IRAQ
Weekly Insight Report
15 – 21 January 2018
**Executive Summary**

Iraq Weekly Report

**National Overview**

**Incidents This Week** 164  
**Weekly Trend** Up

- Hostile incident levels increased negligibly this week, remaining in line with established parameters.

- Patterns of hostile activity in Baghdad were largely unchanged, though a double SVIED attack took place in Tayaran Square.

- The dominant political narratives were dialogue resuming between the KRG and Baghdad, alongside an attempt by Sunni politicians to delay the upcoming national elections.

- In the North, Ninawa continued to be the focal point for insurgent violence. Military operations to the south of Mosul continued into their third week, to counter the re-emergence of IS.

- Militant activity increased in north-eastern Diyala, resulting in reactive security operations in the Jalawla area. Insecurity in Hawija also persisted, fuelled by the residual IS presence.

- In Anbar, apparent retaliatory violence between IS sympathisers and opponents emerged in northern Ramadi.

- Heightened tribal conflict and an increase in IEDs in Basra dominated reporting in the South East, alongside an attendant increase in political commentary.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Summary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baghdad</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forecast of Events 2018</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1: Regional Incident Levels**
Regional Summary
Iraq Weekly Report

WEEKLY INCIDENTS BY PROVINCE: 15 – 21 January 2018

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.
Regional Summary
Iraq Weekly Report

BAGHDAD (City & Province)
Hostile activity increased in Baghdad. Most notably, a double SVIED attack took place on 15 January in Tayaran Square. Elsewhere, key incident drivers remained low-level criminality and localised disputes, with insurgent activity most prevalent in the southern Baghdad Belt area. The dominant political narratives were high level talks between Baghdad and the KRG, alongside an attempt to postpone the upcoming elections in Parliament.

NORTH (Ninawa, Dahuk & Erbil Provinces)
Ninawa remained the focal point for violence. Indeed, evidence suggests the insurgency is gradually regenerating across the province. However, though detected incidents increased, overall levels of hostility remain subdued. Military operations in Albu Saif and Shamsiyat were ongoing, to counter the established IS presence in these zones. Security reporting was dominated by the withdrawal of Federal Police Units from Mosul, who were replaced by the IA 20th Division.

NORTH CENTRAL (Tamim/Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala & Sulaymaniya)
Hostile activity decreased this week, largely due to the garrisoning of Tuz Kharmato by Federal Forces and the resultant decline in violence. A spike in insurgent activity was noted across north-eastern Diyala, likely due to the displacement of militants into the Himrin mountain area following military operations along the Salah ad-Din / Diyala border. Militant SAF attacks also increased in Hawija district, almost certainly attributable to the residual IS presence in this zone.

WEST (Anbar Province)
A slight increase in hostile activity was observed, though most incidents remained low-level. Notably, the home of a Police Captain was destroyed by explosives north of Ramadi, killing three people and wounding four. Fallujah saw a rise in IED events. Most were located and dismantled before they detonated, however one killed a civilian.

SOUTH CENTRAL (Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Qadisiya & Najaf Provinces)
The security situation in the South Central remained largely stable, though hostile activity increased slightly in northern Babil. Notably, a PMU commander was shot dead in what was clearly a targeted attack. Tribal clashes also resulted in several casualties in northern Diwaniya. Elsewhere, established rivalries between two major blocs on the Diwaniya Provincial Council led to a renewal of political conflict.

SOUTH EAST (Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan & Basra Provinces)
Incident levels increased markedly, with Basra again dominating reporting. Tribal violence continued in the province, with four clashes reported. Five IED events were also recorded in Basra. Both issues garnered considerable media coverage and political commentary. Dhi Qar also experienced an uptick in tribal-affiliated violence. Meanwhile, opposition to the electricity privatisation programme endured across the region.
Baghdad

Incidents This Week 57  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 2: Reference Map & Incident Levels – Baghdad
Outlook

- **Hostile activity increased in Baghdad.** Most notably this week, a double SVIED attack occurred in Tayaran Square on 15 January in the Bab al-Shaqi district, which killed 27 people and wounded a further 80. IS claimed responsibility for this event and demonstrates their enduring intent and capability to strike within the city limits. Whilst overall violence in Baghdad City has continued to increase in recent weeks, this represents a return to average levels recorded throughout the year, rather than a deterioration in the security environment. HPAs are likely to remain sporadic, given the security posture and elevated ISF presence in the capital. Insurgent activity continued to be most prevalent in the ‘Baghdad Belt’ areas. In the north, an increase in hostile activity, which included the interception of a SVIED attack, was recorded around Taji and Tarmiyah. A spike in activity also occurred in the southern belt zone with reporting dominated by IED related events. Recorded incidents rose from four to nine, which included IED detonations in Mada'in, Mahmudiya and Hor Rajab.

- **Dialogue between Baghdad and the KRG resumed.** High level delegations from Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) met this week to discuss the control of international border crossings and oil outputs in Kurdistan, alongside the lifting of the ban on international flights operating out of Kurdish airports. Following talks in Erbil on 15 January, a spokesman for the Iraqi Prime Minister, Saad al-Hadithi, stated that airports and border crossings in the Kurdistan region would reopen under federal ‘supervision’. This position was confirmed after a meeting on 20 January between Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad. A statement issued by the Iraqi Prime Minister’s Office indicated international flights would resume after federal authorities were in place to oversee operations. However, Abadi maintained his position that all international borders must be solely under federal control as they fall “within the exclusive powers of the Federal Authority”. Abadi also stressed that any oil produced in the Kurdistan region must be exported through the State Organisation for Marketing of Oil (SOMO), under Federal jurisdiction. Furthermore, conspicuous by its apparent absence was any discussion surrounding the control of areas ceded to government forces in October, notably Kirkuk. Most recently, the Kurdistan Democratic Party announced on 15 January that it would boycott elections in Kirkuk and other disputed zones in Salah ad-Din and Diyala, under the guise of refusing to legitimise what they see as Iraqi occupation of Kurdish territory. Whilst the resumption of dialogue indicates some progress between the two parties, the more contentious issues remain unresolved. Indeed, Abadi’s statement indicates he will maintain his robust negotiating stance on key matters and is unlikely to make concessions, almost certainly due to the upcoming elections.

- **Political wrangling occurred over the date of elections.** Sunni elements of the Iraqi parliament sought to delay the upcoming elections until 1 December in order to, ostensibly, allow IDPs to return to their areas of origin and vote. Central to this effort was a decision by the House of Representatives on 19 January, to hold a secret ballot to decide whether the elections should go ahead as planned. However, this was immediately challenged by numerous political blocs. Most notably, National Alliance – lead by Ammar al-Hakim – engineered, successfully, a walkout by enough MPs to break quorum after Speaker Salim al-Jubouri refused a re-vote; forcing the ballot to be delayed until 20 January. This subsequent session of Parliament was again postponed due to a boycott by Kurdish and Shia parties, and prompted Parliament to defer to the Federal Court for an interpretation of the constitution regarding the date of elections. The Court’s ruling decreed that the elections were constitutionally mandated to go ahead in May on the basis of Article 56 of the Iraqi constitution – which states that the election must occur at least 45 days prior to four years since the previous election - and effectively killed off any further attempts to cause a delay. Indeed, this was a major contributing factor to Jubouri reversing his position and stating that the elections should go ahead on 12 May as planned. This was
followed on 22 January, outside the reporting period, by the resumption of Parliament and the subsequent majority vote of 171 in favour of polling on 12 May. It is assessed the pressure from Sunni politicians for postponement, is a consequence of the apparent disarray and low approval ratings Sunni Parties currently enjoy, as they try and rally themselves ahead of polling. However, attempts to dismiss these concerns by Shia MPs risks provoking Sunni anger; which would likely result in the attempted obstruction, or boycott, of the electoral process, alongside an attendant increase in protest activity.

**Forecast**

- **Short term:** Political tensions are likely to steadily increase as key players seek to develop advantageous political alliances. This will almost certainly result in a rise of low-level political violence, generally intimidatory and targeting affiliated party interests. Dialogue resumed between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government, though key issues remain unaddressed which will likely continue to impede overall progress. This is particularly the case with Haider al-Abadi retaining his robust negotiating stance, supporting a reduction to the KRG share of the Federal budget and insisting on Federal control over international border crossings. As elections approach, political rivals will exploit any unpopular compromises or signs of weakness from negotiating parties, to undermine opponents. There remains a significant chance of derailment, if compromise cannot be reached or if negotiations become overtly politicised.

The overall lull in hostile activity across the province is expected to endure whilst the ISF presence remains high, though sporadic high-profile attacks will continue to occur in Baghdad. These are not expected to be destabilising, however, in part due to the robust ISF and PMU footprint. Ongoing asymmetric attacks are anticipated in the Baghdad Belts, and on the city’s outskirts in areas like Radwaniya, Mahmudiya and Suwaib. These will involve indiscriminate IEDs targeting ISF convoys and populated areas, alongside the occasional employment of more-sophisticated attacks, such as VBIEDs and SVIEDs. North of Baghdad, violent incidents will remain clustered in Tarmiyah and Taji. In the capital, activity will be largely linked to low-level criminality, localised disputes and tribalism.

- **Medium term:** The danger posed by a limited insurgency in the Baghdad Belt area will continue. The return of IDPs to the Baghdad Belts is expected to exacerbate this threat, which has potential to develop in the medium term. The ISF/PMU presence will remain pervasive however, and will ensure that most insurgent violence remains localised. Sporadic VBIEDs and suicide attacks will continue in urban areas of central Baghdad. Indeed, the threat from IS militants to Baghdad is expected to slowly increase as the movement decentralises, though robust security measures in the capital will limit the extent of attacks. Political rivalries will build in the capital as election campaigning begins in earnest, with its typical low-level attendant violence.

- **Long term:** The general outlook for the province remains stable, based on the consistent patterns of activity over the past year. An increase in insurgent attacks levels is anticipated, but this will not preclude normal commercial operations. This is particularly pertinent as IS returns to a traditional covert insurgency, typified by a focus on asymmetric attacks. 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 as the 2018 elections draw near.
North

Incidents This Week  18       Weekly Trend  Up

Figure 3: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North
Outlook

- **Insecurity in Ninawa Province persisted.** Evidence suggests the insurgency in Ninawa is regenerating, despite military operations to quell the growing violence. For instance, in Tal Afar, a roadside IED injured two civilians. Four days later, PMUs stationed in the city announced they had repelled an attack by IS, during which three militants were killed. The assaulting force withdrew following the firefight. In Ayadiya, an IED exploded near an ISF patrol, killing one soldier. Further east, Federal Police Units reported a group of IS militants escaped after a gun battle in Harmat, Mosul. Members of the Sayyid al-Shuhada PMU also arrested two suspected insurgents trying to sneak into Mosul's Old Town. That all these attacks occurred in areas with an enduring, heavy ISF presence, suggests the insurgent population has re-established a level of operational capability. It is likely most were carried out by localised cells, launched from the sparsely populated desert areas in central Ninawa. This is demonstrated by the withdrawal of militants once they came under pressure, almost certainly into established safe havens. Thus far, the gradual growth witnessed of both insurgent capacity and reach along the Tigris River in southern Ninawa, appears to have been mirrored further west in Tal Afar. Insurgents have almost certainly capitalised on the ISF / PMU focus shifting to disputed Kurdish claimed territory further north, allowing for capacity gains in the south. Indeed, south of Mosul, a security campaign continued in the Albu Saif – Shamsiyat corridor, with coalition support. Into its third week, it is clear insurgents are heavily embedded in the area. An ISF attempt to extract the body of a farmer murdered by the group in Albu Saif, resulted in a SAF exchange with a militant cell. The attending force announced they had killed the commander of the IS unit during the skirmish, prompting the withdrawal of the fighters. The upward trajectory of militant activity is likely to continue, as the insurgency further decentralises and local networks consolidate. This will likely manifest in a gradual rise of low-level insurgent attacks, alongside an eventual increase in sporadic HPA’s across urban population centres in the province.

- **Federal Police Units withdrew from Mosul.** On 17 January, the Commander of Ninawa Operations, Major General Najim Jubouri, stated the IA 20th Division will take over responsibility for security in western Mosul from Federal Police Units (FPU). The FPUs have reportedly been deployed to Kirkuk to assist in stabilising the security environment. This coincided with Colonel Ahmed al-Jubouri indicating that FPUs had also begun to withdraw from Hammam al-Alil, as per orders issued from Iraqi security commanders. To discuss the shift in personnel, a security meeting was chaired by Ground Force Commander, Lt General Riad Jalal Tawfiq, at Ninawa Operations HQ in Mosul. Following this gathering, Brigadier General Wathiq al-Hamdani was relieved of his position as Ninawa Police Chief, and replaced by Major General Hamad al-Nams al-Jubouri. These troop movements and changes in leadership are likely in response to the security environment deteriorating. In particular, IS gains in areas just south of the provincial capital was almost certainly viewed as a failure of the exiting security apparatus. Indeed, FPUs are generally considered a less capable force than IA divisions, so this change in troop formation will likely contribute to a lull of hostility in the near future, as the new units seek to assert their authority. However, the militant population in Ninawa has shown resilience in retaining operational capability, albeit at a reduced level, in spite of an elevated ISF presence. The continuing growth of insurgent capacity and reach over the medium term is therefore still assessed to be accurate, regardless of this change in personnel.
Forecast

- **Short term:** There is likely to be a temporary lull in overall activity as newly-arrived IA units assert their control in Mosul, though insurgent activity will almost certainly persist south of the city. Ongoing clearance operations across the province will continue to result in numerous weapons seizures, body finds, IED finds and residual detonations. Insurgent attacks in the city will almost certainly occur, including occasional suicide attacks. Hostile activity is also expected to continue and gradually rise along the Tigris River south of the city, including in Hammam al-Alil and Qayyara. The south-eastern desert areas surrounding Hatra will likely remain a focal point for attacks against ISF, as well as being the staging ground for strikes launched in urban centres along the Tigris. Meanwhile, political and sectarian strain will build, particularly in Mosul, as part of a struggle over power. In Sinjar, the continuing presence of PMUs is likely to result in localised hostility rising, potentially escalating to violence. Tensions linked to reconstruction funding will also build, including among tribes and competing paramilitary factions stationed in liberated areas. Sporadic militant attacks on PMU forces will persist along the Iraq-Syria border. In northern Iraq, Turkish operations against the PKK are expected to continue. This will likely comprise of airstrikes and occasional cross-border raids.

- **Medium term:** Insurgent activity will continue to build across Ninawa, as militant networks regain operational capacity. The enduring presence of Iranian-backed PMUs in Tal Afar and disputed territory is likely to increase tensions with local Sunni actors, as well as with Turkey and the US. Both sectarian and political tensions are likely to rise as disputed territory transitions to Federal governance and displaced citizens begin to return. 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.

- **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. The enduring presence of Iranian-backed PMUs will also result in hostilities with local actors. 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 43  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 4: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North Central
Outlook

- **A deterioration in the security environment was observed in Diyala.** An increase in activity occurred along the Diyala River Valley, particularly in Abu Sayda and Muqdadiya, resulting from a mixture of localised disputes and insurgent activity. In Muqdadiya township, three shooting events against civilians were reported, assessed to be the result of personal or financial conflicts. However further south, gunmen opened fire and injured an ISF member in the Abarah district, whilst in Abu Saïda a police checkpoint came under sniper fire, wounding one officer. Eight IED finds were also noted, though all were dismantled without incident. To the north, two civilians were killed in roadside detonations on the outskirts of Mansuriyah and Sherwin. These incidents are almost certainly the result of militant activity. Similarly, a series of attacks were noted in the area surrounding Qara Tappa. Most notably, a group of IS militants stormed a mosque in the Qara Tappa area, killing one civilian and kidnapping another five. Two were released shortly after the incident and a third the following day, though the fate of the last two remains unconfirmed. A couple of days later, two PMU members were ambushed by IS militants in the Himrin Mountains, and subsequently killed following a shoot-out. Following this, military operations were launched near the Nayaran River in Khalawi and into the Himrin mountains in an attempt to stifle the violence. A security campaign was also launched in Tabaj, Jalawla, and surrounding Himrin villages, resulting in the destruction of IS safehouses, equipment and the death of six militants. However, during this period a large IED detonation was recorded in Tabaj, killing two policemen and injuring six others, alongside a shooting at a checkpoint which killed an ISF member in Jalawla city. This northeastern sector of Diyala is intersected by the Himrin mountain range, almost certainly the launching point for militant incursions into this zone. Following recent large-scale military clearance operations along the Salah al-Din – Diyala border, insurgents likely withdrew into safe-havens established in the Himrin mountains, resulting in this uptick of hostile activity. This largely ungoverned space offers militants a permissive operating environment from which to stage expeditionary attacks. Security operations have been launched to quell the hostility, which will probably lead to a temporary lull in activity whilst fighters regroup and then re-establish in the recently cleared border areas. Indeed, this has been a recurring feature of security campaigns across the province, which generally result in the short-term displacement of fighters only for levels of violence to rise elsewhere. Consolidating long-term gains has long proved a challenge for ISF in Diyala, due to their inability to project a substantial force into the difficult mountain terrain. In the absence of sustained simultaneous operations against insurgent hotspots, this trend is likely to endure.

- **The residual IS presence in Hawija continued to drive hostile activity.** A series of militant attacks were noted in Hawija district, highly likely attributable to the residual IS presence in the area. For instance, PMU members stationed in Riyadh were attacked, during which two PMU fighters died and five others were injured. Following this, clashes between ISF and IS were reported in Hawija City and Abbasid, resulting in the death of four militants. In Nakkar Village, IS members targeted the house of tribal Sheikh, Ammar al-Hamdani, injuring his son. Security forces responded, engaging the militants in armed conflict. Two days later in the same area, a PMU fighter was ambushed, then killed and his vehicle stolen by IS fighters. Lastly, a civilian was shot dead and his brother injured when an armed group, reported to be IS, stormed their residence in Mullah Abdullah. On 30 December, the Deputy Minister of Peshmerga, Sarbast Lazgin warned that IS were still operating in the area, despite it being declared liberated, and that there is potential for the group to retake territory. Indeed, militants retain substantial freedom of movement and operational capability in this zone, despite an ongoing, active ISF presence. However, there is no indication that insurgents are attempting to recapture ground at this stage. Attacks have been sporadic, spread across the district, and have employed traditional insurgent tactics, with militants withdrawing once armed conflict ensued. Ongoing ISF efforts to stifle the violence will continue, which will likely be hampered by proximity to the Makhoul mountains, providing militants with a
safe haven and resupply routes. In the short to medium term, Hawija is undoubtedly going to remain a focal point for future attacks, given the significant IS footprint in this area.

**Forecast**

- **Short term:** The situation in Tuz Khurmatu is expected to stabilise temporarily, though will likely regress as Federal forces withdraw. As such, further attacks on Kurdish and Turkmen civilians by armed groups, and mortar fire directed from surrounding mountains into the town are expected, alongside instances of intra-communal violence. Hawija district will almost certainly remain a focal point for insurgent violence in Tamim, with the potential to spill over into northern Salah ad-Din should militants begin to come under pressure from ISF. Elsewhere, sporadic high-profile attacks will continue across the North Central, particularly in urban population centres. Common targets for high-profile attacks will also include tribal leaders and ISF/PMU troops. As a result of ongoing ISF operations, a temporarily lull in insurgent activity is expected in northeastern Diyala. However, the insurgent presence will almost certainly re-establish once the security posture is relaxed.

- **Medium term:** Hostile activity will build in Diyala, Salah ad-Din and Tamim. There is a substantial risk that ISF/PMU forces 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. Significant urban centres across the region will remain key targets for insurgents. The continuation of political disputes between Kurdish, Shia Arab, and Turkmen groups will prove susceptible to outbreaks of 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 zones, as well as between local community stakeholders.
West

Incidents This Week 15 Weekly Trend Up

Figure 5: Reference Map & Incident Levels – West
Insurgent activity remained most prevalent along the Euphrates River. Fallujah saw a rise in incident levels, particularly involving the deployment of IEDs. Several devices were found inside the city limits, including a large IED placed on a primary roadway. One other exploded at a road junction outside a market area, killing a civilian. The Naimia area on Falluja’s southern outskirts also saw multiple IEDs located and removed by ISF. Other incidents of violence in the city were likely related to general criminality. One event involved a raid on the home of a group of men accused of threatening local businesses and civilians, by demanding payment or face being bombed or murdered. During the raid, the occupants threw grenades at ISF. Security forces responded with gunfire, wounding one of the suspects. A second was arrested. Residents have described similar violence elsewhere in Fallujah, and indeed in other urban areas of Anbar, with criminal groups, tribes and militias capitalising on a chaotic security environment to secure access to funding streams and localised authority. Low level IED activity was also recorded in Karma and Ramadi, while a device in the Tal Aswad area of Hit wounded four children grazing livestock in the area. While that explosive is believed to have been a residual device left behind prior to the withdrawal of IS from the area, Hit has also seen more recent insurgent activity. Last week, for instance, an IED placed at the entrance to a football field wounded seven individuals. ISF followed up with search operations this week, and implemented a temporary curfew. Two suspected militants accused of infiltrating the area alongside returning IDPs were also captured. Remaining activity was largely indicative of ongoing clearance operations, including IED and cache finds in the Qaim-Rawa corridor.

Hostile incidents persisted north of Ramadi. On 17 January, five IEDs were found during ISF patrols in Albu Dhiyab. They were in a zone previously cleared by EOD, and are likely newly-emplaced. Several days later, a large explosive device detonated nearby at a home belonging to a Police Captain, who worked in the Anbar Police Headquarters. The blast wounded the officer, and three other family members, and killed his mother, brother and daughter. This sparked a reactive security operation, and the implementation of a localised curfew. It is probable that the bombing forms part of a campaign of targeted violence observed north of Ramadi recently. This included a similar incident on 7 January, in which the home of a prominent tribal Sheikh was destroyed by explosives. Other tribal elders and figures linked to the security services have also been killed, or had their homes targeted. For instance, one police officer had a bomb placed under his vehicle, while another was abducted, tortured and killed. Pertinently, most were known for their active involvement in the campaign against IS. This included several responsible for recruiting men to fight against the insurgents. It is likely that they were selected for this reason, as local militant cells – whose members are often drawn from the same tribal networks – would certainly be aware of their activities. For instance, the latest bombing against the Police Captain was allegedly undertaken by a militant from his own tribe. Alongside men who fought against the insurgency, those caught up in the violence north of Ramadi have also included individuals suspected of being linked to IS. Unsubstantiated reports of disappearances and extrajudicial killings in the area have certainly increased following the release of lists by tribal leaders, which detailed members accused of collaborating with or joining IS. This suggests that the recent attacks may in part represent a cycle of retaliatory violence. Notably, a similar situation was seen in this region during the fight against al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), especially among the Albu Dhiyab, Albu Ali Jassim and Albu Risha tribes. The bombings are also likely part of a relatively low-risk strategy by which IS can intimidate local security actors, and thus disrupt the counter-insurgency campaign. Similar attacks are expected to continue along the northern bank of Euphrates, as although militants currently lack capacity for large-scale operations in the area, its topography – featuring networks of irrigation ditches, small hamlets and orchards – is favourable for guerrilla violence. Furthermore, its contiguity with the remote Tharthar region to the north – traditionally a Sunni insurgent support zone – will offer routes for supply and troop movement, that will be impossible to interrupt entirely.
**Forecast**

- **Short term**: Overall insurgent activity is expected to remain relatively low over the short term. Sporadic retaliatory attacks will emerge in the newly liberated areas of al-Qaim and Rawa, as well as in Ana and along the Houran Valley. Violence will slowly rise across the province, particularly after a drawdown of military personnel commences, and less experienced police units assume responsibility for security. An increase in complex expeditionary attacks along the Iraqi-Syrian border is expected, alongside areas further east as the security posture is relaxed. Instances of insurgent violence will continue to predominately target tribal volunteers and ISF, alongside occasional attacks against civilians. The frequency of HPAs will gradually build in urban centres as the insurgency decentralises, with Hit, Fallujah and Ramadi the primary targets. Low-level violence will persist along the northern bank of the Euphrates, particularly in Albu Dhiyab. ISF operations will take place in the province’s remote desert regions, but these are not expected to incur particularly strong resistance. Political conflict in the Anbar Provincial Council will heighten as focus turns to the reconstruction of former IS-held territory. This will result in a power struggle emerging amongst key influencers in the province, leading to elevated levels of violence involving competing tribal and militia factions.

- **Medium term**: It is anticipated that militant attacks will build as the insurgency further decentralises across the province, and reconstruction efforts lead to the widespread return of IDPs. Political conflict in the Provincial Council following the liberation is likely to rise as a power struggle ensues, increasing the probability of political and tribal violence over the medium term. There are likely to be attempts to strengthen provincial security capacity as the ISF security posture is relaxed, and local security forces take over responsibility. ISF will continue to try to secure the International Highway.

- **Long term**: In the longer-term, security forces will maintain control over all the population centres along the Euphrates River. IS remnants will remain present in desert areas near Tharthar Lake and in the province’s western desert zones. Militant activity will over time build into a relatively high-intensity insurgency across Anbar, through a network of decentralised cells. Although patterns of violence will be similar to those witnessed before the “caliphate” was established, they are not currently expected to be as pervasive. Nonetheless, Anbar will remain susceptible to militant attacks in the long term, especially given their heavy presence in the Euphrates River Valley of Eastern Syria.
South Central

Incidents This Week: 4  
Weekly Trend: Down

Figure 6: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South Central
Security Overview
Iraq Weekly Report

Outlook

- **Incident levels remained low.** Of note was an increase in hostile activity in northern Babil. The most serious event saw an Asa‘ib Ahl al-Haq commander shot dead by gunmen in Haswa. The perpetrators – who were armed with silenced weapons – ambushed and shot the PMU commander when he was returning to his home. Another militiaman was also wounded in the attack. PMUs turned out in force to search nearby areas, though this was unsuccessful. The next day another individual was shot and killed in the same area. Local security forces heightened their security posture, and several raids were reported to have been carried out. This was followed by unsubstantiated claims regarding the extra-judicial detention of Sunni residents, which were dismissed by authorities as attempts to provoke political conflict. A civilian was shot and wounded soon after in nearby Mahawil, but there is no evidence suggesting that the incidents were connected. Remaining activity was mostly related to localised disputes or low-level criminality, including a number of armed robberies. An outbreak of tribal clashes was also noted in the Suniya area of northern Diwaniya on 19 January, in which one person was killed and another injured.

- **Political conflict resurfaced in the Diwaniya Provincial Council (DPC).** For several months, the political opponents of Diwaniya Governor Sami al-Hasnawi have been attempting to erode his authority and support base. This campaign was energised by his public support for Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s reform programme. Lacking the political capital to oust the al-Hikma aligned Governor directly, an opposition alliance including Badr, State of Law and al-Isaah came together and began targeting his allies. Matters came to a head when this bloc gained enough strength to remove one of the Governor’s closest supporters, Diwaniya Director of Education, Aqeel al-Jubouri. Jabouri refused to step down, with the Governor subsequently stating that the Ministry of Education had the right to reject the DPC’s verdict. With some justification and no small measure of hypocrisy, al-Hasnawi’s rivals accused him of stalling the process for political ends. They seized on the opportunity to act against the Governor, initiating a vote to question him – a necessary first step towards his legal removal from office. In the background, al-Hasnawi – who is known as a skilled political operator – was undertaking an intense round of horse-trading and deal-making. Surprising his Badr and State of Law antagonists, the Governor manage to cobble together enough support to have his questioning session cancelled and the Education Director reinstated. He then went further, calling votes to have several of his attackers replaced. Clearly politically-motivated, these dismissals were justified on thinly-veiled grounds of economic mismanagement. Most notable was the late-December removal of DPC Chairman Jubail Salman al-Jabouri, who had been an active participant in the campaign against the Governor. The Chairman rejected this ruling as unconstitutional, with the resulting controversy prompting the Prime Minister to appoint and dispatch an oversight committee to investigate the situation. This committee eventually ruled in al-Hasnawi’s favour, and the DPC Chairman was dismissed. However, his adversaries persisted in their attempts to collapse the Governor’s fragile majority on the DPC, and were eventually able to draw enough lawmakers away from his ambit to make a renewed challenge. This week, State of Law and Badr led a successful vote to reinstate ousted DPC Chairman Jubail al-Jabouri, despite the emergency session being boycotted by the Governor’s al-Hikma bloc. They described the proceedings as unlawful, and vowed to resist al-Jabouri’s return. Protests followed, in which al-Hikma supporters were joined by Sadrists to condemn the development. Now that al-Hasnawi’s challengers have gained the upper hand, it is almost certain that they will renew their campaign to dislodge him. This would provoke considerable opposition, as al-Hasnawi retains the support of the pro-reform segment of the population – and has Sadrist backing. The Diwaniya Political Council will clearly remain in disarray for the foreseeable future, with intense political wrangling expected to continue in coming weeks.
Forecast

- **Short term**: Activity in the South Central region will remain low, typified by minor hostile activity driven by a mixture of personal and financial disputes, as well as general criminality. SAF events, kidnaps, 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 any such attack 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. Indeed, political conflict over the return of IDPs to northern Babil is expected to intensify in the run up to the elections, alongside a rise in localised sectarian tensions. Protest activity will persist, with electricity privatisation, the water crisis, employment and service provision being key drivers. Political conflict will continue to wrack the Diwaniya Provincial Council, and there is likely to be further efforts to oust key figures like Governor Sami al-Hasnawi. This would result in demonstrations by his supporters, and possibly in low-level political violence.

- **Medium term**: There is likely to be a small but perceptible increase in low-level insurgent attacks in northern Babil in the medium to long term, as IS attempts to re-establish and consolidate local networks. HPAs are expected to increase incrementally, including in urban centres like Karbala and Hilla. However, incidents linked to Sunni militancy will likely remain a minor proportion of activity in the region. The frequency of employment demonstrations is expected to build in the medium term, alongside those related to upcoming elections. Indeed, there is likely to be an increase in minor political violence during the campaigning period. Elevated unemployment will also drive a gradual increase in acquisitive crime.

- **Long term**: 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. Progress by the Baghdad Government on social and economic reform and anti-corruption measures, will have a significant impact on the levels of protest activity in the region.
South East

Incidents This Week  27  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 7: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South East
Tribal violence continued across the South East. In Basra, four outbreaks of armed conflict were recorded, alongside several other incidents of tribal violence. This served to reinforce public perceptions of a deterioration in security in the province, which has resulted in enhanced media coverage and a campaign of criticism directed towards officials. Both factors persisted into this reporting period, placing those responsible for upholding security in Basra under considerable pressure. The first notable exchange of fire this week took place in the Nahr al-Ezz area, involving the Shagamba and Gu’abna. They are engaged in a long-running dispute, which flared into serious conflict on multiple occasions in December, and has resisted several attempts at mediation. While the latest fighting did not reach the same level, clashes lasted for two to three hours, and subsided only after the 2nd QRF Battalion was deployed. The same day, an internal dispute among members of the al-Jabiri led to a gunfight in Dayr sub-district, to which ISF responded and arrested five individuals. Later in the week, tribal SAF was reported in Madaina between the Hajj Hamdi and Albu Issa. A responding police officer was shot by a tribesman, though this marked the only casualty. In the subsequent hours, an unrelated confrontation occurred in the Nusayr area of Qurna district. This related to an internal disagreement among members of the Beit Khanfar, a sub-group of the Halaf. In addition to these reactive deployments, ISF commanders ordered a series of raids into tribal ‘hotspots’ in North Basra. Ostensibly aimed at disarmament and the location of wanted men, they were clearly a response to criticism that security forces were not doing enough to counter the violence. For this reason, they were widely promulgated through official media channels. They did not always have the desired result, however, as evidenced by raid targeting the Beit Huwanim tribe in the Sakrija area. The operation sparked clashes in which one soldier was killed and two others wounded, with two tribesmen also shot dead. Instead of highlighting the robust ISF response, this heightened the censure on security figures. For instance, it helped support the statements of BPC Security Committee Chairman Jabbar al-Saadi, who has repeatedly called for additional troops to be dispatched to Basra, in part to displace blame for the security situation away from the BPC. Tribal violence was also heightened this week in Dhi Qar province, where clashes among members of the Sharifi tribe were reported in Suq al-Shayouk. A separate dispute saw RPGs and SAF directed at a civilian home in Rifai district. These events also resulted in a period of increased scrutiny against local politicians and security commanders, though not to the extent witnessed in Basra.

Multiple IED detonations occurred in Basra. Alongside tribal conflict, IED activity in Basra province has formed a key political and security narrative in recent weeks. However, while the level of tribal violence is certainly high, it is not particularly unusual. IEDs, on the other hand, have certainly spiked to a notable extent. Indeed, incidents recorded in the first three weeks of January have already exceeded totals recorded by BSOC in all but one month over the past two years. Four detonations were observed during this reporting period, all intimidatory in nature, with a larger device constructed using a mortar round also found and dismantled by ISF. The overwhelming majority of recent IED events have been low-level, and as is typical, have related to business or personal disputes. Most have been distinct, rather than forming part of coordinated campaigns – like those seen against cafés and alcohol sellers in 2016 and 2017. As such, there does not appear to be a single driving force behind the increase in explosive events. There has however been a number of incidents that likely fall in the bracket of political violence. For instance, last week’s IED targeting the Basra offices of prominent cleric Kamal al-Haidari was almost certainly related to tensions between supporters of rival camps. Furthermore, it is probable that a blast in the Hamdan area on 17 January also marked a case of political targeting. That event saw a device detonate outside the local offices of the al-Basha’er movement, a relatively new political party. It is linked to Nouri al-Maliki, and comes under the State
of Law alliance. Though not confirmed as such, it is expected that similar violence against partisan interests will build over coming months, as election campaigning gathers steam and political divides solidify.

**Forecast**

- **Short term:** The overall security outlook for the South East remains stable. Hostile activity will be largely driven by localised disputes and low-level criminality, consisting of SAF incidents, kidnaps, intimidatory IEDs and murders. Tribal fighting will remain most prevalent in areas north of Basra City, and to a lesser extent in northern and south-eastern Dhi Qar and southern Maysan. Elevated levels of reported tribal fighting are likely to result in a series of reactive security operations, alongside an attendant rise in political tensions. Local authorities in Basra will also come under pressure from continued IED events. Key drivers of protest activity in the region will continue to be electricity privatisation, electoral reform, unemployment, and demands for greater inward provincial investment, particularly in the provision of municipal services, such as electricity and sewage networks. Indeed, demonstrations relating to privatisation are expected to build in Basra and Dhi Qar, due to growing tribal support for civil action.

- **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. 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. The frequency of HPAs occurring in the region will likely rise as insurgents in northern Babil and western Anbar return to asymmetric tactics. This is not expected to reach a level that will impact commercial operations. Protests over service provision and employment in the region will also continue.
### Forecast of Events 2018

**Iraq Weekly Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 March 18</td>
<td>Nawrouz</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 May 18</td>
<td>Labour Day</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 May 18</td>
<td>al-Sha’baniyah</td>
<td>Religious Event, Karbala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 17 June 18</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 24 August 18</td>
<td>Eid al-Adha</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 September 18</td>
<td>New Hijiri Year</td>
<td>National Holiday, Shia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 September 18</td>
<td>Ashura</td>
<td>National Holiday, Shia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 October 18</td>
<td>al-Arba-iniyah</td>
<td>Religious Event, Karbala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 November 18</td>
<td>Birth of the Prophet Mohammad</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
</tr>
</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>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAH</td>
<td>Asa’ib Ahl Haq (League of the Righteous)</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Jaish al Mukhtar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
<td>JRTN</td>
<td>Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al- Naqshbandia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQA</td>
<td>Close Quarters Assassination</td>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Local National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFP</td>
<td>Explosively Formed Projectile</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Modus Operandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of Iraq</td>
<td>NSTR</td>
<td>Nothing significant to report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HG</td>
<td>Hand Grenade</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Private Security Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Iraqi Army</td>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Private Security Detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Indirect Fire</td>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Small Arms Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
<td>SVBIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vehicle Borne IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>Iraqi Security Forces</td>
<td>SVIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vest IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL / IS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ Islamic State</td>
<td>TTPs</td>
<td>Tactics, Techniques and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPS</td>
<td>Iraqi Police Service</td>
<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IZ</td>
<td>International Zone</td>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle Borne IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaish Al Mahdi (Mahdi Army)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Constellis is a leading provider of risk management, protective security, crisis management and enabling support services to governments, international organizations and major corporations across the globe. We specialize in serving the energy, construction, extractives, critical infrastructure, development and national security sectors—assisting our clients in understanding risk and in conducting their operations safely and securely, no matter their location. Constellis takes pride in our strict adherence to an exacting code of ethics and rigorous focus on standards and compliance—reinforcing the pioneering role we play in fostering stability, efficiency and sustainable economic development.

Representing client interests around the world, we maintain operations in more than 25 countries as well as a global network of strategic and local partners. Connected via our state-of-the-art operations command and control centres, we provide a rapid response capability spanning North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Constellis is headquartered just outside Washington, D.C. in the United States, and possesses regional offices in the UAE, UK, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Kenya. The core values underpinning our operating philosophy are the provision of international best practices while conducting all activities with respect for people, cultures and traditions; to uphold the principles of integrity, reliability and trust; to build capacity through knowledge transfer and to strengthen and empower local economies and communities.

Ultimately, our commitment is to prioritize local talent and local suppliers and to develop a profound understanding of the societal, legislative and operational situation ‘on the ground’. This affords us and our clients a unique freedom of movement and enables us to create safe and secure environments in a discrete and sustainable manner.

For more information about Constellis, please visit our website at:
Constellis’ intelligence analysts and security consultants produce bespoke political and security reports, threat assessments and security risk assessments to inform decisions and to protect people and assets across the Middle East & North Africa Region.

For more information on this report please contact:

James Borrelli
Programme Manager
James.borrelli@constellis.com

For all enquiries on Constellis’ advisory & consulting services please contact:

Mark Allison
Vice President
Crisis & Risk Services
Mark.allison@constellis.com

www.constellis.com