IRAQ
Weekly Insight Report
16 – 22 April 2018
National Overview

Incidents This Week **130**    Weekly Trend Down

- Hostile activity decreased this week, though the figure registered within established parameters.
- Incident levels remained relatively low in Baghdad. Media reporting was dominated by the Islamic State releasing statements indicating its intent to disrupt the upcoming elections.
- Evidence of an operationally capable insurgency in Mosul endured, which included the discovery of a VBIED within the city limits. Militant activity along the Iraq – Syria border in Ninawa persisted, as well as PKK strikes against Turkish forces in the Qandil mountains.
- Military operations were launched in Salah al-Din to counter the spike of militant activity recorded last week. Elevated levels of violence continued in Hawija and in Diyala province, with multiple SAF and IED attacks recorded.
- In Anbar, hostile activity subdued, largely due to the launch of a large-scale military campaign to clear the northern desert areas of the province surrounding Thar Thar Lake.
- Incident levels declined once again in the South East though remained largely driven by low-level criminality and localised disputes. Most notably, in Basra, political candidates running in the upcoming election were attacked with SAF.

**Figure 1: Regional Incident Levels**

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WEEKLY INCIDENTS BY PROVINCE: 16 Apr – 22 Apr 2018

- **North**
  - DAHUK*: 0 ▼
  - ERBIL*: 3 ▼
  - NINAWA: 17 ▼
  - SULAYMANIYA*: ▲ 0
  - TAMIM: ▲ 17
  - SALAH AL DIN: ▼ 15
  - DIYALA: ▼ 16

- **West**
  - ANBAR: 10 ▼

- **South Central**
  - BABEL: 2 ▲
  - KARBALA: 0 ▼
  - NAJAF: 1 ▲
  - QADISYA: 1 ▲
  - WASIT: 0 ▲

- **South East**
  - BAGHDAD: 32 ▲
  - MAYSAN: ▼ 1
  - DHI QAR: ▼ 2
  - MUTHANA: ▲ 0
  - BASRA: ▼ 13

*Indicates that the province comes under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government.
BAGHDAD (City & Province)

Hostile activity remained consistent in Baghdad, albeit low overall. This was due in part to security protocols introduced the previous week during religious commemorations still winding down. Despite this, an increase in targeted SAF attacks against civilians was recorded within the city limits. Media reporting was dominated by the Islamic State releasing statements indicating its intent to disrupt the upcoming elections.

NORTH (Ninawa, Dahuk & Erbil Provinces)

Incident levels declined this week, though still remained slightly elevated. Evidence suggesting that insurgents were preparing for attacks in Mosul emerged. Most notably, a VBIED was uncovered and dismantled in the city centre, alongside the discovery of bomb-making facilities nearby. The Iraq-Syria border region continued to feature in reporting this week. Meanwhile, the PKK continued its operations against Turkish troops in the Qandil Mountains of northern Erbil province, launching multiple attacks.

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

Whilst overall figures dropped this week, evidence of an operationally capable insurgent presence across all provinces persisted. ISF carried out a number of security operations in Salah al-Din, notably including an operation into the Makhoul mountains in response to the attack on PMUs and their funeral processions last week. The ‘Hawija pocket’ remained the main flash point of activity in Tamim. In Diyala, an elevated level of insurgent assaults endured, as multiple engagements were reported.

WEST (Anbar Province)

Incident levels subdued across the province, with a marked decline in insurgent attacks from last reporting period. This is largely the result of the launch of a large-scale military campaign to clear insurgent strongholds surrounding Thar Thar Lake in northern Anbar up to the border with Salah-al Din. However further south, a militant strike on an ISF compound in Akashat was observed, alongside the discovery of a VBIED in the area during clearance operations. A section of the International Highway connecting Fallujah and Ramadi also reopened this week.

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

Hostile activity in the region remained low, with key drivers of incident levels continuing to be localised disputes and low-level criminality. Notable incidents detected this week included a UVID find in Qadisiyah and the assault of a journalist in Babil. Security operations were also launched in the Jurf al-Sakkar area of northern Babil, during which a VBIED was discovered.

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

Tribalism, localised disputes and low-level criminality endured as key drivers of hostile incidents, which were typified by intimidatory SAF and explosive devices, alongside murders and body finds. Security leaders across the region focused on the upcoming election and the formulation of provincial security plans. Most notably this week, in Basra, two political candidates from the Sai’rrun political bloc were attacked with SAF in Sai’r, south of the city.
Baghdad

Incidents This Week 32  Weekly Trend  No Change

Figure 2: Reference Map & Incident Levels – Baghdad
Outlook

♦ **Overall activity levels remained low in Baghdad.** Despite this, incidents of SAF within the city increased this week. The majority of events were low-level attacks against civilians and property, though were assessed as most probably linked to low-level criminality and localised disputes. Indeed, activity was likely suppressed last week due to an increased ISF presence in the city for the Imam al-Khadim commemorations, effecting the recorded rise this reporting period. One incident of note occurred in the Sahafieen area of Baladiyat district on 18 April, when the Editor of the al-Nahar newspaper, Hassan Juma, was targeted by gunmen. Whilst Juma was not injured, the attack highly likely represents an attempt to intimidate the Editor into publishing less pejorative articles during the election campaign. Pertinently, al-Nahar is known for its coverage of political events. The prevalence of protest activity has also begun to increase across Baghdad since the election campaign season commenced on 14 April. Whilst protest narratives may not always appear politically motivated, civil activists and political parties are likely to attempt to build momentum through regular activity, whilst opportunistically taking advantage of popular issues to gather support. For instance, on 15 April, Muqtada al-Sadr rallied local supporters to protest the recent tripartite airstrikes conducted in Syria by France, the UK and the US; a narrative that supports Sadr’s affiliated Istiqmah party’s anti-US interventionist and Iraqi nationalist agenda. Outside of the City, incidents levels in the Baghdad Belts were notably below established levels. In particular, no hostile incidents were recorded in the southern Baghdad Belt, likely due to ISF operations to secure pilgrimage routes from the southern Shia provinces still in the process of winding down.

♦ **IS called for a ‘bitter war’ on Iraq’s elections.** This declaration was released as part of an infographic by IS affiliated media agencies and was disseminated across pro-IS messaging services on 20 April. Whilst not unexpected, the statement confirms that IS is specifically planning attempts to disrupt the smooth running of elections on 12 May. The short release by IS was followed on 22 April by a more comprehensive audio statement from IS spokesman, Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir that established all partakers in the upcoming elections as legitimate targets, “The polling centres and those inside it are a target of our swords … so stay away from them and do not walk near them”. Moreover, the audio statement suggested a shift towards violence primarily aimed at regional, rather than western powers. Therefore, suggesting the group is not only coming to terms with regressing to a regional insurgency, as opposed to engaging its opponents on all fronts, – something it has been preparing for since before the fall of Mosul in July 2017 – but that it is refocusing on its ‘near’ rather than ‘far’ opponents as part of its self-defined ‘long war’. Specifically referencing Iraq in this vein, Muhajir called for violence against all populations allied to the Iraqi government including “every pillar of the security, military, economy, media [of the Iraqi government] … every rotten and apostate tribal chief … every fighting village … [Sunnii] clerics, mosque imams … [Shia] clerics, teachers”. The statement was responded to by Brigadier General Yehia Rasool of the Joint Operations Command who highlighted that previous attempts to halt the elections by IS have been unsuccessful and that pre-emptive security operations to pacify the threat are currently being conducted. Indeed, beyond typical increases in violence expected during the elections, in previous years Salafi-Jihadist groups – e.g. Islamic State in Iraq and al-Qaeda in Iraq – have systematically sought to disrupt the occurrence of elections through attacks on polling stations, targeted campaigns of violence against candidates and supporters, and attempts to intimidate voters through violence in order to suppress voter turnout. Indeed, it is assessed as highly likely, that insurgent violence will increase in the coming weeks.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Political tensions in Baghdad will steadily increase as election campaigning gathers pace, with key players seeking to develop advantageous political alliances and erode the support base of their rivals. This will almost certainly result in a rise of low-level political violence, which will generally be intimidatory and target candidates or affiliated party interests. Politicians like Muqtada al-Sadr may also seize the opportunity to call for demonstrations on populist or nationalist issues, in order to bolster their credentials and standing ahead of voting. However, overall levels of activity are expected to remain relatively low. Further single-issue protests are expected, as residents attempt to leverage concessions from the government over the provision of services. This will likely include efforts by protesters to enforce road closures, which will result in localised disruption. High-profile attacks will continue to occur in Baghdad, though they will be sporadic. These are not expected to be destabilising, in part due to the robust ISF and PMU footprint. This risk will be heightened however in the period immediately prior to the Federal elections. 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, the insurgent threat emanating from Tarmiyah will remain extant. In the capital, activity will continue to 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 and nearby regions 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. It is likely that intra-Shia, sectarian and political divisions will increase in the post-election period, especially during the horse-trading period of government formation.

- **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.
North

Incidents This Week 20  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 3: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North
Outlook

- **Mosul continued to show signs of instability.** Following on from increased violence against PMUs and ISF in Mosul last week, indicators of an insurgent presence in Mosul continued to be evident. Most notably a VBIED was found parked near the western entrance to the 4th Bridge. Whilst the device was successful cleared by an EOD team, VBIED finds in Mosul are rare following the cities liberation from IS in 2017. Indeed, the last such occurrence within the city limits occurred on 28 January. ISF also reportedly arrested a man who they found travelling in a car with a large quantity of concealed explosives, as well as several large cache finds across the city which resulted in well over 100 IEDs and other explosive material being recovered. Furthermore, IED factories were discovered in the east of the city and in the Shura area to the south of the city. Whilst the latter occurred on 23 April, outside of the reporting period, reporting indicates that the facility was relatively sophisticated with iron smelters and fixed-form moulds, suggesting that the facility was capable of both mass-producing IEDs and producing VBIEDs. The detection of large caches of ready-made IEDs and bomb-making facilities are often a key indicator of the operational capability of an insurgency. The low-frequency of VBIEDs in Mosul in recent months demonstrates that IS’s territorial constriction over the past year has diminished its ability to produce high-yield devices unimpeded by ISF. However, with the elections approaching, the stockpiling of devices within the city limits and the uncovering of high-capacity production facilities nearby is assessed as a strong indicator of the increased likelihood of IS planning to conduct a series of attacks during this period.

- **Border regions in Ninawa remained a focal point for activity.** PMU forces stationed along the Syrian border continued to report engagements with insurgents this week. As per established trends, these events were clustered around the Tall Safouk area, where PMUs reportedly killed a number of insurgents. To the east of Tall Safouk, an IS member wearing a SVIED targeted PMU members at an outpost near Ba’aj, killing four soldiers and wounding six others. A PMU commander was among the dead and the attacker had reportedly been dressed in a militia uniform. This strike follows on from an incident last week when an insurgent wearing a suicide vest was intercepted and killed on his approach to a CP in Ba’aj. Further north, in Rabia, the IA reported an intense engagement with insurgents that lasted several hours. The IA unit were stationed on the Syrian border and it is assessed likely that the assault was conducted by militants operating in Syria. Indeed, the Syrian province of Hasakah that borders northern Ninawa still has pockets of IS insurgents and is regularly hit with airstrikes by coalition fighters. Despite this however, insurgent activity along the northern stretches of the border are less common.

- **PKK claimed attacks against Turkish troops in northern Iraqi Kurdistan.** For the second week running, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) launched a series of operations against the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). Three attacks against Turkish forces in the Lilican area of northern Erbil Province were reported on 16 April with the PKK claiming to have killed or wounded 16 TAF troops during the operations. In response to the attacks, Turkey intensified airstrikes in the Sidkan sub-district, where the PKK are well entrenched. However, the Mayor of Sidkan claimed that the airstrikes hit civilian areas and forced two villages to be evacuated. Sabre rattling from Turkey continues to be evident within the Turkish press, with the pro-government Daily Sabah news agency reporting this week that Turkey is ‘mulling’ a large-scale offensive against PKK strongholds in the Qandil mountains, possibly with support from Iranian and Iraqi intelligence. However, despite the rhetoric, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has previously stated that any escalation of force in Iraq would not be conducted until after the elections on 12 May. This has allowed Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to object to Turkish intervention on Iraqi soil, whilst also preventing the issue from becoming a sticking point during the elections which he would likely struggle to manage favourably considering his hopes of broad based, cross-sectarian support.
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Forecast

- **Short term:** Militant attacks will gradually rise to the south of Mosul, including in Hammam al-Alil and Qayyara, alongside retaliatory violence against those with perceived links to the Sunni insurgency. The desert areas surrounding Hatra will remain a focal point for attacks, alongside other remote regions in Ninawa. Incident levels are also expected to slowly build in Mosul after security responsibilities were transferred to local police units. These will however remain underreported. 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, occasionally escalating to violence. Tensions linked to reconstruction funding will also increase, including among tribes and competing paramilitary factions stationed in liberated areas. Sporadic attacks on PMU forces will persist along the Iraq-Syria border. In northern Iraq, Turkish operations against the PKK will continue. This will be largely comprised of airstrikes and increased cross-border ground activity in the Kurdistan region, including in Erbil province. PKK forces will also undertake sporadic attacks against Turkish troops. Widened Turkish actions will provoke considerable backlash from Iraqi politicians, possibly resulting in a period of increased tension between the countries.

- **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 and minority 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. Turkish operations against the PKK will continue, and possibly expand.

- **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 48  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 4: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North Central
ISF conducted multiple security operations in Salah al-Din. This was likely prompted by an increase of violence against ISF last week. The majority of operations in the Tikrit and Samarra districts appear to have focussed on uncovering and destroying caches, safehouses and storehouses in rural areas that provide local insurgents safe havens, from which to launch attacks. Conversely, a security operation took place over multiple days in the east of Shirqt district, entitled ‘Revenge of the Martyrs’, in response to a large-scale bombing in the Sudayrah area the previous week. The attacks first killed multiple PMU soldiers before subsequently hitting the funeral processions with a series of IEDs. The operation was conducted jointly by Federal Police and the 51st PMU Brigade, but was also supported by lights helicopters from Army Aviation. The force spread down through the Makhoul mountain ranges and reportedly cleared four caches, destroyed six tunnel networks, and killed 11 IS insurgents. One PMU soldier was also killed, possibly after a PMU vehicle was hit by an IED on a mountain path. The relative freedom of movement afforded to insurgents in rural territory have consistently acted as staging areas from which hit and run attacks can be conducted against static targets, such as FOBs and CPs, and urban areas. Despite ISF being aware of this, the asymmetric nature of the insurgency precludes the likelihood of uncovering large caches, heavy weaponry or large groups of fighters, and instead will likely more frequently result in smaller scale finds and clashes. Moreover, the topography of the Makhoul mountain range reduces the ability of air assets to effectively survey the area whilst also making it extremely challenging for ISF to impose a consistent security presence, therefore increasing the threat of emplaced IEDs striking ISF during operations, as seen this week. Instead, as per established trends, sporadic security operations that spread into the mountain ranges, before receding into areas where ISF exert relative control are likely to continue.

Elsewhere, a police station in Ishaqi was attacked by insurgents on 16 April that resulted in the deaths of two officers and wounded a further six.

‘Hawija pocket’ remains insecure. Asymmetric attacks against ISF and civilians continued at a consistent pace in the southeast of Tamim province this week, as IS continues to benefit from the geographic and social terrain of the area, as highlighted above in Salah ad-Din. Incidents of note include three suicide bombers attacking PMU and FP units in Zab, multiple high octane SAF engagements in Riyadh and a large group of insurgents attacking PMU lines in the west of Hawija district. The continued violence in the area, following the widescale security operation carried out last month, underscores both the difficult challenges posed during ISF counter insurgency campaigns, and the resilience of IS in riding out concerted operations designed to break the back of the insurgency. Moreover, the continual failure to effectively pacify the insurgency allows operatives in Tamim to benefit from the land corridor stretching between Hawija and northern Anbar that ISF exerts limited control over. IS has proved adept at using this corridor to regroup, run sleeper cells, rebuild finances and store weapons caches in neighbouring provinces before moving resources across the North Central to stage attacks. Furthermore, IS literature in the past has explained the role of attrition warfare as part of a geographically widespread insurgency that spreads federal forces thinly across large areas and allows its fighters to concentrate on attacks against softer targets, whilst supplementing these engagements with targeted attacks against ISF / PMU; tactics regularly observed across the region.

ISF clashed with insurgents in Diyala. ISF continued in their attempts to contain the budding insurgency in Diyala, though elevated levels of detected insurgent strikes endured. Indeed, SAF exchanges between ISF and insurgents were observed in Khanaqin, Buhriz, and Imam Wais. In the agricultural orchards north of Muqdadiya, ISF also suffered casualties when a patrol was hit by an IED. IAF responded by conducting air strikes in the area, which, according to the Diyala Security Council, killed two insurgents including a senior aide to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. An ISF convoy was also hit by an IED on patrol in the Buhriz district.
Forecast

**Short term:** Tamim province will continue to drive hostile incident levels in the North Central region, despite the elevated ISF presence. Federal Police forces and PMUs will struggle to stifle the growing insurgency in the short term. Established networks of IS tunnels and safehouses constructed during their occupation of Hawija will facilitate attacks, and the existence of safe-havens in nearby mountains will also hamper the counter-insurgency operation. As such, Hawija district will remain a focal point for insurgent violence. The potential for the insurgency to spill over into Salah ad-Din and Diyala is increasing, as ISF prove unable to contain the flow of fighters moving in and out of Tamim. The growing insurgency in Tarmiyah, in the northern Baghdad Belts, will continue to threaten security in central and southern Salah ad-Din, primarily Samarra, Dujail and Balad districts, prompting security operations in the Balad – Tarmiyah corridor. Though temporarily stable, the situation in Tuz Khurmato will likely regress, as the area acts as a transport hub for insurgents moving north between Diyala and Tamim. Kirkuk City will witness continued violence, particularly against ISF-PMU elements, with these incidents expected to slowly build. Indications of ethnic tensions in Kirkuk City are also increasing, and could cause flare ups of violence in advance of the elections. Elsewhere, sporadic high-profile attacks will continue across the North Central, particularly in urban population centres. The security situation will remain turbulent along the Diyala River Valley and in the province’s northern zones, with militant attacks persisting against both civilian and military targets. Militant violence will also continue in central and northern Salah ad-Din, mostly striking PMUs and Shia civilians.

**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 in Tamim and across Diyala – particularly in rural or semi-rural areas in its north-east, 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 10  Weekly Trend Down

![Reference Map & Incident Levels – West](image-url)
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Outlook

- **Militant activity subdued across Anbar.** This is largely the result of military operations occurring across the northern areas of Anbar. On 16 April, the Commander of Operations in eastern Anbar, Major General Saad Harith launched an operation on seven axes from Bushehab, Albu Ubaid, Jarayshi, Albu Assaf, Tal Aswad, Suwaib and Karma with the aim of clearing the desert areas south and west of Thar Thar Lake. The following day the 7th and 8th IA divisions, supported by PMUs, conducted operations in Sakhrat, the desert areas north of Rawa and surrounding the banks of Thar Thar Lake, heading towards Salah al-Din. This ungoverned area has historically been an insurgent stronghold and remains an area in which operatives enjoy relatively freedom of movement to regroup and organise. It is likely this zone was the staging ground for at least one of the most recent SVIED attacks in Haditha and Hit, provoking the start of these operations. Thus far, a number of IS safehouses and tunnels have been destroyed, alongside large cache finds comprising of IEDs, explosive material and ammunition. However, there has been few reports of clashes between militants and the attending force. This strongly suggests insurgents have most probably withdrawn into established safe havens further north of the areas of operation, into western and southern Salah al-Din and southern Ninawa, or across the border into IS-held territory in Syria. Whilst the onset of the campaign has almost certainly dampened militant activity, it is unlikely this trend will endure. Instead, it is assessed once the security posture is reduced and forces begin to withdraw, that the militant population will return and re-establish operational capability in this zone. Elsewhere in urban population centres along the Euphrates, Article 4 (Terrorism) arrests, IED and cache finds dominated reported, evidence of the ongoing elevated ISF presence, contributing to the overall decline in militant activity. Incidents of note this week include an IED detonation in the Nassaf area, west of Fallujah, which wounded two civilians, and a rocket attack on a PMU vehicle, killing two on a highway north of Rawa. Both are highly likely attributable to localised insurgent cells operating in these areas.

- **A VBIED was found in Akashat.** During a military operation in Southeast Akashat, a VBIED was found and destroyed. An IS attack on an ISF compound was also repelled by the Ali al-Akbar Brigade PMU in Akashat, during which three militants were reportedly killed, though no ISF casualties were noted. Insurgents embedded in the desert areas across central Anbar and along the Houran Valley are likely responsible for both the attack and the construction of the VBIED. Insurgents enjoy substantial freedom of movement in this zone, aided by the difficult and sparsely populated terrain, which has hampered ISF clearance operations. The discovery of this VBIED suggests an enhanced level of operational capability, a clear indication that the insurgency is continuing to regenerate. Previous weeks have witnessed attacks in the territory punctuated by the International Highway into Rutbah and south to the Trebil Border Crossing, despite ISF / PMU garrisoning this zone. This pervasive military presence is likely to continue, providing attractive targets for High Profile Attacks on ISF / PMUs operating in the area by insurgents using ungoverned spaces nearby as staging grounds, alongside expeditionary attacks into urban population centres along the Euphrates.

- **A portion of the International Highway (IH) reopened.** On 21 April, Anbar Provincial Council member, Hamid al-Dulaimi announced the reopening of the IH section between Fallujah and Ramadi. This follows a closure of more than three years since IS took control of Fallujah City. Dulaimi indicated this reopening eventuated from an improvement in the security environment. Whilst levels of violence have reduced markedly since Anbar province was retaken by ISF, this stretch of road will prove a lucrative target for localised militant cells operating in the area. South of this major transport route is Habbaniyah Lake, an established zone of operations for militants that are embedded in the southeastern desert areas bordering Karbala and Babil. This stretch of territory has proved an effective launching pad for expeditionary attacks into northern Babil, and as such will likely be used to facilitate attacks on the IH.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Overall insurgent activity is expected to remain relatively low over the short term. Violence will however slowly rise across the province when the drawdown of military personnel commences, and less experienced police units assume greater responsibility for security. An increase in expeditionary attacks along the Iraqi-Syrian border is also expected, though this risk will be mitigated to an extent by the high PMU presence along the frontier. Instances of insurgent violence will continue to predominately target PMU and ISF units. 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 and in the towns located throughout the province’s remote desert regions. The International Highway will remain a target for militant attacks, as ISF struggle to secure this strategically important route. Tensions between local powerbrokers are likely to build over control of the Highway, increasing the likelihood of affiliated violence. Political conflict in the Anbar Provincial Council will heighten as focus turns to the reconstruction of former IS-held territory and campaign season for the upcoming elections gathers pace. 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 over time, as the insurgency further decentralises across the province and reconstruction efforts lead to the widespread return of IDPs. The return of IDPs is also likely to lead to an increase in retaliatory violence, particularly against those deemed linked to IS, even through familial connections. 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 and build fixed installations at strategic locations throughout the province.

- **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 to the north and Rutba to the south. Militant activity will build into a relatively high-intensity insurgency across Anbar, through a network of decentralised cells. Anbar will remain susceptible to militant attacks in the long term, especially if IS maintains a heavy presence in the Euphrates River Valley of Eastern Syria.
South Central

Incidents This Week 4  Weekly Trend Up

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

- **Incident levels remained low across the region.** Hostile activity remained driven by low-level criminality and localised personal or business disputes. Most notably this week, a grenade was found and dismantled in the Kufa area of Najaf, as well as a UVIED find in the Umm al-Khail neighbourhood of Diwaniyah. UVIED’s are generally used during assassination attempts, and have been employed by both insurgents during operations and civilians to deal with personal, tribal and political conflict. In the absence of an identified target it is assessed most likely this links to political machinations or the escalation of a localised dispute, as the militant footprint is low in Qadisiyah. Further north in Babil, an NRT Arabic correspondent, Issa al-Atwani was assaulted by unknown individuals, who beat him until he was unconscious. Open source reporting suggests the journalist was working on stories aimed at exposing political and administrative corruption. This incident follows similar circumstances in Najaf last reporting period, when supporters of MP Suad Jabber al-Waeli attacked an al-Hurra cameraman, whom they thought had been filming them. It is highly likely Atwani was assaulted for the subject matter of his political investigations, especially given the proximity of national elections on 12 May. It is assessed most probable this was intended to be intimidatory in nature, in line with expectations of increased violence against media outlets during campaign season. Indeed, any perceived attempts by media organisations to smear or criticise political candidates will increase the likelihood of low-level targeted violence.

- **Military operations occurred in northern Babil.** On 18 April, Babil Police units conducted military operations in the Jurf al-Sakkar area of northern Babil, as part of a pre-election security plan. A large cache of IEDs, ammunition and explosive material were found, alongside the reported destruction of nine IS safehouses. One VBIED was also found and destroyed without incident. The following day four grenades were found and dismantled on the major highway into Alexandria. Though militant activity has been subdued since PMUs garrisoned the area in 2014, these discoveries are indicative of a residual, albeit operationally limited insurgent presence. The detection of a VBIED is particularly notable, as it is likely this was moved into the province from militants operating in the desert area along the Babil /Anbari border in Anbar. The principal threat to this northern zone is currently assessed to emanate from expeditionary attacks launched out of Anbar, though it is possible northern Babil could be used as a transit zone to more lucrative targets in Baghdad, and to a lesser extent the southern provinces over the election period. Evidencing this, following the 2014 fortification of this area, High Profile Attacks in the southern provinces significantly reduced in frequency. However, this threat is heavily mitigated by the large ISF / PMU presence in the province and the implementation of an enhanced security posture for the election, and as such is currently assessed as low.
**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, 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 any such attack will fuel localised political instability, as security officials and politicians seek to displace blame. This will also result in further disagreement over the return of Sunni IDPs. Indeed, political conflict over the return of IDPs, particularly to northern Babil, is expected to intensify in the run up to the elections, and provoke a rise in localised sectarian tensions. There is also likely to be an increase in minor political violence during the campaigning period. Meanwhile, protest activity will persist, with electricity privatisation, the water crisis, employment and service provision being key drivers.

- **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.

- **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 16  Weekly Trend Down

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

- **Hostile activity once again declined across the region.** Reported incidents were largely driven by low-level criminality and localised disputes, typified by intimidatory explosive devices and SAF. Tribal fighting also continued to feature, though subdued this reporting period. In Basra, tribal affiliated SAF was detected in Qarmat Ali, Dayr and Ghumayij. Most notably, the latter resulted in the death of one tribesman and two others wounded, which stemmed from an internal dispute amongst members of the Ma’a’arda. There have been no reports of mediation, and, due to the death, tensions are expected to remain elevated in the area, increasing the likelihood of further related violence. Across the border in Dhi Qar, tribal tensions prompted 11 IP patrols to deploy into Fadhiliya to prevent an outbreak of armed conflict. Open source reporting suggests a historical tribal dispute involving a murder reignited, which caused an escalation of friction in this zone. Elsewhere in Basra, a grenade and IED detonated in Dour al-Shurta and Faw respectively. No casualties were reported, and in line with established trends both were assessed as intimidatory devices. The remainder of detected regional activity consisted of body finds and one kidnap. All involved local nationals and highly likely related to low-level criminal activity.

- **Political affiliated violence emerged in Basra.** South of Basra city in Sai’i on 19 April, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a vehicle. Political candidates Iltifat Tawfiq al - Rubaie from Basra, Jawad Hamdan al – Saadi from Baghdad, and their entourages were reported as the occupants of the targeted vehicle. Both are candidates running in the upcoming national elections under the Sa’irun political bloc, headed by Muqtada al-Sadr. The politicians were not injured during the gunfire, though three of Rubaie’s brothers were wounded. It is assessed almost certain this represents a targeted strike linked to political machinations, most probably intended to intimidate the candidates into withdrawing. However, it is also possible that this was an assassination attempt. Overall, political affiliated violence is expected to increase during campaign season in the run-up to polling on 12 May. As seen in the past, the majority of this activity will consist of intimidatory explosive devices and SAF, targeting party affiliated infrastructure and candidates. However, as demonstrated above this is likely to be interspersed with sporadic more violent incidents.

- **Focus turned to securing the elections.** The Commander of Basra Operations Command, Lieutenant General Jamil al-Shammari (CG) held a security meeting with Basra Governor, Assad al-Idani to discuss securing the province during the upcoming election. The CG indicated he would be meeting with relevant parties over the coming weeks to formulate a security plan for polling. He also announced that 9th Armoured Division troops would be redeploying into Basra City, Shatt al-Arab and Zubayr. In Dhi Qar, a series of security exercises were held at voting stations in population centres across the province, which were designed to test the readiness of forces to undertake their duties. Indeed, the implementation of provincial security plans will almost certainly commence over the coming weeks. Despite this, intimidatory violence of a political nature is expected to increase across the region. Security leaders will highly likely come under pressure and be subject to enhanced political scrutiny and criticism if hostile activity spikes, especially if political candidates are increasingly targeted. In Basra, friction between the new Police Chief, Major General Jassim al-Sa’adi and the CG is likely to be exacerbated by a perceived decline in the security environment. Particularly, as Sa’adi seeks to assert his control and authority over the province’s security portfolio. Tension is already evident as Sa’adi appeared to indicate he would be enforcing security plans in Zubayr and northern Basra outside of the CG’s command, though this was later clarified as a post-election strategy to combat drug related crime. The CG has yet to comment on Sa’adi’s arrival, but should it be politically expedient to do so, it is likely censure will focus on the new Police Chief if any breaches of security occur over this sensitive election period.
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. The ongoing ISF security operations in Basra will continue to target criminal elements and service arrest warrants issued in Baghdad. The operation will remain focused on parts of the city and on northern Basra, including areas such as Qurna, Madaina, Dayr, Qarmat Ali, Qibla and Sharish. Tribal fighting is expected to return to previously established levels as the security campaign winds down. An uptick in politically-motivated violence can also be expected in the run up to the election. Ongoing explosive activity and tribal fighting is likely to prompt reactive security operations, as well as elicit political commentary. The implementation of provincial security plans for the election will likely affect an initial reduction in overall hostile activity. However, tensions are expected as provincial security leaders attempt to displace blame for any perceived decline in the security environment over this period.

Key drivers of civil action 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. Regional water scarcity has the potential to provoke widespread protest activity, should measures to alleviate the affects not be implemented. An attendant rise in provincial political tension is likely to be observed, as local actors seek to displace responsibility for inability to rectify the problem.

**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 provincial elections, currently scheduled for December 2018. 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 May 18</td>
<td>Labour Day</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>02 May 18</td>
<td>al-Sha’baniyah</td>
<td>Religious Event, Karbala</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 – 17 June 18</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 – 24 August 18</td>
<td>Eid al-Adha</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 September 18</td>
<td>New Hijri Year</td>
<td>National Holiday, Shia</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 September 18</td>
<td>Ashura</td>
<td>National Holiday, Shia</td>
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<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>
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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>
<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>
<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>ISIL / IS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ Islamic</td>
<td>SVIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vest IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPS</td>
<td>Iraqi Police Service</td>
<td>TTPs</td>
<td>Tactics, Techniques and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IZ</td>
<td>International Zone</td>
<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaish Al Mahdi (Mahdi Army)</td>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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