Executive Summary

Iraq Weekly Report

National Overview

Incidents This Week 224       Weekly Trend Up

- Violence levels rose to above average levels this week.
- Activity fell slightly in Baghdad, owing in most-part to increased security for the Eid al Ghadeer festivities. There were no high-profile attacks in Baghdad.
- In the North, IS continues to mount strong resistance in Ayadiyya, despite Haider al Abadi’s declaration of victory last week.
- The Hawija offensive remains stalled as a result of deadlock over the Kurdish independence referendum.
- Activity in Ramadi was notably higher, reflecting a gradually increasing insurgent capability.
- Activity rose in the south, including continued insurgent violence in Babil Province. In Basra, violence increased, with several murders and tribal fights.

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Figure 1: Regional Incident Levels
As a result of the open conflict between ISF and IS in the northern and central regions of the country, the weekly incident totals annotated in RED are not representative of actual levels of activity taking place. The real totals for these provinces and regions will be significantly higher than those officially recorded.
BAGHDAD (City & Province)

Activity dropped slightly, though remained around average levels. Reporting on a political level was mostly associated with the Kurdish referendum. Meanwhile on a security level, there were no high-profile attacks, most likely due to increased security during the Eid al Ghadeer festivities.

NORTH (Ninawa, Dahuk & Erbil Provinces)

Hostile incidents increased negligibly this week, from 38 to 44. Throughout the reporting period, ISF units saw heavy resistance from IS remnants in Ayyadiya sub-district. Cross-border insurgent attacks against PMUs continued along the frontier with Syria, while insurgent activity rose in areas south of Mosul adjacent to the Tigris River, including Nimrud and Hammal al-Alil.

NORTH CENTRAL (Tamim/Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala & Sulaymaniya)

Hostile incidents rose following a subdued week previously. In Diyala, security forces mounted a major counterinsurgency operation, whilst southern Salah ad Din witnessed a deterioration in security. Preparations continued for an assault on Hawija, but the offensive has been delayed by wrangling over the KRG referendum.

WEST (Anbar Province)

There was a slight rise in reported incidents this week, although levels were around average. Whilst an imminent assault into IS-held territory in Anbar is unlikely, ISF movement indicates preparations are making progress. Meanwhile, a perceptible increase in more serious incidents in Ramadi suggests insurgents are generating greater operational capability.

SOUTH CENTRAL (Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Qadisiya & Najaf Provinces)

Incident levels rose sharply in the South Central, largely due to an above-average number of reported murders. Insurgent attacks also continued in northern Babil, with three IEDs and a shooting recorded in the Jurf al-Sakhar area. Activity elsewhere comprised mostly of low-level violence, though several outbreaks of clashes were reported in Karbala and Wasit.

SOUTH EAST (Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan & Basra Provinces)

There were 26 hostile incidents recorded in the South East, a sharp rise on the previous week. Most took place in Basra and Dhi Qar. Tribal violence increased across the region, with clashes reported in Basra, Dhi Qar and Maysan. Elsewhere, activity remained largely low-level, linked mostly to personal or financial disputes. Three kidnaps were reported, including that of a Basra Oil Company employee in the Shuaiba area.
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Baghdad

Incidents This Week: 60
Weekly Trend: Down

Figure 2: Reference Map & Incident Levels – Baghdad
Activity in Baghdad broadly unchanged. The majority of violence was related to criminality or tribalism, occurring mostly in Eastern Baghdad. There was a high rate of grenade attacks (five in total), though analysis of these incidents suggests they were all unrelated. A rise in body finds was also recorded. Most bore characteristics accordant to criminality, such as the gender of the victim being female, or strangulation as the cause of death. However, there were several murders that may have been related to sectarianism, involving male victims bearing gunshot wounds. It is most probable that this week’s spike in body finds is incidental, rather than indicative of a more sustained period of sectarianism. Sectarian killings are likely to remain infrequent in Baghdad, and certainly an uncontrollable surge in body finds is implausible. There were no high-profile attacks recorded, almost certainly because of an increase in security for the Eid al Ghadeer festival. As this security draws down, isolated high-profile attacks can be expected to resume.

Baghdad draws little to bear in stopping Kurdish referendum. Despite protestations from Baghdad, and even the threat of military retaliation from PMUs, the KRG looks set to hold an independence referendum on 25 September. KRG President Masoud Barzani has been under pressure to postpone the election, but has argued against this, citing a lack of viable alternatives from those urging postponement. In a recent BBC interview, Barzani clarified that the result of the vote will form the basis for future negotiations, but that moving towards statehood was justifiable given that the constitution had failed to represent the Kurds. Prime Minister Abadi has been ineffectual in countering the referendum, relying instead on the legal provisions in both the Iraqi Constitution and International Law that render the referendum result practically unenforceable. Nevertheless, the process is placing pressure on Baghdad, mostly because it is stalling the Hawija offensive. Having spent the last 12 months or longer expressing readiness to assault Hawija, the KRG has now become an intransigent partner. The delay confers two clear advantages to the KRG. First, it places Abadi under pressure, as calls to assault Hawija grow louder. Second, delaying an assault until after the referendum avoids an influx of Arab IDPs who would suddenly become eligible to vote and who would almost all oppose independence. At the current level of rhetoric, a military confrontation appears unlikely, although strained tensions will continue, particularly in disputed territories in Diyala and Kirkuk.
Security Overview
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Forecast

- **Short term:** As IS continues to lose territory, it is expected that high-profile retaliatory attacks will continue in Baghdad. These attacks are not expected to be destabilising due to the high ISF and PMU presence in central Baghdad and surrounding Baghdad belts. Insurgent violence is expected to dominate reporting in the north, south and west of Baghdad province. As the insurgency regrows in northern Babil, asymmetric attacks in southern Baghdad province and city are expected. This will likely be made up of indiscriminate IED attacks against populated areas, such as markets in Suweib and Radwaniyah. More sophisticated attacks, such as VBIEDs, are likely in the southwest of Baghdad city. In northern Baghdad, security is expected to deteriorate further. Reactive security operations are expected to quell insurgent violence, although they often result in only temporary displacement of militant cells. In central Baghdad, the majority of incidents will remain linked to low-level criminality, localised disputes and tribalism.

- **Medium term:** The return of IDPs to the Baghdad Belts is expected to result in the re-emergence of a limited insurgency and minor civil unrest as resources become stretched. ISF/PMU presence will be robust, and is likely to ensure that most insurgent violence remains localised. VBIEDs and suicide attacks are expected to continue in the urban areas of central Baghdad. The threat from IS to Baghdad is expected to increase as the movement de-centralises. The upcoming Kurdish referendum is likely to result in political tension between the Central and Kurdish Governments as well as strained diplomatic relations with regional power players.

- **Long term:** The general outlook for the province remains largely stable, based on the consistent patterns of activity over the past year. An increase in insurgent attacks is anticipated, but this will not preclude normal commercial operations. This is particularly pertinent as IS return to a traditional covert insurgency, typified by asymmetric attacks, once they lose the last of their territory. However, the heavy ISF and PMU presence in the city and surrounding areas makes a sustained surge in violence unlikely. Intra-Shia divisions represent a risk to the long-term political and security outlook in Baghdad and the country’s southern governorates. It is likely both Intra-Shia and sectarian divisions will increase in the run up to the 2018 elections. Coupled with the return of PMU forces post-Mosul this is likely to cause considerable tension as sensitive political and sectarian negotiations take place.
North

Incidents This Week  44  Weekly Trend  Up

Figure 3: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North
Mopping up operations proving difficult in Tal Afar district. Despite Prime Minister Abadi’s announcement that major combat activities were completed in Tal Afar, heavy resistance from IS elements in the Ayyadiya area has continued. The sub-district’s clearance was originally being undertaken by the IA 15th Division, however several PMUs and Federal Police units have been drafted into the effort. An ISF spokesman stated that 55 insurgents were killed in the three days following Abadi’s claim of victory, including 26 wearing suicide vests. Attacks have continued apace since then, including several major assaults featuring multiple SVIED operatives. The scale of these incidents suggest that militants retain a substantial presence. This is largely due to the nature of the local terrain, which is extremely rugged. Those IS fighters who were not killed in the Tal Afar offensive, and did not surrender to the Peshmerga, likely fled to hide in the mountains to the west, south and east of Ayyadiya. Clearing these zones will be challenging, as there is little incentive for militants to attempt to withdraw into the well-protected and largely open ground beyond. Indeed, several groups that attempted this week to retreat from the mountains towards the Syrian border were spotted and killed.

Hostile activity increased in south-eastern Ninawa. Notably, clashes broke out between insurgents and tribal Hashd elements in Nimrud sub-district. The fighting began during a sweeping operation carried out by security forces into an area where the men had been hiding. Several militants were killed, including one wearing a suicide vest, before the remainder surrendered. Further south, eight IS members were killed after launching an attack on ISF positions in the al-Adla village, in which one soldier was shot dead and another wounded. Three other shooting incidents were also recorded in the area. These events are believed to reflect a combination of factors, namely a remnant insurgent presence, a slow build-up of new networks, and expeditionary attacks from the northern boundaries of the IS-controlled Hawija pocket. Low-level activity also rose in in the Hammam al-Alil area. Two IEDs were discovered near an IDP camp, while a police officer guarding the facility was also shot from an unidentified source inside. This provided impetus to local concerns that IS members have managed to infiltrate displaced residents. Though this is a recurring theme, the recent commentary claims minimal screening was carried out of those who had fled fighting in Tal Afar district.

Insurgent operations continued along the Syrian border. Four attacks were recorded, a similar number to that seen in recent weeks. Indeed, for several months PMUs garrisoning the area have reported around three cross-border attacks per week. Most have been relatively low-level, involving small groups of insurgents infiltrating and firing on militia positions with small arms, technicals and mortars. Several more serious attacks have been noted, involving large-scale assaults against the Tal Safouk border post, all of which have been repulsed with heavy militant losses. Given the porous nature and length of the frontier that abuts IS-held territory in Syria, such incursions represent a simple and relatively low-cost strategy for insurgents to harass and tie down PMU forces stationed along the border. However, it is probable that the PMU reports also feature some embellishment for political purposes, with militia leaders continuing to point towards the necessity of acting against militant holdings in Syria.
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Forecast

- **Short term:** Ongoing clearance operations in Mosul will result in numerous weapons seizures, IED finds and residual detonations. Sporadic attacks carried out by IS remnants are almost inevitable, including suicide attacks launched by sleeper cells and by IS fighters who escaped the Old Town. The ISF drawdown in the city has seen many security responsibilities handed over to local and Federal Police units, which will likely result in a steady heightening of violence. Indeed, a gradual increase in asymmetric attacks is expected across the liberated areas of Ninawa province more generally, as insurgent cells regroup. Political and sectarian tensions will build as the last pockets are cleared, and a power struggle ensues. Most ISF troops will be redeployed from Tal Afar district, though clearance operations in the mountains around Ayyadiya are expected to continue for several weeks. Sporadic militant attacks on PMU forces will persist along the Iraq-Syria border. Tensions related to the Kurdish independence referendum will build in coming weeks, particularly in disputed territories.

- **Medium term:** Insurgent activity will continue to build across Ninawa, particularly in Mosul, as militant networks regain operational capacity. The enduring presence of Iranian-backed PMUs in Tal Afar is likely to increase tensions with local Sunni actors, as well as with Turkey and the US. Rivalries in Sinjar between Kurdish-aligned forces and PKK-backed Yazidi militias is expected to mount. These hostilities may result in sporadic outbreaks of armed conflict, and are expected to heighten regional tensions with Turkey. Iranian-aligned PMU forces will continue to secure the frontier with Syria. They will highlight ongoing cross-border attacks to advocate widening their operations against IS into Syrian territory, as well as further south along the border. This will provoke considerable opposition, including from Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

- **Long term:** A decentralised insurgency is expected to persist in Ninawa. Political tension and rivalries will increase over the long-term, due to disputes over governance and territory. PMUs will seek to dominate the Ninawa desert region, adjacent to the Syrian border. Turkey’s objections to the PKK and YBS presence in the north will exacerbate existing tensions between KDP Peshmerga – the KDP being allied to Turkey – and PKK affiliates. Mosul will see a patchwork of armed and political actors attempt to strengthen their position and gain localised authority. This will likely result in sporadic violence between rival groups.
North Central

Incidents This Week  54  Weekly Trend  Up
Outlook

- **Reporting this week focused on ISF preparations for an assault on Hawija.** A pontoon bridge arrived earlier in the week, followed shortly after by armoured units to Shirqat, and other infantry units to Kanous. Similar to last week, leaflets were again dropped over Hawija, and IS reportedly issued a communique to its fighters to launch an ‘invasion’ of Salah ad Din should the Hawija area be recaptured. However, these developments notwithstanding, no offensive action was recorded. The major factor holding up the operation is the role of the KRG, who indicated on 6 September that they would not agree over participation until their terms had been met. According to the KRG, their opposition to the involvement of PMUs in the battle had been dismissed by Abadi, resulting in the establishment of a planning committee in Kirkuk. Very often in Iraq, committees are a means of delaying or dampening political deadlocks, meaning a complete and coordinated operation against Hawija looks unlikely to be imminent. Limited military action from the ISF-held northern axis is feasible, but a wider assault from other axes, particularly the Kurdish-held areas, and will probably be delayed until after the Kurdish Referendum on 25 September.

- **ISF mount major counterterror operations in eastern Diyala.** In response to heightened insurgent activity, a joint ISF, IP and PMU force conducted operations along three axes in the Naft Khana, Imam Weis and Khanaaqin areas. ISF announced that they had killed at least 13 insurgents, including six fighters wearing suicide vests. In a separate attack, two suicide bombers struck ISF in the Imam Weis area, killing and wounding at least a dozen, but overall, the operation met with reasonable success. The area around Naft Khana has witnessed a notable uptick in insurgent activity over recent months, mostly the result of insurgent displacement from the Himreen. Traditionally an area of support for the Sunni insurgency, PMU pressure on populations in the Himreen has driven many tribes to actively oppose insurgent groups, pushing fighters into the eastern fringes of Diyala Province. It is likely that the operations this week will dampen violence in the short-term, but further operations will be required to stymie insurgent activity longer-term.

- **High-profile attacks highly likely to target southern Salah ad Din.** This week marked a severe deterioration of security in southern Salah ad Din, attributable in most part to Sunni insurgents. Violence included SAF attacks against PMU locations, at least one IDF attack, several IEDs and three attempted suicide attacks, each involving multiple suicide bombers. By way of indication, detected incidents in the last week were approximately the same frequency and seriousness as the total activity recorded through July and August combined. Notably, these months had witnessed a perceptible increase in violence, suggesting the overall trend is one of deteriorating security. Previous insurgent activity through 2012 and 2013 bore similarities to that witnessed this week, suggesting patterns of violence are gradually regressing to those of the pre-IS caliphate period. In response to the situation, the Abbas Brigades PMU sent reinforcements to the area. However, without a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign, further strikes on ISF locations are inevitable in the near-term, including high-profile or complex attacks. High-profile attacks against civilians in Shia urban areas such as Balad and Dujail are also highly likely in the near to medium-term.
**Forecast**

- **Short term:** A partial offensive into IS-held territory is deemed feasible in the near-term. However, there is very little chance of an agreement between Baghdad and the KRG on coordination between ISF and Peshmerga until after the independence referendum. This makes a full assault on Hawija highly unlikely in the near-term. Sporadic high-profile attacks are anticipated across the North Central, particularly targeting urban centres. Insurgent violence will probably fall in eastern Diyala following this week’s operations. Northwest Diyala will remain chronically insecure. Northern Salah ad-Din will remain a primary driver of incident levels, with regular asymmetric attacks in the Shirqat-Bayji corridor. The Baiji-Haditha road and Siniya will face ongoing instability, as will the Alas-Ujail oilfields and Zarka. It is probable that militant activity in Kirkuk will remain subdued, although it will present an attractive target for occasional HPAs. Internal conflict amongst IS members from Diyala and Hawija will build, resulting in localised armed skirmishes in IS-controlled territory in Tamim and in Mutabijiya in Salah ad-Din.

- **Medium term:** Hostile activity will build in Diyala and Salah ad-Din. There is a substantial risk that ISF/PMU will fail to contain the growing violence, and that the Sunni insurgency will continue to regenerate. This will result in a significant deterioration in security across Diyala – particularly in rural or semi-rural areas, and along the Diyala River Valley. Although activity levels will be lower in Tamim province, Kirkuk and other significant urban centers across the north central region will remain key targets for insurgents. Tensions between Kurdish, Shia Arab, and Turkmen groups will prove susceptible to outbreaks of violence in Tamim and eastern Salah ad-Din, particularly in the event of an escalation of ongoing political disputes. The Kurdish referendum will likely exacerbate existing tensions, increasing the probability of inter-ethnic violence.

- **Long term:** In both Salah ad-Din and Diyala provinces, long-term stability depends on political efforts to engage moderate Sunnis and counter the influence of certain Shia elements to prevent sectarianism. Tensions between Baghdad and Erbil will remain over the status of Kurdish-majority parts of Tamim Province – the disputed areas – as well as between local stakeholders. When Hawija is retaken, the post-conflict period will reflect localised competition and inter-communal violence between Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen.
West

Incidents This Week 23  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 5: Reference Map & Incident Levels – West
Outlook

- **Imminent assault on IS-held territory in Anbar unlikely, but preparations making progress.** There were several reports this week relating to the preparations for an offensive against IS in the upper Euphrates. On 5 September, Iraqi security officials stated that IA 14th division was heading to Anbar as part of preparations, reportedly into the Rutba area. Meanwhile, probing operations continued around the Anah area, with ISF mounting several forays into the fringes of IS-held territory. Airstrikes also intensified, and ISF fired artillery into IS-held land. A reported increase in IDPs followed. This week also witnessed the arrival of British EOD specialists into Ain al Assad airbase. Though positive momentum is being made, there is unlikely to be an imminent commencement of the operation against IS. Currently, much of the political focus centres on the situation around Hawija. Meanwhile, the role, if any, of Shia PMUs has yet to be determined. Pertinently, a spokesman for Kataib Hezbollah criticised Prime Minister Abadi for his reluctance to authorise PMUs to secure the border with Syria, accusing him of bowing to US pressure. Ultimately, as with Tal Afar, it is almost certain that a formal agreement on PMU involvement, or at the very least a broad understanding of roles, will be required before the greenlight is given. In the meantime, preparations are set to continue, resulting in a largely unchanged situation.

- **Gradual worsening of security in Ramadi set to continue.** There was a notable increase in detected violence in and around Ramadi, with other lower-level incidents highly likely to have occurred without detection. On the outskirts of the city, ISF intercepted a VBIED at the 18km marker and arrested its driver before the device detonated. Another VBIED was found on the southern fringes of the city in Tameem District. ISF arrested its driver and a passenger, suggesting the device had been intended for emplacement rather than detonation by suicide attacker. Though several VBIEDs have been interdicted on the city's outskirts, very few have been recorded inside Ramadi itself, with this the first detected since January 2017. On 5 September, ISF also announced the arrest of a suicide bomber, whom they had followed as part of an intelligence-led operation. These incidents had followed rumours of a curfew in Ramadi, which were later denied by official sources, who clarified that a security cordon had been put around an area of the city, but that the whole of Ramadi was not under curfew. In addition to these more serious incidents, IED finds also rose slightly, adding credence to the wider assessment that the insurgency in Ramadi will grow steadily over the medium to longer-term.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Overall insurgent activity will likely remain at or near current levels over the short term, with violence predominately targeting tribal volunteers and ISF, alongside occasional attacks against civilians. Sporadic HPAs will continue, mostly in urban centres. Hit, Fallujah and Ramadi will represent the primary targets. Activity in Ramadi is expected to gradually increase. Until ISF focus turns to liberating northern Anbar, frontlines will remain largely static, though occasional raids into IS territory are expected. ISF and Coalition airstrikes will continue in northern Anbar, particularly in the al-Qa’im and Anah areas. Insurgent attacks will persist along the International Highway, particularly in the Rutbah and 160 Kilo area. Political conflict in the Anbar Provincial Council will escalate, increasing the likelihood of political violence, particularly as the bidding process for lucrative reconstruction contracts begins, fueling both political and tribal tensions.

- **Medium term:** It is anticipated that militant attacks will continue to build as the insurgency further decentralises across the province, and reconstruction efforts lead to the increased return of displaced civilians. Political and tribal violence is likely to worsen over the medium term, particularly as groups compete for reconstruction contracts. Mounting violence is likely to result in political calls to strengthen local tribal groups and build local security capacity. ISF will continue to try to secure the International Highway. Operations to clear the Anah – Qaim corridor will likely commence in the medium to long term.

- **Long term:** In the longer-term, security forces will achieve and maintain control over all the population centers along the Euphrates River. IS remnants will remain present in desert areas near Tharthar Lake and in the province’s western desert zones. Militants will engage in a high-intensity insurgency across Anbar through a network of de-centralized cells, similar to previous patterns of insurgency before the “caliphate” was established. Northwestern Anbar will remain susceptible to IS attacks in the long term, given the heavy IS presence in the Euphrates River Valley of Eastern Syria.
**South Central**

Incidents This Week 17  
Weekly Trend Up

*Figure 6: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South Central*
Outlook

- **Hostile incidents rose sharply in the South Central.** This was largely due to the high number of murders recorded in Karbala, Diwaniya and Najaf. This is assessed to represent a statistical anomaly rather than a trend. Apart from several insurgent-related events in northern Babil, the overwhelming majority of incidents were linked to low-level criminality, or the escalation of local disputes. For instance, tribal clashes in the al-Da'oum area of eastern Karbala wounded four people, while an exchange of fire between families in northern Wasit killed one civilian and injured another. There were also several isolated shootings wounding civilians in Hilla and Diwaniya.

- **The militant focus on northern Babil persisted.** The recent campaign of low-level violence targeting PMUs around Jurf al-Sakhar continued this week. Three IED detonations were reported, including a large roadside device that wounded six patrolling militiamen. A PMU member was also shot and wounded. The continued instability has placed security leaders under pressure, and led to calls for a change in strategy. For instance, a group of tribal elders recently requested Muqtada al-Sadr’s Saraya al-Salam militia take over local security provision from hard-line PMUs like Asai’b ahl al-Haq and Kata’ib Hezbollah. They claimed Sadr’s forces had more consideration for the community than Iranian-aligned factions, who they accused of stirring sectarian tensions. Indeed, this week the United Nations called on local parliamentarians and officials to stop these PMUs from carrying out destabilising acts in northern Babil, and from blocking the return of displaced residents. Iraqi politicians calling for the return of these IDPs – a policy fiercely opposed by the PMUs and the Babil Provincial Council – suggested that the situation may calm if ISF play a greater role. In reaction to the violence and attendant political attention, security leaders came together this week to roadmap a response. On 8 September, an Iraqi Defence Ministry spokesman stated a plan had been developed to secure Jurf al-Sakhar and surrounding districts, and suggested that it would result in more ISF involvement. He added that the plan would involve the construction of new roads and external defences, aimed at preventing the infiltration of IS members from Anbar, alongside an extensive IED clearance campaign.

- **A Shia cleric claimed to be the victim of an assassination attempt in Najaf.** On 5 September, relatives of prominent Shia cleric Fadel al-Badiri, a follower of the Sadrist school, told media outlets that gunmen had thrown three hand grenades at his convoy leaving a funeral gathering in Najaf. His son stated that Badiri had received multiple threats leading up to the incident, after publicly condemned the deal reached between IS and Hezbollah in Syria. He had also previously evoked criticism after rejecting Iran’s ‘guardianship’ over Iraq. One media outlet quoted the cleric as having said that the incident was an assassination attempt by the “fifth column”, a term referring to those that willfully undermine a nation’s solidarity out of sympathy for a rival actor. Badiri stated that he did not accuse Hezbollah of carrying the attack, but that "other parties" seeking to exploit division were to blame. Some controversy surrounds the apparent attack, however. Earlier reports had suggested that the Sheikh’s home had been targeted by a percussion IED, while others claimed that three of his bodyguards were wounded after grenades were thrown at the convoy, a claim later contradicted by al-Badiri’s office. Indeed, the Najaf Police Directorate denied the existence of any assassination attempt within their geographical area. Nonetheless, the situation evoked widespread commentary. Other religious leaders issued condemnations, including Sheikh Jawad al-Khalisi, who stated that it reflected an attempt to “strike the social fabric of the Iraqi people”.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Activity in the South Central region will remain relatively low, typified by minor hostile activity driven by a mixture of personal and financial disputes, as well as general criminality. SAF events, kidnap, murder, and intimidatory IEDs will feature prominently in reporting. Northern Babil will remain the area most affected by insurgent activity. Sporadic HPAs are also likely to occur in the South Central, particularly in Babil and Karbala. The political fallout of these attacks will fuel localised political instability, as security officials and politicians seek to displace blame. This will result in further disagreement over the return of Sunni IDPs. Protest activity will persist, including those events related to anger over electricity shortages. Other protest themes will include employment-related grievances, service provision, plans to privatise the electricity sector, and calls for electoral and IHEC reform.

- **Medium term:** There is likely to be a small but perceptible increase in the frequency of low-level insurgent attacks in northern Babil in the medium to long term, as IS attempts to re-establish and consolidate local networks. This will also impact on northern Wasit. HPAs are expected to increase incrementally, including in urban centres like Karbala and Hilla. Incidents linked to Sunni militancy will likely remain a minor proportion of activity in the region, however. The frequency of employment-related demonstrations is expected to build in the medium term. Elevated unemployment will also drive a gradual increase in acquisitive crime.

- **Long term:** Progress by the Federal Government in political and economic reform, as well as anti-corruption measures, will have a considerable influence on the level of civil unrest in the South Central region. High-profile attacks will increase as Sunni insurgents revert to asymmetric tactics. Militants will also attempt to reach symbolic Shia targets in the Najaf and Karbala areas. Because of the significant presence of ISF and PMUs in the area, it is highly unlikely that levels of violence will reach the scale witnessed during 2013-2014.
South East

Incidents This Week 26  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 7: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South East
Outlook

- **Hostile activity levels increased sharply in Basra.** This did not reflect any meaningful deterioration in the security situation, but rather a return to near-average levels following a relative lull over the previous fortnight. Multiple incidents of tribal violence were recorded, including several murders linked to historical animosities. The most noteworthy involved the kidnap of a young Maliki tribesman from the Sa’ad Square area. His body was later dumped in the Abu Skhier area with six gunshot wounds. The victim’s family accused a member of the Shagamba of orchestrating the killing, due to an old dispute. His relatives shot at the man’s home in Huwayr, sparking an outbreak of clashes between the Shagamba and Bani Malik. A QRF unit deployed to halt the fighting, after which they raided the suspect’s residence, where they found the victim’s vehicle stolen during the abduction. Efforts at tribal mediation have reportedly gained traction, awaiting the outcome of legal proceedings initiated against the Shagamba member. In an unconnected event, a second Maliki tribesman was also shot to death in Thagr. This was in retaliation for an old killing during an internal dispute, for which the victim was wanted by the authorities. Several violent tribal ‘warnings’ were also recorded, including one in which the al-Mayahi shot at the home of an Imara man in Qarmat Ali, and another in which tribesmen threw a Molotov cocktail at rival’s home in Zubayr. Other notable incidents included a kidnap of a Basra Oil Company employee, who was taken by gunmen in two 4WD vehicles on the Zubayr – Shua’aiba roadway. It is unlikely that the abduction was directly linked to the victim’s employment with the BOC, and is instead probably related to a tribal, financial or personal dispute. Elsewhere, two IED events were reported, including one which detonated outside the home of a Basra Electricity Department employee in Dour al-Hindiya. An investigation ascertained that the man was using his home to sell alcohol, presenting a likely motivation for the attack. The second saw a small IED found during the search of a vehicle in Mishraq al-Jadida, for which a member of the al-Haydari was arrested. It is believed that the individual intended to use the device to intimidate another actor over a localised dispute.

- **Tribal violence prominent in Dhi Qar and Maysan.** A series of apparently unconnected events were recorded on 4 September in central and northern Dhi Qar. This included two attacks in the districts of Rifai and Dawaya, both involving groups men with grenades and small arms targeting homes. Media reports suggested these incidents resulted from historical disputes, and that neither resulted in casualties. A more serious outbreak of clashes took place in the al-Zahra area of Shatra, where members of the al-Bajima and Bani Khayghan fought for at least three hours with light and medium weaponry. Three people were killed, including a local Sheikh, and three others wounded. ISF intervened and cordoned the district, before carrying out search operations. A man believed to be the primary instigator of the violence – a former soldier - was arrested, and a variety of weapons seized. Two others were later arrested during ISF raids. The fighting resulted from a land dispute between the tribes. These events placed considerable pressure on local security leaders, particularly as they occurred within hours. Several Dhi Qar politicians argued that a more proactive approach should be taken by ISF against unruly tribes. There were also renewed calls for the confiscation of illegal weaponry. Similar criticism was noted in Maysan following a serious round of fighting between tribes in Kahla district. Beginning on 6 September, intermittent clashes involving grenades, light and medium weaponry continued into the following day. Several casualties were reported. Kahla, along with nearby Majar al-Kabir and Qalat Salih, were among the primary focus points of successive ISF deployments throughout 2016 and 2017, which followed a perceived decline in the security situation in so-called tribal “hotspots”. Further violence in these areas in the short term is likely to spark renewed efforts by rival political actors to force a reshuffle in the local ISF leadership, after several failed attempts to oust Maysan Police Chief Brigadier Nizar al-Saadi.
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Forecast

- **Short term**: The outlook for the South East remains stable. Hostile activity will consist largely of SAF, kidnaps, intimidatory IEDs, and murders. Most incidents will be linked to business or personal disputes, and low-level criminality. Tribal fighting will remain most prevalent in areas north of Basra City, and to a lesser extent in northern Dhi Qar and southern Maysan. Meanwhile, protests related to various grievances will continue, including those over poor electricity provision and the perceived lack of investment and job opportunities provided by oil companies. Politics in Basra are likely to remain relatively stable in the short term, following a recent period of instability.

- **Medium term**: Demands for reform, election issues, employment-related grievances, and widespread opposition to plans for the privatisation of electricity provision are expected to be the dominant themes of protest activity in the South-East. Political rivalries will steadily build ahead of elections, including those between the Sadrist movement and the Dawa Party. The expected intensification of these conflicts will likely result in an increase in low-level activity against party interests in southern governorates. In the past, this type of activity included small IEDs detonating outside party offices, UVIEDs targeting affiliated persons or SAF against offices or private residences.

- **Long term**: The outlook for the Southeast in the longer-term is stable. Hostile activity is most likely to arise in the form of low-level SAF. Criminality and tribal confrontations will continue to present a risk of kidnap, SAF exchanges, and intimidatory IEDs. Alongside demonstrations focused on reform and corruption, there will be ongoing protest activity regarding employment-related concerns and service provision.
**Forecast of Events 2017**

**Iraq Weekly Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 September 17</td>
<td>First day of Islamic Calendar</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 October 17</td>
<td>Ashura</td>
<td>Shia festival and official public holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 October 17</td>
<td>Iraq National Day</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 November 17</td>
<td>Arba’een</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 December</td>
<td>Mawlid</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Muslim holidays are often determined by local sightings of lunar phases; dates given are approximate.

** Sunni and Shia’ celebrate the Prophet's birthday on different days, though the Sunni date is usually used to designate the national holiday.

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAH</td>
<td>Asa’ib Ahl al Haq (League of the Righteous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>CQA</td>
<td>Close Quarters Assassination</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFP</td>
<td>Explosively Formed Projectile</td>
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<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HG</td>
<td>Hand Grenade</td>
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<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Iraqi Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Indirect Fire</td>
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<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>Iraqi Security Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL / IS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ Islamic State</td>
</tr>
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<td>IPS</td>
<td>Iraqi Police Service</td>
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<td>IZ</td>
<td>International Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaish Al Mahdi (Mahdi Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Jaish al Mukhtar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRTN</td>
<td>Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al- Naqshbandia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Local National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Modus Operandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSTR</td>
<td>Nothing significant to report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Private Security Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Private Security Detail</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Small Arms Fire</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Rocket Propelled Grenade</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVBIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vest IED</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTPs</td>
<td>Tactics, Techniques and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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</table>
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