**USAID-Supported Activities Related to Water**

Activity	Objective
<b>Inclusive Access to Sustainable Water and Sanitation Services</b>	In partnership with UNICEF, this program modernizes water sector management by introducing digitized water safety systems for real-time monitoring and decision-making.
<b>Ma'an Activity</b>	Assists local governments and provincial councils in identifying and addressing development needs in water, solid waste, and wastewater sectors, including resource allocation for infrastructure.
<b>Digital Water Prediction System</b>	Developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, this system forecasts long-term surface water availability under various crisis scenarios, enabling the Iraqi government to implement mitigation and risk management plans.
<b>Climate Adaptation for Food Security and Stability</b>	In partnership with WFP, this program enhances irrigation sustainability by developing weather centers to collect and disseminate climate data, promoting smart irrigation practices among farmers.
<b>Water and Energy for Food Iraq</b>	Supports entrepreneurial innovation by helping local subject matter experts develop and promote smart irrigation systems and advanced water technologies.

Source: USAID MEB, response to USAID OIG request for information, 1/13/2025.

## USAID Launches Initiative to Improve Water, Sanitation Services

On November 25, USAID Iraq launched a \$20 million partnership with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to improve water and sanitation services in collaboration with the Iraqi government.<sup>500</sup> This program will benefit 2.5 million people across Maysan, Diwaniyah, Ninewa, Baghdad, and Erbil provinces over the next 4 years.<sup>501</sup> The initiative aims to modernize water management systems, enhance service delivery, and strengthen community communication with the Iraqi government to ensure access to clean water, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized communities, including women, youth, and children in rural and post-conflict areas.<sup>502</sup>

Other USAID projects support Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources in adopting water management strategies and fostering collaboration with the private sector and civil society to strengthen the water sector.<sup>503</sup> (See Table 8.)

## Iraq Transitions to Direct, Correspondent Banking as Sector Makes Measured Progress

During the quarter, the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) completed a multi-year transition to direct correspondent banking for Iraq's private banks. The transition means that Iraq's import financing needs – which underpin the economy – are fully met through correspondent bank relationships in more than five currencies and at more than 13 banks in Iraq. The CBI instituted enhanced anti-money-laundering and countering terrorist financing controls throughout the year. However, Iraq's Mutual Evaluation Report, published in November,

**Private banks saw 14 percent growth in deposits between 2023 and 2024 and a record number of businesses and individuals opened accounts at financial institutions.**

highlighted ongoing, strategic deficiencies in Iraq’s anti-money laundering and countering terrorist financing regime, particularly financial threats posed by political corruption.<sup>504</sup>

These changes contributed to increased trust in Iraq’s banks and a rise in the percent of Iraqis with bank accounts, State said. Private banks saw 14 percent growth in deposits between 2023 and 2024 and a record number of businesses and individuals opened accounts at financial institutions. Iraq’s Mutual Evaluation Report published in November 2024 highlighted ongoing, strategic deficiencies in Iraq’s anti-money laundering and countering the finance of terrorism regime, particularly financial threats posed by political corruption and associated money laundering, terror financing, and poor AML implementation.<sup>505</sup>

Meanwhile, private banks in Iraq continued to face technical capacity challenges to lending to small businesses, compounded by outdated commercial legislation, weak business registration and commercial oversight, and still-weak trust in the banking sector.<sup>506</sup> The limited ability to assess creditworthiness leads to high collateral requirements, insufficient risk-sharing, and increased financing costs for businesses.<sup>507</sup>

In 2024, to address the above challenges, USAID launched CATALYZE Iraq Access to Finance, to increase lending to micro, small, and medium enterprises. During the quarter, the program faced challenges in identifying eligible banks for partnerships.<sup>508</sup> In response, USAID expanded its focus to include microfinance institutions and venture capital, promoting innovative financing solutions and financial literacy among eligible businesses.<sup>509</sup> As a result, \$3,620,093 in loans were channeled to local firms in 2024.<sup>510</sup> To further enhance financial inclusion, USAID assisted the CBI in improving microfinance regulations and adopting international best practices to strengthen the microfinance sector’s contribution to micro, small, and medium enterprise growth.<sup>511</sup>

USAID supported the CBI in establishing Riyadh Bank, the country’s first bank dedicated to financing micro, small, and medium enterprises, based on successful models from Gulf countries.<sup>512</sup> The assistance primarily focused on developing the bank’s governance structure and human resource systems, ensuring it will offer accessible and competitive financial services, promote financial inclusion, and help reduce unemployment.<sup>513</sup>

USAID plans to use third-party monitors to conduct site visits on small and medium enterprises benefiting from commercial loans that CATALYZE supports once those loans are disbursed.<sup>514</sup>

## DISPLACED PERSONS

### Jeddah 1 Rehabilitation Center Ready for More Families from al-Hol Camp in Syria

As of January 1, 2025, a total of 2,618 Iraqi households (10,241 individuals) have been repatriated from al-Hol to the Jeddah 1 Rehabilitation Center (Jeddah 1) in Iraq, including 181 households (706 individuals) that were repatriated on October 9.<sup>515</sup> According to State, this was the long-delayed “Group 17” tranche of Iraqis coming from al-Hol. At the beginning of the quarter, Jeddah 1 housed 577 households (2,219 individuals). As of December 31,

the population at Jeddah 1 is 637 households (2,461 individuals). The average number of occupants in Jeddah 1 during this quarter was around 485 families (1,870 individuals).<sup>516</sup>

Following the fall of the Assad regime, the Iraqi government accelerated an initiative to repatriate Iraqi nationals from al-Hol camp to Jeddah 1.<sup>517</sup> USAID said that the accelerated repatriations will cause Jeddah 1 to reach full capacity and will result in an increased need for reintegration assistance.<sup>518</sup>

Jeddah 1 conditions are much better than the conditions at al-Hol. At Jeddah 1, families have access to U.S. Government-supported essential services and await security clearance to proceed to their area of return.<sup>519</sup> (See Table 9.)

Jeddah 1 residents told visitors during this quarter that they were pleased with Jeddah 1 security and social services compared to those at al-Hol, which one resident described as a “graveyard for the living.”<sup>520</sup> Children said they appreciated teachers and instructional opportunities at Jeddah 1. A U.S.-supported humanitarian partner reported that women at Jeddah 1 say that they have felt comfortable enough to sleep peacefully through the night, which they did not in al-Hol. There have been no reports or allegations of torture at Jeddah 1. On October 29, Amnesty International published a report alleging that individuals who have been arrested while at Jeddah 1 were subjected to torture in prisons, not at the camp.<sup>521</sup>

On November 19, officials from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, including then-Ambassador Alina Romanowski, visited Jeddah 1.<sup>522</sup> During the visit, camp residents expressed their relief at leaving al-Hol and their satisfaction with the services at the camp.<sup>523</sup> Officials from

Table 9.

**U.S.-funded Services at Iraqi IDP Camps and Areas of Return**

Jeddah 1	Areas of Return
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water, sanitation, and hygiene services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Livelihoods assistance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection support, including child protection case management, parenting programs, and gender-based violence prevention and response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health and psychosocial support</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal services to support access to civil documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing and shelter support</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational training, education, and early childhood development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community health support</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary health services and subsidized referrals to secondary health care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community and social cohesion support</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A visitor’s center that connects residents to family and community members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-return referrals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure and maintenance</li> </ul>	

**Source:** State, response to State OIG request for information, 1/3/2025; USAID MEB, response to USAID OIG request for information, 1/13/2025.

**As of the end of August, more than 1 million individuals were internally displaced across 18 provinces of Iraq, according to the latest available data from the IOM.**

the Government of Iraq's Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD) stated that they were prepared to accommodate an increased number of returnees but highlighted the need for additional financial support, especially for water and electricity provision.<sup>524</sup>

## **More than 1 Million Iraqis Remain Displaced**

State PRM and USAID—through UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and several NGOs—continued to support vulnerable host communities who are absorbing returnees, including al-Hol returnees.<sup>525</sup> (See Table 10.)

As of the end of August, more than 1 million individuals were internally displaced across 18 provinces of Iraq, according to the latest available data from the IOM.<sup>526</sup> Dohuk, Erbil, and Ninewa provinces host the largest numbers of IDPs.<sup>527</sup> Approximately 112,000 of these individuals live in established IDP camps, and more than 85,000 live in critical shelters, including public buildings, religious structures, tents, caravans, and unfinished or abandoned buildings.<sup>528</sup> The remaining 80 percent of IDPs live in private settings with host families or in rented or owned housing.<sup>529</sup>

In 2024, more than 10,900 households (approximately 53,000 individuals) departed IDP camps in Iraq, with the majority relocating to Ninewa province, including Sinjar and al-Ba'aj.<sup>530</sup> The Iraqi government closed Tazade and Ashti IDP camps in Sulaymaniyah on March 19 and July 11, 2024, respectively, resulting in the departure of 2,106 families.<sup>531</sup> Additionally, departures were recorded from camp settings in Ninewa (1,883 households) and Erbil provinces (1,089 households).<sup>532</sup> Interviews with IDPs indicated that while many returned to their pre-crisis residences, some are secondarily displaced.

Many returnees lack official civil documentation, which is essential for enrolling children in schools, accessing employment opportunities, and receiving social welfare benefits.<sup>533</sup> The communities receiving returnees are still recovering from conflict and often have inadequate infrastructure and services such as healthcare, education, water, and electricity.<sup>534</sup> The influx of additional families strains these resources, leading to tensions between host communities and returnees.<sup>535</sup> Female-headed households, in particular, face limited employment opportunities and low household incomes.<sup>536</sup> In some cases, returnees are stigmatized due to their perceived affiliation with ISIS.<sup>537</sup> Host community leaders have also highlighted the importance of victim compensation for successful reintegration, as the Iraqi government's continued failure to compensate ISIS victims has fueled resentment against returnees, who are seen as receiving more government and NGO support.<sup>538</sup>

During the quarter, the Iraq government continued to provide grants to some returning IDP families of approximately 4 million Iraqi Dinars (approximately \$3,000) though not every family has reported receiving a grant.<sup>539</sup> Additionally, the Ministry of Education in Iraq has issued a decision allowing children up to 6th grade to enroll without a Unified National Card.<sup>540</sup>

Through the Community Reconciliation and Reintegration of Iraqis Returning from Syria's Al Hol Camp activity, USAID has supported a total of 3,040 direct beneficiaries, including 1,528 al-Hol returnees and 1,512 host community members, selected through a community-led, conflict-sensitive process in Anbar, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, and Ninewa.<sup>541</sup> Based on



preferences, skills, experience, and labor market assessments, beneficiaries participated in USAID’s livelihoods and economic reintegration programs, with 1,400 in Cash for Work, 500 in vocational training, and 1,140 in business management support.<sup>542</sup> Additionally, 431 houses were rehabilitated (216 for al-Hol returnees and 215 for host community members).<sup>543</sup>

The USAID Return with Hope case management system facilitates tailored referrals for beneficiaries based on their needs and the availability of service providers.<sup>544</sup> These services include, but are not limited to, legal assistance, mental health and psychosocial support, basic needs (such as food, clothing), livelihood support (such as vocational training, employment), financial aid, housing support, and health services.<sup>545</sup> Since the project’s inception, the case management system has provided referral services to 432 cases.<sup>546</sup> USAID’s case management system is open to all returnees, with no time limit for requesting assistance after cases are closed.<sup>547</sup>

State PRM supported IOM’s Facilitated Voluntary Movement program, which aims to advance sustainable solutions for IDPs. The program offers support both in areas of displacement and in areas of return or relocation. Through this program, the IOM explains the registration process, assistance provided in areas of destination, and how the program facilitates voluntary return and relocation.<sup>548</sup>

During the quarter, State PRM supported IOM-facilitated interactive visits, known as “Come-and-Tell” visits, for IDPs in informal sites and camps, during which local authorities come to meet and engage with households to provide information about the areas of origin or relocation. In addition, IOM supports “Go-and-See” visits to their communities of origin, allowing households to directly observe the conditions in their potential return or relocation areas, at times visit their former homes, and meet with local authorities. To support the families’ departure and immediate installation-related needs, IOM provides cash grants for transportation, departure, and reinstallation. As of September 2024, IOM has facilitated the voluntary return and relocation of 6,136 households from different camps and informal visits to their areas of origin or to other locations within Ninewa, Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Erbil provinces.<sup>549</sup>

A U.S. Government team, including representatives from USAID BHA and State PRM, conducted a program monitoring visit to the Khanke IDP camp in Dohuk, IKR on November 26.<sup>550</sup> The visit aimed to evaluate the implementation of U.S.-funded activities in camps for IDPs in the region.<sup>551</sup> The team met with beneficiaries, camp management authorities, and staff from U.S. implementing partners, including UN agencies and NGOs.<sup>552</sup> While the overall camp conditions were adequate, challenges remain regarding shelter, space for schools, and adequate staffing.<sup>553</sup> Humanitarian service providers have been phasing out, resulting in gaps in services.<sup>554</sup> The Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) is responsible for water, sanitation, hygiene, and electricity, but these are available only for limited hours.<sup>555</sup> Additionally, while MoMD is supposed to provide water, sanitation, hygiene, and food items monthly, it has only distributed food four times in the past year and no non-food items.<sup>556</sup>

**Based on preferences, skills, experience, and labor market assessments, beneficiaries participated in USAID’s livelihoods and economic reintegration programs, with 1,400 in Cash for Work, 500 in vocational training, and 1,140 in business management support.**

## Arrivals from Lebanon

Iraq's Ministry of the Interior reported 48,341 Lebanese individuals entered Iraq between September 20 and November 3 as a result of the escalation of Israeli hostilities in Lebanon. Displaced Lebanese individuals arrived in Iraq by air and over land from Syria crossing at al-Qaim, pursuant to the Iraqi government's arrival, residency, and support policies. According to government decree, the Iraqi government considered Lebanese arrivals "guests," not "refugees." The Iraqi government granted a 30-day renewable residency with access to government services (including health care and school enrollment), while religious foundations and local authorities provide housing. UNHCR reported that 62 percent of arrivals were women and children, and 50 percent of households were headed by women. Since the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement, nearly all but about 10,000 Lebanese nationals have returned to Lebanon. Beginning in December, the Iraqi government has arranged and paid for flights from Baghdad to Beirut to help returnees.<sup>557</sup>

## More than 110,000 Displaced Persons Remain in Camps in the IKR

At the end of the quarter, more than 112,000 IDPs remained in 21 camps in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR).<sup>558</sup> Conditions remain particularly dire in the three East Mosul Camps in disputed areas operated by the KRG and serviced by MoMD. Residents have expressed dismay at the lack of consistent food or hygiene kits. Humanitarian partners have referred to the East Mosul Camps as being like "another al-Hol" with a complex population set with perceived ISIS affiliation, dire camp conditions, and no freedom of movement. IDP families in the East Mosul Camps continue to express concerns about the camp consolidation process, as they have not been informed which camp will be consolidated.<sup>559</sup>

Recommendations from the High Committee on IDP issues, produced by the Iraqi government and KRG representatives, were still pending formal endorsement. In December, the Iraqi government issued Diwani orders to establish three joint committees, including Iraqi government and KRG members, as follow up to the High Committee recommendations. State said these committees will review matters of security, reconstruction, and judicial barriers to IDP returns, including the issue of former detainees in the East Mosul Camps.<sup>560</sup>

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

During the quarter, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) funded eight active awards valued at \$19.8 million.<sup>561</sup> State PRM funding supported 19 active NGO and international organization awards valued at more than \$62 million).<sup>562</sup>

Approximately 2.5 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Iraq during the quarter, including IDPs, returnees, and others affected by conflict.<sup>563</sup> While direct humanitarian assistance needs have not been estimated, it is important to note the increasing climate-induced displacement across central and southern Iraq.<sup>564</sup> Families are being forced to relocate due to drought, water scarcity, environmental degradation, and other climate factors.<sup>565</sup>

With support from USAID, Sarri Zaweta, a leading poultry farm in Iraq increased efficiencies and increased sales by 10 percent. (USAID photo)



With U.S. support, IOM and partners delivered primary health care services to conflict-affected populations in Iraq.<sup>566</sup> U.S. partners enhance service quality and accessibility, including mental health services, through capacity-building, staff salary support, and ensuring the availability of essential equipment and medicines.<sup>567</sup> During this quarter, USAID BHA also aided IOM and WHO in responding to communicable disease outbreaks by implementing risk communication activities, strengthening disease surveillance, and training medical professionals on screening and treatment.<sup>568</sup>

A USAID BHA partner provided water, sanitation, and hygiene support to more than 1,100 individuals in Anbar and Ninewa provinces during July.<sup>569</sup> Services included desludging water infrastructure, solid waste management, hygiene promotion, and water trucking at collective centers in both provinces.<sup>570</sup> In Ninewa province, the partner reached at least 840 individuals with hygiene promotion and waste management services, and nearly 500 individuals in IDP camps with desludging services.<sup>571</sup> Additionally, more than 270 individuals in Anbar province's UN-Habitat Kilo-18 informal settlement received water trucking services.<sup>572</sup> A State PRM partner also supported Jeddah 1 in Ninewa province, providing maintenance to water, sewage, drainage systems, and latrines, while serving more than 3,300 residents in June.<sup>573</sup>

Regional instability has prompted many NGOs to implement additional security measures and movement restrictions.<sup>574</sup> In the Sinjar district, competing security forces vying for control have created a particularly precarious environment for returnees and made it challenging for NGOs to plan around the shifting areas of control.<sup>575</sup>

There were no significant changes in USAID's ability to monitor and evaluate programs during the quarter.<sup>576</sup> In areas where USAID BHA staff cannot travel due to security restrictions, USAID BHA relies on third-party monitors to conduct monitoring and oversight of all of its Iraq programs.<sup>577</sup> During the quarter, the third-party monitor conducted 13 monitoring visits.<sup>578</sup>

## Prosecutions and Sanctions of ISIS

Several U.S. Government agencies 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.<sup>579</sup>

### DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Since 2014, the DoJ has charged more than 245 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS. Over the same time period, the DoJ has obtained more than 208 convictions; the remaining cases are in various stages of litigation. These numbers include individuals who could be described as foreign terrorist fighters or homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS, as well as those who may have assisted their conduct, obstructed investigations, or otherwise involved an identified link to ISIS.<sup>580</sup>

The DoJ reported that a total of 3 individuals from Iraq and 12 from Syria have been transferred to the United States from Iraq to face federal criminal charges related to terrorism.<sup>581</sup>

Table 10.

### Terrorism-related Charges Against Individuals, October to December 2024

Jurisdiction and Date	Description
<b>Northern District of Illinois</b> <b>October 16, 2024</b>	<b>Jason Brown</b> was sentenced to 18 years in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release after pleading guilty to knowingly attempting to provide material support to ISIS and other related charges. Brown pled guilty to providing \$500 on three occasions in 2019 with the understanding that the money would be wired to an ISIS fighter in Syria.
<b>Southern District of New York</b> <b>October 11, 2024</b>	<b>Cole James Bridges</b> was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment followed by 10 years of supervised release for attempting to provide material support to ISIS and attempting to murder U.S. military service members through support to ISIS. Beginning in at least 2019, the year he joined the U.S. Army, Bridges began researching and consuming online propaganda and began to express his support for ISIS on social media. In 2020, Bridges began communicating with an FBI online covert employee who was posing as an ISIS supporter in contact with ISIS fighters in the Middle East. During these communications, Bridges expressed his frustration with the U.S. military and his desire to aid ISIS. Bridges then provided the undercover FBI agent training and guidance to purported ISIS fighters who were planning attacks, including in New York City. Bridges also provided the FBI contact with portions of a U.S. Army training manual and guidance about military combat tactics, with the understanding that the materials would be used by ISIS to plan future attacks. Bridges also provided instructions on how to attack U.S. forces in the Middle East, among other provisions of aid, including on tactics and attack methods.

Source: DOJ OIG, response to DoD OIG request for information, 25.1 LIG WOG 004, 1/3/2025.

(continued on next page)



## Prosecutions and Sanctions of ISIS Activity *(continued from previous page)*

The DoJ reported that the FBI's Fly Team has provided sensitive site exploitation training, crime scene management, interview, and post-blast investigation training to the SDF in conjunction with U.S. military partners. The training is intended to develop skillsets pursuant to countering ISIS operations within Syria.<sup>582</sup>

The FBI continued to aide in the repatriation process by attempting to obtain biometrics of all individuals prior to their departure from Syria. The FBI also worked with Syrian partners to monitor the movement of prisoners of interest and assisted with interviews of persons of interest located in the detention centers.<sup>583</sup>

### DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Treasury reported that it did not sanction any individuals or organizations for providing support to ISIS during the quarter.<sup>584</sup> Additionally, no sanctioned individuals or organizations were removed from the sanctions list this period.<sup>585</sup> Treasury has designated 183 ISIS-associated individuals and entities since 2014.<sup>586</sup>

Treasury reported that it continues to work with interagency and Global Coalition partners, including the Iraqi government, to prioritize identifying ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders and disrupting its financial facilitation networks in the Middle East. In addition, Treasury worked to designate ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in various countries. Treasury takes a leadership role in the Global Coalition, serving as a co-lead of the Counter ISIS Finance Group, along with its counterparts from Italy and Saudi Arabia.<sup>587</sup>

### DEPARTMENT OF STATE

All relevant U.S. sanctions, including mandatory sanctions on foreign persons under the Caesar Act, and designations remain in effect and can be employed against any foreign person engaged in de-stabilizing activities in Syria.<sup>588</sup> Congress also included a renewal of the Caesar Act sanctions in the National Defense Authorization Act of FY 2025 (NDAA) for FY 2025 that extends it until 2029.<sup>589</sup> The provisions in the Caesar Act are still applicable even after the departure of Assad, as the United States monitors how things progress in Syria and the nature and behavior of any future government.<sup>590</sup> The United States has remained focused on advancing the following core policy priorities in Syria, including through the imposition of targeted sanctions.<sup>591</sup>

However, the United States is committed to assisting the Syrian people at this extraordinary moment, and the Syria sanctions framework contains a number of licenses and exemptions to facilitate humanitarian aid.<sup>592</sup> The ultimate goal of sanctions is to bring about a positive change in behavior, State said.<sup>593</sup> The United States will continue to monitor the situation and assess the actions of the interim authorities to inform the U.S. position going forward.<sup>594</sup>


### DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) also continued to monitor and mitigate ISIS threats in Iraq and Syria posed to the U.S. through participation in joint plans and exercises, and through collaborative intelligence support to ongoing HSI investigations.<sup>595</sup>

DHS reported that during the quarter, the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis disseminated the 2025 Homeland Threat Assessment, which provided insights from across the DHS and other homeland security stakeholders to identify the most direct and pressing threats to the United States. Among other threats, this assessment indicated that foreign terrorist organizations maintain the enduring intent to conduct or inspire attacks in the homeland and have leveraged the conflict in the Middle East to reaffirm this intent.<sup>596</sup>







A U.S. Air Force B-52H Stratofortress conducts a combat air patrol in support of OIR over the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. (U.S. Air Force photo)

## OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

74 Strategic Planning

74 Audits, Inspections, and Evaluations

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# 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 (OIR).

## 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 2025 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR*, published on October 1, 2024, as part of the *FY 2025 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*, is organized into three strategic oversight areas: Military Operations and Security Cooperation; Diplomacy, 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 Washington, D.C. and Frankfurt, Germany conducted oversight work of the State activities in Iraq and Syria. USAID OIG staff provided oversight of USAID activities in Syria and Iraq from their regional offices in Frankfurt and Cairo, Egypt supported by additional staff in Washington, D.C.



**FY 2025  
Comprehensive  
Oversight Plan  
for Overseas  
Contingency  
Operations.**

## COMPLETED PROJECTS

Between October 1 and December 31, 2024, the Lead IG and partner agencies issued one oversight report related to OIR. Completed reports by Lead IG agencies are available on their respective web pages.

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

#### ***Management Advisory: Compliance With Safety Standards at the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance Warehouse in the United Arab Emirates***

8-000-25-001-A; December 18, 2024

USAID OIG issued this management advisory as part of an ongoing audit of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). USAID OIG's audit team as part of a site visit to BHA's warehouse in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, observed subcontractor personnel failing to follow established safety standards and practices regarding the use of personal protective equipment, such as helmets, gloves, and safety goggles. These deficiencies could lead to preventable injuries. The Dubai warehouse employees' lack of adherence to established safety requirements indicated that neither the warehouse contractor nor its subcontractor was enforcing those requirements. As a result, the warehouse contractor was not complying with the safety provisions of its contract with USAID. Moreover, USAID OIG found that Agency officials did not verify that the contractor was complying with the contract's safety provisions.

BHA's warehouse in Dubai, United Arab Emirates delivers prepositioned food commodities and nonfood items to vulnerable populations in the Middle East, such as Syria. Between October 2022 and May 2024, BHA used supplies valued at approximately \$8.1 million from the Dubai warehouse to respond to 16 crises through 46 shipments. USAID's Bureau for Management's Office of Acquisition and Assistance provides contracting services that support BHA's warehouse activities.

In December 2023, USAID awarded a new contract to provide storage and logistics services at the Dubai warehouse. According to the contract, these services include personnel handling items manually and with the use of equipment, such as forklifts, reach trucks, pallet jacks, and trailers. The contractor subsequently awarded a subcontract to provide the services. USAID's contract also requires the warehouse contractor to ensure that safety procedures are followed, provide proper personal protective equipment for staff, and ensure all contract employees adhere to safe work practices.

USAID OIG made two recommendations to address the safety issues at the Dubai warehouse and enforce compliance with the safety provisions in the contract. USAID agreed with one recommendation and took action to implement it. As a result, the recommendation is closed. USAID disagreed with the second recommendation but described actions it plans to take to address it. USAID OIG determined that these actions meet the intent of the recommendation. As a result, the recommendation is resolved but will remain open until USAID OIG receives documentation that all agreed-upon actions are completed.

## ONGOING AND PLANNED OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of December 31, 2024, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 9 ongoing and 1 planned project related to OIR, including those summarized below. Tables 11, 12, and 13, contained in Appendixes F and G, list the titles and objectives for all ongoing and planned projects.

### Military Operations and Security Cooperation

- **State OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether State's efforts to counter Iran-backed groups have been strategically developed and implemented; executed to promote coordination among implementing bureaus, posts, and interagency partners; and designed to measure performance results and inform adjustments in its approach.

### Diplomacy, Stabilization, and Humanitarian Assistance

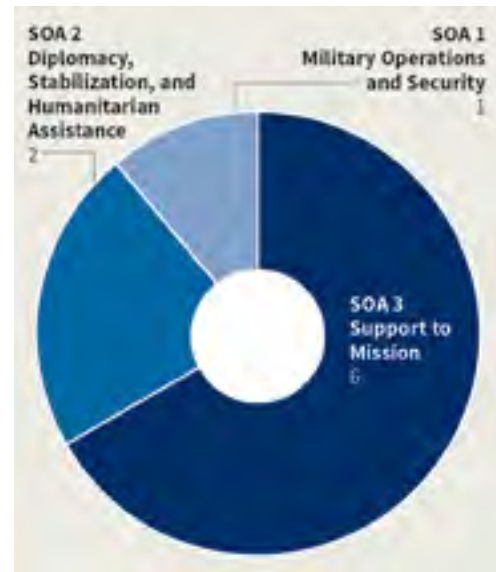
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine the extent to which USAID monitored selected economic development activities in Iraq to achieve their goals.
- **USAID OIG** is also conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has designed and implemented policies, procedures, and practices to manage and oversee humanitarian assistance supplies warehoused in the United Arab Emirates.

### Support to Mission

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to assess the effectiveness of the DoD's management of the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund program resources for the improvement of security and humane conditions at detention facilities and displaced persons camps for Islamic State of Iraq and Syria detainees.
- **State OIG** is conducting an inspection of the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, Türkiye and constituent posts to evaluate the programs and operations.

Figure 9.

### Ongoing and Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



## INVESTIGATIONS

The DoD OIG's criminal investigative component, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), maintained investigative personnel in Bahrain and Kuwait, 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.

During this quarter, investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies ended the quarter with 39 open investigations, while 9 investigations were closed. Two referrals were made to the Department of Justice during this quarter.

The Lead IG agencies and their partners continue to use the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group (FCIWG) framework to coordinate investigative activities, deconflict potential or common targets, and interact for logistical and legal support. The FCIWG framework consists of representatives from DCIS, State OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Figure 10 displays the data on investigations related to OIR.

Figure 10.

### OIR-related Investigation Activities, October 1–December 31, 2024



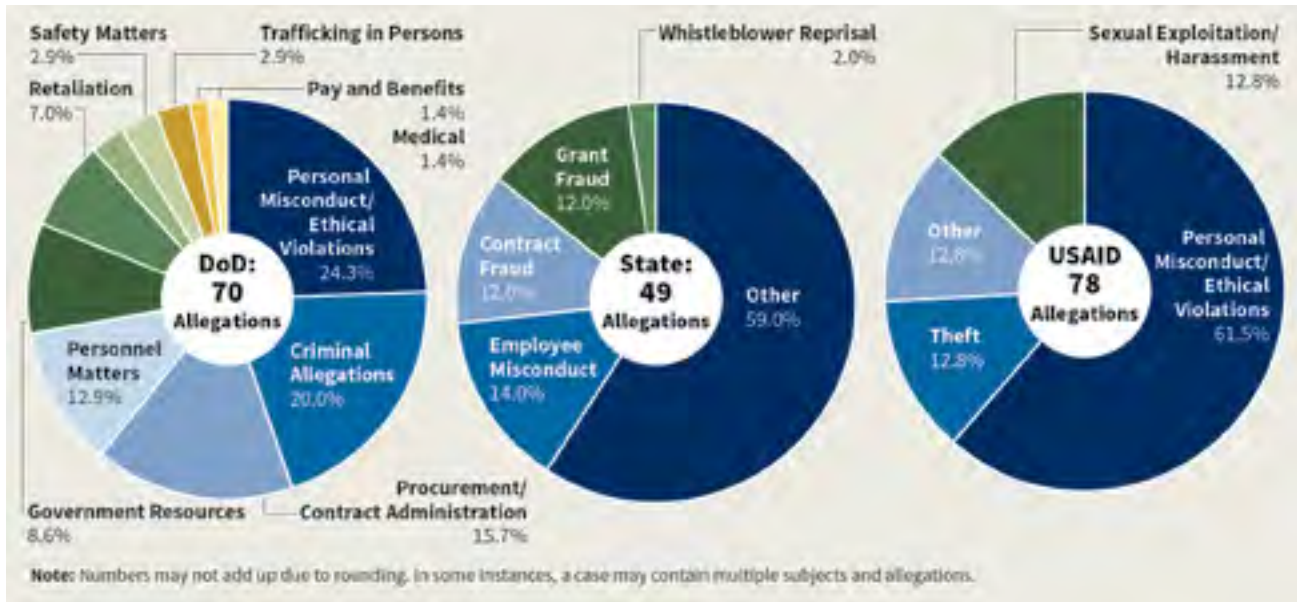
## HOTLINE ACTIVITY

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.

During the quarter, the DoD OIG Hotline received 70 allegations and referred 57 cases related to OIR to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple subjects and allegations. State OIG received 49 allegations and referred 34 cases and USAID OIG received 78 allegations. The majority of allegations during the reporting period related to personal misconduct, criminal allegations, procurement and contract administration and security. (See Figure 11.)

Figure 11.


**DoD, State, and USAID OIR-related Hotline Activities, October 1–December 31, 2024**











**U.S. Army Soldiers conduct ground line of communication security operations in northeastern Syria. (U.S. Army photo)**

## APPENDIXES

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## APPENDIX A

# Classified Appendix to this Report

A classified appendix to this report provides additional information on OIR, 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 (codified at 5 U.S.C. Sections 401-424), established in Section 419 the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. The Lead IG agencies are the Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Section 419 requires the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to appoint a Lead Inspector General from among the inspector generals of the 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 “sunsets” 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 419 of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (codified at 5 U.S.C. Sections 401-424), 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 Inspector Generals 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, 2024. 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 input to 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

### State-funded Stabilization Programs in Syria During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
<p><b>Essential Services and Local Governance</b> 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>Local governance actors worked to become increasingly capable of delivering essential services such as infrastructure rehabilitation and repair. Example: Rehabilitated a vital sanitation machine in Raqqa, which is transforming the health and sanitation of the city after years of disrepair. This machine is now clearing 12 tons of debris daily, removing illegal dump sites, and maintaining public spaces, benefiting around 350,000 residents.</p> <p>Local governance actors addressed essential service barriers preventing the reintegration of displaced persons.</p> <p>Local governance actors improved coordination among key stakeholders in delivering essential services will be improved.</p> <p>Local governance actors become increasingly capable of delivering essential services without donor support.</p>
<p><b>Civil Society</b> 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>Rehabilitated the Shanani Drinking Water Station located in eastern Deir Ezzor to provide clean drinking water to approximately 16,000 residents. Restored electricity to five water stations along Deir Ezzor's Khabour Canal was completed in December 2024, thereby increasing the availability of water to several villages with a total population of about 99,000 residents.</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>Worked with families recently returned from displaced persons camps through a social reintegration program focused on building cohesion in the communities.</p>
<p><b>Education</b> Seeks to build the capacity of local councils, 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>Provided training in computer skills, solar panel repair, carpentry, and other vocations.</p> <p>Worked with families recently returned from displaced persons camps on social reintegration and remedial education.</p>

Program	Activity Highlights
<p><b>Support to Independent Media</b> 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><b>Support for Community Security</b> 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 security and the governance bodies that oversee them to deliver community policing services that serves, and are supported by, the population.</p> <p>Rehabilitated security stations; held engagements between 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><b>Humanitarian Mine Action</b> 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, 1/3/2025.

### USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Syria During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
<p><b>Elections and Political Processes</b> Seeks to enhance participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in transitional or electoral processes in Syria and improve inclusive citizen-governance relationships in northeastern Syria.</p> <p>Duration: 4 years (ends August 2025)</p> <p>\$12 million award</p>	<p><b>Training and Capacity Building:</b> Provided training and capacity building to 40 local actors trained in best practices for transparent, accountable, and effective local governance.</p> <p><b>Community Dialogue:</b> Engaged with Syrian stakeholders resulted in tangible action from civil society organizations (CSOs) to hold authorities accountable. Facilitated 37 dialogues and roundtables to date on issue identification, effective communications, conflict analysis, and negotiations and mediation for local communities.</p> <p><b>Advocacy Campaign:</b> Worked with a group of CSOs on 11 new campaigns with a range of ideas and objectives focusing on addressing al-Hol returnees and the wider community's key needs and priorities.</p> <p><b>Transition:</b> Implemented a two-day roundtable with Syrian CSOs to discuss how civil society can play a constructive role in Syria's political transition process and engagement with the de facto authorities. The event resulted in an action plan/road map for CSOs' coordinated engagement with Syria's new de facto authorities</p>

*(continued on next page)*

Program	Activity Highlights
<p><b>Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria (GROW)</b>                      Seeks to improve agricultural production, increase food security, and increase incomes for farmers and agribusiness in non-regime areas of Syria.</p> <p>Duration: 3 years base with 2 option years (ends August 2028)</p> <p>\$42 million award</p>	<p><b>Further Development of Grants:</b> Using a market-system development approach, GROW is vetting applications for potential funding in a co-creation process with businesses in Dayr az Zawr, Hasakah, and Raqqa governorates. Four grants have been approved, supporting butchery, two agricultural input/extension service providers, and an agricultural sheeting/irrigation pipe producer. Grants have leveraged an additional \$374,753 in cash and in-kind support from the grantees.</p> <p><b>Access to Finance for Producers and SMEs:</b> GROW is liaising on a potential agriculture-lending facility and tailored technical assistance to support this lending via a micro-finance institution in (MFI) in NES.</p> <p><b>Value Chain selection:</b> Following an in-depth assessment, narrowed down work to the tomato, olive oil, and livestock (dairy and red meat) sectors.</p> <p><b>Reviewing Expressions of Interest:</b> Reviewing numerous proposals, meeting with potential grantees, and developing concepts through co-creation on a rolling basis to be submitted to USAID for approval.</p>
<p><b>Syria Livelihoods Project</b>                      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: 5 years (July 2020–July 2025)</p> <p>\$14.55 million award</p>	<p><b>Career Opportunities:</b> Placed of 564 women to date in paid internship opportunities with 470 active internships ongoing. Placement examples include retail, tailoring, sales, hairdressing, and food and beverage.</p> <p><b>Career Guidance:</b> Provided career guidance and job readiness training sessions to 2,277 women to date. These sessions assist women in identifying their livelihood assistance needs and potential career pathways, while assessing areas of interest and recognizing marketable or transferable skills and experience.</p> <p><b>Accelerating Inclusive Economic Recovery:</b> Registered 6,611 persons with disabilities seeking support in the case management system. Supported 67 small business owners with disabilities to help them start-up or grow their green businesses.</p> <p><b>Improving Services for Returnees and Host Communities:</b> Registered 2,277 al-Hol women returnees and host community women seeking livelihoods support to track, register, and match women with economic opportunities including paid internships, financial support to start-up or expand a small business, and technical and vocational education training.</p>
<p><b>Essential Services, Good Governance, and Economic Recovery</b>                      Aims to restore essential services, including power, water, and health, strengthen inclusive, participatory, accountable, and transparent governance, and restore livelihoods and revive local economies in the agriculture and energy sector in non-regime held areas in northeast Syria.</p> <p>Duration: 5 years (May 2020-May 2025)</p> <p>\$49.9 million award</p>	<p><b>Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from al-Hol in Raqqa–Case Management System and Capacity Building:</b> Tracking and monitoring returnees through the established case management system and is linking the returnees to a suite of social, economic, and property services to facilitate reintegration. As of mid-December, the program made 695 referrals and closed 548 referrals during the quarter.</p> <p><b>Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from al-Hol in Raqqa–Service Provision:</b> With program support, the RCC Energy Committee is installing 23 new electrical transformers at existing transformation centers to enhance electricity provision in Raqqa city. The program is also restoring grid electricity to Raqqa National Hospital.</p> <p><b>Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from Al Hol in Dayr az Zawr–Service Provision:</b> Continued case management capacity development activities with the Social Affairs and Labor Committees in Raqqa and Dayr az Zawr. The program is restoring essential services to support returnees and residents in communities of return, including rehabilitation of the Sha’afa al Soor Water Station (provides drinking water) and the provision of new pumps and equipment for as well as the rehabilitation of irrigation canals at the al Jamal Agricultural Complex, both in Baghouz.</p>

Program	Activity Highlights
<p><b>Essential Economic Growth Enabling Environment (EEE)</b> The overarching goal of EEE is to promote stabilization of macroeconomic conditions in northeast Syria, and to lay the regulatory and institutional groundwork for a sustainable, broad-based socio-economic recovery. EEE will promote economic recovery and job growth, economic stability private sector investment, and transparent, accountable economic governance in northeast Syria.</p> <p>Duration: 3 years (ends September 2027) \$15 million award</p>	<p><b>Establishment of Hasakah Table Eggs and Fertilized Eggs Production Farms:</b> The General Directorate of Agriculture and Animal Welfare in Hasakah are operating farm facilities and the activities are in their 1-year warranty period.</p> <p><b>Establishment of Pasta Factory in Hasakah:</b> Completed installation of pasta production line equipment and commissioned the facility. This activity is now in its 1-year warranty period.</p> <p><b>DAANES Energy Authority:</b> Supported the DAANES Energy Authority (EA) to restore power-generation capacity for NES inhabitants.</p> <p><b>Economic Surveys:</b> Carried out economic surveys of 160 companies, towards a target of 700 companies across all economic sectors.</p> <p><b>Support to Agriculture:</b> Provided intensive training to personnel at the Center for Agricultural Research and Innovation Excellence (CARIE) on advanced nematode detection and management protocols during November, which will significantly upgrade wheat seed quality moving ahead.</p> <p><b>Support to Local Government:</b> After applying rigorous cost-benefit analysis, EEE advisors provided technical advisory support to local governance actors on health, education, energy, and agriculture.</p> <p><b>Applying Best Practices:</b> EEE experts have recently initiated support to the EA in developing a new best practice plant protection regulation, compliant with International Plant Protection Convention Standards.</p>

**Source:** USAID MEB, response to USAID OIG request for information, 1/14/2025.

## APPENDIX E

## State and USAID Humanitarian Assistance Programs

## State-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
<p><b>International Organization for Migration</b> 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><b>UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency)</b> 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><b>Other International Organizations</b> 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 (MHPSS) services, legal assistance, shelter, prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV), child protection issues, and more.</p>
<p><b>NGOs–Livelihoods and Economic Empowerment</b></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><b>NGOs–Protection</b></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 (MHPSS) services, child protection and child safeguarding training, and support for community centers and Women &amp; Girls Safe Spaces.</p>

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 1/3/2025.



## USAID-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
<b>Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene</b>	<p>Supplied an IDP camp with water sourced through camp boreholes; provided solid waste management and desludging services; provided water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion and awareness raising sessions; distributed non-food items; and maintained water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in IDP camps.</p> <p>Provided solid waste management collection, desludging, water quality testing, the operation of four water boreholes, water trucking, and water/sanitation facility maintenance at an IDP camp in Erbil and Ninewa provinces.</p>
<b>Shelter and Settlements</b>	<p>Provided critical shelter upgrades and a distribution of non-food item kits to vulnerable internally displaced person households in Diyala province. The critical shelter upgrades included rehabilitations to windows, doors, ceilings, locks, corridors, handrails on stairs, and hand-washing basins. In addition, families received a distribution of a kit that included blankets, bedsheets, mattresses, a stove, jerry cans, a kerosene heater, an electrical heater, a kitchen set and a carpet.</p>
<b>Protection</b>	<p>Provided awareness sessions on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation; case management services; individual protection assistance and referrals through a protection center in Ninewa province and other organizations. Provided recreational, educational, and structured PSS sessions, such as MHPSS awareness sessions, case management services, and children’s resilience sessions, through a protection center.</p>
<b>Health</b>	<p>Provided several primary healthcare services through a primary health care center, including primary health care consultations; treatment of communicable, non-communicable, and chronic diseases; and reproductive health services, including antenatal care, and postnatal care.</p>
<b>Food Assistance</b>	<p>Provided unconditional food assistance to Syrian refugees and other Iraqi IDPs located in the Jeddah 1 camp. The food assistance for Syrian refugees activity involves the provision of 30,000 IQD (approximately \$22.91 USD) per person in each beneficiary household, through mobile money transfers (MMTs), every 6 weeks. The October 2024 distribution was the first distribution of 30,000 IQD (approximately \$22.91 USD) per person in each household. Before this distribution, WFP distributed 24,000 IQD (approximately \$18.32 USD) per person in each eligible household.</p>

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

**Source:** USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 1/8/2025.

## APPENDIX F

# Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 11 and 12 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR

Table 11.

### Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of December 31, 2024

#### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

***Audit of DoD Reimbursement from the State of Kuwait in Accordance with the Defense Cooperation Agreement***

To determine whether the DoD requested and received reimbursement from Kuwait for services provided by the DoD in accordance with the Defense Cooperation Agreement.

***Audit of the DoD's Management of the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program Contract for the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts at Camp As Sayliyah***

To assess the effectiveness of the DoD's management of the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program V contract in support of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts Doha at Camp As Sayliyah.

***Audit of the DoD's Management of the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) Program Resources for Detention Facilities and Displaced Persons Camps***

To assess the effectiveness of the DoD's management of CTEF program resources for the improvement of security and humane conditions at detention facilities and displaced persons camps for Islamic State of Iraq and Syria detainees.

#### DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

***Audit of the Department of State's Efforts to Counter Iran-Backed Groups***

To determine whether State's efforts to counter Iran-backed groups have been 1) strategically developed and implemented with goals and objectives; 2) executed to promote coordination among implementing bureaus, posts, and interagency partners; and 3) designed to measure performance results and inform adjustments in its approach.

***Inspection of Embassy Ankara, Türkiye, and Constituent Posts***

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, Türkiye, and constituent posts.

***Classified Inspection of Embassy Ankara, Türkiye, and Constituent Posts***

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, Türkiye, and constituent posts.

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

***Audit of USAID/Iraq's Economic Development Activities***

To determine the extent to which the USAID Mission in Iraq monitored its Durable Communities and Economic Opportunities project's Business Competitiveness and Job Creation Initiative to achieve its goals.

***Audit of USAID's Management of the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance Warehouse in the United Arab Emirates***

To determine the extent to which USAID has 1) followed best practices for inventory management of its humanitarian assistance supplies stored at the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance warehouse in the United Arab Emirates and 2) conducted oversight of the warehouse and third-party monitor contracts for the warehouse.

Table 12.

### Ongoing Oversight Project Related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of December 31, 2024

#### ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

***Audit of International Cooperative Administrative Support Services Program***

To determine whether program reimbursement payments for International Cooperative Administrative Support Services were correct and supported, including U.S. Army Central (ARCENT) and Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR).

## APPENDIX G

# Planned Oversight Projects

Table 13 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 13.

### Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of December 31, 2024

#### ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

***Audit of Base Operations Services at Area Support Groups Jordan and Kuwait***

To determine if area support groups in Jordan and Kuwait provided base operations services according to mission needs.



## ACRONYMS

Acronym	
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CBI	Central Bank of Iraq
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
CMS	Case management system
COP29	29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
CTS	Counterterrorism Service
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
ERW	explosive remnants of war
EUM	end-use monitoring
EEUM	enhanced end-use monitoring
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FY	fiscal year
G7	Group of Seven
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HIS	Homeland Security Investigations
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
IAMG	Iran-aligned militia groups
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IqAF	Iraqi Air Force
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
ITP	Iraq–Türkiye Pipeline
JFS	Jabhat Fateh al-Sham
JN	Jabhat al-Nusra

Acronym	
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
KCL	Kurdish Coordination Line
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KSF	Kurdish Security Forces
MERV	Middle Euphrates River Valley
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MoE	Ministry of Energy
MoMD	Ministry of Migration and Displacement
MoPA	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs
MoU	memorandum of understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OPCW	Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OUSDP(P)	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RGB	Regional Guard Brigade
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SFA	Syrian Free Army
SNA	Syrian National Army
State	Department of State
Treasury	Department of the Treasury
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children's Agency
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	the U.S. Central Command
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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