

# Security Trends Analysis

28<sup>th</sup> February to 31<sup>st</sup> March

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لجنة تنسيق المنظمات غير الحكومية لأجل العراق  
NGO COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR IRAQ



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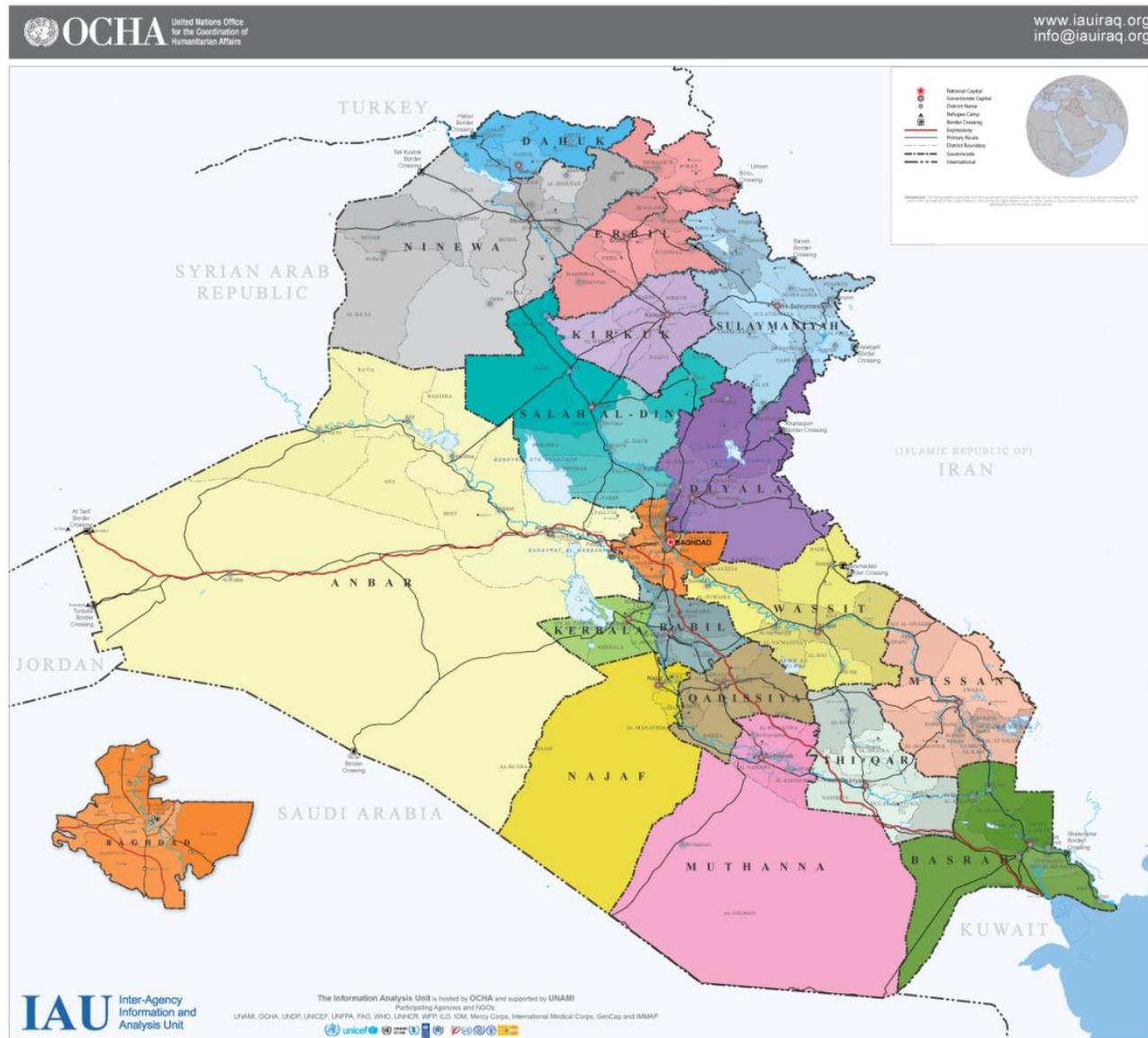
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# MAP OF IRAQ AND GOVERNORATES



# ANBAR PROVINCE LATEST SITUATION UPDATE



Photo from Reuters

## **Background**

The conflict in Anbar, which started at the end of December with the breakup of an anti-government protest camp in Ramadi, is still ongoing. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have been trying to restore Ramadi back to a degree of normality by reopening shops and the Houz Bridge<sup>1</sup>. However on the 30<sup>th</sup> a suicide car bomb targeted the security checkpoint on the Houz Bridge, which caused several casualties and a partial collapse of the bridge. During the month, several attacks forced ISF to divide the city with concrete walls. In Fallujah, ISF tightened their grip on the city and closed the southern and northern entrances with concrete walls and barbed wire. Clashes are reported in the belts around the city and military shelling continues on the neighborhoods where ISIS is still in control. The government of Anbar is offering cash payments to returnees, and despite obvious risks to their safety some families have returned home. The attempts of border forces to halt the traffic from Syria to Iraq also resulted in an increase in violence against ISF in western districts including Al Qaim.

## **Analysis**

The Anbar Medical Directorate announced that since the beginning of military operations in the province, 1,898 people were killed or injured, including women and children who died as a result of indiscriminate shelling on residential neighborhoods. Statistics released by the MoDM show that there are now 66,520 families displaced as a result of the ongoing conflict in Anbar province, 77% of these families are displaced inside Anbar itself. As the situation worsens and the number of IDPs increases, prices for fuel and food supplies have reached sky high. There is an urgent need for food and healthcare but due to regular closing of roads to Fallujah and the Habaniya district, aid delivery remains a challenge. Militants holding Fallujah are reportedly providing social services and policing the streets, which marks an effort to bolster their standing in the community<sup>2</sup>.

## **Forecast**

The complex network of tribal militants and lack of political compromise to the unrest has resulted in a stalemate which is unlikely to break in the short term<sup>3</sup>. The longer term impact might include an increase in tribal tensions between groups on the side of the insurgency and those that are siding with the government. There could also be a power vacuum in areas, like the southern provinces, where the army has withdrawn from in order to reinforce the ISF presence in Anbar. If the crisis is not solved prior to elections then it will be hard to form a new government, which will further catalyze existing tensions.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.edinburghhint.com/services/advisory/recent-analysis/anbar-security-update-21-march-2014/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.heraldextra.com/news/national/militants-launch-social-support-in-an-iraqi-city/article\\_9f771f30-3897-5e53-814c-60ebe850c165.html](http://www.heraldextra.com/news/national/militants-launch-social-support-in-an-iraqi-city/article_9f771f30-3897-5e53-814c-60ebe850c165.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/category/security/weekly-security-update/>

# PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IMPACT SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

## Background

The deteriorating security situation in Iraq makes it difficult for parliamentary elections to take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April. In Baghdad, there are increasingly frequent bombings targeting the commercial infrastructure and ISF, the southern governorates witness sporadic violence and there is an increased bloodshed in the Northern parts of the country. In Anbar voter registration cards are only available in safe areas, which currently only include 30% of the governorate<sup>4</sup>. Moreover relations between the KRG and Baghdad remain tense due to ongoing disputes about oil contracts. On top of that, the board of Iraq's election commission temporarily resigned as a result of a dispute over the interpretation of the electoral law, which excluded candidates on the grounds of "a bad reputation"<sup>5</sup>.

## Analysis

The commission's temporary resignation complicated the outlook for the elections and raised doubts about the integrity and transparency of the elections. Additionally, questions arise about Sunni representation in the elections, as Anbar is likely not to participate. This might further frustrate the Sunni population who feel marginalized by the Shia led government. There is also a growing disagreement between the three biggest Shiite Muslim parties. These three former allies have decided to compete separately in the upcoming federal elections, which might further decrease the odds of a government being immediately formed. In the 2010 elections, it took 8 months to form a government and now the situation is even more difficult, with waning support for the current cabinet, less trust among the different parties and more national and regional insecurity.

## Forecast

Given the possibility that a large number of the Sunni Iraqis might be excluded from voting in the elections, support for ISIS and the tribal insurgency might increase, leading to further sectarian violence and targeting of election sites and civilians. The rapidly approaching election date might spur an increase in military operations to try and put immediate pressure on this issue, which will most probably result in more bloodshed. An increase in VBIED incidents in several provinces south of Baghdad could indicate a willingness to strike Shia-dominated areas ahead of the votes. Given the imminence of the votes and continued political stagnation, incident levels are likely to escalate in the lead-up to the elections<sup>6</sup>.



Photo from AFP

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.edinburghint.com/services/advisory/recent-analysis/anbar-security-update-21-march-2014/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26733772>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/category/security/weekly-security-update/>

# SECURITY DETERIORATES IN NORTHERN GOVERNORATES

## Background

The security in the northern Governorates continues to deteriorate, as a result of actions of militant groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Da'esh). Most incidents were concentrated in Nineveh and Salah al-Din which continue to witness devastating vehicle-borne IED and suicide bomb attacks. Increased militant activity in Diyala and Kirkuk governorates was reflected in multiple VBIED incidents, as most car bombs were distributed across the north<sup>7</sup>. Throughout the month, gunmen from different militia have clashed heavily with police and have targeted government buildings and politicians. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, militants seized the city council of Tikrit and on March 27<sup>th</sup> unidentified gunmen blew up the local council of the Siniya district of northern Tikrit. In Diyala, 3 MPs escaped a roadside bomb that killed 3 of their bodyguards.

## Analysis

During the brief occupation of Buhriz in Diyala, which left dozens dead and wounded on both sides and forced hundreds of families to flee the town, ISIS militants reportedly incited through loudspeakers in mosques to kill the family members of the Awakening and the security services<sup>8</sup>. This shows that militants are taking advantage of emotions among Sunni minorities against the Shia government. These actions attempt to ignite the frustration of Shia populations and drag individuals in to join an open sectarian conflict. Da'esh has increased its presence in areas bordering with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), which has been politically involved in responding to the Syrian conflict since KRG announced their support to Syrian Kurds which are fighting against ISIS in North Eastern Syria.

## Forecast

While violence in the northern governorates will most likely continue, insurgents could shift their focus to central regions as elections approach and political campaigns are due to start<sup>9</sup>. As the security forces will try to control the violence in the northern governorates in light of the upcoming elections, they will continue to be the focus of militant attacks. The more the fighting spreads to other areas of the country, the more difficult it will be to resource effective military operations that will enable the reclamation of areas that are seized by militants.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/category/security/weekly-security-update/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://english.shafaq.com/index.php/politics/9326-diyala-announces-regaining-control-on-buhriz>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/category/security/weekly-security-update/>

# SPORADIC ATTACKS IN BABEL AND WASSIT

## Background

Although the Shia-dominated provinces of Babel and Wassit have experienced sporadic attacks in the past, they were preserved from major attacks up until this month. In March the levels of violence sharply increased in the governorates that are neighboring on Baghdad. Whilst Babel was the most volatile, Wassit also witnessed VBIED incidents. One of the deadliest attacks in Babel occurred on March 9<sup>th</sup>, when a suicide bomber in a van packed with explosives detonated the van at a checkpoint in the city of Hilla. The attack killed approximately 40 people and wounded around 150, including security personnel. In response, PM Nouri Al Maliki decided to appoint the Commander of the Intelligence Directorate, Riyadh al-Khekani, as the new Police Commander for Babel<sup>10</sup>.

## Analysis

The cumulative attacks on Babel and Wassit indicate increasingly widespread discontent among Iraq's Sunni population of their relative political underrepresentation. Media speculation indicates that this may be a response to the upcoming elections<sup>11</sup>. The armed campaigns in Babel and Wassit could continue to drive further south in a bid to influence the upcoming voting, as the core of Maliki's Shiite electorate is established in this region. The ISF in Wassit have been increasing security measures, which have enabled them to arrest a total of 86 people under Article 4 of the controversial Anti-Terrorism Law. Considering current sectarian tensions in the region and that the southern provinces comprise of a majority of Shiites, increased security measures are vital for the Prime Minister in order to maintain order and press on for the elections to take place.

## Forecast

With strengthened law enforcement measures in Wassit and a new Police and Operations Commander for Babel, the security forces might be able to maintain security in order for the country to hold elections next month. The power struggle opposing various Shia factions could result in the targeting of local figures in the weeks preceding the elections. In addition, violence within the region raises sectarian tension between the Sunnis and Shiites. This may escalate violent acts towards the civilian population. The likelihood of devastating attacks depends primarily upon the pre and post-election strategy of armed groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Da'esh), who are enjoying regional support.



Photo from Reuters

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/new-police-commander-appointed-in-babel-2014-03-10/#axzz2xM6Kb3JJ>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26505128>

# BAGHDAD DISTRICTS WITNESS DEADLY ATTACKS

## Background

For the past few months Baghdad has witnessed a high frequency of large-scale deadly attacks on its citizens. Baghdad continues to be one of the most regularly targeted cities in the country. In February, an estimated total of 239 people were killed and in March, according to the Iraq Body Count, there were around 211 people killed (statistics released on 29<sup>th</sup> March)<sup>12</sup>. Most deaths in the capital this month have been the result of IED attacks by extremist militants. In addition to these devastating attacks, there was also the killing of a well-known journalist by a presidential guard, which sparked several protests in the capital. The deadly attacks have made Baghdad the “World’s Worst City” when it comes to the quality of life according to a study by the Mercer consulting group.

## Analysis

Security measures have been increased over recent months but seemingly with little avail as rigged car bombs and suicide bombers continue to devastate the city. Despite a slight decrease in deaths in Baghdad this month, and increased focus by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Da’esh) and other groups upon northern governorates and areas surrounding the capital, Baghdad itself continues to attract the most deadly incidents. The total number of VBIED attacks in March is slightly reduced from previous months but still remains high. The ISF seem unable to thwart such attacks and the police have been criticized for not thoroughly investigating the post-bomb crime scenes. They instead seem to focus upon cleaning up the damage as quickly as possible. ISF are still deploying fraudulent bomb detection devices sold by a UK defense company that have zero explosive detection value<sup>13</sup>.

## Forecast

Tensions in Baghdad remain high in line with the national political and security situation. As the nation’s capital, Baghdad is likely to remain one of the most targeted cities in the country as elections approach. With the threat of Da’esh strengthening on a regional level, Baghdad will continue to witness well organised and devastating attacks. The capital’s suburbs might face further ISIS infiltration as the group is gradually expanding their territory to their previous strongholds around Baghdad. The upcoming elections will be an especially vulnerable time in the nation’s capital. As electoral campaigning begins, political gatherings will be targeted and will draw militant focus back to the capital. Adding this concern, the celebration of Easter on April 20<sup>th</sup> may present an escalation in violence against the Christian population as previously seen with the Christmas bombings last year.



Photo from AFP

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.iraqbodycount.org>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/03/james-mccormicks-fake-bomb-detectors-still-used-in-iraq>

# CONTINUING TENSIONS BETWEEN KRG AND BAGHDAD



Photo from Reuters

## **Background**

The continuing tensions between the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the Government of Iraq (GoI) in Baghdad are reaching a critical point. The KRG and Baghdad have been at odds with each other about budget allocations and the centralized control of oil revenues during the past year. The debates started because of a discussion over who is responsible to pay the dues of the international oil companies operating in Kurdistan. The dispute however evolved to cover Kurdish oil contracts being deemed illegal by Baghdad, and who should have authority over oil sales from the KRG. Meanwhile the KRG started using a new pipeline to Turkey in defiance of Baghdad. Unable to solve the dispute, Baghdad has cut off the Kurdish region's budget for the past two months, thereby halting salary payments of Kurdish civil servants<sup>14</sup>.

## **Analysis**

More than a fifth of Kurdistan's people are on a government payroll that has swollen to 840 billion dinars (\$722 million) a month. As the KRG is currently unable to pay these wages, Kurdish businesses are giving loans to the KRG. This however is not sustainable and the region is looking for ways to raise more revenue and cut spending, as well as for alternative sources of financing abroad<sup>15</sup>. The growing tensions were felt when a well-known radio journalist was killed the 22<sup>nd</sup> March by a junior Kurdish guard of the country's president Talabani. Following this incident there were strikes, protests and according to some local media reports even revenge kidnappings of Kurds in central and eastern Baghdad.

## **Forecast**

The differences between Baghdad and Erbil are dividing the country even more along ethnic and sectarian lines. The cutting of the budget might lead to more frustration among the Kurdish people and push them even further away from Baghdad, leading to more protests. There have been some threats that the KRG would constrain water supplies as a form of leverage over Baghdad. The problems might be hard to overcome ahead of national elections as neither side wants to be seen as weak for making concessions. The Kurdish Region of Iraq (IKR) is becoming increasingly autonomous, with the cultural identity evolving significantly to reflect this.

<sup>14</sup> <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/14032014>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Middle-East/2014/Mar-18/250552-financial-squeeze-tests-limits-of-kurdistan-self-rule.ashx#axzz2wrRqWO77>