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Map of Iraq
IAU and OCHA
In terms of the number and severity of security incidents, the month of October was considered calmer than September and August. In the past month, the most heated areas included Baghdad (and particularly Baghdad city), Basra city, Kirkuk, and Mosul city and other areas of Ninewa. There were also a few isolated security incidents in areas spread throughout Iraq, including Ramadi, Tikrit and Amara.

**Attacks**

**Including IEDs, sticky bombs, suicide operations, and assassinations**

In October, the Baghdad neighbourhoods and districts of Dura (and mainly in the Mechanic region), Rusafa and Tarmiya had the highest incidences of militias targeting Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Sahwa/Awakening forces.

Although Najaf is considered relatively quiet, a United Nations convoy carrying high-ranking UN and police officials (including Special Envoy Ad Melkert), was hit by a car bomb explosion on the 19th October.

On the 29th October, the town of Balad Ruz, Diyala, witnessed the most destructive suicide attack since September 2010. A man reportedly detonated a belt of explosives in an internet café frequented by Shi’a Kurds during its busiest hour; between 25 and 30 individuals were killed, and more than 60 were wounded. In another violent instance in Diyala, a violent clash between the ISF—with support from the US forces—and local militias lasted for four days. In Baquba, Diyala, there was an unusually high number of reported IED attacks targeting government and police officials, as well as Sahwa members.

On the 31st October, armed members of Islamic State of Iraq (which has links to Al-Qaeda in Iraq) took more than 100 Christian worshippers hostage. The hostage-taking occurred during Sunday mass, after the gunmen failed an attempt to raid the nearby stock exchange building. This attack occurred in the Our Lady of Salvation church in Karrada, a Baghdad neighbourhood, and is considered the worst massacre of Christians since the beginning of the 2003 invasion. When Iraqi police and ISF members stormed the church to rescue the hostages after a two-hour stand-off, some of the hostage-takers detonated explosives, killing themselves and others. More than 58 hostages (including women and children), as well as Iraqi police officers and soldiers, were reportedly killed by the sporadic gunfire and multiple explosions; 67 were wounded, but the death toll may still climb as more information emerges.
United Nations Convoy Hit by Roadside Bomb

A roadside bomb explosion next to a United Nations convoy killed one Iraqi Security Forces member and wounded several other Iraqi individuals, prompting international condemnation and immediate investigations on the 19th October. Several high-profile UN representatives, including the Special Envoy to Iraq Mr. Ad Melkert, were travelling in the convoy but managed to escape without injury. This attack was especially surprising given the relative calm and mobility that humanitarian workers had become accustomed to over the past year. Soon after the attack, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that the startling event would not deter the UN from continuing its operations in Iraq.

Details of the Attack

While the exact target of this attack is still in question, such security incidents involving humanitarian workers and representatives have not occurred for quite some time. The Deputy Special Representative Jerzy Skuratowicz and UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) staff were also travelling in the UN convoy on its route from the Najaf airport (160 kilometres (100 miles) south of Baghdad), headed for the Baghdad airport. The roadside bomb reportedly hit the second-to-last vehicle in the UN convoy without any warning.

The group responsible for orchestrating the attack is not known. Shiite militia Asaib Al-Haq, also known as the “League of Righteousness,” (a faction that splinters from the Mehdi Army of cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr), is one main suspect, as the group has a reputation for violently targeting US forces and foreign nationals. Moreover, it is possible that the attackers’ primary target was not the UN Special Envoy to Iraq, but rather the Iraqi police forces; 10 of the 14 cars travelling in the convoy were carrying many high-ranking police officers.

Melkert’s Visit to Al-Sistani

Melkert was in Najaf to meet Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, Iraq’s most revered Shiite cleric, in an attempt to urge political leaders to immediately meet and directly negotiate the formation of a coalition government. This visit was highly publicized in the Iraqi press. After the attack, Melkert declared to many media outlets that the enduring seven-month political stalemate is resulting in security deterioration.

Melkert’s visit with Al-Sistani appears to have prompted several UN representatives to again propose a “roundtable” conference, to allow leaders of political blocs to sit at one table and resolve the government formation stalemate. This proposal does not seem to have considerable popularity or backing within Iraq’s political scene.

Crime
(Including murder, kidnapping, robbery/theft, narcotics selling and trafficking)

NCCI noted that the areas of Dura and Abu Ghraib in Baghdad governorate recorded the highest number of incidents involving robbery and theft of shops and homes. There was also an unusually high number of reports of women kidnapped in these areas. Additionally, there were some reported incidents of young girls being abducted in Kirkuk. In Amara, Missan, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) arrested a number of individuals suspected of committing crimes within the past month. A number of armed gangs were also arrested by the ISF in Basra governorate. In Diyala, Baghdad and Kirkuk, there have been many reported robberies in gold markets. In the most violent case, at least 10 Iraqis—including 5 policemen—were killed by gunmen after they attacked a goldsmiths’ market in Kirkuk city. The gunmen were armed with hand and rocket-propelled grenades; it is not clear whether they were members of a gang, or an insurgent organization turning to crime to finance their operations.
More Evidence of Sunni Fighters Defecting to Insurgent Groups

The Sahwa (also known as the “Sons of Iraq” or “Awakening”) coalition of Sunni armed groups, which aligned with US forces to fight Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) in late 2005 and 2006, was a major development for Iraq’s tenous security situation. However, recently disclosed files from the US military\(^1\) draw the extent of Sahwa’s actual influence and intentions into question.

WikiLeaks Reports Reveal Problematic Aspects of Sahwa

Dozens of reports released by Wikileaks detail the ways in which major Sahwa leaders exploited their positions to stockpile weapons, extort money and have their rivals detained/incarcerated. The Sahwa “Awakening Councils” involved complex tribal relations between Sunni Arabs who were predominantly from the governorates of Anbar, Salah Al-Din, Baghdad and Diyala. As the US aligned with this complicated power structure, it simultaneously provided an opportunity for some Sunni militia leaders to misuse their power.

The US military discovered that some Sahwa members were actually still aiding insurgent and militia groups, using their Sahwa status as a cover-up to conceal their real activities. There are also reports that some Sahwa members secretly planted weapons caches or IEDS, and then led Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and American troops to “discover” these sites in an attempt to boost their standing and reward.

In these and other aspects, it appears that some Sahwa members exaggerated the Awakening movement’s influence and efficacy for personal benefit. Yet the steady decline of Sahwa influence may still negatively impact Iraq’s future security situation. When the US transferred control of the Awakening Councils to the Iraqi government in 2008, Sahwa members numbered more than 90,000.

Sahwa Forces Continue to Experience Marginalization

Under direct US control, most Sahwa members enjoyed special benefits and privileges—including a monthly government salary, protection, and high-ranking positions. The Shiite-dominated central government, which is now responsible for overseeing the Sahwa forces, allegedly aims to marginalize and weaken the Awakening improvement by gradually removing these benefits and privileges.

The central government has ceased paying many Sahwa members on time, or at all. The ISF have been instructed to disarm Sahwa members in some areas, and the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) most recently issued an order to fire and demote high-ranking Sahwa police officers in Anbar (although the MoI reportedly rescinded this order due to considerable protest against it). Moreover, the central government has mainly turned a blind eye to a wave of assassinations and violence against Sahwa members that broke out after the parliamentary elections in March 2010. These factors are prompting many Sahwa members to leave the Awakening Councils, and it appears that more Sahwa members are actually defecting to join AQI and other insurgent groups.

Although some recently released evidence suggests that many Sahwa members joined the Awakening movement in pure self-interest, there is no doubt that the Sahwa forces are a vital entity within Iraq’s security configuration. In general, Sahwa members have developed familiarity with US and Iraqi forces’ tactics and are well-trained; should they collaborate with AQI and insurgent groups on a greater scale, this would certainly result in an escalation of military operations and violence, particularly in the central region of Iraq.

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\(^1\) Wikileaks, a whistleblower organization, has recently released over 390,000 classified US files on the Iraq war and occupation, some of which bring new aspects about the Sahwa movement to light.
Civil Society Leaders Claim Victory in Lawsuit, yet Government Formation Process Remains Uncertain

The wide-ranging impacts of the delayed formation of a government affect almost all aspects of daily life in Iraq, from social services to security. Some American and Iraqi officials fear that as the political vacuum endures and public discontent rises, these factors may create a situation in which the military could stage a coup against the Al-Maliki administration. Many insurgent groups have certainly felt emboldened to exploit many widening security gaps and stage attacks amidst this lack of certainty and authority.

On the 24th October, Iraq’s Federal Supreme Court—the country’s highest judicial body—sided with civil society leaders who filed a lawsuit against an Iraqi parliamentarian. According to the Supreme Court’s ruling, Muhammed Fouad Masoum, the oldest Member of Parliament, failed to use his constitutional authority as Provisional Chairman to avert the enduring political impasse. Although this decision is considered a victory for Iraqi civil society, many politicians and analysts doubt that it will effectively accelerate the government formation process, which continues more than eight months after parliamentary elections were held. At best, the formation of a new government is still weeks, if not months, away.

Details of the Federal Supreme Court’s Ruling

The Federal Supreme Court stated that as the Provisional Chairman (a position awarded to the oldest Member of Parliament), Fouad Masoum’s decision to leave the first parliament session open, after official election results were approved, is unconstitutional. Therefore, the court cancelled the open session and has obliged Masoum to use his constitutional authority to convene and resume the first parliamentary session according to timetables and procedures described in Article 55 of the Iraqi constitution. Additionally, the Federal Supreme Court is obliging Masoum to cover the plaintiffs’ expenses and legal fees at an estimated cost of $10,000 Iraqi dinars.

Predicting the Impact of this Ruling

Although the Federal Supreme Court’s rulings are “absolutely binding” according to the Constitution, there is concern that this recent decision may only complicate the current impasse and constitutional crisis. Masoum and other politicians have announced that parliament will be reconvened within two weeks. Yet some remaining loopholes could allow the political process to further stall. For example, if the parliament fails to achieve a quorum, this would prevent the process from moving forward.

Some critics of the incumbent Prime Minister Al-Maliki—who seems the most likely candidate to assume the premiership once a government forms—charge that the Federal Supreme Court’s ruling is politicized and personally benefits his bid for nomination. With only two weeks to negotiate before the next parliamentary meeting, it is likely that Al-Maliki’s rivals will not have enough time to assemble an effective oppositional alliance.

Iraqi Civil Society Continues to Pressure Elected Politicians to End Stalemate

In past months, hundreds of local NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) formally pledged support for this lawsuit case, which was filed by prominent Iraqi civil society leaders, including Hanaa Edwar George, Ali Khudair Abas Al-Anbori, Sami Shati Abeid and

2 Once parliament convenes, the Iraqi Constitution clearly outlines the appropriate timetable and procedures for making political appointments. Parliamentarians must first pick a speaker and two deputies. Then, within a 30 day period, a president must be appointed by a majority vote of at least two-thirds. The appointed president then has 15 days to name the head of the largest parliamentary bloc to form a government. The final government formation stages must be completed within the next 30 days.

3 Article 55 stresses the importance of the Provisional Chairman’s call to convene parliament in its first meeting no more than 15 days after election results are officially approved. However, Provisional Chairman Masoum considered the first parliamentary session as an open meeting, which has led to successive postponements in nominating the president, the head of parliament, and other important positions in the new Iraqi government. In an exclusive interview with NCCI, Hana Edward, one of the plaintiffs and a civil society leader (Secretary of the Iraqi NGO Al-Amal Organization), explained, “Because of these violations, nothing has happened in the political process. We are still on the first stage of nominating the head of parliament and his deputies.”
Shaza Naji Hussein. After the Federal Supreme Court’s decision was announced, Edwar told reporters, “This is a historic moment for us, the civil society organizations.” If the government formation process continues to stall, she stated, “We [representatives of Iraqi civil society] will go to the court and ask them to dissolve the Parliament.”

Since the election results were officially approved, the parliament has only convened once in June for a total of eighteen minutes. Rather than regularly convening in parliament thereafter, the government formation process has instead been discussed between coalition and party leaders, oftentimes in meetings abroad or in closed, confidential settings.

Refugee Returnees and IDPs Facing More Difficulties

According to a recent study conducted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 61% of Iraqi refugees who have resettled back in Iraq report that they regret their decision to return.4

Return Rate Declining

The UNHCR has also noted a steadily declining trend of return, particularly since the elections and the uncertain aftermath which leaves Iraq with no new government more than eight months later. According to the UNHCR’s data the number of returning refugees and IDPs has dropped from an average of 15,000-20,000 individual returns per month before the March 2010 elections to about 10,000 individual returns per month at present. Due to the political impasse, the central government has failed to meet and discuss durable solutions and meet basic needs of returnees and IDPs. Also, many Iraqis are waiting to see how the lack of political developments affects Iraq’s security before deciding to return and assume many new risks.

Most Refugees Reluctant to Return

Refugees who reside outside of Iraq are facing considerable difficulties in determining a durable solution and planning their futures. There have been instances in which Iraqi refugees have tried to return in recent months, only to seek asylum in neighboring Syria, Jordan, or another country due to deteriorating security, rising crime and a lack of employment opportunities in most areas of Iraq.

87% of returnees recently surveyed by the UNHCR stated that they are unable to cover their families’ economic needs. Also, 11% of the surveyed returnees cited poor economic conditions and unemployment as barriers that have prevented them from returning to their former homes and neighbourhoods. In questioning Iraqi refugees at the Jordanian and Syrian border crossings with Iraq, UNHCR officials concluded that 45% of those surveyed not wish to return to Iraq permanently due to the lingering “political uncertainty.” 15% responded that they did not plan to return due to the poor security situation. 40% cited poor public services as their main reason for not wishing to permanently return to Iraq at this time.

Deportations and Forced Returns/Resettlements

In the past three months, the UNHCR and other IDP/refugee organizations with operations in Iraq have expressed considerable concern about the rising frequency in forced returns/deportations of Iraqi refugees, particularly from European nations. Many of the deported Iraqis are returned to parts of the country which are still unsafe, in contravention of UNHCR guidelines for the handling of Iraqi asylum applications. This pattern is jeopardizing the safety of many refugees.

Returnees and IDPs are more vulnerable to increasing rates of violent targeting and especially crime, as they often lack any formal or reliable source of protection. In fact, UNHCR discourages return to many areas of Iraq, including Baghdad—although most of the

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recorded instances of return have been to Baghdad city. Upon returning to Iraq in 2010, many returnees found that their homes have become occupied, either by organized militias or individual families. In turn, these returnees have effectively become IDPs, forced to relocate to another home or community yet again.

Moreover, many IDPs are living in a state of uncertainty, as at least 500,000 internally displaced Iraqis are squatting in informal settlements in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Mosul, and other cities and towns. These “squatters” do not actually own the buildings or land on which they live. In recent months, there has been a noted increase in pressure from local and national authorities to forcibly evict many of these squatters.

The UN Secretary General’s special envoy on the human rights of IDPs, Walter Kaelin, recently noted that “to keep such large numbers of people [IDPs] in total marginalisation in itself might become a factor of instability” in Iraq. Indeed, IDPs and other vulnerable groups are often targeted for recruitment by AQI and other militias; those IDPs without any occupation or source of income may not have other viable options for survival and protection.

Tensions Rise between Arab and Kurdish Residents in Kirkuk and other Disputed Territories

Although the Al-Maliki administration further postponed the national population census from the 24th October to the 5th December, many events in wake of the approaching date have actually worsened Kurdish-Arab relations, particularly in Kirkuk. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and other Kurdish parties reportedly feel a renewed urgency to impose last-minute demographic changes to the governorate of Kirkuk and other disputed areas, including Ninewa.

Many Kurdish parties believe that by displacing Arab residents outside of the governorate, they will be able to ensure that the census records a Kurdish demographic majority in Kirkuk. According to the constitution, any governorates found to have a Kurdish majority in the national referendum must then be assimilated into the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Recently, the Iraqi Minister of Planning suggested the removal of any questions relating to nationality from the census form. However, the Kurds overwhelmingly rejected this proposal.

Due to intensifying violence and threats, dozens of Arab families have voluntarily left Kirkuk in the past month. According to many reports, in some cases, these Arab families were forcibly displaced. Several Sunni and Shi’a Arabs, including large families, have recently received threats from various armed groups in Kirkuk city; new threats are appearing daily. A Kurdish armed group, the “Revenge Demander Youths,” sent many threatening letters to Arabs in an attempt to push them to leave Kirkuk. In the Haweejaa district of Kirkuk, an Arab armed group was reportedly formed in response to the Kurdish group’s threat. This armed Arab group has publicly stated that it plans to target Kurdish residents of Kirkuk if the “Revenge Demander Youths” and other Kurdish armed groups do not halt their threats against Arab residents. Some Arab residents also say that the Kurdish Asayesh forces are further stirring tensions between Kurdish and Arab residents in many areas of Kirkuk city. It has been reported that dozens of Arab families were recently displaced in/from Kirkuk.

Some Arab families are concerned because they can no longer register their children in certain schools; in many cases, the authorities have not allowed these Arab families to transfer their children to other schools. By imposing such obstacles and discriminatory policies, it is thought that Kurdish officials are organizing an unofficial displacement campaign targeting Arab residents.

On the 1st November, Asayesh security forces thwarted an attempted terrorist attack when an Arab driver sought to enter Erbil in a car lined with bombs. The Asayesh prohibited the car from entering the Erbil-Kirkuk checkpoint and killed the suicide bomber before the car exploded. A statement issued by the Paristan organization asserted that terrorist groups, such as Islamic State of Iraq, are focusing their efforts to undermine security and stability in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This attack could be a direct reaction to growing tensions between Arab and Kurdish communities as a result of the upcoming census.

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7 Members of the Ninewa Fraternized List, a Kurdish political bloc, have boycotted the Ninewa Provincial Council (PC) for a considerable period of time. Recently, they announced that they would form a new local council separate from the Nineva PC if their demands were not met concerning sixteen disputed areas in Ninewa. The Hadbaa’ List is currently engaged in discussions aimed at easing this political tension, but it is not yet clear to what extent these talks will actually improve the situation.
Update on Mosul IDPs

In August 2010, IDPs living near the Presidential Palaces compound in Mosul began receiving eviction threats from the local government of Ninewa, and later the Second Brigade of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). NCCI has monitored and reported on this situation via contacts in the IDP camp, and it appears that relations between the IDPs, the local government and the ISF have recently begun to improve.

According to NCCI’s contacts, the ISF has ceased patrolling the camps and harassing IDPs. In fact, at a recent meeting between seven IDP representatives and a high-ranking ISF officer, the IDPs were promised that they would no longer be bothered, that the decision to evict IDPs was annulled, and that basic supplies—like electricity and water—would be restored to the camps. The latter promise has yet to be realized, but it appears that the IDPs are no longer facing substantial threats from government or military officials.

In the meeting between IDP representatives and an ISF officer, the representatives reportedly described their poor living conditions and explained that because most of the IDPs do not have property rights in their places of origin, they have no alternative place to move to, should eviction/forced relocation occur. At the request of the ISF officer, many IDPs provided proof that they do not own properties in their areas of origin. Those IDPs who do not possess such documentation were asked to sign an affidavit of non-possession/non-ownership.

Although the UN is reportedly aiding some of the IDPs and the UNHCR appears to be providing better shelter for many of the IDPs, many still face crucial shortages of water, electricity and other basic services. In September 2010, the ISF reportedly cut off water and electricity supplies from the IDPs’ homes in order to pressure them to leave the Presidential Palaces.8

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8 According to one of the IDPs residing in a camp at the Presidential Palaces, the families that are living in the area still suffer from a lack of basic services. As a result of the ISF cutting one of the camp’s two main generators, the IDPs transferred their power supplies to the only remaining generator. This has resulted in a reduced share of electricity per person. The ISF also undertook cutting the main pipe that provides drinking water for the area’s residents. As a result, the IDPs pooled the necessary funds to lay new pipes from another water source.