OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

APRIL 1, 2023–JUNE 30, 2023

We are pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This report discharges our quarterly reporting responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

The United States launched OIR in 2014 to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), while setting the conditions for follow-on activities to increase regional stability. The U.S. Government strategy to defeat ISIS includes military operations, as well as support for local security forces, diplomacy, governance, humanitarian assistance, and stabilization programs.

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OIR as well as the work of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to further the U.S. Government's policy goals in Iraq and Syria during the period of April 1 through June 30, 2023. This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies—the DoD, State, and USAID OIGs—and our partner oversight agencies.

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Iraqi Army soldiers help move artillery projectiles during an exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

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A U.S. Army Soldier provides overwatch during an exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) mission is to advise, assist, and enable partner forces until they can independently maintain the enduring defeat ISIS in Iraq and designated areas of Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks.[1] The broader counter-ISIS campaign includes supporting the Iraqi government and local Syrian partners with civilian-led stabilization activities.[2]

ISIS capabilities remained degraded in Iraq and Syria.[3] The group conducted fewer attacks, which were mostly small and opportunistic, and suffered from ongoing leadership losses at the hands of the Coalition.[4] ISIS attacks during Ramadan—historically a period when attacks spike—decreased compared to previous years.[5] However, the group continued to pose a threat and its violent ideology remained unconstrained.[6] ISIS likely remained intent on breaking its fighters out of Syrian Defense Forces (SDF)-managed detention facilities to add to its ranks, although no breakouts occurred.[7] It also attempted to indoctrinate and recruit residents of displaced persons camps, particularly the al-Hol camp, where ISIS-related violence and activities continued, but at a diminished rate.[8]

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) made no notable gains in counter-ISIS capability.[9] There was no movement on the creation of ISF-KSF joint brigades, though the two forces coordinated more closely on counter-ISIS operations than before.[10] CJTF-OIR and NATO Mission-Iraq expanded their coordination to improve critical ISF capabilities where improvements can be made: command and control; sustainment; and joint operations and operational planning.[11]

Syrian partner forces, with Coalition support, continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations and train guard forces.[12] Coalition forces continued to train SDF and Internal Security Forces to provide security at detention facilities—where the SDF is holding an estimated 10,000 ISIS fighters—and al-Hol and other displaced persons camps.[13] While ISIS activities in al-Hol declined, the security force at al-Hol faced challenges in disrupting ongoing ISIS activity due to the small size of the force and the susceptibility of some forces to ISIS bribes.[14]

Lead IG Oversight Activities

Lead IG and partner agencies completed two management advisories and two reports related to OIR during the quarter, including on: DoD management of shipping containers and preposition stock equipment, including at facilities that support OIR; and on State's management of programs at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. As of June 30, 2023, 13 projects related to OIR were ongoing and 1 project was planned.

Lead IG investigations resulted in one guilty plea related to a bribery investigation at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, which provides logistic support to the OIR mission. Investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 4 investigations and coordinated on 68 open investigations. The investigations involve a variety of alleged crimes, including procurement fraud, corruption, grant fraud, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the investigator referred 75 cases to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.

Third party forces operating in Iraq and Syria—particularly Iran, Türkiye, Russia, and the Syrian regime—complicated the progress of the OIR mission. Their activities increased Coalition force protection needs, distracted partner forces, and escalated the risk of further conflict. Türkiye conducted ongoing unmanned aerial system (UAS) strikes targeting SDF leaders, claiming they were affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).[15] Türkiye does not differentiate between the PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization, and the SDF, a CJTF-OIR partner force.[16] Russia continued to violate deconfliction protocols it has agreed to with the U.S. military, mostly by conducting flights over U.S. forces in Syria.[17] Iran-aligned militias conducted limited, ineffective attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces in Syria during the quarter.[18] However, the militias increased rhetorical threats against the U.S. presence in Iraq, signaling a possible resumption of attacks in Iraq which have been paused since May 2022.[19]

There was limited progress toward U.S. goals to improve security, governance, promote economic growth, and address humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria. On June 12, the Iraqi parliament approved a 3-year, $153 billion annual budget.[20] The delayed passage of the budget contributed to delays in planning the provincial elections, which are now scheduled for December 18.[21] In Syria, there was no progress toward a political solution to the conflict under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.[22] State remained concerned about reported human rights abuses committed by Türkiye-supported Opposition (TSO) groups.[23] Ongoing conflict, weak economies, lack of public services, and natural disasters continued to create conditions for violent extremism to flourish.[24] On June 8, members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS pledged $311 million toward stabilization needs in liberated areas of Iraq and Syria for 2023, with the goal of reaching $601.6 million by June 2024.[25]

Iraqi and U.S. Army Soldiers participate in an artillery training exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

MISSION UPDATE

MISSION UPDATE

This section, "Mission Update," describes U.S. and Coalition activities during the quarter and progress toward meeting the OIR campaign objectives. The following section, "Broader U.S. Policy Goals," describes U.S. diplomatic, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance activities that seek to set the conditions necessary for ultimate success of the OIR mission.

A Coalition Forces F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft takes part in an aerial operation exercise in northeastern Syria. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

INTRODUCTION

The Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) mission is to advise, assist, and enable partner forces until they can independently maintain the enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq and designated areas of Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks.[26]

Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), the military arm of the 86-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, executes the OIR campaign.[27] CJTF-OIR comprises 28 troop-contributing countries, led by the United States.[28]

The OIR campaign is organized around four lines of effort.[29] (See Figure 1.) In June, the CJTF-OIR Commanding General approved an amendment to the 2022 OIR Campaign Plan.[30] The document, which is classified, outlines desired end states for OIR and the ways and means to achieve those end states.[31] The updated document also includes more clearly defined and measurable operational objectives and decisive conditions for the lines of effort. CJTF-OIR said that these changes allow it to better assess campaign progress in time through routine assessment of progress toward, or achievement of, the identified conditions.[32]

Figure 1.

OIR Lines of Effort

1. ADVISE, ASSIST, AND ENABLE PARTNER FORCES TO MAINTAIN THE DEFEAT OF ISIS The campaign is currently in Phase IV of the operation. Coalition Forces are focused on transferring the long-term work in the fight against ISIS to local partner forces by providing those forces with advice, assistance, and other measures needed to enable them to maintain the territorial defeat of ISIS.

2. MAINTAIN THE COALITION The protection and preservation of the Coalition is critical to continuing the mission to maintain the defeat of ISIS.

3. ENABLE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ENDURING SECURITY COOPERATION FRAMEWORK IN IRAQ This complements parallel efforts at the institutional level by Unified Action Partners (including NATO Mission-Iraq and OSC-I) to set the conditions for the future transition of the OIR mission.

4. MAXIMIZE EFFECTS IN THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT Through press releases and social media, the Coalition reinforces the messages that support CJTF-OIR's regional partners and combats disinformation from ISIS.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.1 OIR 004, 12/21/2022 and 23.2 OIR 004, 6/21/2023; CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 7/18/2023.

FUNDING

In FY 2023, Congress appropriated approximately $5.5 billion to the DoD for OIR, of which $3.4 billion had been expended as of the end of May.[33] CJTF-OIR uses the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) as the primary vehicle for providing materiel and other support to Iraqi and vetted Syrian partner forces. Of the $475 million CTEF enacted for FY 2023, $315 million was designated to support partner forces in Iraq and $160 million was designated to support partner forces in Syria.[34] (See page 10.)

FMF/FMS: Congress approved $1.25 billion for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Iraq ($250 million annually) for FY 2019 through FY 2023.[35] Funds for FY 2019 through FY 2022 are available for immediate expenditure against cases developed with the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). As of the end of the quarter, approximately $579 million of these funds had been spent.[36] Although funding for FY 2023 for Iraq has been appropriated by Congress, it has not been apportioned. State said the process to apportion and obligate the FY 2023 funds will be completed prior to the end of the fiscal year.[37]

The United States also provides training and equipment to the Iraqi government and the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, through which the recipients are responsible for payment. State said that FMS cases under negotiation during the quarter for the MoPA include development of a regional logistics hub; potential procurement of unmanned aerial surveillance systems (UAS); logistics training; equipment, training, and maintenance support for combat engineering, counter-improvised explosive devices, and explosive ordnance disposal.[38]

DOD FUNDING FOR OIR

DoD Enacted Funding for OIR FY 2019-FY 2023, in $ Millions

Various State and USAID programs receive funding that support U.S. Government political, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance objectives in Iraq and Syria. Funding information for stabilization and humanitarian assistance programs managed by the State Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) is available on pages 62 and 63. State and Mission Iraq require separate funding for personnel, operations, facilities, and security that support U.S. Government activities and programs in Iraq and Syria.

CTEF-funded Support to Iraq and Syria, April–June 2023
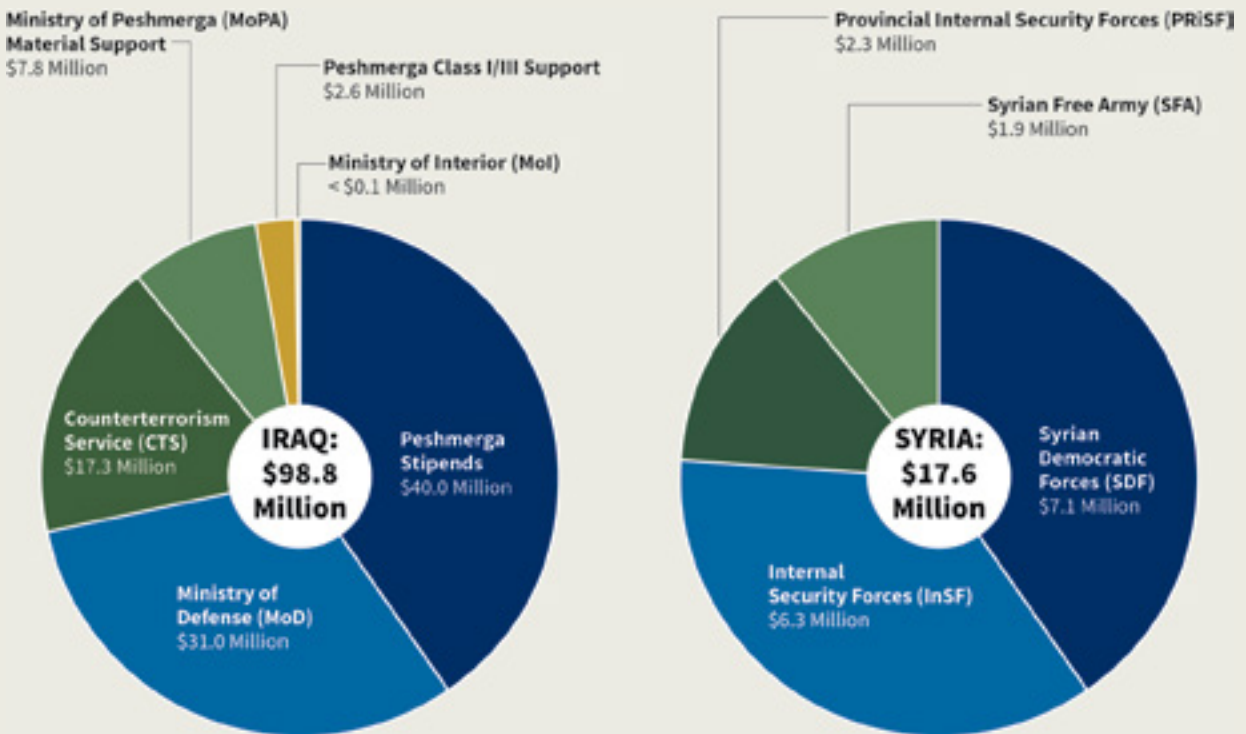
Notes: Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. Syria includes $9.2 million in stipends.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.3 OIR FOL010, 7/10/2023; OUSD(C), response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.3 OIR 009, 7/7/2023.

End-Use Monitoring: According to State, U.S. personnel conducted end-use monitoring and enhanced end-use monitoring inspections in Iraq during the quarter but due to ongoing security concerns and the embassy's travel restrictions, the majority of enhanced inspections occured in and around Baghdad.[39]

State reported that during the quarter, U.S. personnel conducted enhanced inspections of night vision devices and their physical security requirements: Army Aviation Command at Camp Taji on April 23; the Federal Intelligence and Investigation Agency (part of the Ministry of Interior (MoI)) on April 30; and Counterterrorism Service (CTS), 1st Special Operations Command, on May 29; and CTS 2nd Special Operations Command on June 11. According to State, all organizations inspected met all physical security standards and all night-vision devices assigned to those units were accounted for.[40]

Leahy Vetting: State reported that the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) was not aware of any instances during the quarter where assistance was provided by the United States to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) in violation of the Leahy Law. The Leahy Law refers to two statutory provisions prohibiting the United States from providing certain assistance to a unit of a foreign security force if the United States has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. State vets proposed recipients of such assistance to determine if there is credible information that they have committed a gross violation of human rights.[41]

STATUS OF ISIS

ISIS capabilities remained degraded in Iraq and Syria during the quarter, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).[42] CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS conducted fewer attacks compared to the same time last year and remained incapable of launching large, complex attacks in Iraq and Syria.[43] ISIS continued to suffer leadership losses, including the killing or capture of at least four leaders in Syria during the quarter.[44] (See pages 12-13.)

However, the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and CJTF-OIR Commanders stated that ISIS remains a threat.[45] The group seeks to resurge and its ideology remains "unconstrained and active," according to CJTF-OIR Commander Major General Matthew McFarlane.[46]

> **CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS conducted fewer attacks compared to the same time last year and remained incapable of launching large, complex attacks in Iraq and Syria.**

In particular, ISIS views its fighters in detention and the population in the al-Hol displaced persons camp as keys to its resurgence.[47] The DIA said that while ISIS likely remained intent on breaking out its fighters from Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) detention facilities, those intentions have been aspirational since the failed attack at the Ghuwayran Detention Facility in January 2022.[48]

In al-Hol, poor living conditions offer a "favorable environment for ISIS to exert influence," according to the DIA.[49] ISIS members and sympathizers attempt to indoctrinate and recruit residents of the camp. ISIS sees critical strategic value in recruiting from the camp, particularly among youth, who make up the vast majority of the population.[50] Speaking in June, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative for Iraq stated that conditions in al-Hol created the risk of violent extremism becoming normal for children in the camp.[51]

ISIS ACTIVITY AND CAPABILITY

Attack Trends This Quarter

Most ISIS attacks in Iraq and Syria were small, opportunistic, and involved a **small number of individuals**. However, Syrian partner forces said that ISIS was actively preparing financing and training cells to conduct more attacks in Iraq and Syria.

ISIS attacks during **Ramadan**—historically a period when attacks spike—decreased compared to previous years. USCENTCOM attributed the decrease to increased operations by partner forces.

In both Iraq and Syria, the group remains **focused on survival**.

IRAQ

ISIS attacks in Iraq occurred mainly in Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din provinces and were often **thwarted** by Iraqi Security Forces.

Ramadan in Iraq was one of least active for ISIS, with an 80 percent decrease in attacks compared to Ramadan 2022.

ISIS remained able to **inflict harm**. A June 11 pre-dawn attack in Kirkuk killed three Iraqi soldiers and wounded four others.

SYRIA

ISIS operated largely in **remote regions** of the Syrian Desert, mostly near larger population centers, and limited by pressure from pro-regime forces.

ISIS continued to strike SDF personnel and **civilians**, including reported attacks on truffle foragers.

At the al-Hol camp, **ISIS-linked violence** and smuggling activities further **declined**. In April, ISIS activists set fire to a charity headquarters in al-Hol.
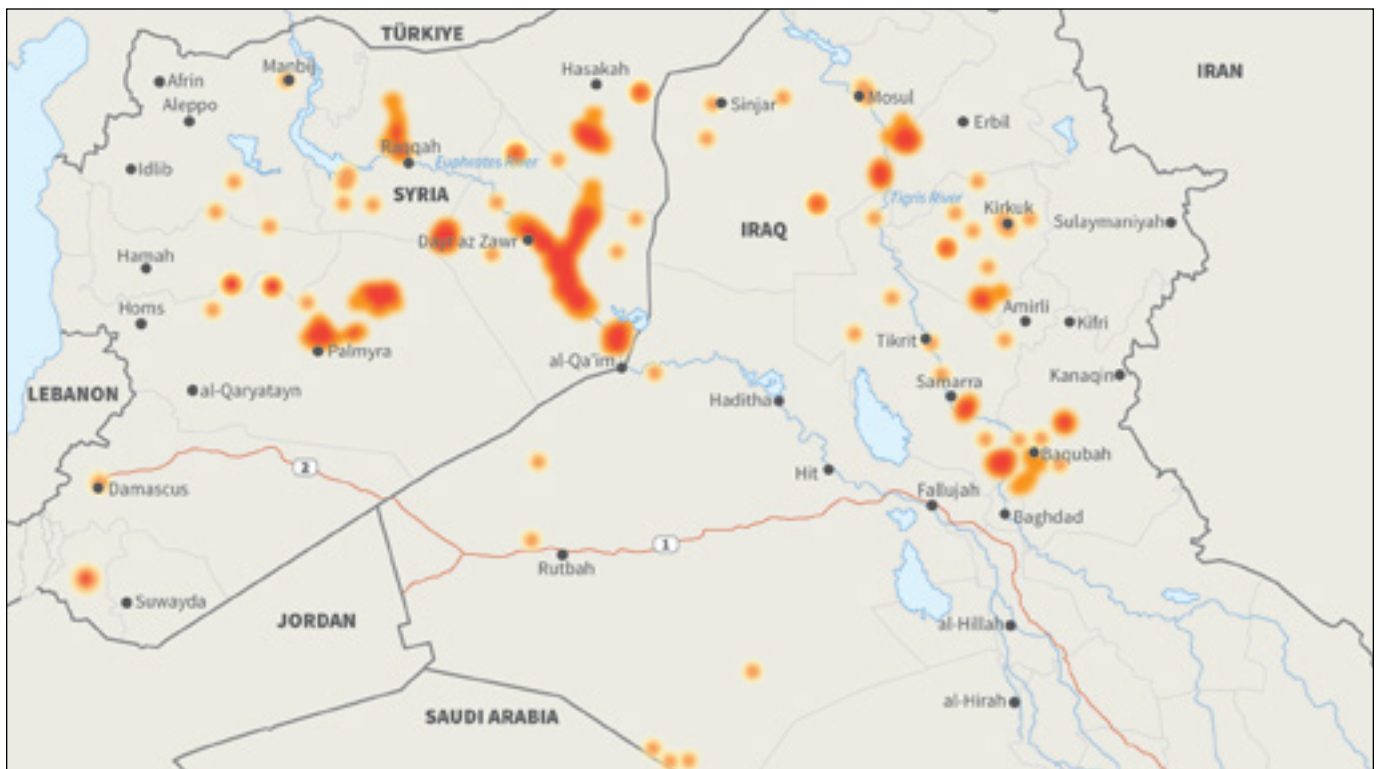
ISIS LEADERS KILLED OR CAPTURED

Khalid Ayed Ahmed al-Jabouri: An ISIS official who planned ISIS attacks in Europe. Killed on April 4 by U.S. forces in a unilateral strike in Syria.

Hudayfah al Yemeni: ISIS attack facilitator. Captured by U.S. forces along with two associates in a helicopter raid on April 8, disrupting ISIS's ability to plot and carry out attacks.

Abd-al-Hadi Mahmud al-Haji Ali: An ISIS leader who was involved in a plot to kidnap officials abroad. Killed on April 17 in a U.S. forces helicopter raid in northern Syria.

Abu al-Husayn al-Husayni al-Qurayshi: The alias for the overall ISIS leader. Killed by Turkish forces in northwestern Syria on April 30, the Turkish president said, just ahead of Turkish elections. U.S. officials did not corroborate the claim.

Given its established leadership succession practices, ISIS likely appointed replacements it had been grooming for senior positions.

ISIS Attacks by Month, January 2021–June 2023
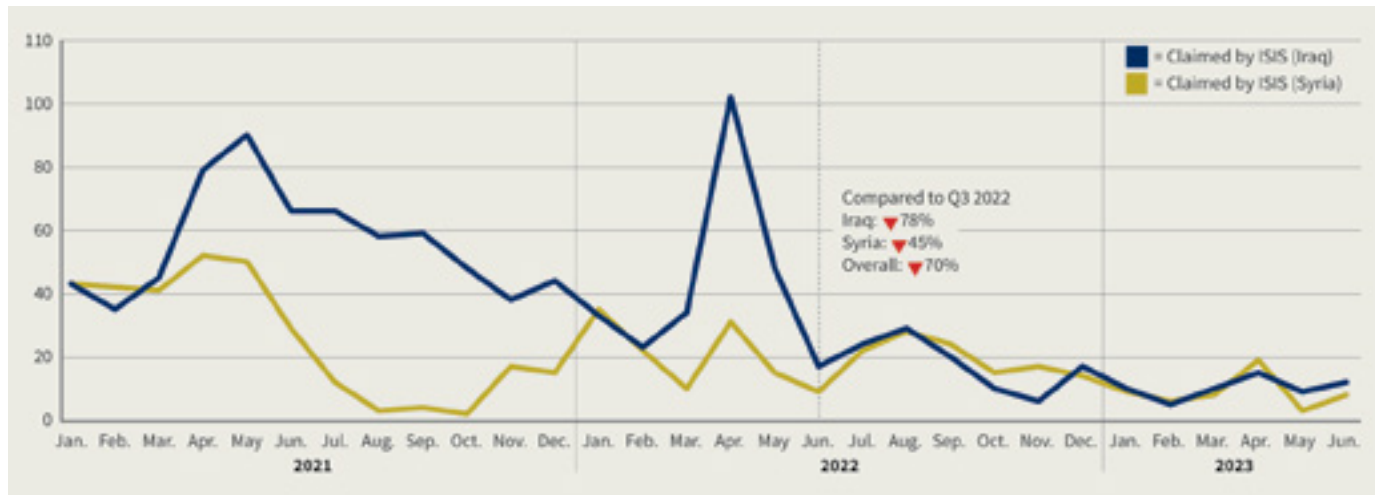
ISIS Capability Assessment

CAPABILITIES: Indicators of attack capability—including attack sophistication and complexity, employment of IEDs, activities within proximity to urban centers, and diversity of targets—continued to decline. Mounting mid- and senior-level **leadership losses**, sustained partnered operations, and **low local popular support** probably contributed to the group's degraded capabilities to plan and conduct more lethal complex attacks. The group's ability to break its fighters out of detention facilities has been degraded by targeted operations to kill or capture individuals directly involved in the planning or facilitation of such attacks.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS: In Iraq, ISIS **seeks to build popular support** as "defender of Sunni Muslims" with a goal of governing communities under its violent extremist interpration of Sharia law. ISIS targets and **tries to weaken local security forces** and spark sectarian divisions by inciting retaliatory attacks against local Sunni populations, though the group's simple, infrequent attacks during the quarter failed to provoke reprisals. In Syria, ISIS continued to **exploit SDF vulnerabilities and bribe officers** to free ISIS detainees in facilities across Syria. The DIA assessed that ISIS would move quickly to exploit any SDF easing of counterterrorism pressure if Turkey launches an incursion into Syria.

EXTERNAL OPERATIONS: The ongoing killing and capture of ISIS leaders, external operations plotters, and facilitators has **likely degraded** ISIS's external attack capabilities. Worldwide, the number of ISIS-claimed attacks during Ramadan was the lowest since 2019.

ISIS leaders in Iraq and Syria almost certainly remain committed to directing and enabling attacks in the West, particularly Europe. ISIS maintained approximately **20 publicly recognized branches** worldwide and claimed responsibility for attacks in dozens of countries in ISIS official media releases. The majority of ISIS's branches likely lack the intent or capability to direct attacks against the U.S. homeland. Instead, they rely on small-scale attacks to demonstrate their reach beyond normal operating areas.

FINANCES: Coalition and law enforcement actions targeting ISIS leadership, networks, and financial entities continued during the quarter, leading to a further decline in ISIS cash reserves in Iraq and Syria.

As a result of counterterrorism efforts, ISIS Core leadership in Iraq and Syria was **unable to meet its financial obligations**, including payments to family members of deceased and imprisoned ISIS personnel. In addition, ISIS Core paid its leaders sporadically, probably several hundred dollars a month, while skipping payments to fighters. ISIS missed payments in order to extend the duration of its limited financing.

ISIS was still able to draw from millions of dollars in **cash reserves** it held as of late 2022, which are buried in physical caches and dug up and smuggled through Iraq and Syria. To raise funds, the group engages in extortion, kidnapping for ransom, and soliciting donations via online platforms. ISIS relied on its global administrative arm to fund and guide ISIS branches and networks around the world, particularly across Africa, in Yemen, and in South, Central and Southeast Asia.

ISIS continued to use **informal cash transfer networks** known as hawalas, **virtual currencies,** and **online fundraising platforms** to support operations, recruit and maintain supporters, and secure release of its detained members. The group also transferred funds to individuals at al-Hol through intermediaries in Türkiye and hawala dealers in the camp. Supporters in al-Hol have received up to $20,000 per month via the hawala system.

Sources: See Endnotes on page 107.

IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

In Iraq, CJTF-OIR operates at the invitation of the Iraqi government in an advise, assist, and enable role to support ISF and KSF operations to defeat ISIS.[52] (See page 15.)

New Iraqi Budget Expands Security Sector

On June 12, the Iraqi government passed a 3-year budget, with $153 million allocated for each year.[53] (See Table 1.) The security sector—including the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI)—received significant increases in funding.[54] The budget allows the MoD and MoI to increase their force strength by 5.8 percent and 3.3 percent, respectively. On June 25, the MoD announced plans to rehire up to 37,000 separated personnel to fill the new billets and other empty positions. Despite continued depletion of CTS personnel due to a lack of recruiting combined with retirement, family hardship, and casualties, the budget decreases CTS force strength by 14.3 percent, according to government documents.[55]

The budget also authorizes increased funding to the Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC), which oversees Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[56] The PMF consists of more than 50 armed factions, some of the largest of which are aligned with Iran.[57] The budget increases authorized PMF force strength to 238,000 personnel—an increase of 95 percent since 2021, when the last budget was approved—though it is likely that fewer than half of those positions could be funded given the size of the appropriation increase and existing PMF stipends.[58]

Table 1.

Funding for Iraqi Security Sector in the 2023 Iraqi Budget

	2023 appropriation (USD millions)	Change from 2021
Ministry of Interior	$11,303.6	41%
Ministry of Defense	$7,977.9	40%
Military Pensions and Bonuses	$5,009.2	-9%
Popular Mobilization Committee	$3,659.5	54%
Counterterrorism Service	$651.9	41%
National Security Council	$352.4	93%
Military Industrialization Corporation	$255.8	3,955%
Iraqi National Intelligence Service	$243.1	17%
Border Crossing Commission	$80.8	133%
Special Division Command, COR Presidency	$7.30	-29%

Note: The Iraqi Parliament passed its last budget in 2021 and sustained those funding levels through 2022.
Source: DIA, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.3 OIR FOL021, 7/10/2023.

In al-Hol, poor living conditions offer a "favorable environment for ISIS to exert influence," according to the DIA.

COALITION ADVISING IN IRAQ

Kurdish Security Forces
Coalition advisors work with leaders from the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs at the Kurdistan Coordination Center to enhance operational-level command and control, promote coordination with the ISF, and support other ministry reform objectives. The advisors occasionally work with lower-level KSF units.

Counterterrorism Service
Coalition military advisors work with the CTS at the strategic and operational levels. The advising focuses on air-to-ground integration, ISR, site exploitation, and other areas to develop and assess CTS capabilities.

Iraqi Security Forces
Coalition military advisors have daily contact with Ministry of Defense leaders at Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I), located at Union III in Baghdad. This advising focuses on the five areas most important for defeating ISIS: target development, air operations, logistics and sustainment, information sharing/command and control, and planning. The advisors do not have regular contact with subordinate ISF units, including the Iraq Ground Forces Command, or ISF personnel outside of Union III.

Non-OIR Advising and Support
Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad conducts bilateral security assistance and security cooperation activities, including training, with partner forces. NATO Mission-Iraq advises ISF leaders at the ministerial level.

Note: OCs are not shown in their actual location within each province.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 22.2 OIR 035, 3/23/2022; Michael Knights and Alex Almeida, "Back to Basics: U.S.-Iraq Security Cooperation in the Post-Combat Era," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 10/26/2021.

No Significant Change in ISF Capability

Coalition advisors, who provide operational-level advising to the ISF's Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I), reported that the JOC-I was improving slowly in its execution of most "warfighting functions," but with no significant changes in capabilities since the previous quarter.[59] (See Table 2.)

The JOC-I demonstrated many of these capabilities during Operation Righteous Saber, a multi-month campaign to clear ISIS operatives from Iraq. During the quarter, the ISF executed phases IV, V, and VI of the operation under command of the JOC-I.[60] Phase IV— which included the Iraqi Army, the PMF, and Federal Police—targeted ISIS in multiple provinces north and west of Baghdad, including along the Kurdistan Coordination Line (KCL), which runs through unsecured areas claimed by the Iraqi government and the KRG and which ISIS exploits due to the absence of security forces there.[61]

During Phase V, which also occurred along the KCL, the ISF cooperated with several KSF units.[62] (See page 25.) CJTF-OIR reported that during the two phases, the ISF cleared more than 100 pre-determined sites, destroyed bed-down locations and IEDs, and found weapons caches and other enemy material.[63] CJTF-OIR reported that the Coalition provided support to the operation by attending the initial planning conference and passing information between the JOC-I and the KSF.[64]

ISF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

CTS Targeted Operations Decrease Substantially

The CTS is Iraq's premier special operations force and one of the Coalition's primary partners for targeting ISIS leadership and key facilitators in Iraq. During the quarter the CTS conducted 39 partnered operations against ISIS, an increase from 28 partnered operations last quarter.[65] The 19 targeted raid operations resulted in 15 ISIS suspects detained and no enemy killed in action.[66] Additionally, the CTS seized various captured enemy material, including weapons, phones, sim cards, and bed down locations destroyed.[67]

CJTF-OIR reported that the number of CTS overall operations was lower than the previous quarter for several reasons. This includes a reduction in operations when Coalition forces accompanied or played a more direct role in supporting the CTS. Additionally, the decrease in CTS operations was due to a general trend toward fewer ISIS attacks, which means that the CTS are probably conducting fewer operations as a result.[68]

CJTF-OIR reported that CTS capabilities did not change significantly during the quarter, though individual CTS units demonstrated varying levels of proficiency based on capability, level of Coalition partnership, and the threat environment in each province.[69] All of the operations were partnered with Coalition forces and did not receive any additional support from other ISF units.[70] (The CTS sometimes requests support from other ISF units for rotary wing air lift or close air support.[71]) The CTS operates its own tactical ISR and has the ability to request theater ISR assets through the JOC-I.[72]

CJTF-OIR reported that CTS capabilities did not change significantly during the quarter.

Table 2.

Status of JOC-I Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Status
Operations	There were no significant changes in capabilities since last quarter. Neither the ISF Operations Directorate nor the JOC-I "Operations Floor" have the capacity to assess operations in progress, measure any deviation from what was planned, or propose an alternate plan while operations were in progress. Coalition advisors observed parts of Operations Righteous Saber using ISR and made recommendations on battle tracking, communications, and coordination between the ISF and KSF. Coalition advisors recommended that the JOC-I track unit movement during future operations by observing the Coalition ISR feed or calling provincial operational commands for updates.
Intelligence	The ISF conducted two major intelligence-driven operations, conducted several successful airstrikes based on intelligence, and improved intelligence-sharing between the ISF and KSF. Coalition advisors recommended increased use of Iraqi ISR platforms for intelligence collection, using updated intelligence to determine targets.
Command and Control	JOC-I commanders discussed implementation of their ability to track ISF units on the battlefield using a digital Harris Command and Control system. Coalition advisors helped the JOC-I set up the system and described the ISF's adoption of the system as "progress" although the accuracy of the information and use of the system at the lowest levels was unclear. Coalition advisors also created a manual to promote the ISF's use of Shout Nanos—handheld two-way satellite messaging and tracking devices—to enable positional reporting of ISF units on the battlefield. The advisors recommended implementing a digital Common Operating Picture during operations and embracing the Harris and Shout Nano technology through training and practice.
Fire Support	The ISF is becoming increasingly independent in the targeting/strike process, but progress is slow. (See pages 19-21.) Coalition advisors recommended increased use of artillery during operations or as an alternative to airstrikes, especially when bad weather prevents airstrikes, integration of Iraqi Tactical Air Controllers into the Iraqi Targeting Cell, and the creation of a JOC-I Targeting Fusion Cell. Following Phase V of Operation Righteous Saber, advisors recommended combining airstrikes and artillery fire.
Sustainment and Logistics	The ISF Logistics and Sustainment Directorate continued to focus primarily on the acquisition of military materiel from the Coalition in part due to the lack of institutional logistics practices. Advisors recommended establishing a "capability briefing" to enable the ISF to articulate its logistical needs, and forming an ISF "recognized logistic picture" to anticipate logistics needs.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.2 OIR 024 and 23.2 OIR 025, 3/23/2023; CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.3 OIR 024 and 23.3 OIR 025, 6/21/2023; CJTF-OIR, vetting comment, 7/18/2023.

Convictions of suspected ISIS detainees arrested by the CTS remained high this quarter, with the overall conviction rate more than 90 percent.[73] According to CJTF-OIR, the conviction rate has been steadily increasing in part due to frequent Coalition advising, including through regular meetings with members of the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General Corps.[74] Special emphasis has been placed on the Special Forensics and Investigations Laboratory, which exploits captured enemy material and is manned by 12 CTS personnel and 2 U.S. contractors.[75] Advising efforts have focused on improving sensitive site exploitation, and ensuring that all collected exploitable material makes its way to the laboratory for exploitation to maximize chances of conviction at trial.[76] However, the CTS does not appear to have the capability to train its own forensic technicians beyond some lower-level exploitation skills.[77] CJTF-OIR said that legal advising has included intelligence advisors to ensure exploited enemy material is being used for subsequent targeting.[78]

CTS Faces Continued Challenges with Recruitment and Procurement

CJTF-OIR reported that the uncertainty due to the delayed budget continued to negatively impact the CTS's ability to man, train, and equip a premier counterterrorism force. The CTS is actively planning for the future through its "CTS 2030 Vision" but needs procurement funding to modernize the force.[79]

In addition, the CTS requires funding to recruit new soldiers to address its undermanned, top-heavy, and aging force.[80] The CTS has not recruited any new soldiers since November 2018, with the exception of a small contribution of officers (20 to 50 per year) from the graduating class of the MoD academy.[81]

In anticipation of funding approval for 3,500 new recruits over 3 years, Coalition advisors worked with the CTS school to prepare to run the first full classes of selection events and the initial Special Operator Course. CJTF-OIR said that the CTS also plans to establish a new CTS school called Habbaniyah in Anbar province. The CTS seeks to move all three CTS school battalions from Area IV in Baghdad to Habbaniyah. CJTF-OIR assessed that after the CTS receives funding to move the force structure to Habbaniyah and will likely take 2 to 3 years.[82]

While the new Iraqi budget increased CTS funding overall, it decreased the CTS authorized force strength by 3,951 personnel (14.3 percent), according to government documents reviewed by the DIA.[83] A year ago, CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS was manned at approximately 43 percent (16,506) of its authorized strength (38,591).[84] Data shared with Coalition advisors indicates a steady 3 percent decrease in end strength year over year will continue due to standard personnel losses such as retirement, family hardship, and casualties.[85]

During the quarter, the CTS continued to receive support through CTEF and FMF. The CTS received approximately $7.2 million in CTEF-funded equipment including M4 rifles, armored detainee transportation vans, and various repair parts, body armor, office, and medical equipment. The CTS received no CTEF-funded training or advisement programs during the quarter.[86]

The U.S. Government also added $1.5 million in FMF funding to an ongoing project to refurbish a CTS medical warehouse bringing the overall case value to $7.5 million in FMF funding. Additionally, the U.S. Government transferred $10 million of additional funding to the CTS Forensics Lab case to provide contactor support and licensing for the Automated Biometric Information System in the next quarter timeframe.[87] This system will enable the CTS to improve fingerprint analysis and provide improved evidence for use during trials of arrested ISIS members.[88]

While the new Iraqi budget increased CTS funding overall, it decreased the CTS authorized force strength by 3,951 personnel (14.3 percent).

ISF AIR SUPPORT AND ARTILLERY

ISF Targeting Cell Lacks Equipment and Training for Independent Operations
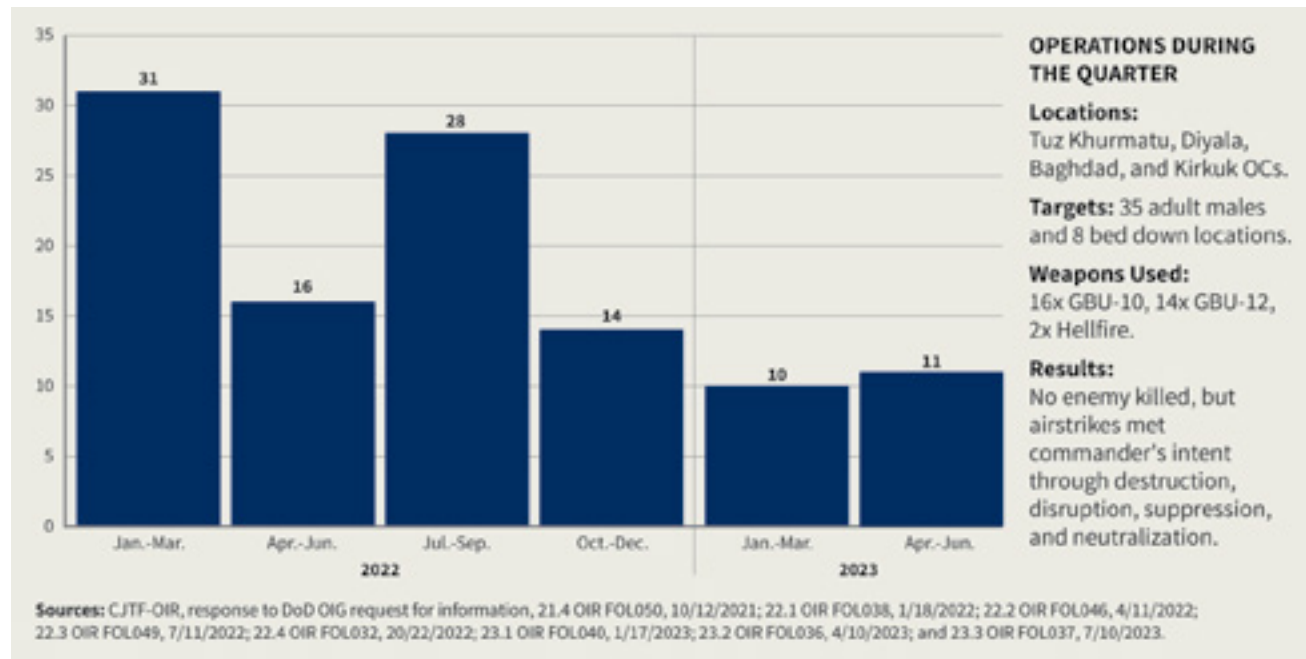
Coalition advising and enabling for ISF airstrikes and target development remained a core area of focus during the quarter. CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi Air Force (IqAF) continues to rely on Coalition ISR assets for all strikes for one main reason: the use of a laser designator to guide precision munitions dropped from Iraqi aircraft. Because ISIS targets are always in austere environments, such as wadis, thick vegetation, and cave or tunnel complexes, it is nearly impossible to identify targets and direct strikes through an F-16's targeting pod using only imagery provided by another source, typically an ISR asset's video feed. Coalition ISR is essential to spot, positively identify, and laser designate ISIS targets for ISF F-16s.[89] This quarter, Coalition assets provided 935 hours of ISR support to the IqAF. Last quarter, the ISF achieved 477 hours of ISR support provided by their own assets.[90]

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted 11 airstrikes during the quarter.[91] (See Figure 2.) Unlike the last three quarters, the IqAF conducted no strikes independently this quarter. CJTF-OIR added that the locating of targets and strikes against ISIS is a collaboration between Coalition intelligence collection and the priorities established between the JOC-I leadership, Iraqi intelligence directorates, and the JOC-I Targeting Cell.[92]

According to CJTF-OIR, the JOC-I Military Intelligence Directorate is "exceptional" in the find-and-fix portion of the targeting cycle with using its own ISR, particularly the Puma

Figure 2.

Counter-ISIS Airstrikes by Iraqi Aircraft, July 2022-June 2023

OPERATIONS DURING THE QUARTER

Locations:
Tuz Khurmatu, Diyala, Baghdad, and Kirkuk OCs.

Targets: 35 adult males and 8 bed down locations.

Weapons Used:
16x GBU-10, 14x GBU-12, 2x Hellfire.

Results:
No enemy killed, but airstrikes met commander's intent through destruction, disruption, suppression, and neutralization.

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 21.4 OIR FOL050, 10/12/2021; 22.1 OIR FOL038, 1/18/2022; 22.2 OIR FOL046, 4/11/2022; 22.3 OIR FOL049, 7/11/2022; 22.4 OIR FOL032, 20/22/2022; 23.1 OIR FOL040, 1/17/2023; 23.2 OIR FOL036, 4/10/2023; and 23.3 OIR FOL037, 7/10/2023.

tactical UAS. CJTF-OIR stated it is the finish portion, when a target is either struck with an airstrike or raided by ground forces, where the ISF lack capability. There is no air-to-ground integration with Puma operators on the ground or terminal attack controllers in the JOC-I Targeting Cell.[93]

However, CJTF-OIR said that the JOC-I Targeting Cell is on the brink of making necessary advancements. First, it is moving to a more suitable room. The current cell is too small and lacks necessary command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence infrastructure. A room has been identified with the requisite infrastructure prepared to support but is awaiting approval from the JOC-I leadership.[94]

Second, the JOC-I is making steps toward integrating qualified terminal attack controllers and radios into its operations, both of which it currently lacks. Currently, IqAF F-16s receive targeting packages and then fly and execute the mission without communication with the JOC-I. Coalition advisors worked with the CTS to provide an Iraqi terminal attack controller (ITAC), who is trained to direct airstrikes, to the JOC-I until they can develop their own.[95] Due to a lack of available aircraft, the ITAC school run by the CTS has struggled to maintain ITAC proficiency let alone add other candidates from the ISF. Coalition advisors are providing some ITAC training on a daily basis to the JOC-I Targeting Cell staff but cannot provide a certified program in accordance with U.S. or NATO standards.[96]

As for the radio, Coalition advisors has worked with JOC-I Communications Directorate to receive a Harris 7850 radio base station, amplifier, and antenna to establish radio communications with IqAF and IqAAC aircraft. CJTF-OIR estimated that the radio would be delivered in August 2023.[97]

Additionally, Coalition forces visited the King Air 350 squadron multiple times during the quarter with air advisors, terminal attack controllers, and intelligence officers to teach scanning techniques, limited close air support terminology, and threat avoidance.[98] The King Air 350 is a U.S.-supplied manned ISR aircraft that has been in service with the IqAF since December 2007.[99] CJTF-OIR said that Coalition advisors determined and corrected intelligence collection product distribution gaps. Coalition personnel also advised the JOC-I Strike Cell and King Air 350 ground station exploitation cell on creating an intelligence collection points database. CJTF-OIR noted that the only ISR asset locations that Coalition air advisors have been able to physically visit are the King Air 350 squadron and the AC-208 squadron.[100]

In previous quarters, Coalition advisors also implemented courses designed to develop JOC-I personnel capable of communicating and directing ISF UAS operators for target development, reducing the need for Coalition ISR support. For example, five ISF personnel graduated from the Intelligence Tactical Controller (ITC) course last quarter to support JOC-I operations by coordinating and planning Iraqi ISR assets.[101] CJTF-OIR stated this quarter that there have been no new graduates of an ITC course because there are no means for ITC-trained personnel to securely communicate with the ground control stations for certain UAS platforms during operations.[102]

CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advisors are working with the JOC-I Communications Directorate to get all UAS ground control stations licenses to a chat system so they can mirror the way Coalition forces control assets. The Communications Directorate is currently

Coalition forces visited the King Air 350 squadron multiple times during the quarter with air advisors, terminal attack controllers, and intelligence officers to teach scanning techniques, limited close air support terminology, and threat avoidance.

coordinating with the ISF's UAS squadrons to complete this task. CJTF-OIR assessed that the ISF do a fair job directing UAS assets but lack what a chat service would provide in regards to taskings and the amount of information which would be shared and observed by all. CJTF-OIR reiterated that the JOC-I's ability to perform independently of the Coalition is limited by available equipment, manning numbers, and training.[103]

ISF Using Larger Bombs in Airstrikes for Messaging Purposes

During the quarter, all strikes involved IqAF F-16s utilizing 500-pound GBU-12 and 2,000 pound GBU-10 laser guided bombs.[104] (See Figure 2.) In general, the IqAF only uses three types of precision guided munitions: GBU-10 or GBU-12 from the F-16s, and Hellfire missiles from the AC-208s, of which there was only one AC-208 strike this quarter.[105] CJTF-OIR assessed the ISF's ability to weaponeer, or select and prepare the best munition to use, for the appropriate target as "fair."[106] CJTF-OIR personnel said that they have observed instances where there was opportunity to employ a munition with lower collateral effects that would have still accomplished the desired effect. However, the JOC-I lacks air advisors who are experts on weaponeering, tactics, and all elements of close air support.[107]

Additionally, CJTF-OIR said that the JOC-I commander will occasionally give direct orders on which munitions to use. Although he likely understands a smaller munition can still meet his intent, he leverages the explosions from higher yield munitions as part of the information operations campaign against ISIS as strike videos are published on social media through the Iraqi Security Media Cell.[108]

Most IqAF Personnel Trained in Iraq by Iraqis

The IqAF is able to provide a significant level of training to its pilots, a capability that is critical for the long-term sustainability of the force. However, the IqAF remains reliant on U.S. training—often conducted outside of Iraq—to operate its more advanced platforms.[109]

Coalition air advisors provide limited training to IqAF pilots and maintainers when able, though these advisors often do not have expertise on any of the aircraft in the IqAF fleet. Mobile Training Teams from the Coalition can provide some training but the amount possible is limited by budget constraints.[110]

CJTF-OIR reported that the IqAF is capable of providing basic training to its pilots without Coalition support. The IqAF squadron that operates Iraq's T-6 trainer aircraft seeks to train 40 students this year, though CJTF-OIR assessed that the IqAF is unlikely to meet that target given the limited maintenance support within the squadron. The IqAF also conducts its own instructor qualification course at Balad Air Base in Iraq. Some IqAF T-6 instructors are trained at the U.S. Air Force's 559th Flight Training Squadron at Randolph Air Base in the United States alongside U.S. instructors.[111]

The IqAF is also able to train personnel to operate and support some of its more advanced U.S.-produced aircraft. The IqAF trains most of its King Air 350 pilots in Iraq, though the pilots still receive simulator and annual emergency procedures training in the United States.[112] The IqAF also recently trained 12 new C-130J transport aircraft copilots, most of whom were experienced King Air 350 pilots. However, the pilots were trained in air-land

During the quarter, all strikes involved IqAF F-16s utilizing 500-pound GBU-12 and 2,000 pound GBU-10 laser guided bombs.

operations only and still lack training in the tactical employment of C-130 aircraft, such as airdrops, unimproved runway operations, and formation flying. CJTF-OIR said the pilots receive this training only when they return to the United States for their annual recurrent C-130J simulator training. Coalition advisors plan to deliver an advanced wiring course for Iraqi C-130 maintainers in August 2023.[113]

CJTF-OIR reported that Iraq's F-16 pilots attend Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals and the F-16 Basic Course in the United States.[114] The F-16 remains Iraq's primary combat aircraft for targeting ISIS targets and defending Iraqi airspace.[115]

NATO Mission-Iraq (NMI) also provides support to the IqAF's training institutions, however this training is focused on administrative capability and curriculum development.[116] CJTF-OIR said that the NMI training advisor does not currently work with CJTF-OIR in any capacity nor does he envisage a requirement for it.[117] However, Coalition and NMI advisors meet occasionally through a working group to exchange information about ISF air capabilities. Areas of shared interest include the status of English language and technical English courses for IqAF and IqAAC personnel; hardware updates in Iraqi Air Defense Command provided by the Coalition; and a training exercise between French Rafale fighters and Iraqi F-16s at Balad.[118] CJTF-OIR had noted that English proficiency, a requirement for air operations, is an obstacle in recruiting for the IqAF, significantly limiting the pool of available candidates.[119] However, Jordan has offered to support Iraqi pilot training to mitigate language challenges.[120]

Iraq Air Force Lt. Gen. Shihab Jahid Ali, the Iraqi Air Force commander, visits McEntire Joint National Guard Base, South Carolina. (U.S. Air National Guard photo)

STATUS OF U.S.-SUPPLIED AIRCRAFT AND EQUIPMENT

USCENTCOM reported no significant changes in the readiness of Western-made aircraft within the IqAF or IqAAC during the quarter. Parts shipments continue to flow into Iraq for the various Bell manufactured helicopters in the operated by the IqAAC, and substantial progress has been made in the Foreign Military Sales process to procure additional Bell aircraft by the end of 2023. The ISF's Russian-made aircraft remain in disrepair due to sanctions preventing the acquisition of parts.

F-16: *66% mission capable.* The AIM-7 air-to-air missiles used by the IqAF's F-16s remain a point of concern due to broken guidance devices that lack spares and vendors able to perform repairs. Not all F-16s are affected, but as the devices break on remaining aircraft, ISF air-to-air capability will diminish. One course of action being considered is for a request to replace the IqAF's AIM-7 missiles with more capable AIM-120 AMRAAM missiles.

Bell IA 407: *Partially mission capable.* Of the 17 helicopters equipped with Mx-15 cameras, four cameras are non-functional and no spares remain. The Mx-15 allows the IA407 to use laser guided rockets. The IqAAC is unable to repair the cameras. OSC-I, USCENTCOM, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency are working to fix the issue which is impacting IqAAC readiness. In the interim, Bell Helicopter is sending a team to the IqAAC base in Taji to try to fix some of the non-operational cameras.

AC-208: *Fully mission capable.* The IqAF continues to use AC-208 for ISR and strikes, and can support basic maintenance and sortie generation without U.S. assistance. Long-term maintenance and spare parts supply, as well as a lack of advanced training on mission systems, remain a concern. OSC-I is working to address these issues by extending maintenance contracts and upgrading systems.

King Air 350: *Regular operations tempo.* The IqAF continued to use the aircraft for ISR for which they are designed and as a light transport aircraft.

C-130: The aircraft are currently being used to transport distinguished visitors and supplies. In late May of 2023, OSC-I arranged for a contractor to upgrade the carbon brakes on three C-130s and provided training to IqAF personnel to complete the additional aircraft upgrades.

Scan Eagle: *Fully mission capable.* The JOC-I has not tasked Scan Eagle UAS for missions since becoming fully mission capable last quarter. This is partly because many targets are outside the Scan Eagle's range.

Air Defense: All three TPS-77 radars are operational again following an electrical supply issue with one radar's power source last quarter. Significant gaps in capability and coordination between the IqAF and Iraqi Air Defense Command continue to undermine the ISF's ability to detect, track, and identify air targets within its airspace.

CJTF-OIR and NMI Collaborating to Improve ISF Artillery Capabilities

Although the use of artillery in named ISF operations is generally at the discretion of divisions and below, CJTF-OIR reported that ISF leadership in the JOC-I continues to prefer airstrikes over the utilization of surface-to-surface fire support, or artillery, for targeting ISIS personnel and positions.[121] Frequent airstrikes, which are costly, place a burden on Iraq's limited combat aircraft and aircrews, while artillery—a core component of ground forces' combined arms tactics—are significantly cheaper, abundant, and often can meet the need for immediate targeting of ISIS fighters and infrastructure at range.

In particular, CJTF-OIR reported that the JOC-I does not effectively use its fire support team, established in October 2022, to coordinate and plan artillery support for ISF operations. However, the fire support team remains of limited utility to the JOC-I.[122] For example, the JOC-I did not involve the fire support team during planning for this quarter's phases of Operation Righteous Saber.[123] CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advisors had provided the ISF fire support team—which consists of an Iraqi brigadier general and a colonel— with planning materials and advisement to help the JOC-I plan the use of artillery during operations.[124]

Nonetheless, CJTF-OIR did support further development of the ISF's ground-based fire support during the quarter, including advising the JOC-I on the use of mortars in support of clearance operations and through courses on the use of artillery for ISF personnel that graduated 17 students during the quarter. Of note, during a training session in June, three students returned from an earlier course and served as instructors, validating the train-the-trainer intent of the program.[125]

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF Artillery Director, although not part of the JOC-I, is an important counterpart for Coalition advisors with whom they can discuss training and equipment needs as well as cooperation with Coalition contributing nations.[126]

CJTF-OIR said that NMI support to the ISF Artillery School was "paramount" to improving ISF artillery capabilities.[127] Begun in January 2023, this NMI advising has focused on building rapport with the different members of the school, understanding the structure and working method, observing how they prepare and conduct the courses, discovering shortfalls and collecting as many facts and details as possible to develop a feasible support plan. CJTF-OIR said that NMI and Artillery School staff have met regularly to support plan development and implementation, brief the School's commander on E-learning methods, or hold sessions with experts.[128]

CJTF-OIR said that it has engaged with the NMI advisors to exchange information, including through a cross-mission Working Group that was established in April to create a common understanding between CJTF-OIR and NMI of capabilities and challenges of the Iraqi artillery branch, in order to develop a coordinated plan with actions for improvement.[129] Through the Working Group, the Coalition and NMI identified actions to improve ISF artillery capabilities in three areas: equipment, training and operations, and procurement.[130]

CJTF-OIR reported that ISF leadership in the JOC-I continues to prefer airstrikes over the utilization of surface-to-surface fire support, or artillery, for targeting ISIS personnel and positions.

Equipment: The Coalition and NMI engage with the ISF to develop a clear picture of the status of Iraqi artillery equipment. Coalition advisors continue to track the equipping process in conjunction with CTEF and OSC-I, for items including call-for-fire simulators, lightweight counter-mortar radars, and spare parts. CJTF-OIR said that this up-to-date data will help policymakers shape future CTEF allocations and OSC-I initiatives.[131]

Training and Operations: CJTF-OIR and NMI have been coordinating on the development of training programs for ISF artillery units at the tactical level as well as encouraging the JOC-I to include artillery in fire support missions. To boost confidence, the CJTF-OIR and NMI advised the JOC-I to use field artillery from their own bases for ground-based fire support on "safe targets" first, such as for illumination or against targets in isolated areas.[132] Additionally, CJTF-OIR and NMI seek to extend training to officers from other branches, in an attempt to integrate fire support in combined arms combat. CJTF-OIR and NMI are trying to influence the artillery curricula and the artillery portion of the Iraqi Army Training Bulletin over the long-term.[133]

KURDISH SECURITY FORCES

In September 2022, the United States renewed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the MoPA to support reform measures it is undertaking.[134] The non-binding MoU has served as an organizing framework for DoD counter-ISIS support to the MoPA since 2016 and encourages continued MoPA reform. It will last for 4 years, subject to the availability of funds.[135]

No Progress Toward Creation of ISF-KSF Joint Brigade

CJTF-OIR continued to encourage the creation of joint ISF-KSF brigades, which would operate within or near disputed areas that are claimed by both the Iraqi government and the KRG. However, while the Iraqi government and the KRG have discussed the planned brigades, progress toward establishing them has been delayed in part due to the absence of a federal budget.[136] According to media reports published prior to the budget passing in June, the budget allocates funds to create two joint brigades.[137]

Meanwhile, the ISF and KSF conducted joint operations during Phase V of Operation Righteous Saber, which CJTF-OIR described as "a major step forward in cooperation" between ISF and KSF forces.[138] CJTF-OIR reported that ISF and KSF forces—consisting of several KSF Regional Guard Brigades and members of the politically aligned 70s Unit—shared intelligence on security gaps identified along the KCL.[139]

However, CJTF-OIR reported that the Regional Guard Brigades participated in the operation only after Coalition advisors pressured MoPA leaders. Advisors also recommended that the MoPA command the KSF forces participating in the operation, but the MoPA refused.[140] Instead, the ISF commanded Phase V. MoPA involvement was limited to validating the operation plan, giving the approval to start the operation, and receiving reporting on operational progress.[141]

The ISF and KSF conducted joint operations during Phase V of Operation Righteous Saber, which CJTF-OIR described as "a major step forward in cooperation" between ISF and KSF forces.

CJTF-OIR reported that, according to the JOC-I, ISF and KSF units cleared a single ISIS hideout together and shared a meal in a trench afterward.[142] In after-action reviews, Coalition advisors urged the ISF and KSF to conduct "truly combined operations," which it said meant "not just conducting operations simultaneously, but having ISF and KSF soldiers conduct operations together at the same time and place."[143]

Transfer of Forces Delayed by Equipment Dispute

Another key element of the KSF reform plan is the transfer of politically aligned Kurdish forces—specifically, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) 70s Unit and the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) 80s Unit—to the command of the nonpartisan MoPA.[144] CJTF-OIR reported that it is still uncertain how and when the parties will transfer the remainder of their forces to the MoPA.[145]

CJTF-OIR reported that during the quarter, transfer of three brigades from the 70s Unit to the MoPA was delayed due to a dispute over the level of equipment the brigades will have when they transfer to MoPA control; CJTF-OIR said the brigades were "half-equipped."[146] Political tensions between the KDP and PUK also hampered the transfer of forces to the MoPA.[147] Citing open sources, the DIA characterized the tensions between the KDP and PUK as "deep and enduring" and driven by "mutual distrust."[148] (See pages 54-55.)

CJTF-OIR said that neither the 70s Unit nor the 80s Unit has shared with Coalition advisors detailed plans on the movement of personnel and equipment into the MoPA.[149] The MoPA also hasn't shared this information with the Coalition "due to political concerns," CJTF-OIR said.[150]

As of June, the MoPA continued to work towards enhancing its end strength.[151] The 70s and 80s Units each had approximately 50,000 soldiers under their separate commands, while the MoPA commanded 20 Regional Guard Brigades with 54,384 personnel biometrically enrolled, CJTF-OIR reported.[152] A few hundred additional "special cases" are not yet biometrically enrolled and remain "under consideration."[153]

MoPA Forces Show No Progress in Developing Warfighting Functions

Coalition advisors continued to engage with the KRG and the MoPA at various levels but the KSF showed no progress in developing key warfighting functions, CJTF-OIR said.[154] (See Table 3.) Some of the most effective counter-ISIS capability, including aggressive patrolling, raids, and ambushes, still lies with the commando forces in the 70s and 80s Units and the Zerevani Force, a police unit under the command of the KRG's Ministry of Interior.[155]

CJTF-OIR said that the United States did not provide direct advice or equipment to the 70s or 80s Units, or to the Zerevani forces, because they are "politically aligned and therefore outside the remit" of Coalition advisors and do not fall under the command and control of the MoPA.[156] CJTF-OIR said that there was limited interaction and support to elements of the 70s and 80s Units to encourage intelligence sharing at joint intelligence working groups between the MoPA and the wider KSF.[157] However, the Zerevani forces and the Counter Terrorist Group, another politically aligned force, conducted counter-ISIS intelligence-driven operations with Coalition and ISF special forces.[158]

> In after-action reviews, Coalition advisors urged the ISF and KSF to conduct "truly combined operations," which it said meant "not just conducting operations simultaneously, but having ISF and KSF soldiers conduct operations together at the same time and place."

Table 3.
Status of KSF Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Capability
Operations	While the KSF participated in Operation Righteous Saber, Coalition advisors advised the MoPA to increase activities along the KCL and pressed for greater MoPA participation in combined operations with the ISF.
Intelligence	No unclassified information provided.
Planning	The MoPA has not planned operations against ISIS, which CJTF-OIR attributed to a perception that ISIS is not a significant threat in KRG-controlled areas. Instead, MoPA units routinely conduct "control of area" operations in the IKR. Coalition advisors worked with the MoPA's Planning Directorate to develop plans, including a long-term defense strategy. The MoPA continues to lack a long-term plan but has taken steps to begin planning a long-term budget.
Command and Control	MoPA counter-ISIS command and control capabilities have not improved since last quarter. However, plans were underway to establish a new Operations Center next quarter that can communicate with and control deployed KSF units, increase planning support, better coordinate with Joint Coordination Centers, the JOC-I, and the Ministry of Interior, control the narrative, and track units on the battlefield. MoPA lacks the ability to develop and maintain a common operating picture, synchronize priorities in line with their commanders' intents, plan and issue operational orders, battle track operations, and communicate with the MoPA, among other necessary functions.
Fire Support	The KSF does not use fire support in operations against ISIS. The 1st Support Forces Command Artillery Battalion has not participated in counter-ISIS operations near the KCL since 2017 due to what the battalion considers the "unsuitability" of artillery to target small, dispersed groups of ISIS fighters. Coalition advisors worked with the MoPA to improve target acquisition, indirect fire support systems, command and control structure, and plans for integrating artillery into the Regional Guard Brigades' training and operations. Advisors also proposed combined exercises with infantry and artillery units. The KSF units expressed a willingness to increase the frequency of live firing exercises.
Logistics and Sustainment	MoPA sustainment activities support training and "framework operations"—such as patrols— rather than counter-ISIS operations. The MoPA has upgraded logistics and ammunition warehouses and hubs. In one instance during the quarter the MoPA provided equipment and ammunition to a non-MoPA KSF unit operating along the KCL, demonstrating the ability to provide logistics support for a counter-ISIS task. Coalition advisors advised the KSF to decentralize logistics and financial authority, release ammunition for training, purchase IT equipment, allocate a budget for regional logistics hubs, and build more ammunition storage facilities.
Information Operations	The MoPA did not conduct information operations against ISIS during the quarter and plans for information operations are not fully endorsed across all MoPA units. Some units use social media to inform and influence their audience, but struggle with budgets, resources, and clear authorization to post information on social media sites. Genuine and proactive integration of information operations in the fight against ISIS is still lacking. Coalition advisors worked with the MoPA on implementing information operations, including decentralizing the operations; analyzing target audiences; and being proactive. Advisors also trained MoPA personnel on the use of social media, video production, and using photos.

Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.3 OIR 044 and 23.3 OIR 045, 6/21/2023.

SYRIAN PARTNER FORCES

To achieve its mission in Syria, CJTF-OIR works with vetted local partner forces, including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeastern Syria and the Syrian Free Army (SFA), formerly known as the Mughawir al-Thawra.[159]

The SDF operates in Hasakah governorate, in areas of the Dar az Zawr and Raqqah governorates east of the Euphrates River, and in portions of the Aleppo governorate.[160] The SFA mans outposts in and secures a deconfliction zone within a 55-kilometer radius around At Tanf Garrison, near the confluence of Syria's border with Jordan and Iraq. (See page 29.) The SFA provides force protection against pro-regime forces and Iran-aligned militia group positions surrounding the deconfliction zone.[161]

A convoy of U.S. M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles and Syrian Democratic Forces conducts a patrol stop. (U.S. Army photo)
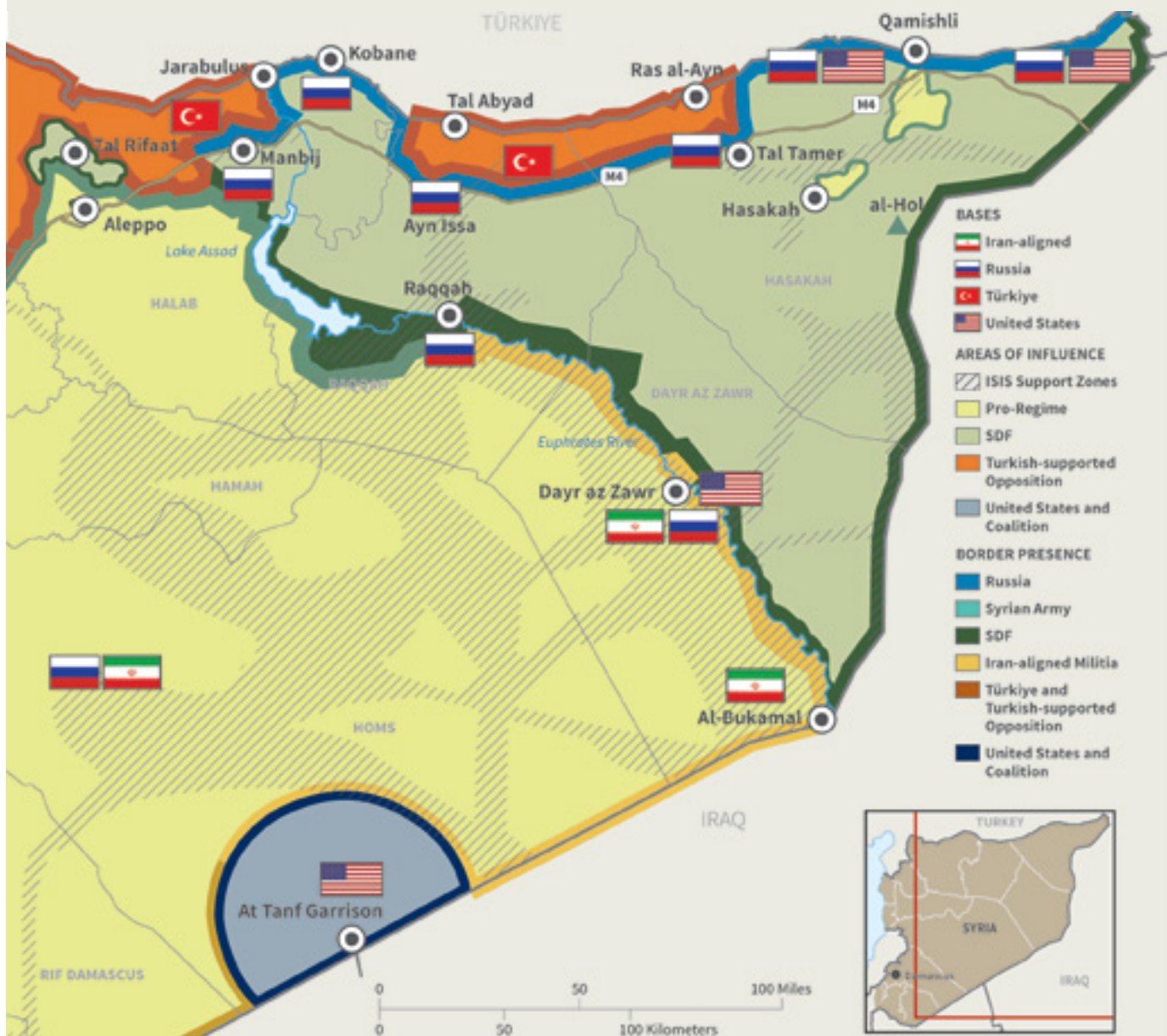
THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT IN SYRIA

Coalition forces in Syria operate in a complex political and military environment. Violence associated with the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, has destabilized the country and led to the deaths of more than half a million people. Today, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, with military support from Russia and Iran, controls most of the country.

The Coalition supports partner forces in areas not under regime control, including the SDF in the northeast and the SFA near the At Tanf Garrison. Russian and pro-regime forces also operate in these areas. Türkiye exercises influence over territory along the northern border and conducts cross-border operations that often target SDF forces. All of these rival forces operate in close proximity, often restricting Coalition and partner force movement, distracting partner forces, limiting humanitarian access, and putting civilians at risk.

BASES
- Iran-aligned
- Russia
- Türkiye
- United States

AREAS OF INFLUENCE
- ISIS Support Zones
- Pro-Regime
- SDF
- Turkish-supported Opposition
- United States and Coalition

BORDER PRESENCE
- Russia
- Syrian Army
- SDF
- Iran-aligned Militia
- Türkiye and Turkish-supported Opposition
- United States and Coalition

Note: This map does not depict precisely or comprehensively bases or operational locations in Syria.

Sources: See Endnotes on page 107.

Coalition forces operate and support the SDF in the Eastern Syria Security Area, which includes Hasakah governorate and parts of Dayr az Zawr east of the Euphrates.[162] Coalition forces also support SDF operations in Raqqah governorate.[163]

On May 3, USCENTCOM announced that its forces conducted a unilateral strike in northwestern Syria targeting a senior al-Qaeda leader.[164] However, media reports later cited USCENTCOM officials who confirmed they were looking into claims by the family of the man who was killed that he was a civilian.[165] USCENTCOM opened a formal investigation into the incident and appointed an investigating general officer, according to a media report.[166]

On June 11, during a routine counter-ISIS operation, a U.S. MH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed while landing at a staging base in Syria, injuring 22 U.S. Service members. Fifteen Service members were medically evacuated to Germany with non-life-threatening injuries. As of early July, all were reported in stable condition with 7 expected to return to duty, and 1 scheduled to be moved to the United States for further treatment. The crash, attributed to mechanical failure, remained under investigation but was understood to have occurred during landing, not take-off, as initially reported, the Office of the Secretary of Defense said.[167]

On June 11, during a routine counter-ISIS operation, a U.S. MH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed while landing at a staging base in Syria, injuring 22 U.S. Service members.

SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

SDF Conducts Unilateral and Partnered Operations Targeting ISIS Cells and Operatives

During the quarter, the Coalition conducted only one unilateral operation against ISIS but partnered with the SDF on dozens of others.[168] (See Table 4.) The SDF did not conduct any large, multi-day operations during the quarter.[169] The SDF reported both unilateral and joint operations in which it dismantled or captured ISIS cells, including a May 15 raid with Coalition forces in which it said it captured an ISIS leader who had been actively planning attacks against SDF forces.[170]

Table 4.

U.S. and SDF Counter-ISIS Operations in Syria During the Quarter

	April	May	June	TOTAL
Partnered Operations	10	17	7	34
U.S. Only Operation	1	0	0	1
ISIS Operatives Captured	21	20	14	55
ISIS Operatives Killed	4	2	1	7

Sources: USCENTCOM, press release, "April 2023 Month in Review: The Defeat ISIS Mission in Iraq and Syria," 5/5/2023; USCENTCOM, press release "CENTCOM Month in Review: The Fight Against ISIS in Iraq and Syria," 6/6/2023; USCENTCOM, press release, "June 2023 Month in Review: The Defeat ISIS Mission in Iraq and Syria," 7/6/2023.

In late May, the SDF announced that its anti-terrorism forces conducted a joint operation with Coalition and the KSF during which they captured an ISIS operative responsible for facilitating the work of ISIS cells in eastern Dayr az Zawr countryside.[171] The SDF also reported that it conducted an operation with Coalition forces in Raqqa city, killing one ISIS fighter and capturing another four fighters.[172]

CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF is capable of operating within the find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate targeting cycle; conducting unilateral operations to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS; and providing regional security in northern and eastern Syria.[173]

Coalition Trains Guards at SDF Detention Facilities

The SDF operates approximately 26 detention facilities across northeastern Syria, containing an estimated 10,000 ISIS fighters, 2,000 of whom are from countries other than Syria and Iraq.[174] There was no significant change in the number of detainees from the previous quarter.[175] CJTF-OIR assessed that the majority of the facilities are moderately secure and sufficient to keep detainees from escaping and rejoining the ISIS fight.[176]

U.S. Special Forces conduct periodic threat vulnerability assessments of detention facilities and, if required, provide recommendations to the SDF regarding the physical structures for corrective action.[177] Most SDF detention facilities were not purpose-built for detention purposes. The DoD is working on multiple detention facility construction projects including the building of purpose-built facilities and renovation of non-purpose built facilities up to standard.[178] Following the ISIS attack at the Ghuwayran Detention Facility in January 2022, all of that facility's detainees were moved to a newly built annex that was near completion at the time of the attack.[179]

CJTF-OIR said that overall, there were no significant changes during the quarter to SDF abilities to manage the detention facilities and safeguard against future attacks.[180] There were no uprisings or riots at detention facilities, and the ongoing degradation of ISIS networks is reducing their ability to conduct effective detention facility attacks.[181]

Coalition forces have been training SDF and Internal Security Forces (Asayish) to guard the detention facilities, with the aim of creating a guard force that can effectively maintain security and prevent ISIS ability to reconstitute.[182] During the quarter, U.S. Special Forces advisors provided specialized training to SDF security forces to protect detention facilities and continued physical security improvements at the facilities.[183]

The SDF graduated 106 Asayish and 86 SDF guards from guard force training this quarter.[184] Those figures were lower than previous quarters due to the Ramadan observance.[185] CJTF-OIR said that the ability of these guards to secure the detainees increases with every graduating class.[186]

Training and physical security improvements at SDF detention facilities are currently conducted in person.[187] U.S. Special Forces advisors worked with the SDF to identify and train and SDF instructors, CJTF-OIR reported.[188]

The SDF operates approximately 26 detention facilities across northeastern Syria, containing an estimated 10,000 ISIS fighters, 2,000 of whom are from countries other than Syria and Iraq.

Saudi Arabia, Iraq Repatriate Detainees

The United States maintains that the only durable solution for foreign-national ISIS fighters in detention and their families in displacement camps is for their countries of origin to repatriate them either for prosecution or rehabilitation and reintegration.[189]

Speaking at the June 8 Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ministerial in Riyadh, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said that failure to repatriate foreign terrorist fighters from Syrian detention facilities "risks the possibility that they could again take up arms and attempt to restore ISIS's so-called 'caliphate,' terrorize communities that we're working to stabilize and rebuild, and potentially threaten our homelands."[190]

This quarter, the U.S. Government facilitated the repatriation of 18 foreign terrorist fighters to Saudi Arabia.[191] Separately, Iraq worked directly with the SDF to repatriate 50 detainees.[192]

Secretary Blinken noted that in 2023 more foreign nationals—both fighters in detention and displaced persons—were repatriated from northeastern Syria than in the previous 2 years combined. As of June 8, 14 countries had repatriated more than 2,000 of their nationals, including hundreds of children."[193] In particular the Iraqi government had repatriated more than 500 of its nationals from northeastern Syria.[194] Secretary Blinken singled out Kuwait for its help as a "critical transit hub" in expediting these repatriations.[195]

The United States "supports countries of origin to repatriate their nationals on a case-by-case basis," State reported.[196] Repatriations—including detainees and displaced persons—remained challenging, as countries of origin, including Iraq, do not have "uniform views on repatriations," State said.[197]

U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken participates in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ministerial Closing Session In Riyadh. (State photo)

Global Leaders Reaffirm Support for OIR

In June, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met with the foreign ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in Saudi Arabia. In a communique released after the meeting, the U.S. Government and foreign ministers confirmed their commitment to enhance the civilian-led counterterrorism capacities of Coalition members throughout the world. State and the other Coalition members emphasized the importance of border and internal security, judicial reform, and intelligence and law enforcement information sharing bilaterally and multilaterally.[198]

While in Riyadh, Secretary Blinken also met with the foreign ministers of the six-member (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman) Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).[199] In discussions about the Syria crisis, the ministers reaffirmed their support for the Coalition's counter-ISIS mission in Syria and "condemned all actions that threaten the safety and security" of these forces.[200] They stressed the need for "secure conditions for the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons" consistent with UN High Commissioner for Refugee standards, and the importance of providing the "necessary support to Syrian refugees and to the countries hosting them."[201]

The ministers also reaffirmed their commitment to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis in a "manner that preserves Syria's unity and sovereignty," meets the aspirations of its people, is consistent with international humanitarian law, and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.[202]

SYRIAN FREE ARMY

Coalition Forces also continued to conduct training-related operations with the Syrian Free Army (SFA) focusing on defensive tasks. This training is conducted at each of the SFA combat outposts. During the quarter, the SFA conducted 51 partnered training operations with Coalition forces.[203]

The SFA also conducts routine area security operations and patrols independent of Coalition forces.[204] There were no kinetic engagements during the quarter.[205] The SFA primarily relies on Coalition support, including through CTEF, to carry out its mission to counter ISIS activities and provide Coalition force protection.[206]

SFA Improves Some Capabilities, Remains Reliant on Coalition Support and Instruction

CJTF-OIR advises, assists, and enables the SFA to conduct routine training that achieves increased levels of readiness up to the company or troop level. This includes weapons proficiency, medical response, communication techniques, maintenance, integrated indirect fire support, and synchronized operations.[207] Coalition forces also conducted train-the-trainer sessions and bi-weekly patrols to train the SFA personnel at combat outposts, while SFA medics and personnel also received training in medical capabilities, and participated in a separate line of effort in which they helped provide medical care to the population.[208]

During the quarter, U.S. Forces worked with the SFA to improve proficiency at the platoon level.[209] CJTF-OIR said that it used gated training structures, with defined benchmarks, to assess proficiency, allowing the SFA to see their improvement in each iteration of training.[210] The training involved weekly interactions between multiple combat outposts to work on maintaining individual skills and crew proficiency on moving, shooting, and communicating.[211] CJTF-OIR said that these capabilities were critical to defending the At Tanf Garrison area.[212]

U.S. Forces conducted six iterations of platoon live fire training with the SFA using mortars in support of maneuver training, both during the day and at night.[213] CJTF-OIR validated the SFA's progression from section to platoon-level during a combined arms live fire exercise in May using direct and indirect fire support.[214] Following this platoon validation, the SFA is scheduled to receive follow-on training at the platoon and company levels over the summer of 2023.[215]

CJTF-OIR said that during the quarter's training, the SFA continued to build task proficiency in mounted and dismounted maneuver, incorporating mortars, using communications equipment, medical tasks, planning defensive operations, and messaging in the information environment.[216]

The SFA also continued to build proficiency in individual and collective tasks, including: communication capability at the team and platoon echelon as part of line of sight and command-and-control planning; establishing observation posts with integrated combat outpost defense plans; conducting procedures for leading troops at the platoon and company level; planning and integrating indirect fire support; mortar registration and certification; advancing from individual qualification to crew-mounted machine gunnery; planning logistics support for operations and basic life support at individual combat outposts; and evaluating and treating casualties using tactical combat care and advanced field medical techniques.[217] CJTF-OIR further reported that the SFA media cell increased its abilities.[218]
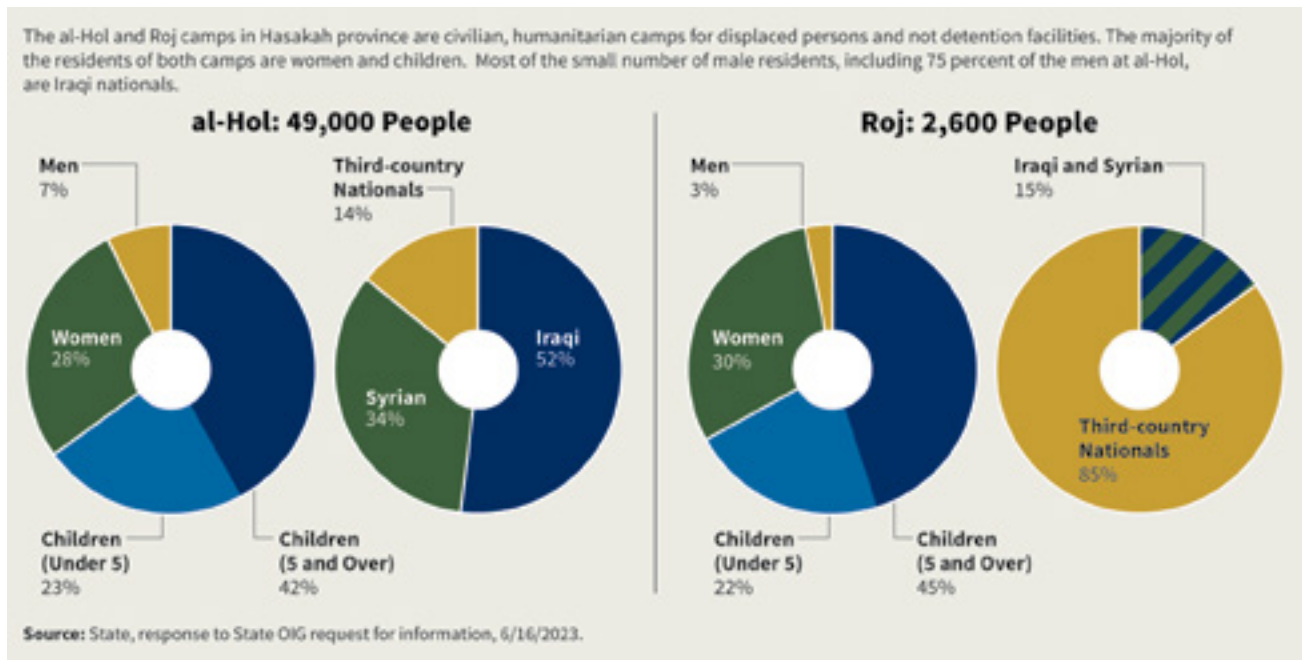
DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS

The U.S. Government has placed increasing emphasis on the urgent need to address security and humanitarian concerns at displacement camps in Syria, particularly the al-Hol camp. Approximately 49,000 people live at the al-Hol camp, down from a peak of more than 70,000 in 2019.[219] (See Figure 3.)

The U.S. Government continued its whole of government efforts to return or repatriate and reintegrate residents from al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps.[220] While the DoD works with the SDF to counter ISIS activity and influence in the camp, State and USAID have the primary role in addressing humanitarian conditions in the camp and facilitating efforts to repatriate and reintegrate residents of the camp in their home communities.[221] State said it also works with the DoD to provide logistical assistance on a case-by-case basis to countries seeking to repatriate their nationals.[222]

Approximately 49,000 people live at the al-Hol camp, down from a peak of more than 70,000 in 2019.

Figure 3.

Demographics of the al-Hol and Roj Displaced Persons Camps

The al-Hol and Roj camps in Hasakah province are civilian, humanitarian camps for displaced persons and not detention facilities. The majority of the residents of both camps are women and children. Most of the small number of male residents, including 75 percent of the men at al-Hol, are Iraqi nationals.

al-Hol: 49,000 People

Men 7%
Third-country Nationals 14%
Women 28%
Iraqi 52%
Syrian 34%
Children (Under 5) 23%
Children (5 and Over) 42%

Roj: 2,600 People

Men 3%
Iraqi and Syrian 15%
Women 30%
Third-country Nationals 85%
Children (Under 5) 22%
Children (5 and Over) 45%

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 6/16/2023.

Speaking in June, Secretary of State Blinken said while the United States prioritizes the "serious security and humanitarian needs at al-Hol and other camps…repatriation is the only durable solution."[223]

Violent Incidents Decrease in al-Hol, "Ordinary Criminality" Continues

During the quarter, the conditions in al-Hol displaced persons camp remained "a challenge for local security and humanitarian partners" despite the decrease in the number of violent incidents and no killings since November, State said.[224] However, "ordinary criminality" continued at the same level as in previous quarters and included threats of extortion against humanitarian organizations working at the camp.[225]

At both the Roj and al-Hol displaced persons camps, overall criminal acts decreased since May 2022. State reported that "crimes against property" and "non-fatal violence" remained the two most common crimes.[226]

This quarter State continued work with DoD and USAID to coordinate with local security partners on camp security, including ensuring that humanitarian recommendations are considered.[227] These include freedom of movement for camp residents within the camp to access services, and reducing displacement of resident homes during the construction of fencing and other security outposts, State said.[228]

More al-Hol Security Forces Graduate Training, Challenges Remain

CJTF-OIR continued training security forces to provide security at al-Hol.[229] During the quarter, approximately 300 Asayish recruits graduated basic training to provide security in the camp, bringing the total number of security personnel at al-Hol up to 1,377, including 112 female guards.[230] CJTF-OIR said that at the current pace of training, the program is on track to reach the stated goal of 3,000 personnel trained in 2024.[231]

During the quarter, Syrian partner forces conducted arrests and confiscated weapons and military equipment in al-Hol.[232] Partner forces also established more patrols around the perimeter of the camp to put an end to ISIS smuggling within the camp.[233] CJTF-OIR said that overall security posture increased monthly as more recruits graduate.[234]

However, despite some improvements in camp security, camp security forces continued to face challenges and vulnerabilities.[235] Because of the size of the force, security forces at al-Hol remained challenged in disrupting ISIS activity, including the smuggling of people and weapons throughout the various sections of the camp, and ISIS indoctrination efforts.[236]

The reluctance of security forces to conduct patrols in the camp, and the risk of security forces being bribed by ISIS affiliates, are the greatest vulnerabilities of the security forces at al-Hol, CJTF-OIR said.[237] The forces are also undergoing professionalization courses where they are being instructed on best practices while dealing with the camp population.[238]

U.S. Government Funds Essential Services in al-Hol

This quarter, the U.S. Government continued to fund humanitarian partners working at al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps that provide life-saving and essential services to camp residents, including monthly food assistance, water and sanitation services, shelter, health, protection, and education services.[239] Education programs provided mental health and psychosocial support, remedial literacy and numeracy courses, and self-learning program classes to children in formal schools and in informal displaced persons camps. State said that it views education at al-Hol and Roj camps as the "most pressing need for children residing at displaced persons camps."[240]

State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) funded two nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that provide services to displaced persons in Syria. One NGO provides the camp management functions at al-Hol and Roj camps.[241] The second NGO provides multi-sectoral assistance to out-of-camp Iraqi refugees living throughout Syria. State said it coordinates closely with other U.S. Government agencies on its humanitarian assistance priorities related to al-Hol camp and also works with other international donors to prioritize funding for the most pressing requirements.[242]

Repatriation and Reintegration Remains Slow

On June 4, the Iraqi government facilitated the 10th round of repatriations from the al-Hol camp, resuming repatriations for the first time in more than 3 months. This repatriation included 659 Iraqis coming from al-Hol to the Jeddah 1 camp in Iraq. Since May 2021, the

During the quarter, approximately 300 Asayish recruits graduated basic training to provide security in the camp, bringing the total number of security personnel at al-Hol up to 1,377, including 112 female guards.

Iraqi government has returned 1,382 households, or 5,562 individuals, from al-Hol to the Jeddah 1 camp, leaving fewer than 26,000 Iraqi nationals in the camp.[243]

Syrian departures from al-Hol slowed after early January 2022, according to State, with the first large-scale departure of Syrians from al-Hol to areas of origin in northeastern Syria on June 4, when 222 Syrians returned to Manbij.[244] This return group, the majority of whom originated from Manbij, was initially organized to leave in October 2022, but its departure was postponed.[245] These individuals returned to areas where U.S. Government stabilization and humanitarian programs operate, necessitating programmatic shifts to support their return.[246]

There is also a process to voluntarily repatriate displaced Iraqis living in Syria outside of displaced persons camps, separate from the 150 households Iraq committed to repatriate monthly from al-Hol, State reported.[247]

State and USAID continued to implement programming in northeastern Syria and Iraq in support of repatriations, returns, and reintegration of Iraqi and Syrian residents of al-Hol camp to their communities of return.[248] In Syria, State continued its work supporting social cohesion, education, and essential services in communities of return.[249] USAID reported that it was working to dedicate programming in the Syria stabilization portfolio towards returnee communities, prioritizing interventions into known communities of return based on data and trends of returnees over the past 2 to 3 years.[250] Approximately 42 percent of USAID stabilization resources this quarter supported communities known to be hosting al-Hol returnees.[251]

Iraqis Face Barriers to Return

State reported that as of mid-June, approximately 2,200 individuals, representing 579 households, lived in the Jeddah 1 camp.[252]

Once they depart Jeddah 1 for areas of origin or relocation, Iraqis face barriers to return, such as lack of housing, civil documentation, livelihoods, access to basic services, and concerns about safety and security, according to USAID.[253] Iraqis can struggle to integrate or secure community acceptance in areas of return due to their affiliation or perceived affiliation with ISIS.[254]

The United States provides assistance to various stages of the Iraqi repatriation, rehabilitation, transitional service, and reintegration process. During the quarter, both State PRM and USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) provided humanitarian assistance and services in the Jeddah 1 camp, including camp management support, mental health and psychosocial support services, protection assistance, primary health care, and other humanitarian assistance. Through the UN Refugee Agency, State PRM supported Jeddah 1 residents to access legal support to obtain civil documents, housing, land, and property rights, and services in areas of return. Through the International Organization for Migration, State PRM supported returnees as they transition out of Jeddah 1 and into their areas of return, including protection monitoring and follow up with returnees, reintegration grants, and livelihoods support.[255]

State reported that during the quarter, UN agencies under the umbrella of the Global Framework for UN Support on Syria/Iraq Third Country National Returnees worked closely with the Iraqi government to provide technical support for the al-Hol returns process. For Iraq, this includes technical assistance and support for security and accountability, legal rights of children, rehabilitation and transitional services, and reintegration. The United Nations, in coordination with the Iraqi government, is working with international donors to encourage funding for key activities to support the Iraqi returns process.[256]

State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor programs work directly with civil society, tribal leaders, and local peace committees to facilitate the return and sustainable reintegration of individuals and families with perceived ISIS affiliation. The bureau recently launched and funded a program in western Anbar province to build consensus among tribal and community leaders on how to handle returns, including from al-Hol, and reintegration efforts.[257]

Iraqi Government Closes Jeddah 5 IDP Camp

On April 17, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement closed the Jeddah 5 camp for internally displaced persons (IDP), where 342 internally displaced households (more than 1,500 individuals) had been sheltering.[258] This closure took place despite widespread criticism. Following the closure, a significant number of IDPs remain "secondarily displaced."[259] Jeddah 5 was the last remaining IDP camp in federal Iraq; 25 IDP camps remain in the IKR.[260] USAID noted that international media reported that humanitarian organizations have raised concerns that the camp closures leave vulnerable families, including many women and children, unable to integrate in their areas of origin due to perceived affiliations with ISIS.[261]

During the quarter, State PRM continued to support humanitarian assistance, programs, and advocacy for vulnerable displaced communities and promote interim and durable solutions for Iraqi IDPs, returnees, refugees, and others affected by conflict.[262]

According to State, the IDP camps in the IKR are assisted through a variety of mechanisms, including multi-national contributions to UN agencies and NGOs, direct and indirect assistance and coordination of assistance by KRG and federal Iraq entities, and private donations. State PRM and USAID BHA provide assistance to NGOs, international organizations and camp management to support displaced persons in IDP camps and informal settlements.[263]

During the quarter, Iraqi IDPs consistently listed insecurity and lack of assurance that they will be safe in their communities, insufficient shelter, a lack of livelihoods, difficulty obtaining civil documentation, and a lack of basic services as obstacles to their return, according to State PRM. Most individuals affected by displacement were living on daily wages, and movement restrictions have significantly affected their ability to make ends meet. Furthermore, many Iraqi IDPs are at high risk of secondary displacement.[264]

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OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Operations in Iraq and Syria by third party forces—particularly those from Iran, Türkiye, Russia, and the Syrian regime and their proxies—complicate the progress of the OIR mission by increasing Coalition force protection needs, influencing and distracting partner forces, and increasing the risk of further conflict.

NON-COALITION OPERATIONS AGAINST ISIS

Third party forces continued to conduct some counter-ISIS operations during the quarter. Russian forces conducted sporadic airstrikes in the Syrian Desert in support of counter-ISIS operations by Syrian regime-aligned forces, according to the DIA.[265] At the same time Russia publicly accused the United States—without substantiation—of training ISIS terrorists in Syria to carry out sabotage and terrorist attacks in Syria and Russia.[266] Russian activities in Syria are frequently aimed at pressuring the United States to pull its forces from Syria, and include statements aimed at directing public opinion against the United States.[267]

Turkish forces continued operations to degrade ISIS capability within both Syria and Türkiye. The U.S. European Comman (USEUCOM) reported that in February, Turkish security services arrested more than a dozen individuals connected with an ISIS threat against European consulates in Türkiye.[268]

Syrian regime and Iran-backed forces continued to conduct some counter-ISIS operations in the Syrian Desert, but they were not very effective, according to the DIA. These forces rely on both a network of checkpoints, and on intermittent and ineffective mounted ground patrols around known ISIS operating areas. The DIA said that these tactics did not durably dislodge ISIS members operating in the Syrian Desert during the quarter.[269]

Syrian regime forces rely on less experienced military units, foreign partners, and poorly-disciplined Syrian paramilitary forces to prevent ISIS's low-level insurgency in the desert from growing.[270] The DIA said that some of these security forces, notably Iran-backed foreign units, alienate locals around ISIS operating areas.[271]

IRAN

Iran-aligned Militias Conduct Limited Ineffective Attacks, But Threat of Escalation Remains

The DIA reported that there were no significant hostile activities between Iran or Iran-aligned actors and Coalition forces or local partners in Iraq during the quarter.[272] Meanwhile, CJTF-OIR reported that six "incidents" occurred involving UAS and two indirect fire attacks occurred within the vicinity of Coalition forces in Syria during the quarter.[273] In one attack that occurred on April 10, USCENTCOM said Mission Support Site Conoco in central Dayr az Zawr governorate was targeted with one rocket that was ineffective, resulting in no injuries or damage to the base.[274] This follows at least eight attacks in Syria last quarter, including a series of escalating attacks in March that killed one U.S. contractor and wounded 25 U.S. military personnel.[275]

U.S. Army soldiers fire a counter-UAS system to engage a target during a training scenario in Southwest Asia. (U.S. Army photo)

Since May, Iran-aligned militias and their front groups have increased public threats against the U.S. presence in Iraq. The DIA assessed the increased threats may signal the early stages of the resumption of attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq, which have been paused since May 2022.[276] According to CJTF-OIR, Iran-aligned militias publicly messaged that they have an agreement with the Iraqi government to pause attacks on Coalition positions in Iraq.[277] CJTF-OIR also noted that while Iraqi militias aligned with Iran continue to threaten to target U.S. forces in Syria, the militias do not always follow through with their threats to attack.[278] The DIA also said that partner forces in Syria remain threatened by Iran and Iran-aligned forces by virtue of being in close proximity to Coalition forces.[279]

CJTF-OIR assessed that the threat from Iran and its aligned militias present an overall moderate risk to the OIR campaign. Iran-aligned militia groups remain capable of conducting and enabling IED, indirect fire, and UAS attacks against U.S., Coalition, and partner force targets. Specifically, the threat posed by one-way UAS and indirect fire attacks by militias remains high, resulting in increased force protection requirements at installations in Syria. CJTF-OIR said that the credible stream of threats and attacks requires the Coalition to reallocate ISR assets to monitor the threats, which reduces ISR availability to support counter-ISIS and partner force operations.[280] Iranian malign influence detracts from the counter-ISIS mission in Iraq through its political influence and restrictions it imposes on U.S. and Coalition freedom of movement in the region.[281]

Meanwhile, Iran renewed threats this quarter to target Iranian Kurdish dissidents residing in the IKR should Iraq fail to implement a joint security agreement signed between Baghdad and Tehran in March. The DIA reported that that agreement called for Iraq to prevent the dissidents from using territory in the IKR to enable cross-border attacks on Iran. Iran has publicly accused the groups of being used by Israel to conduct operations inside Iran as well as being a key driver of ongoing domestic unrest in Iran since last summer. Previous Iranian attacks on dissident positions in the IKR involved one-way attack UASs and ballistic missiles.[282]

On June 6, a newer Iran-aligned militia front-group called Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq claimed an attack against Türkiye's Camp Zilkan military base in northern Iraq. However, the DIA could not confirm this attack occurred.[283]

Iraqi Government Exerts Little Control over Militias

Citing open source analysis, the DIA reported that Iraqi Prime Minister al-Sudani did not take steps to assert control over militias or their umbrella organization, the Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC), during the quarter. Further, the Prime Minister approved the Finance Ministry's budget proposal to increase funding allocations to the PMC. The DIA noted that the PMC-affiliated Shia Coordination Framework bloc, which holds a plurality of the seats in the Iraqi Parliament, continued to hold high levels of influence within the Iraqi government.[284]

However, the DIA reported that the ISF continued to demonstrate willingness to challenge or confront Iran-aligned militias when directed by the government. The DIA cited press reporting of a clash between Iraqi Federal Police and the Iran-aligned militia Kata'ib Hezbollah on May 15 over a land dispute in Baghdad's Doura district, which led to a firefight. The DIA said that although the incident demonstrates ISF willingness to confront illicit militia activity, the ISF does not take the initiative to confront militias without judicial or executive guidance. Iran-aligned militias did not deliberately target members of the ISF during the quarter.[285]

TÜRKIYE

During the quarter, Türkiye conducted ongoing UAS strikes in Syria targeting SDF leaders who Turkish press reports claimed were affiliated with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).[286] Türkiye does not differentiate between the PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization and the SDF, a CJTF-OIR partner force.[287] These included Turkish attacks in April and May that killed high-ranking SDF members near Kobane and Qamishli which Türkiye claimed were PKK affiliated with the SDF, according to Turkish media reporting.[288] A Syrian war monitor reported that the Turkish strikes marked an escalation and resulted in the deaths of civilians and local council members.[289] State described the escalation as "dangerous and a threat to the safety of civilians."[290]

On April 7, a Turkish UAS strike near Sulaymaniyah International Airport in Iraq narrowly missed SDF leader General Mazloum Abdi, who was traveling in a convoy that included U.S. personnel. The DIA reported that there were no casualties.[291] In a statement issued by the SDF, General Mazloum said he believed the attack was in part related to the Turkish presidential elections and in part because Türkiye was unhappy with the "recently strengthened" relations between the SDF and forces in Iraqi Kurdistan, which he said was unifying Kurdish forces.[292]

The PKK has been waging a longtime insurgency against Türkiye.[293] For the past year, Turkish leaders have threatened to launch a new ground offensive into northern Syria to remove the PKK and SDF from its border.[294]

Since December, Türkiye has engaged in a series of diplomatic talks with Iran, Russia, and Syria with the intent of normalizing ties between Syria and Türkiye.[295] The DIA, citing media reporting, said that Russian-led negotiations in April and May led to an agreement involving Türkiye, Russia, Iran, and Syria to establish a joint center in northern Syria to monitor developments in the region.[296] USEUCOM said the negotiations have potentially reduced the likelihood of a Turkish ground incursion into Syria.[297]

During the quarter, Türkiye conducted ongoing UAS strikes in Syria targeting SDF leaders who Turkish press reports claimed were affiliated with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Image capture from declassified footage of a Russian Su-35 violating Coalition force airspace in Syria on April 18, 2023. (U.S. Air Force video)

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) stated that the DoD consistently engages Türkiye on a number of shared interests and issues, including mitigating civilian casualties, damage to civilian infrastructure, and disruption of the counter-ISIS campaign.[298]

RUSSIA

Russian aircraft continued to violate established deconfliction protocols with the Coalition during the quarter, mostly by flying over Coalition forces in Syria.[299] Russian forces also conducted sporadic ground violations.[300] CJTF-OIR reported that the number of violations during the quarter remained at the level of historic norms and that Russian forces mostly followed the deconfliction protocols.[301]

USCENTCOM, describing Russian activity as "increasingly unsafe and unprofessional," deployed U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptors to the Middle East in June."[302] USCENTCOM stated that it was integrating the stealth fighter jets with Coalition air and ground forces.[303] The Commander of U.S. Air Forces Central, Lieutenant General Alexus Grynkewich, told reporters that the deployment of the F-22s was a show of U.S. strength amid Russia's air violations in Syria.[304]

Lieutenant General Grynkewich said that Russia's disregard for the agreed upon protocol increased the risk of miscalculation and "potentially dangerous encounters."[305] In April, Air Forces Central released footage of a Russian Su-35 that flew into Coalition airspace in Syria. Air Forces Central said that when U.S. Air Force fighter aircraft responded to intercept the Russian aircraft, the Russian fighters "maneuvered unprofessionally within 2,000 feet of U.S. aircraft."[306]

The Air Forces Central Commander said that Russian planes flying over American bases were most likely collecting intelligence that it was probably sharing with U.S. adversaries in the region, including Syria and Iran, according to a media report.[307]

Lieutenant General Grynkewich said in June that Russia has had to move capability and capacity out of Syria to support its war in Ukraine.[308] According to media reporting, the private military company known as the Wagner Group—which was instrumental to Russian military assistance to the Assad regime during the Syrian civil war—would no longer operate in Syria independently, following the attempted insurrection by Wagner forces in Russia in late June.[309] It remained unclear how that extrication might be accomplished.[310]

A Syrian veterinarian vaccinates one of 4,000 sheep in northeastern Syria with equipment, vaccines, and medicines provided by USAID. (USAID photo)

BROADER U.S. POLICY GOALS

BROADER U.S. POLICY GOALS

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Government pursues several policy goals in Iraq and Syria that, while not directly a part of the OIR mission, are integral to the success of the campaign. (See Table 5.) The U.S. Government, primarily through State and USAID, remains the largest donor for stabilization and humanitarian programming in Iraq and Syria.[311] Other U.S. Government agencies, including the Department of Treasurey (Treasury) and the Department of Justice (DoJ), also contribute to the counter-ISIS mission through sanctions, prosecutions, and technical assistance programs.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Through diplomacy and stabilization programs, State and USAID seek to help Iraq expand its inclusive private sector growth, create opportunities for U.S investment through comprehensive economic reform, implement anti-corruption measures, and diversify Iraq's economy.[312] In Syria, where the economy has been ravaged by 12 years of conflict and natural disaster, the U.S. Government promotes economic rebuilding through stabilization programs and humanitarian assistance. (See page 61.)

The Iraqi government under Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani must address a range of issues to support a stable Iraq, State said. At the start of the hot summer months, Iraq

With support from USAID, Green Scape is expanding its business to include new water-retaining technologies and tools that will help Iraqi farmers use less water for irrigation. (USAID photo)

Table 5.

U.S. Policy Goals in Iraq and Syria

Iraq	Syria
Promote inclusive, economic reform	Sustain the U.S. and Global Coalition campaign against ISIS
Support an Iraqi democracy that delivers for all citizens	Support local ceasefires across the country
Support a resilient Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR)	Support the expansion of humanitarian access throughout Syria
Bolster Iraqi independence and advance regional integration	Press for justice, accountability, and respect for international law including promoting respect for human rights and non-proliferation
	Support a political process led by Syrian people, as envisioned in UNSCR 2254

Source: State, "Integrated Country Strategy-Iraq," 5/30/2023; State, response to State OIG request for information, 6/16/2023.

was not generating enough electricity to provide continuous power for its citizens, despite being rich in energy resources. During the quarter, little progress was made to address an acute water crisis that is exacerbated by climate change, and Iraq is experiencing many of the worst impacts. A third of young Iraqis are unemployed. At the end of the quarter, State said the onus is on the Iraqi government to enact bold policies and reforms that visibly improve the lives of Iraqis and reinforce democratic values and good governance.[313]

Iraqi Parliament Approves 2023 Budget

On June 12, the Iraqi parliament approved a 3-year, $153 billion annual budget with a projected annual deficit of $48.3 billion, nearly 3 months after it was submitted by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's cabinet.[314] It is Iraq's largest ever national budget. As a comparison, the last budget approved by the Iraqi parliament in 2021 amounted to $89 billion per year.[315]

The budget provides guidance regarding the IKR's share of the funding and how oil revenues will be managed, and it increases spending on public sector jobs.[316] At the end of the quarter, issuance of implementation regulations by the Ministry of Finance was pending.[317]

The new budget, like the 2021 budget, is paid for almost entirely with oil export revenues.[318] According to media reports, the budget assumed crude oil exports of 3.5 million barrels per day, sales averaging $70 per barrel, and daily oil revenues of $245 million. However, oil exports have not reached the 2023 budget target of 3.5 million barrels per day since January 1.[319] Although oil prices have remained above $70 per barrel since January 1, Iraq has been able to reach the average daily revenue target of $245 million only during the months of January, February, and April.[320] (See Figure 4.)

Much of the delay approving the budget was due to the debate over oil exports and revenue sharing with the IKR. For years, the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have fought over oil revenues from exports from the IKR to Türkiye.

Figure 4.

Actual vs. Projected Daily Oil Revenue, in $ Millions, April 2022–June 2023
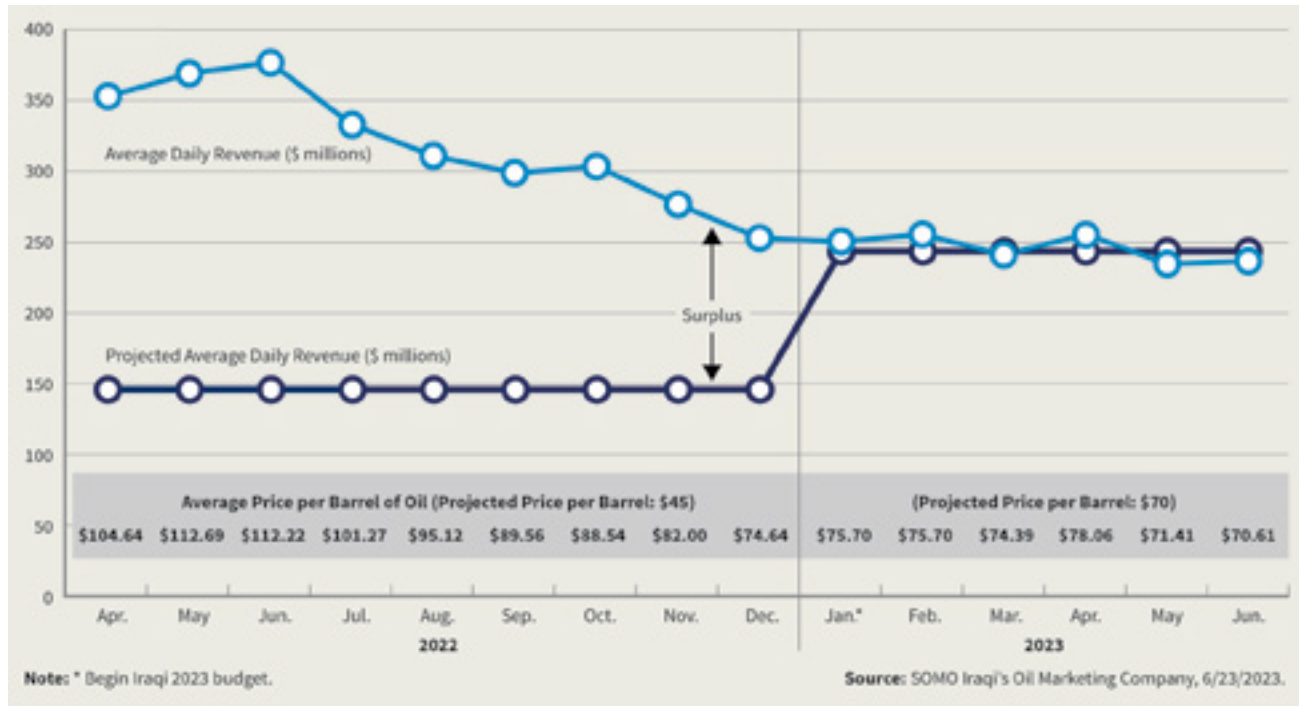
According to media reports, this situation escalated in March when Türkiye closed the Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline (ITP), effectively halting the transit of oil from the IKR to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. Türkiye's action followed an International Chamber of Commerce determination that Türkiye had breached portions of a treaty with Iraq by facilitating the transport of hundreds of millions of barrels of IKR oil via the ITP from 2014 through 2018, without authorization of the Iraqi government. The tribunal awarded Iraq approximately $1.5 billion.[321]

In April, media reported that the KRG and the Iraqi government reached an agreement under which the Iraqi government's State Organization for the Marketing of Oil would market the IKR's oil in coordination with the KRG. Last-minute amendments to the budget removed the KRG's ability to receive direct revenues from those sales, making the KRG solely dependent on the Iraqi government for budget allocations for the first time since 2014.[322] According to a media report, the budget allocates 12.6 percent of its funding, after excluding sovereign expenditures, to the KRG.[323]

State reported that Iraq's new budget—if fully implemented—offers the KRG direct budget transfers of up to $1.2 billion per month, which may reflect a modest increase from historical income based largely on oil revenues, although KRG officials caution that actual KRG allocations are likely to be less based on overall spending.[324] The KRG continues to express concern over implementation of provisions relating to the delivery, transit, and sale of oil, as well as the handling of oil revenues.[325]

Shutdown of Iraq-Türkiye Pipeline Has Minimal Impact on Oil Exports

According to a media report, Iraq's nationwide crude oil production decreased 320,000 barrels per day following the shutdown of the ITP; however, the ITP shutdown had a minimal impact on Iraq's oil exports, resulting in a decrease of just 2.2 million barrels exported per month from March to April.[326] Over the same period, oil prices increased from $74.39 per barrel in March to $78.06 in April, resulting in an increase of $190 million in monthly revenues. By May, Iraq's crude oil exports had recovered from the ITP shutdown, and monthly exports were the highest of the year.[327]

Subsequently, in May and June, Iraq was able to offset the crude oil export reductions from the closure of the ITP by increasing exports through its southern Um Qasr oil terminal.[328] Despite the increased exports from Um Qasr, daily revenues did not meet the $3.5 billion monthly target.[329] The ITP remained closed at the end of the quarter, even though Iraqi officials were urging Türkiye to reopen the pipeline to enable crude oil from the IKR to reach the global market.[330]

After the OPEC+ meeting in Vienna in early June, Iraq's Minister of Oil said Iraq, as an OPEC member, would continue to honor the voluntary reduction in oil production of 211,000 barrels per day through the end of 2024, according to a media report.[331] With Saudi Arabia announcing a unilateral production cut of 1 million barrels per day effective in July, State said it is expected that global oil prices will remain steady and may increase slightly.[332]

Iraq's 5-Year Plan to Meet Electricity Needs

State reported that the Iraqi government took steps during the quarter to develop energy infrastructure to ensure long-term electricity services. Advancing domestic gas production and gas capture projects, as well as regional electricity interconnections, are critical to meeting the basic needs of all Iraqis, according to State.[333]

During the quarter, Iraq's Ministry of Electricity proposed an energy transition plan that focuses on producing 47,000 megawatts of power from natural gas, heavy fuel oil, and solar energy by 2027, according to State. Iraq's plan includes increasing imports of Iranian natural gas by 17 percent. The Ministry of Electricity is hopeful that after 2027, various gas capture projects, including the development of gas fields in Iraq, will eventually supplant the need for Iranian gas.[334] However, the energy transition plan would require Iraq to nearly double its existing electricity production levels, and Iraq has not meaningfully increased generation levels or made progress on gas capture projects in the last 5 years.[335]

Advancing domestic gas production and gas capture projects, as well as regional electricity interconnections, are critical to meeting the basic needs of all Iraqis, according to State.

The plan also calls for 10,000 MW of solar power and 1,500 MW of electricity from interconnections with Jordan and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Up to 100 MW are expected to be distributed from Jordan to al-Rutbah in Anbar province beginning in August. State reported that GE has started work on building electrical cable towers from Jordan into western Anbar province with the eventual goal of completing distribution lines to northern Anbar. Electricity is expected to begin flowing later this summer.[336]
A 2,000 MW interconnection from Saudi Arabia is planned as well. As part of the plan, the Ministry of Electricity is also investing in transmission and distribution upgrades as well as improvements in bill collection from customers who do not pay.[337]

KRG Develops Strategic Plan to Increase Electricity Generation

During the quarter, the KRG continued to develop and implement its strategic plan to increase electricity generation and reliability of services, State reported. This includes the installation of approximately 1.35 million "smart" meters across the region to eliminate illegal electricity hookups, expansion of pilot programs in Erbil to introduce demand-based pricing, and projects to increase generation capacity and transmission and distribution infrastructure. Unlike peak summertime electricity demand in southern Iraq, peak demand in the IKR is during the winter. [338]

State said a project to expand production at the Khor Mor natural gas field resumed after delays due to rocket attacks; when complete, this project will increase available fuel stocks for power generation in the region by nearly 50 percent.[339] This project has been funded by a loan from the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, which also loaned $49 million to HKN Energy to finance the development of a gas capture project at the Sarsang oil production block in Duhok province; this project is on hold due to the ITP closure.[340]

State reported that additional expansion of the gas sector, including new projects to capture associated gas in lieu of flaring, are mostly on hold pending resolution of the legal issues in the wake of the February 2022 Iraqi Federal Supreme Court decision invalidating the KRG's oil and gas law and resumption of oil exports via the ITP. The KRG Ministry of Electricity has a plan in place to develop 3,300 MW of solar power projects, although lack of funding and financing options is a major challenge.[341]

Iraq Settles Debt with Iran for Gas Imports

According to media reports, the U.S. Government approved a €2.5 billion ($2.76 billion) payment by the Iraqi government to Iran for electricity and gas imported from Iran.[342] According to the National Security Council, the payments are considered "humanitarian" and are consistent with longstanding U.S. regulations and practice.[343] According to the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce director, the funds would be used for Iranian pilgrims' expenses during the Haj, the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and importation of essential goods.[344]

According to multiple media reports, Iraq's Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein received the approval to proceed with the payment from U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken at the June 8 Riyadh Conference. Iraq's Foreign Ministry said the funds would be transferred through the Commercial Bank of Iraq.[345]

Private Banks in Iraq Lack Liquidity and Technical Capacity to Lend to Small Businesses

Private banks in Iraq lack the liquidity and technical capacity to lend to small businesses, according to USAID.[346] Risk sharing from the banking sector for new businesses is insufficient, limiting lending opportunities and increases the cost of finance.[347] USAID reported facilitating a loan portfolio guarantee from the Development Finance Corporation

to support two private banks to increase lending.[348] However, this process faces significant delays since these two banks lack experience with international financial standards, requiring USAID to deploy additional resources to build capacity at these banks to meet loan requirements.[349] USAID-supported businesses also seek financing from equity investors and venture capital funds due to the challenges of securing loans from local banks.[350]

Access to Clean Water Remains Critical

As part of its goal for inclusive economic growth in Iraq, the U.S. Government seeks to help Iraq accelerate cross-sectoral actions to mitigate and combat climate change.[351]

Lack of sanitation facilities, dated and inefficient infrastructure, water-intensive agricultural practices, effects of climate change, and reduced downstream flow are key drivers of water insecurity in Iraq.

The U.S. Government continued to help the Iraqi government improve its water resource management during the quarter. Lack of sanitation facilities, dated and inefficient infrastructure, water-intensive agricultural practices, effects of climate change, and reduced downstream flow are key drivers of water insecurity in Iraq. To address these challenges, the Ministry of Water Resources signed a deal in June with two international firms whose updated strategic studies of water and land resources will be used for planning efforts through 2035, according to media.[352]

U.S. Government officials in Iraq continued to advocate for the Iraqi government to increase resources dedicated to the delivery of electricity and potable water to Iraqis. State reported that USAID activities seek to increase the efficiency of water use in agricultural activities, expand the use of solar energy, and improve residential water services.[353] A recent U.S. trade delegation to the IKR focused on bringing sustainable agricultural practices to the region through commercial engagements.[354]

Desertification has reached about 70 percent of Iraq's land because of poor water flow from Iran and Türkiye, according to media reports. This water crisis has significantly affected agriculture in Iraq, and many farmers have been forced out of farming. Media reported that during the quarter Iraq's Ministries of Agriculture and Water Resources moved to reduce the amount of land available for agriculture due to the water shortage crisis. To combat desertification and dust storms, which lead to heat waves and droughts, Prime Minister al-Sudani launched an initiative endorsed by the UN Development Programme to plant 5 million trees, including 4 million mangroves, across Iraq.[355]

Speaking at the 3rd Baghdad International Water Conference in early May, Deputy United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Director Ghulam Isaczai noted that technical solutions to Iraq's water problems are available. Isaczai said Iraq needs to make water resources a national priority, to invest in water infrastructure such as dams, irrigation systems, and wastewater treatment plants, and to encourage water conservation, which includes repairing leaking pipes, adding new water saving technologies, and enforcing water conservation rules. Isaczai told the conference that the UN would continue to work with Iraqi government counterparts through the UN Water Task Force and the interagency working group on climate and environment.[356]

In March, Prime Minister al-Sudani met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss water cooperation between Iraq and Türkiye. Türkiye agreed to increase water flow from the Tigris River for 1 month.[357]

Embassy Operations Update

In addition to pursuing U.S. policy goals, Mission Iraq—which comprises the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil, and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center (BDSC)—has been working to modernize and enhance its security and services, reassess staffing levels, and improve consular and refugee processing capabilities.[358]

ERBIL CONSULATE COMPOUND CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY

State reported that the U.S. Consulate General's new compound in Erbil is 85 percent complete, and the estimated contract completion date is July 8, 2024.[359] The original contract completion date was April 11, 2022. The project's completion was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, security-related project closures, and changes in the scope of work, including additional diplomatic and technical security.[360] Additional changes remain pending, including corrections to building requirement discovered through inspections, and changes to such things as air shipments of secure material.[361]

State said that the budget for the new consulate compound funded within the Embassy Security, Construction and Maintenance account remained $795 million. As of December, the total funds allocated for the project were $796.1 million, which includes a reimbursement collected from another tenant agency to perform work on their behalf.[362]

MISSION IRAQ OPERATIONS NOT LIMITED BY SECURITY THREATS

State reported that threats to Mission Iraq facilities during this quarter remain largely unchanged from the previous quarter. Attacks from unmanned aerial system (UAS) attacks were the most likely, while attacks from mortars and rockets remained possible, and the threat of sudden civil violence in Baghdad, including the international zone, was constant.[363]

During the quarter, the Iraqi government continued to station the CTS along roads in the International Zone most commonly traveled by embassy personnel, State reported. The Iraqi government also provided security for OIR logistics convoys and continues to provide information regarding demonstrations or gatherings that may hinder Mission Iraq movements. There have been no attacks against U.S. diplomatic or military personnel in Iraq in more than a year.[364]

State said there have been very few instances of embassy staff being unable to meet with the new government leadership. Since the start of the government formation in October 2022, and most likely due to Iraqi government accessibility and the increased stability and security in Baghdad and throughout Iraq, State said meeting with Iraqi government officials has been "incredibly easy to the point of now being considered routine."[365] Moreover, embassy security movement teams have had minimal issues accessing Iraqi government venues. This increased accessibility has also extended to areas outside Baghdad, including recent official meetings in Ramadi in Anbar province.[366]

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In Iraq, the U.S. Government encourages the development of an inclusive, responsive democracy that is transparent, accountable, and committed to international norms.[367] In Syria, the U.S. Government seeks a political resolution to the ongoing conflict through the UN-facilitated, Syrian-led process under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.[368]

IRAQ

Provincial Council Elections Set for December

Iraq's provincial council elections are currently planned for December 18. The delayed passage of the 2023 budget contributed to delays in planning the provincial elections. State reported that the next step is for Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission to establish procedures for voter registration, candidate selection, and conducting the elections.[369]

In March, the Iraqi parliament reversed election reforms that were adopted following the October 2019 protests and that governed the 2021 elections. The reversal is perceived to put independents and political newcomers at a disadvantage. According to a media analysis, the Iran-aligned Shia Coordination Framework was the driving force behind the March changes to the elections law.[370]

The March election law uses the same election procedures as were used in the 2013 provincial council and 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections, called the Sainte-Lague proportional representation system. Under this system, candidate lists, often associated with large political parties, have a clear advantage, concluded a think tank analysis.[371]

Anticorruption Activities in Iraq Continue

In March and April, the Iraqi courts issued arrest warrants against 102 former and current senior Iraqi government officials and secured convictions in 158 cases against 190 defendants.

During the quarter, U.S. diplomats routinely addressed concerns over Iraqi government corruption with officials at all levels of the Iraqi government. State said that the promotion of government transparency and accountability is recognized as a key to fighting corruption. One focus has been increasing transparency in the banking sector, improving the Iraqi Financial Intelligence Unit's ability to conduct investigations, and providing investigative support to Iraqi investigations into corruption. U.S. and Iraqi actions to restrict fraudulent activity in the banking sector have likely made it more difficult for corrupt actors to conceal the proceeds of their crimes, State said.[372]

In March and April, the Iraqi courts issued arrest warrants against 102 former and current senior Iraqi government officials and secured convictions in 158 cases against 190 defendants, according data provided to State by Iraq's Commission of Integrity.[373] According to a media report, Prime Minister al-Sudani fired Mohammed al-Ani, the head of the Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terrorist Operations, which was created to oversee the rebuilding of areas damaged during fighting against ISIS. Al-Ani is the first senior government official suspected of corruption terminated by the prime minister since he took office in October 2022.[374]

After Protests, Situation Remains Tense in Sinjar for Returnees

In Iraq's contested Sinjar district, the international community continued efforts to rebuild local government and services that were destroyed when ISIS took control of the area in 2014. Though ISIS was expelled the following year, the district lacks legitimate governance and is claimed by both the Iraqi government and the KRG.[375]

According to USAID, displaced persons returning to Sinjar face significant challenges, including security threats from extremist groups and social stigmatization and marginalization due to the complex ethnic and religious dynamics in the area.[376] The destruction of infrastructure, lack of basic services, and limited livelihood opportunities further compound the difficulties that returnees face.[377]

According to media reporting, on April 27 dozens of Yazidi community members protested in Sinjar against the return of Sunni Arab families, alleging that the returnees had ties to ISIS.[378] Protesters attempted to set a newly renovated mosque on fire.[379]

USAID supported the establishment and operations for a multi-ethnic women's journalist group in Sinjar, with rented office space, equipment, training, and financial support to expand inclusive and moderate media coverage in Sinjar.[380] The goal of this program was to support an independent and unbiased platform that would highlight local stories, amplify recovery efforts, and counter destabilizing narratives currently prevalent in Sinjar, according to USAID.[381] The journalists met with representatives of Sinjar's Yezidi, Sunni, and Shia communities to discuss the situation and calm tensions.[382] All three Sinjar representatives emphasized their commitment to peaceful co-existence between Sinjar's different communities.[383] A video of the meeting, which was disseminated to correct misperceptions and dispel misinformation, according to USAID, received more than 100,000 views.[384] However, USAID noted that the situation in Sinjar remained tense for returnees.[385]

KRG Relations with Iraqi Government Remain Difficult

During the quarter, relations between the KRG and the Iraqi government progressed unevenly, according to State, with internal disagreements on both sides making it difficult to deliver on agreements negotiated between Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and Prime Minister Masrour Barzani.[386]

State said that tensions between the two main Kurdish political parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) "have likely undermined" the ability of the KRG to negotiate effectively with the Iraqi government.[387] Nevertheless, State said there were some positive trends during the quarter: the PUK rejoined the KRG cabinet (ending its boycott) and a compromise agreement provided for restructuring public finance by centralizing revenues, public expenses, and salaries.[388] A media report related that the two parties differed over the distribution of government positions, management of funds for large construction projects, adoption of the election law, and the IKR's oil sector.[389]

According to a media report, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani (of the KDP) and KRG Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani (of the PUK) met in May at a KRG cabinet meeting—meetings which the deputy prime minister had been boycotting for 6 months. However, KDP-PUK tensions continued.[390] According to State and press accounts, on June 4, a court in KDP-dominated Erbil province convicted and sentenced to death (in absentia) several officials of the PUK-dominated Counter Terrorism Group for the October 2022 assassination of a high-ranking defector from the PUK. The following day PUK President Bafel Talabani presented one of the alleged killers with a "Badge of Thanks."[391]

Another source of tension between the two parties involved the terms of the FY 2023 budget relating to revenue sharing, which KDP President Masoud Barzani said were inconsistent with the political understanding negotiated with Prime Minister Sudani during government formation. According to press accounts, the budget gave the Iraqi government greater power to control IKR oil revenues and distribute funds directly to IKR provinces, bypassing the KRG.[392] State said the PUK reportedly celebrated the change.[393] Although Kurdish members of parliament ultimately voted for the budget, the KRG continues to express concern over implementation of provisions relating to the delivery, transit, and sale of oil, as well as the handling of oil revenues.[394]

KRG President Nechirvan Barzani, of the KDP, said that he welcomed the passage of the 2023 budget, although, he said, some members of parliament had acted against KRG interests. According to a media report, he said that the budget bill vote showed that Kurdish disunity harmed the IKR; although he said the current situation could be turned into an opportunity for the Kurdish parties to "reorganize their relations towards unity."[395]

Federal Supreme Court Dissolves IKR Parliament

Iraq's Federal Supreme Court ruled on May 30 that the one-year extension of the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament in November 2022 was unconstitutional. Last fall, members of the IKP voted to extend the legislature's 4-year term by 1 year after they could not agree on a bill to reform the region's election law, according to media reports. The high court ruled that all decisions issued by the Parliament after October 9, 2022, were null and void.[396] According to a wire service report, on June 26, 54 members of the 111-member Parliament resigned in protest over the court's decision, including all 45 members from the KDP.[397]

Iraq's Federal Supreme Court ruled on May 30 that the one-year extension of the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament in November 2022 was unconstitutional.

According to State, the KRG is now ruled by a caretaker government, which limits the authority of the government to taking only those actions required to "continue the work of public utilities regularly, and the continuation of services to the people."[398]

State said KRG President Barzani is empowered to work with the Iraqi government's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) to prepare for parliamentary elections, currently scheduled for November 18. However, State said IHEC has signaled it may not be able to oversee the elections while it also prepares for Iraq's provincial elections which are slated December 18. If IHEC is unable to organize elections before November 18, then President Barzani will need to set a new election date based on his discussions with IHEC, according to State. State said that could force the further postponement of the elections, prolonging the KRG's caretaker status.[399]

Türkiye Continues Military Activity in Northern Iraq

The Turkish defense minister announced in mid-April that Türkiye would continue its armed intervention in Iraq and that its efforts would be akin to those it had undertaken in Syria, according to an Iraqi press agency.[400]

A Western media account of the human impact of Türkiye's military activity in Iraq characterized rural residents of northern Iraq as being caught "in the crossfire" between the Turkish army and the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) terrorists, an organization of Turkish Kurds who use northern Iraq as a base for a war of attrition against Türkiye.[401]

According to a media report, on April 4, Türkiye closed its airspace to flights to or from the Sulaymaniyah airport until July 3. Türkiye's Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted in the press as explaining that the action was in response to what it called an increase in the activities of the PKK in Sulaymaniyah, including what he said was its "infiltration" of the airport.[402] On July 3, Türkiye announced that it was extending, until January 3, 2024, its ban on flights to or from Sulaymaniyah, according to a media report.[403]

On April 7, a Turkish drone struck near a convoy near the Sulaymaniyah airport; the commanding general of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), General Mazloum Abdi, was present.[404] A U.S. official confirmed that U.S. personnel were in the convoy but there were no casualties, press accounts said. General Mazloum accused Türkiye of launching the drone, and said that it was a sign of Turkish irritation at the support given to the SDF by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdish political party that dominates Sulaymaniyah.[405] According to a media account citing an Ankara-based analyst with a U.S. think tank, Türkiye "has been increasing pressure on the PUK to not accommodate PKK presence in its territory," and the drone attack "could be seen as part of this pressure."[406] The Iraqi government condemned the attack, while the Kurdish parties blamed their political rivals.[407] Türkiye denied involvement in the incident.[408]

The Turkish government announced on several occasions during the quarter that it had "neutralized" what it said were PKK fighters in Iraq.[409] For example, in early May, in the course of his election campaign, the Turkish defense minister reportedly announced the killing of 13 PKK militants and described the seizure of ammunition and weapons used by militants in northern Iraq, implying there were at least some ground operations.[410] According to Turkish government announcements reported in the press, Türkiye repeatedly carried out air attacks on the PKK and its affiliates in Iraq.[411]

On May 16, an airstrike attributed to Türkiye was reported by the KRG's Counter-Terrorism Unit to have killed three fighters with the Shinghal [Sinjar] Resistance Units (YBS) in Sinjar, a press account said.[412] The account noted that Türkiye frequently targets the YBS because of its links to the PKK.[413] A YBS-affiliated local official denied there were any deaths but said a civilian was slightly injured.[414]

On June 13, the Peoples' Defense Forces (HPG) (the name of the PKK's armed wing) announced it was ending the ceasefire that it had imposed in February in the wake of the earthquake that struck Türkiye and Syria.[415] According to a news report, the HPG said on its website that Türkiye had fired on targets in northern Iraq thousands of times and that it and

the Turkish side engaged one another 237 times, resulting in unspecified losses to its own forces in Iraq. It said it had killed what it called 84 members of the "occupation forces."[416] On at least one occasion during the quarter Türkiye noted the loss of one of its soldiers.[417]

State said the United States had urged Türkiye publicly and privately to coordinate more closely with Iraqi authorities on cross-border military operations against terrorist targets, in order to avoid harm to civilians.[418]

SYRIA

No Progress on UNSCR 2254

State said that a Syrian-led political solution that represents the will of all Syrians as outlined in UNSCR 2254 remains the only viable solution to the conflict.[419] Stability in Syria, and in the greater region, can only be achieved through a political process that represents the will of all Syrians and "we are committed to working with allies, partners, and the UN to ensure that a durable political solution remains within reach," State said.[420] "We continue to urge all parties to engage fully in this process and to support [UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir] Pedersen's efforts, but it is clear the problem lies squarely with the [Syrian] regime," State said.[421]

In a May 30 briefing to the UN Security Council, Special Envoy Pedersen highlighted the importance of reconvening the Constitutional Committee, which has not met in nearly a year.[422] Special Envoy Pedersen said a "way must be found to…resume the Committee's work, and see it develop in a positive direction."[423]

Geir Pedersen (on screen), Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, briefs the Security Council meeting. (UN photo)

State reported that the United States continued to support Resolution 2254 and to promote accountability for atrocities committed by the Syrian government, some of which State said rise to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity.[424] The "plight of detainees and displaced persons must remain at the forefront of the international community's efforts to mitigate the suffering of the Syrian people" and work toward a political resolution, State said.[425]

Arab League Readmits Syria Despite U.S. Opposition

On May 7, the Arab League readmitted Syria after a 12-year suspension. According to a media report, the decision was part of a regional push to normalize relations with President Assad.[426] The decision allowed Syria to immediately resume its participation in Arab League meetings. The Arab League called for a resolution of the crisis in Syria, including solutions to plight of millions of Syrian refugees and to the Syrian government's continued drug smuggling.[427]

The U.S. Government disagreed with the Arab League's decision to reactivate Syria's membership: "We do not believe that the Assad regime merited a return to the Arab League, just as we do not support normalization of the regime."[428] State said that despite the Arab League's readmission of Syria, the U.S. Government stands "by our sanctions principles… we will not normalize with the Assad regime."[429] The U.S. Government will not support efforts to normalize or rehabilitate the "brutal dictator Bashar al-Assad," or change its opposition to reconstruction in Syria until there is "irreversible progress towards a political solution," State said.[430]

Despite this disagreement, State continued to "emphasize to our partners that in any engagement with the regime, real steps to improve the humanitarian, human rights, and security situation for Syrians should be front and center."[431] State said it also "stressed to regional partners that Assad will not change his behavior without consistent and coordinated diplomatic pressure."[432]

State acknowledged that "we share many of the same goals as our Arab partners."[433] These goals include reaching a solution to the Syrian crisis consistent with Resolution 2254, expanding humanitarian access to all Syrians in need, building security and stability to ensure ISIS cannot resurge, creating safe conditions for the eventual return of refugee, clarifying the fate and whereabouts of those unjustly detained and the missing, reducing Iranian influence, and countering captagon drug trafficking from Syria.[434]

State said the U.S. Government "understands the Arab League intends to use Syria's readmission to push for and demand progress in these areas…although we are skeptical of the efficacy of this approach, we are aligned with our Arab partners on the ultimate objectives."[435]

The U.S. Government disagreed with the Arab League's decision to reactivate Syria's membership: "We do not believe that the Assad regime merited a return to the Arab League, just as we do not support normalization of the regime."

Captagon Smuggling From Syria Threatens Regional Security

When the Arab League readmitted Syria in early May after nearly 12 years, one of the first items on the agenda was addressing the drug trafficking from Syria.[436] Several states across the Middle East, as well as European countries, are battling the growing threat from the synthetic amphetamine-type drug captagon.[437]

The United States estimates the captagon trade has become a "billion dollar illicit enterprise" and in late March joined with the United Kingdom in sanctioning Assad's family members and close associates who manufacture captagon, and Hezbollah associates enabling the trafficking of the highly addictive drug across the Middle East.[438] According to a think-tank analysis, the captagon trade generates about $3 billion annually, some of which flows back to the Assad regime.[439]

The captagon trade does not directly impact the counter-ISIS mission, but it does affect regional stability.[440] The DIA said that ISIS members have been associated with captagon trafficking and use since at least 2015, but ISIS does not officially condone the activity. As of mid-2023, there are no substantial indications that ISIS is part of the main groups that sustain the captagon market structure, although it remains plausible that ISIS can benefit from captagon production and trafficking.[441] State said that captagon smuggling from Syria "threatens regional security, negatively affects public health across the Middle East, and undermines efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict."[442]

THE TRAFFICKING OF CAPTAGON: FROM PRODUCTION TO CONSUMPTION

The DIA reported that most captagon production occurs in regime-controlled areas of Syria, with large-scale production sites concentrated near the Lebanese and Jordanian borders and near Syrian ports.[443] These locations provide logistical advantages for trafficking the drug to target markets in the Middle East. There are also smaller-scale production sites in Lebanon.[444] According to State, Assad- and Hezbollah-linked entities are producing captagon as well as counterfeit tablets purporting to be captagon in Syria and Lebanon.[445]

Consumer markets in the Arabian Peninsula are the primary destination for captagon, while increasing amounts are being consumed in former transit countries, such as Iraq and Jordan.[446] State said that that the abuse of captagon and crystal methamphetamine has increased in Iraq, which does not have the healthcare capacity to deal with increased use by Iraqis.[447]

According to media reporting, Iraqi security forces conducted multiple drug seizures during the quarter in response to increased internal consumption of captagon and crystal methamphetamine.[448] On June 13, the ISF reported the arrest of a drug trafficker and seizure of 44,000 captagon pills meant for sale in Iraq.[449] In late June, Iraq's federal security forces arrested more than 300 drug traffickers across the country over the course of a week, and seized more than 250,000 illicit tablets.[450]

THE CAPTAGON NETWORK IDENTIFIED

The DIA said that Syria- and Lebanon-based captagon production and trafficking networks involve state actors and non-state actors and rely on decentralized execution by lower-level

(continued on next page)

Captagon Smuggling From Syria Threatens Regional Security *(continued from previous page)*

associates.[451] These networks involve a transactional relationship between state affiliates, local alliance structures, and independent regional facilitators.[452]

Elements of the Assad regime involved in captagon production and trafficking enable and profit from it. These include elements of Syria's 4th Armored Division, Syrian military intelligence, and other security services.[453] Treasury, in coordination with the United Kingdom, designated four Assad associates in Syria and three entities in Lebanon with ties to Hezbollah, citing their association with drug trafficking activities.[454]

The designees include two of Assad's cousins, Samer Kamal al-Assad and Wassim Badi al-Assad, and Khalid Qaddour, a close associate of Assad's brother, Maher al-Assad. Maher, who heads the Fourth Division of the Syrian Arab Army, which has been designated by the United States as a terrorist entity, is known to run illicit schemes, according to Treasury.[455] The designations also include a Syrian Military Intelligence-affiliated militia leader, and Lebanese nationals with ties to Hezbollah and linked trading and import-export companies involved in captagon production and trafficking.[456]

In addition, local tribes and refugees wittingly or unwittingly engage in captagon production and trafficking to end-markets in the Middle East.[457] The DIA said that while elements of the Syrian government largely control captagon production and likely retain the majority of the profits, these local networks and drug syndicates conduct the majority of the captagon trafficking.[458]

TSO Groups Continued to Commit Human Rights Abuses

This quarter, State said that reports indicated that most Türkiye-supported Opposition (TSO) groups "continued to recruit and pay fighters, some of whom are former ISIS members," with funds extorted from civilians at checkpoints and by threatening or carrying out threats to detain, physically abuse, rape, or kill the individual and/or their family members.[459] The TSO groups continued to "control most revenue-generating activities in northwestern Syria and to carry out their illicit activities with impunity," including reportedly providing safe passage of ISIS members through the areas under their influence, State reported.[460]

According to nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports, TSO groups in northern Syria continued to commit human rights abuses, "reportedly targeting Kurdish and Yezidi residents and other civilians," according to State's 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (Türkiye).[461] These human rights abuses reportedly included acts involving unlawful killings, physical abuse, sexual violence, disappearances, unjust detention, and kidnapping for ransom, looting, seizure of private property, and the transfer of detained civilians across the border into Türkiye, State said.[462] (See Table 6.)

Many TSO groups continued to "propagate rumors that women's empowerment and gender-related activities go against religious and societal norms," according to State.[463] This has negatively impacted women's civic participation, as "many women face harassment" if they attempt to become politically active, engage in civil society organizations, or seek justice.[464] Syrian women reported in April that women in TSO-controlled areas faced "intense discrimination and criticism when they engage in political and civil society efforts" from a variety of groups in northwestern Syria, including TSO groups.[465]

Table 6.

Examples of Reported TSO Abuses During the Quarter

April
A civilian reportedly died while being detained for 5 months by the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiya, which ordered the family to secretly bury the victim's body.
The Hamza Division killed a civilian in al-Bab after a robbery attempt.
Members of the Hamza Division seized the home and belongings of a 36-year-old man and kidnapped him after he asked them to return the items.
TSO group members stationed at a military police checkpoint reportedly arrested a young man from Afrin for allegedly participating in protests against the Ahrar Al-Sharqiyah. The young man was taken to unknown destination and his fate remains unknown.
An 18-year-old was arrested by the military police in Afrin for unknown reasons.
The Al-Sham Legion arrested a civilian at a check point in Afrin, without explaining the charges.

May
SNA civil police attacked women in Raju camp in Afrin as they gathered to demonstrate.
The SNA detained activist and journalist Rizk Al-Abbi and his wife, for allegedly trying to travel illegally from Türkiye to Afrin.
A nine-year-old child and his father were reportedly physically abused to extract confessions at the al-Bab police station after they were arrested on charges of theft.

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 6/16/2023

State reported that violent infighting among rival TSO groups continued to "negatively affect stabilization efforts, to deter investment, and to prevent economic growth."[466] Syrian civil society organizations continued to develop contingency plans to "mitigate the security risks and limit the impacts on program activities affected by TSO groups' actions," State reported.[467]

STABILIZATION AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

According to State, U.S. Government stabilization assistance plays a critical role in the counter-ISIS mission by addressing the economic and social grievances previously exploited by ISIS and other violent extremist groups, improving local service provider capacity, and supporting civil society to advocate for critical needs that Syrians and Iraqi have identified.[468] Speaking in June at the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ministerial Meeting, Secretary Blinken said that stabilization assistance is a top priority and encouraged Coalition members to stay as committed to stabilization goals as "we've been to our military campaign."[469]

IRAQ

U.S. Government-funded stabilization programs in Iraq seek to accelerate the restoration of essential services in conflict-affected areas. In addition, the U.S. Government assists ethnic and religious minority communities and supports programs that help displaced persons return

with dignity, safely, and voluntarily to their places of origin or settle in other destinations of their choosing.[470] State funded 6 stabilization programs and USAID funded 19 stabilization programs in Iraq during the quarter.[471] (See pages 86-91.)

USAID reported that it supported stabilization activities in Iraq through 10 active programs during the quarter funded by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and the Middle East Bureau.[472] The International Foundation for Electoral Systems and the Iraq Governance Performance Activity both concluded their activities during the quarter.[473] Funds obligated in FY 2023 through the third quarter for these programs totaled approximately $22 million ($12 million obligated to the Durable Communities and Economic Opportunity activity and $10 million for an activity through the International Organization for Migration).[474] In addition, $17.5 million was transferred during the quarter to the ongoing OTI Ta'afi activity.

United Nations Continues to Transition Humanitarian Assistance Programs

The international community is in the process of transferring humanitarian response operations to the Iraqi government and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as part of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. This transition reflects Iraq's decreasing acute humanitarian needs and the responsibility of the Iraqi government to provide services to its vulnerable communities.[475] As a result, while most USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA)-funded activities will continue through the end of FY 2023, BHA assistance will largely focus on the most vulnerable populations in the protection, health, and water, sanitation, and hygiene sectors.[476] State PRM humanitarian assistance will focus primarily on protection, livelihoods, and durable solutions programming for refugees, displaced persons, returnees, and persons at risk of statelessness.[477] USAID reported that the decrease in internationally-funded humanitarian services has not been met with an equivalent, or even near equivalent, increase in services from the Iraqi government.[478] The United States continues to be the largest humanitarian donor for Iraq.[479]

In May, the United Nations indicated that local-level coordination groups responsible for durable solutions (sustainable reintegration, local integration, and relocation/resettlement of refugees or IDPs) would be transitioned to Joint Coordination Forums, which have the additional responsibility of bringing humanitarian, stabilization, development, and peacebuilding organizations together with provincial authorities.[480] However, it remains unclear if this will improve local-level coordination and encourage government responsibility, according to USAID.[481]

USAID noted that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in mid-May that the Humanitarian Access Working Group would remain active through December 2023.[482] The group, co-led by the Norwegian Refugee Council and OCHA, monitors and advocates to address difficulties in access.[483] The group is also developing an online platform where members can more easily report access incidents.[484]

Table 7.

U.S. Government Humanitarian Funding Announced for the Iraq Response in FY 2023

Agency	
USAID BHA Funding	$6,154,200
State PRM Funding	$0
TOTAL	**$6,154,200**

Source: USAID, "Iraq-Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #2," 5/5/2023.

SYRIA

Ongoing State stabilization efforts work with local Syrian governance entities and communities to support education, community security, independent media, civil society, reintegration, humanitarian mine action, transitional justice, accountability, restoration of essential services, and a political resolution to the Syrian conflict in line with UNSCR Resolution 2254.[485] USAID-supported stabilization programs supported conflict mitigation, private sector productivity, economic recovery, livelihoods, and growth in northeastern Syria.[486] (See pages 86-91.) This stabilization assistance is "vital…to accelerate inclusive economic recovery" in areas liberated from ISIS, State reported.[487]

USAID has not obligated any funds in FY2023 for USAID stabilization programs in Syria.[488] Due to limitations of available FY 2022 funding, some implementers slowed spending or paused activities.[489] During the quarter, USAID obligated $3.9 million, for the White Helmets, in addition to the $5 million that BHA obligated previously in response to the February earthquakes.[490] (See pages 64-65.) In addition, the Qatar Fund for Development gifted $1.9 million to USAID to support the White Helmets earthquake recovery efforts and women's health centers.[491]

At the June 8 Defeat-ISIS Coalition Ministerial, members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS pledged $311 million toward stabilization needs in liberated areas of Iraq and Syria for 2023, according to State. The Coalition will continue to collect stabilization pledges throughout the year, with the goal of reaching $601.6 million by June 2024.[492] Secretary Blinken said that the United States would commit $148.7 million toward this goal.[493]

U.S. Government Announces $920 Million in Additional Humanitarian Assistance for the Syria Crisis

On June 15, the U.S. Government announced an additional $920 million in humanitarian assistance for the Syrian crisis, including $566 million for USAID.[494] USAID and State plan to support vulnerable communities in Syria and Syrian refugees and host communities in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye with this funding.[495] According to USAID, this funding will allow USAID implementers (UN and NGO partners) to continue to provide emergency food and nutrition support, healthcare, shelter for displaced persons, access to safe and reliable sources of water, and psychosocial support and other protection services for conflict-affected communities.[496] Of these funds, $83 million will be used to support response efforts in Syria related to the February earthquakes.[497]

Table 8.

U.S. Government Humanitarian Funding for the Syria Regional Crisis Response in FY 2023

Agency	
USAID BHA	$581,031,555
State PRM	$354,910,000
TOTAL	**$935,941,555**

Note: Year of funding indicates the date of commitment or obligation, not appropriation, of funds. Funding figures reflect publicly announced funding as of June 15, 2023.

Source: USAID, "Syria–Complex Emergency Humanitarian Update #770," 06/23/2023.

Economic Challenges, Earthquake, Drought Increased Stabilization Needs

This quarter State reported that although levels of violence in Syria are at their "lowest point in the decade-long course of this brutal conflict, the economic situation is at its worst."[498] Humanitarian needs are at their highest, compounded by

the COVID-19 pandemic, devastating earthquakes, historic levels of drought which have decimated food crops, and the collapse of the Lebanese financial sector, State said.[499] The World Food Programme estimates that more than 12 million Syrians are now food insecure, an increase of more than 4.5 million in the last year, with more than 90 percent of Syrians living in extreme poverty.[500]

The economy in northeastern Syria faced ongoing challenges this quarter including rapid fluctuations in commodity prices, the continued devaluation of the Syrian pound, reduced agriculture yield due to drought conditions, and the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake in northwestern Syria.[501] These conditions and the economic challenges have increased the overall need for stabilization and humanitarian assistance funding in Syria during the last 2 years, State reported.[502]

While ISIS continues to threaten stability in northeastern Syria, "ISIS attacks did not directly affect U.S. stabilization activities" this quarter, State reported.[503] Attacks targeted individuals affiliated with the Self Administration of North and East Syria, local councils, and the Syrian Democratic Forces, "posing a threat to immediate and longer-term stability in the area."[504]

Significant Gaps in Health Services Remain Following Earthquake

USAID reported that according to the World Health Organization (WHO), health service gaps have remain significant in northwestern Syria in the wake of the February 2023 earthquakes, particularly in areas where healthcare infrastructure was already fragile due to conflict.[505] At least 60 health facilities continued to be rehabilitated after experiencing earthquake-related damage and 6 health facilities in the region are permanently damaged.[506] Health needs remained higher as a result of the earthquakes, with demand for physical rehabilitation services, as an example, increasing an estimated 40 percent since the earthquakes.[507] Only 120 physical therapists operate in northwestern Syria: a ratio of one physical therapist for every 37,500 persons.[508]

The WHO, with USAID BHA and other donor support, operated to address gaps in healthcare by supporting nearly 300 health facilities, including approximately 160 primary healthcare facilities, 65 hospitals, 30 mobile clinics, and 30 specialized care centers in northwestern Syria, according to USAID.[509] The WHO reached an estimated 4.2 million people with medicines, and medical consumables, kits, and supplies, to perform trauma interventions since the February earthquake.[510]

USAID-funded White Helmets Continue to Support Earthquake Response

The USAID-funded White Helmets—volunteers officially known as the Syria Civil Defense that operate in opposition-controlled parts of Syria—continued to remove earthquake rubble and provide first responder and firefighting services during the quarter. The White Helmets removed between 90 and 95 percent of rubble caused by recent earthquakes, moving a total of 418,790 cubic meters of debris to landfills in the hardest hit areas of northwestern Syria.[511]

At least 60 health facilities continued to be rehabilitated after experiencing earthquake-related damage and 6 health facilities in the region are permanently damaged.

To support the earthquake recovery response, the White Helmets raised approximately $55 million, but estimated a remaining gap of $20 million to meet its earthquake recovery targets.

While they made significant progress on rubble removal, the White Helmets faced challenges in obtaining permission to remove rubble from private property, requiring confirmation of property ownership, which was sometimes difficult to confirm.[512] The White Helmets also conducted 513 demolition operations of damaged and partially destroyed buildings in 96 communities.[513] They also dug 3,087 meters of sewer lines in 20 communities and 5 camps.[514] Minor aftershocks during the quarter created significant fear and panic, resulting in at least one stampede that sent four children to the hospital.[515]

In addition to the earthquake response, USAID reported that the White Helmets continued to provide first responder services, with firefighting crews responding to 888 fires in 2023 (294 of which were in May and 206 in the first two weeks of June), and to raise awareness through 150 activities dispensed to 1,894 beneficiaries of ways to increase earthquake safety, prevent cholera, and prevent and respond to fire.[516]

To support the earthquake recovery response, the White Helmets raised approximately $55 million, but estimated a remaining gap of $20 million to meet its earthquake recovery targets.[517] USAID reported that it is working with the White Helmets to implement a strategic fundraising strategy to diversify its donors to include more private donations.[518]

Operation of Border Crossings Continue to Impact Humanitarian Assistance

On May 20, Iraqi authorities closed the Faysh Khabur-Semalka border crossing—the only border crossing that NGOs can use to provide assistance to northeastern Syria from Iraq—for 16 days.[519] Ahead of the closure, approximately 300 international humanitarian staff were evacuated from northeastern Syria.[520] During this time, personnel and commodities were not allowed to cross the border, negatively impacting U.S. Government humanitarian and stabilization assistance, according to USAID.[521] Closure of this border crossing put more than 2 million people dependent on humanitarian assistance at serious risk, according to the EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).[522] The Faysh Khabur-Semalka border crossing reopened to all traffic on June 5.[523]

Three border crossings on the Syria-Türkiye border remained open during the quarter, improving the flow of humanitarian assistance into northern Syria.[524] On May 13, the Syrian regime granted a 3-month extension for the UN to use the Bab al-Salam and al-Ra'i border crossings, which were opened following the February earthquakes until August 13.[525] A third crossing, Bab al-Hawa in northwestern Syria, was open during the quarter but closed in July.[526] These additional border crossings have provided more routes for humanitarian assistance to enter Syria from Türkiye, although Bab al-Hawa, which had been opened prior to the earthquake, has a higher operational capacity and is the most cost effective, remained the most-utilized border crossing.[527]

PROSECUTIONS AND SANCTIONS OF ISIS ACTIVITY

OVERVIEW

State and three other Federal government departments conduct activities to degrade ISIS capabilities in Iraq and Syria as part of a whole-of-government effort to reduce ISIS manpower and disrupt its financing. Efforts include the following:

Prosecutions of ISIS-related individuals. The DoJ prosecutes foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS, as well as those accused of assisting ISIS, obstructing investigations, or otherwise affiliated with ISIS.[528]

Disruption of ISIS financing. Treasury and State's Bureau of Counterterrorism target ISIS financial activities to disrupt the group's ability to fund operations.[529]

Aiding the repatriation process. The DoJ, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), supports U.S.-led efforts to repatriate to their countries of origin ISIS-affiliated individuals in Syria.[530]

Designation of ISIS-linked terrorists and terrorist organizations. Both Treasury and State designate specific individuals or groups as Specially Designated Global Terrorists and State designates specific groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.[531]

Strengthening of evidence in support of warrants and prosecutions. The DoJ's Justice Attaché works with Iraqi security and legal partners, including the Iraqi CTS and the investigative judge assigned to the CTS to improve electronic surveillance and forensic laboratory capabilities in support of warrants and prosecutions. Additionally, the DoJ National Security Division Attaché reviews intelligence and other available information to determine if criminal prosecutions can be brought against suspected foreign terrorist fighters and other terrorists and provides other assistance.[532]

Mitigating the threat to the United States homeland. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) works to reduce threats to the homeland posed by ISIS-linked individuals attempting to enter the United States to conduct attacks.[533]

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

The FBI aided in the repatriation process by attempting to obtain biometrics of all individuals prior to their departure from Syria. Although the FBI does not assist in detention operations in Syria, the FBI works with Syrian partners to monitor the movement of detainees of interest.[534]

Separately, the Justice Attaché continued to work with senior CTS officials and the investigative judge assigned to the CTS to improve the issuance of warrants for ISIS suspects and prosecutions of ISIS detainees, including issues pertaining to electronic surveillance and forensic laboratory capabilities.[535]

The DoJ's National Security Division provided a full-time, in-country attorney to help support Operation Gallant Phoenix, an intelligence-sharing effort involving 25 countries.[536] This attorney will continue to support a range of matters related to facilitating appropriate civilian prosecutorial dispositions for foreign terrorist fighters and other terrorists, including efforts to counter the financing of terrorism.[537]

Table 9.

Department of Justice Prosecutions and Activities against Terrorism

Date and Jurisdiction	Description
4/7/2023 District of Maine	**Xavier Pelkey ("Pelkey")** pleaded guilty to conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS. According to court records, beginning in November 2021, Pelkey, 19, conspired with two minors, one located in Chicago and one in Canada, to conduct a mass shooting at a Shia mosque in the Chicago area. Pelkey planned to contribute firearms, ammunition, and explosives to be used in the attack. In February 2022, the FBI executed a search warrant at Pelkey's Waterville, Maine, residence and discovered three handmade explosive devices and an ISIS flag on the wall of his bedroom, and recovered written statements intended to be released just prior to the planned attack claiming the attack in the name of ISIS.
6/9/2023 Southern District of Indiana	**Moyad Dannon** entered a guilty plea to one count of attempting to provide firearms to ISIS. According to court records, in 2018, Dannon, 21, and his brother, Mahde Dannon, 20, sold a number of illegally obtained firearms to an individual cooperating with the FBI. Around the same time, the Dannon brothers began manufacturing untraceable "ghost guns" by purchasing unserialized firearms parts online and assembling them into fully automatic .223 caliber rifles with the intent of sending them to ISIS. Dannon was arrested after selling the rifles to an FBI undercover agent.
6/13/2023 District of Oregon	**Hawazen Sameer Mothafar Mothafar** pled guilty to conspiring to provide material support to ISIS by producing and distributing ISIS propaganda in coordination with ISIS members overseas. An ISIS supporter since 2014, Mothafar was the co-founder of the Sunni Shield Foundation, a pro-ISIS media organization that created and published violent propaganda promoting ISIS ideology and objectives. In this role, Mothafar created Al Anfal, an online ISIS newspaper, and a videos showing ISIS battle footage and encouraging viewers to travel to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS. Mothafar communicated directly with ISIS media officials in Iraq, from whom he regularly took instructions about media production. Mothafar also provided graphic designs to other ISIS publications. Additionally, Mothafar communicated with Abu Qaswara al-Shanqiti, a Specially Designated Global Terrorist imprisoned in West Africa, and connected al-Shanqiti with two ISIS officials in hopes of aiding his release.
6/15/2023 Eastern District of Michigan	**Ibraheem Izzy Musaibli** was sentenced to 14 years in prison after being convicted on charges of providing and conspiring to provide material support to ISIS and attending an ISIS training camp. Evidence presented during the trial established that Musaibli, a natural-born U.S. citizen, traveled to Yemen in April 2015 to research ISIS, including downloading ISIS propaganda and an ISIS book on how to get into Syria. From Yemen, he traveled to Syria in the fall of 2015, where he attended an ISIS-run religious training camp before undergoing ISIS military training. Upon graduation from the ISIS military training camp, Musaibli swore allegiance to ISIS and its leader, and remained with ISIS for more than two and a half years. During that time, Musaibli fought for ISIS against the United States and its allies, and was wounded in battle. Musaibli was eventually apprehended by Syrian Democratic Forces in 2018, turned over to the FBI, and flown back to the United States to face terrorism charges.

Source: DoJ OIG, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.3 WOG DOJ 01B, 7/6/2023.

Lastly, the FBI's Fly Team provided sensitive site exploitation training, crime scene management, interview, and post-blast investigation training to the SDF in conjunction with U.S. military partners. All of the training is intended to develop skillsets relevant to countering ISIS operations within Syria. The FBI also has personnel providing support to the interagency and foreign partners at Operation Gallant Phoenix.[538]

The DoJ reported that no individuals were transferred to the United States from Iraq or Syria to face terrorism charges during the quarter. A total of 3 individuals from Iraq and 11 individuals from Syria have been transferred to the United States to face terrorism charges since 2014.[539]

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Treasury reported that it used the full range of its authorities to aggressively target ISIS leaders, operatives, financiers, and associated organizations around the world. These efforts have resulted in Treasury designating 136 ISIS-associated individuals and entities since 2014.[540] Treasury reported that no individuals or entities were sanctioned during the quarter and no individuals or organizations were removed from the sanctions list during the quarter.[541]

Treasury worked with interagency and Coalition partners, including the Iraqi government, to prioritize identifying ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders and disrupting its financial facilitation networks in the Middle East. In addition, Treasury is working to designate ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in various countries.[542] On June 7, Treasury co-led a Counter-ISIS Finance Group meeting with over 40 Coalition members and observers, including Iraqi partners, to exchange information on ISIS financing activities and efforts to counter them across Asia and Africa.[543]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

During the quarter, the Secretary of State sanctioned 5 individuals with connections to Iraq or Syria, pursuant to Executive Order 13224, as amended:

Sami Mahmud Mohammed al-Uraydi, for his leadership role in Hurras al-Din, a Syria-based al-Qaeda affiliate responsible for killings, kidnappings, and violence targeting members of religious minority groups.[544]

Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Mainuki, an ISIS Global Directorate of Provinces al-Furqan office senior leader.[545]

Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rufay'i, the ISIS Global Directorate of Provinces Bilad al-Rafidayn office emir and previously the wali (governor) of ISIS's Iraq Province.[546]

Nawaf Ahmad Alwan al-Rashidi, who manages ISIS financial payments to members and widows and works in the group's smuggling operations, who was involved in planning, coordinating, and conducting several attacks in Syria between 2018-2019, and who was also responsible for the sexual slavery and rape of Yezidi women and girls in Sinjar, Iraq.[547]

On June 7, Treasury co-led a Counter-ISIS Finance Group meeting with over 40 Coalition members and observers, including Iraqi partners, to exchange information on ISIS financing activities and efforts to counter them across Asia and Africa.

Arkan Ahmad 'Abbas al-Matuti, a senior field commander in Wilayat al-Jazirah, who held several positions within ISIS, including the wali (governor) of the Bulayj, Syria, sector, and who was involved in selling Yezidi women and girls, taking several Yezidi captives as sexual slaves for himself.[548]

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

DHS works with interagency partners, including from the Intelligence Community and the DoD, to identify, analyze, and mitigate the threat posed by ISIS and ISIS affiliates and associates traveling to the United States to potentially conduct attacks.[549]

DHS reported that during the quarter Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) worked in collaboration with other federal agencies, the U.S. Central Command, and forward-based military entities to monitor and mitigate ISIS threats to the United States by participating in joint plans and exercises, and through collaborative intelligence support to ongoing DHS investigations. DHS investigators, as part of a collaboration with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, uses its unique customs and immigration authorities in furtherance of the counterterrorism mission.[550]

INTERNATIONAL

The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) works with the Iraqi government, as well as other governments, to document the crimes of ISIS (by exhuming mass graves, recovering electronic evidence, and digitizing documents) and to train authorities to use the evidence it has gathered.[551] UNITAD's mandate is to gather evidence of crimes against "customary international law."[552]

Iraq established a joint working group in March 2023 to work on "an appropriate domestic legal framework" allowing for the "prosecution of [ISIS] criminal acts as international crimes, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide" before Iraq's national courts.[553] Media reported that the group seeks to support development of a legal framework that allows such activity to be prosecuted as an international crime in Iraq.[554]

Speaking in June, Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis, U.S. Acting Deputy Representative to the United Nations, encouraged the Iraqi government to adopt legislation on international crimes "notably genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and to take steps necessary to ensure transparent prosecutions against ISIS members that respect minimum fair-trial guarantees and legal protections."[555]

Ambassador DeLaurentis welcomed reports of growing cooperation between UNITAD and the Iraqi government, noting ongoing engagements with Iraqi political officials and judges. He said that the United States "acknowledge[s] the [Iraqi government's] desire for UNITAD to turn over the evidence it has collected for use by the Iraqi judicial system and UNITAD's attempt to develop a creative solution to try to make this possible."[556]

An HH-60G Pave Hawk refuels during an exercise at an undisclosed location in support of CJTF-OIR. (U.S. Air Force photo)

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies' strategic planning efforts; completed, ongoing, and planned oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; investigations; and hotline activities from April 1 through June 30, 2023.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. This effort includes reviewing and analyzing completed oversight, management, and other relevant reports to identify systemic problems, trends, lessons learned, and best practices to inform future oversight projects. The Lead IG agencies issue an annual joint strategic oversight plan for each operation.

FY 2023 JOINT STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT PLAN ACTIVITIES

In 2014, upon designation of the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the three Lead IG agencies developed and implemented a joint strategic oversight plan for comprehensive oversight of OIR. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2023 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR* was published on October 3, 2022, as part of the *FY 2023 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*. The *FY 2023 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR* is organized by three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations and Security Cooperation; 2) Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance; and 3) Support to Mission.

The Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group serves as a primary venue to coordinate audits, inspections, and evaluations of U.S. Government-funded activities supporting overseas contingency operations, including those relating to the Middle East. The Joint Planning Group meets quarterly to provide a forum for coordination of the broader Federal oversight community, including the military service IGs and audit agencies, the Government Accountability Office, and the OIGs of the Departments of Justice, the Treasury, Energy, and Homeland Security, and of the Intelligence Community.

In May 2023, the Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group held its 62nd meeting. Guest speaker Air Force Brigadier General Jeffrey Schreiner, the Chief of Staff for Combined Joint Task Force-OIR, led a classified discussion on the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

FY 2023 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations.

Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Military Operations and Security Cooperation focuses on determining the degree to which the contingency operation is accomplishing its security mission. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Conducting unilateral and partnered counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations
- Providing security assistance
- Training and equipping partner security forces
- Advising, assisting, and enabling partner security forces
- Advising and assisting ministry-level security officials

DIPLOMACY, GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance focuses on countering some of the root causes of violent extremism. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Countering and reducing corruption, social inequality, and extremism
- Promoting inclusive and effective democracy, civil participation, and empowerment of women
- Promoting reconciliation, peaceful conflict resolution, demobilization and reintegration of armed forces, and other rule-of-law efforts
- Providing emergency relief, assistance, and protection to displaced persons, refugees, and others affected by crisis
- Building or enhancing host-nation governance capacity
- Supporting sustainable and appropriate recovery and reconstruction activities, repairing infrastructure, removing explosive remnants of war, and reestablishing utilities and other public services
- Countering trafficking in persons and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse

SUPPORT TO MISSION

Support to Mission focuses on U.S. administrative, logistical, and management efforts that enable military operations and non-military programs. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Ensuring the security of U.S. personnel and property
- Providing for the occupational health and safety of personnel
- Administering U.S. Government programs
- Managing U.S. Government grants and contracts
- Inventorying and accounting for equipment

AUDIT, INSPECTION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Lead IG agencies use dedicated, rotational, and temporary employees, as well as contractors, to conduct oversight projects, investigate fraud and corruption, and provide consolidated planning and reporting on the status of overseas contingency operations.

DoD OIG oversight and investigative staff maintained their presence in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain during the quarter. State OIG staff in Baghdad, Iraq, and Frankfurt, Germany conducted oversight work of the Department of State's activities in Iraq and Syria. USAID OIG staff provided oversight of USAID activities in Syria and Iraq from their regional office in Frankfurt, supported by additional staff in Washington, D.C.

Lead IG and partner agencies completed four management advisories and two reports related to OIR during the quarter, including on: DoD management of shipping containers and preposition stock equipment, including at facilities that support OIR; and on State's management of programs at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon.

As of June 30, 2023, 13 projects related to OIR were ongoing. The OIGs had 1 planned project related to OIR as of the end of the quarter.

FINAL REPORTS BY LEAD IG AGENCIES

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Management Advisory: Basic Issue Items and Components of End Items Shortages in the Army's Prepositioned Stock–5 Program

DODIG-2023-087; June 15, 2023

The purpose of this management advisory was to inform Headquarters, Department of the Army and Army Materiel Command officials responsible for the Army Prepositioned Stock (APS) program and Army-wide equipment transfer decisions of shortages in Basic Issue Items and Components of End Items from APS-5 equipment. Specifically, 401st Army Field Support Battalion–Kuwait officials identified a shortage of specific Basic Issue Items and Components of End Items. Officials from the 401st Army Field Support Battalion–Kuwait explained that some of the shortages could have resulted from containers shipped by other military units not arriving at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Army Sustainment Command officials also stated that the shortages could have resulted from contractors using incorrect technical manuals when conducting inventories and 401st Army Field Support Battalion–Kuwait officials not validating on-hand inventory before migrating the APS-5 inventory to the current system of record. Neither 401st Army Field Support Battalion–Kuwait nor Army Sustainment Command officials could not provide the audit team with documentation to support these explanations.

The shortage of these items from APS–5 equipment puts the Army at risk of not being ready to execute required missions. U.S. Military units also use this equipment to support operations throughout Middle East, including OIR.

The DoD OIG made several recommendations in this management advisory, which remain unresolved. For example, the DoD OIG recommended that the Commander of the 401st

Army Field Support Battalion–Kuwait establish and implement procedures electronic transfer and inventory documents to account for equipment transfers between military unit; and to investigate property losses to determine who may be financially responsible for the missing items and, as appropriate, to recoup funds from individuals or organizations deemed responsible for the loss.

Audit of Tracking, Recovery, and Reuse of Department of Defense-Owned Shipping Containers

DODIG-2023-081; June 8, 2023

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine the extent to which the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps complied with DoD requirements to track, recover, and reuse shipping containers, including those at facilities that support OIR, and included those containers in an accountable property system of record.

The DoD owns shipping containers that it uses for the transportation, prepositioning, and storage of weapons and equipment. The DoD OIG found that the six installations visited maintained visibility of the majority of the containers reviewed. However, the installations did not accurately track or report location or condition related to 32 of 190 (17 percent) containers in the Joint Container Management system as required. This occurred because the installation personnel did not prioritize updates. In addition, Surface Deployment and Distribution Command officials who owned shipping containers did not use an accountable property system of record to account for 19 of 62 (31 percent) containers with an acquisition cost of $5,000 or more.

The DoD OIG recommended that the Commanders of the six installations develop procedures to ensure prioritization of compliance with the tracking and reporting of information related to DoD owned shipping containers. The DoD OIG also recommend that the Commander of the Surface Deployment and Distribution Command provide the DoD OIG results of the 2022 biennial inventory and take actions to ensure that the Surface Deployment and Distribution Command reports shipping containers that have an acquisition cost of $5,000 or more in an accountable property system of record. Management agreed with the recommendations.

Management Advisory: Maintenance Concerns for the Army's Prepositioned Stock–5 Equipment Designated for Ukraine

DODIG-2023-076; May 25, 2023

The DoD OIG issued this management advisory report as part of its ongoing audit to determine whether the Army accurately maintained and accounted for APS-5 equipment, to include at facilities that support the OIR mission, in accordance with Federal and DoD policies. The advisory determined that the 401st Army Field Support Battalion–Kuwait did not adequately oversee the maintenance of M1167 High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles and M777 howitzers in the APS-5 inventory. These deficiencies resulted in unanticipated maintenance, repairs, and extended lead times to bring the equipment up to the level where the DoD could issue it to Ukraine. While this advisory focuses on the condition of equipment identified for use by Ukrainian Armed Forces, the advisory also provides insights into larger issues with the maintenance of all APS-5 equipment.

Additionally, if U.S. forces needed this equipment, they would have encountered the same challenges. Army prepositioned stock locations includes equipment stored at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. U.S. Military units also use this equipment to support operations throughout Middle East, including OIR.

The DoD OIG made two recommendations: that the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army, G 3/5/7 consider the level of maintenance and leadtime required before selecting APS–5 equipment for Ukraine; and that the Commander of the 401st Army Field Support Battalion–Kuwait develop and implement increased inspection procedures to not only validate that the APS–5 contractor has properly corrected known maintenance deficiencies but also to conduct a thorough visual inspection of equipment and correct any deficiencies. The Chief, Army Strategist War Plans Division, addressed the specifics of recommendation one; therefore, the recommendation is resolved but will remain open. The ASC Commanding General, responding for the Commander of the 401st AFSBn Kuwait, acknowledged the advisory findings but disagreed with the recommendation, which remained unresolved.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Inspection of U.S. Embassy Beirut, Lebanon

ISP-I-23-10; April 17, 2023

State OIG conducted this inspection to evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, including U.S. Government assistance being provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

State OIG inspected the executive direction, policy and program implementation, resource management, and information management of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. As a part of its bilateral assistance to Lebanon, the U.S. Government has provided more than $2.3 billion in humanitarian assistance to help Lebanon support refugees from the conflict in Syria.

State OIG found that 1) the embassy generally managed grants in compliance with standards and addressed areas for improvement during the inspection; 2) the layout of the embassy's compound, consisting of multiple buildings of varying ages and construction spread over more than 19 acres, contributed to infrastructure problems and safety deficiencies; 3) the embassy's fire protection program did not comply with State standards and the embassy had not addressed several issues identified in previous fire reviews; 4) the embassy's public diplomacy section used program evaluation and data analytics to inform its outreach to target audiences in Lebanon; and 5) the embassy's foreign assistance working group centralized oversight of new programming by involving all embassy sections and agencies handling assistance programming.

State OIG made 15 recommendations to the embassy. In its response to a draft of the report, the embassy concurred with all 15 recommendations and State OIG considered all 15 recommendations to be resolved pending further action at the time the report was issued. This inspection included a report with classified findings, which are discussed in the classified appendix to this report.

ONGOING OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of June 30, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 13 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 5 categorizes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Table 10, contained in Appendix F, lists the titles and objectives for each of these projects. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Military Operations and Security Cooperation

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD properly stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, which includes OIR.

Diplomacy, Governance, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance

- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has adequately strengthened Iraqi business capacity through economic development activities.

Support to Mission

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD is effectively monitoring sensitive equipment provided to the Iraqi government.

- **State OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Department of State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, construction, and commissioning of the central power plant at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

- **State OIG** is evaluating the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil.

- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has effectively implemented its New Partnerships Initiative, which includes support for religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that were victimized by ISIS.

Figure 5.

Ongoing Projects by Strategic Oversight Area

PLANNED OVERSIGHT PROJECTS

As of June 30, 2023, the DoD OIG had one planned project related to OIR, which is also listed in Appendix G.

Support to Mission

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct a follow up audit to determine whether the Military Services implemented corrective actions related to a previous audit of the U.S. Central Command's management of pharmaceuticals in its area of responsibility, which includes OIR.

INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

INVESTIGATIONS

The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OIR during the quarter. The DoD OIG's criminal investigative component, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), maintained investigative personnel in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, where they worked on cases related to OIR. DCIS agents also worked on OIR-related cases from offices in the United States. State OIG and USAID OIG investigators worked on cases related to OIR from Washington, D.C., El Salvador, Germany, Israel, South Africa, and Thailand.

Investigative Activity Related To OIR

During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in one guilty plea related to a bribery investigation at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

The investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 4 investigations, initiated 12 investigations, and coordinated on 68 open investigations.

Figure 6.

Types of Allegations and Primary Offense Locations, April 1–June 30, 2023
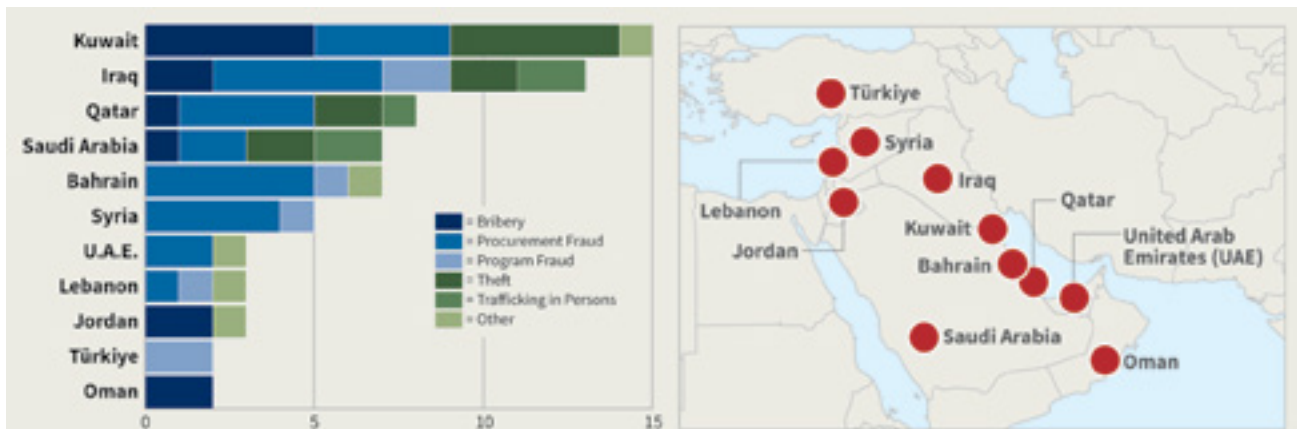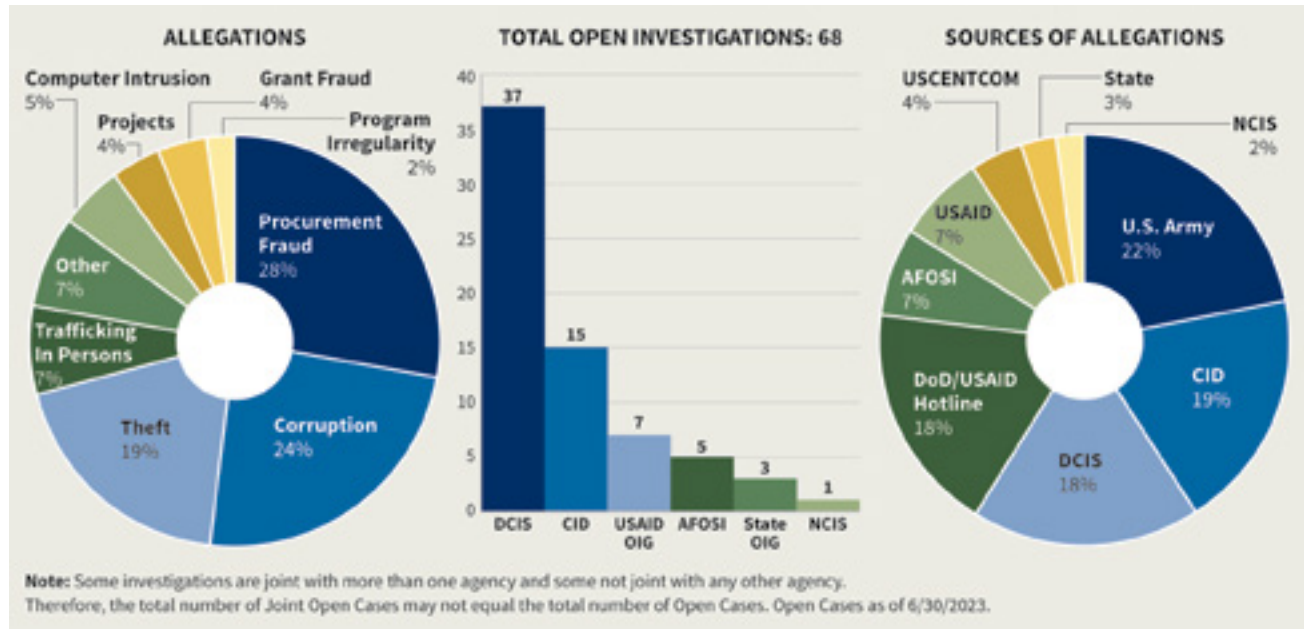
Figure 7.

Open Investigations and Sources of Allegations, April 1–June 30, 2023

ALLEGATIONS

Computer Intrusion 5% | Grant Fraud 4% | Program Irregularity 2%
Projects 4%
Procurement Fraud 28%
Other 7%
Trafficking In Persons 7%
Theft 19%
Corruption 24%

TOTAL OPEN INVESTIGATIONS: 68

DCIS 37 | CID 15 | USAID OIG 7 | AFOSI 5 | State OIG 3 | NCIS 1

SOURCES OF ALLEGATIONS

USCENTCOM 4% | State 3% | NCIS 2%
USAID 7%
U.S. Army 22%
AFOSI 7%
DoD/USAID Hotline 18%
CID 19%
DCIS 18%

Note: Some investigations are joint with more than one agency and some not joint with any other agency. Therefore, the total number of Joint Open Cases may not equal the total number of Open Cases. Open Cases as of 6/30/2023.

The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations. As noted in Figure 6, the majority of primary offense locations and allegations related to OIR originated in Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar.

The Lead IG agencies and partners continued to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from DCIS, State OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

Figure 7 describes open investigations related to OIR and sources of allegations. During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 43 fraud awareness briefings for 627 participants.

CEO of DoD Contracting Firm Pleads Guilty on Bribery Scheme in Kuwait

On April 11, 2023, Roy George Varkey, CEO of Royal Bridge International, pleaded guilty to two counts of bribery of a public official, based on a DCIS investigation into bribery allegations at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

Varkey was indicted in December 2020, in Washington D.C., for offering and paying multiple bribes to a Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) employee at Camp Arifjan. Varkey's company, Royal Bridge International, was contracted to remove demilitarized excess scrap metal from Camp Arifjan. In an attempt to win additional contract awards, Varkey offered and paid bribe payments to the DLA employee in exchange for that employee writing a letter

of recommendation to the DoD contracting office in Battle Creek, Michigan. Additional cash payments were made to the DLA employee in exchange for giving Varkey excess metal and scrap items that the DLA had in its possession at Camp Arifjan. The payments to the DLA employee were meant to ensure items of value (e.g., heating and air conditioning systems, generators, and cranes) were not destroyed beyond usable condition, enabling Varkey to use the items or sell the parts for additional profit. Varkey is scheduled to appear for his sentencing in August 2023.

Investigative Activity Related to Legacy Cases

DCIS has three ongoing "legacy" investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the formal designation of OIR.

HOTLINE

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority. A DoD OIG Hotline investigator coordinates among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate.

During the quarter, the DoD OIG Hotline investigator received 85 allegations and referred 75 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple subjects and allegations.

As noted in Figure 8, the majority of allegations during the reporting period related to personal misconduct, personnel matters, and retaliation.

Figure 8.

Hotline Activities

Intelligence 1.3%
Pay and Benefits 1.3%
Other 2.7%
Safety 1.3%
Medical 5.3%
Government Resources 5.3%
Criminal Allegations 8.0%
75 Allegations
Personal Misconduct/ Ethics Violations 52.0%
Retaliation 16.0%
Personnel Matters 20.0%

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

U.S. Air Force Airmen stare out of the back of a U.S. Air Force HC-130J Combat King II aircraft at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia. (U.S. Air Force photo)

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
Classified Appendix to this Report

A classified appendix to this report provides additional information on Operation Inherent Resolve, as noted in several sections of this report. The appendix will be delivered to relevant agencies and congressional committees.

APPENDIX B
About the Lead Inspector General

The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. Section 419, previously found at 5 U.S.C. App, Section 8L) established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. The primary Lead IG agencies are the Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Section 419 requires the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to appoint a Lead Inspector General from among the inspectors general of the primary Lead IG agencies upon the commencement or designation of a military operation that exceeds 60 days as an overseas contingency operation; or receipt of notification thereof.

Lead IG oversight of the operation "sunsets" at the end of the first fiscal year after commencement or designation in which the total amount appropriated for the operation is less than $100,000,000.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out the Lead IG statutory responsibilities to:

• Submit to Congress on a quarterly basis a report on the contingency operation and to make that report available to the public.

• Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operation.

• Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.

APPENDIX C
Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

This report complies with the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. Section 419), which requires that the designated Lead IG provide a quarterly report, available to the public, on each overseas contingency operation, and is consistent with the requirement that a biannual report be published by the Lead IG on the activities of the Inspectors General with respect to that overseas contingency operation. The Chair of the Council of the Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve. State IG is the Associate IG for the operation.

This report covers the period from April 1 through June 30, 2023. The three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG—and partner oversight agencies contributed to this report.

To fulfill the congressional mandate to report on OIR, the Lead IG agencies gather data and information from Federal agencies and open sources. The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or from Federal agencies, and the information provided represents the view of the source cited in each instance.

INFORMATION COLLECTION FROM AGENCIES AND OPEN SOURCES

Each quarter, the Lead IG agencies gather information from the DoD, State, USAID, and other Federal agencies about their programs and operations related to OIR. The Lead IG agencies use the information provided by their respective agencies for quarterly reporting and oversight planning.

This report also draws on current, publicly available information from reputable sources. Sources used in this report may include the following:

- U.S. Government statements, press conferences, and reports
- Reports issued by international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and think tanks
- Media reports

The Lead IG agencies use open-source information to assess information obtained through their agency information collection process and provide additional detail about the operation.

REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD IG, as the Lead IG for this operation, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies and then participate in editing the entire report. Once assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process of the report within its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask relevant offices within their agencies to comment, correct inaccuracies, and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review prior to publication. The final report reflects the editorial view of the DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.

APPENDIX D
State and USAID Stabilization Programs

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Funding Facility for Stabilization Aims to stabilize areas recently liberated from ISIS by restoring damaged or destroyed essential services and providing the conditions for a dignified, safe, and voluntary return of IDPs to their home. July 2015–December 2025 $469 million award	USAID is the largest contributor to this 29-donor, multilateral program.
Durable Communities and Economic Opportunities Aims to build resilient, adaptive communities and advance economic well-being in target communities in Iraq by addressing underlying drivers of conflict and increasing community leadership of inclusive local development. June 2020–September 2025 (including two option years) $40 million award	Engaged selected communities impacted by conflict and their leadership to identify and resolve conflict sustainably and peacefully through inclusive dialogue and practical solutions. Provided training and networking services to Iraqi victims of war to help them gain high-quality and sustainable sources of livelihood.
Shared Future Supports the durable return for IDPs from the Ninewa Plain, focusing on religious and ethnic minority communities. June 2018–September 2023 $29 million award	Worked with youth, community, and religious leaders to increase mutual understanding, tolerance, and trust both within their communities and with other communities. Improved vocational and leadership skills and youth livelihood opportunities through targeted vocational training.
Iraq Response and Resilience Program Supports vulnerable people in areas suffering from limited resources as a result of natural or other disasters, such as acute pollution, to ensure every Iraqi has safe access to water, electricity, health, education, free movement on sealed roads and civil/municipal services, and the opportunity to support their family financially. September 2019–December 2023 $11 million award	Rehabilitated nine water treatment units in Basrah that will provide over 640,000 beneficiaries with potable water.
Supporting the Vulnerable Populations in Iraq September 2018–September 2024 $49 million award	Supported the return of displaced populations from ethnic and religious minorities in Ninewa Plain and western Ninewa through activities related to livelihoods, housing, community peacebuilding, education, and psychosocial services.

Program	Activity Highlights
Transitional Assistance to IDPs in Erbil, Iraq Assists vulnerable IDP families with immediate household needs, such as shelter and food, and ease their return home when possible. September 13, 2019–September 30, 2023 $7.4 million award	Provided cash assistance to support the IDPs from Ninewa province in protracted displacement in Erbil and assisted beneficiaries to prepare for durable solutions for their families through targeted information and planning sessions.
Strengthening the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee to Response to Communities in Crisis Supports building the capacity of the committee while responding to the ongoing needs of IDPs in Iraq through institutional capacity-building and organizational development. October 1, 2020–September 30, 2024 $1 million award	Strengthened the capacity of the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee and prepared it to fully engage with USAID on future development initiatives through strengthened capacity and commitment.
Building Resilience in Children Leverages Ahlan Simsim's unique approach that combines locally driven, crisis-sensitive and age-appropriate interventions to increase resilience capacities among children, families, and communities impacted by conflict and violence. July 1, 2021–June 30, 2024 $11 million award	Engaged families and communities impacted by conflict and violence using a combination of original multimedia, direct services, and youth engagement programming to increase resilience capacities that help to counter malign influences and prevent radicalization to violence and violent extremism.
Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Minority Communities in Iraq Aims to contribute to communal healing, intercommunal understanding, and appreciation of the diversity of Iraq, a fundamental step toward the promotion and actualization of democracy. May 12, 2021–May 11, 2023 $1 million award	Partnered with local Iraqi organizations to describe and document the tangible and intangible heritage of religious and ethnic minority communities in Iraq. Created digitally documented collections as databases, built for portability, interoperability, and accessibility.
Iraq Community Resilience Initiative II ICRI Phase II provides direct assistance to Iraqi partners to empower inclusive civic action with the goal of supporting a prosperous and inclusive Iraq. This is achieved by improving positive perceptions of civic engagement among Iraqis and increasing community mobilization around national causes. September 2021–September 2024 $31 million award	Supporting increased positive perceptions of civic engagement Supporting increased community mobilization around national causes Supporting dialogue between citizens and elected officials, as well as cultural and social spaces that foster engagement and interaction among diverse community members. Highlighted commonalities that foster unity and a shared identity across Iraq, including in new community spaces south of Baghdad such as Nasiriya, Basra Center, Islah, and al-Madina.

Source: USAID Middle East Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 6/16/2023.

State-funded Stabilization Programs in Syria During the Quarter

Program Goals	Activities During the Quarter
Essential Services and Local Governance Seeks to build capacity of local governance entities to provide essential services, making target communities less susceptible to ISIS influence.	Rehabilitated water infrastructure, trained technical teams that operate water stations, and built local authorities' capacity to collect and share water quality information with humanitarian assistance providers to combat a cholera outbreak in northeastern Syria. Provided operational and infrastructure assistance to emergency medical teams, municipal vehicle mechanics, trash collection workers, firefighters, emergency response drivers, body exhumation teams, documentation/forensics specialists and rubble removal teams.
Civil Society Seeks to help civil society organizations restore essential services and livelihoods in areas liberated from ISIS.	Supported Syrian civil society organizations to restore essential services, improve livelihoods, represent Syrians, and strengthen social cohesion in communities liberated from ISIS and in communities with members of religious minority groups.
Education Seeks to build the capacity of local councils, their education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial numeracy, primary education, and psychosocial support for children.	Built the capacity of civil councils, education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial literacy and numeracy, technical and vocational training, psychosocial support, teacher training, and rehabilitation/winterization of schools. Rehabilitated and equipped schools in Raqqah. Provided training in computer skills, solar panel repair, carpentry, and other vocations. Worked with families recently returned from displaced persons camps through a social reintegration program focused on building cohesion in the communities.
Support to Independent Media Seeks to promote unbiased, professional and relevant reporting.	Provided capacity building and operational support to 10 independent northern Syrian media outlets that improved access to accurate, unbiased information and countered violent extremism and disinformation perpetuated by Iran-backed militias, Russia, the Assad regime, and other malign actors. Expanded news programs, gender programming, and programming discussing community issues. Supported gender inclusion in partners' reporting and internal operations to improve the representation of women in the media by raising awareness of women's issues and gender equity in media and reporting. Supported a media consumption survey for all media partners.
Community Security Seeks to build the capacity of internal security forces to provide security that supports, and is supported by, the communities they serve.	Supported the InSF and the governance bodies that oversee them to deliver community policing services that serves, and are supported by, the population. Rehabilitated InSF stations; held engagements between InSF officers and local community members; and rehabilitated streetlights in under-served areas to address a primary security concern of local communities. Provided a holistic approach to community security, supporting officer trainings, building the capacity of civilian authorities, promoting community engagement, and supporting public safety initiatives.

Program Goals	Activities During the Quarter
Syrian Political Process Seeks to strengthen the capabilities of stakeholders to participate in the Constitutional Committee and work with other UN-convened negotiations in support of UNSCR 2254.	Built the capacity of political process stakeholders to engage in UN-convened processes and fostered their engagement with Syrian civil society and marginalized populations. Supported workshops and dialogue sessions to help bridge the gap between local community-based organizations and their local constituents by facilitating initiatives to ensure political inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and outreach.
Humanitarian Mine Action Seeks to clear explosive hazards contamination from areas liberated from ISIS to allow for broader stabilization efforts.	Surveyed, marked, and cleared explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices from key critical infrastructure sites and areas liberated from ISIS. Delivered explosive ordnance risk education to displaced persons and at-risk communities to teach them about the hazards of explosives. Provided local capacity building support.

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 6/16/2023; State, vetting comment, 7/19/2023.

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities During the Quarter

Program	Activities During the Quarter
Elections and Political Processes Seeks to enhance participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in transitional or electoral processes in Syria and improve inclusive citizen-governance relationships in northeastern Syria. Duration: 4 years (ends August 2025) $12 million award	**Assessments:** Conducted rapid assessments among returnees from al-Hol and the communities they returned to in Raqqah and Dayr az Zawr. **Training and Capacity Building:** Provided training and capacity building to 46 civil society organizations on civil society's role in peacebuilding, 42 civil society organizations on the legal framework and applicable legislation governing NGO work, and with leaders from local organizations on leading effective advocacy campaigns. **Community Dialogue:** Facilitated 18 dialogues and roundtables to date on issue identification, effective communications, conflict analysis, and negotiations and mediation for local communities
Supporting Livelihoods in Syria (wheat and livestock program) Seeks to address critical quality wheat seed shortages and input gaps, and to make farmers, agro-service providers, and cooperatives more resilient to price and market shocks. Duration: 5 years (ends September 2023) $16 million award	**Wheat Seed Program:** Completed the provision and planting of 1,750 metric tons of locally sourced high-quality, certified and registered wheat seed with 4,700 farmers in Amouda, Hasakah, and Dayr az-Zawr. **Agricultural Mechanization Equipment and Alternate Sources of Agricultural Livelihoods:** Prepared for the provision of 8 tractors, 8 mechanical seeding and fertilizing tractor attachments, 8 portable seed sorting machines, and 14 threshing machines. This supports mechanized agriculture in 14 villages in Dayr az-Zawr governorate, which will increase production and produce a byproduct with useful straw, salts, and minerals used to make animal feed and build homes, generating alternative income sources for farmers. **Products Ready for Market:** Prepared for the provision of over 90,000 100 kg wheat seed bags and over 67,000 200 kg wheat bags which will allow over 4,000 farmers in Dayr az-Zawr governorate to get a better price in the market for their crops.

Program	Activities During the Quarter
Syria Livelihoods Project Increases equitable income generation and access to services for women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, and creates an inclusive enabling environment for economic recovery. Duration is 5 years (July 2020–July 2025) $14.55 million award	**Career Opportunities:** Placed 250 job seekers with disabilities in vacant positions; 93 have completed their six-month, part-paid internships and are now permanently employed. Provided training to a local NGO on entrepreneurship and business plan development to 316 beneficiaries. **Case Management:** Worked with local authorities to support to more than 18,000 persons with disabilities. Launched a case management system that registers, assesses and refers persons with disabilities, channeling individuals to support services that meet their economic, health and social assistance needs both within SANES and to external specialist service providers. As of the quarter, the program has registered 2,671 beneficiaries with disabilities and referred 126 to requested service providers. **Career Guidance:** Delivered employment readiness sessions and career guidance to 1,996 persons with disabilities through a local disabled persons organization. The beneficiaries can also receive financial support for their businesses, job placements, or referrals to other specialist service providers. Technical support to North Syria Network's Job-Matching Website (NSjobs.net): This is an ongoing activity aimed at improving the NSjobs.net website, a job-matching platform operating in northeastern Syria, to serve new users and give vulnerable populations access to employment opportunities. During this period, SLP held the kick-off meeting for the subcontract supporting the delivery of technical assistance to improve the NSJobs website. Accelerating Inclusive Economic Recovery: This activity is implemented by a local partner to support increased resilience for persons with disabilities in Hasakah and Qamishli to the impacts of climate change, supports internships in green jobs, and expansion of green MSMEs owned by or employing persons with disabilities.
Economic Management for Stability in Northeast Syria Aims to stimulate private sector-led growth and investment for job creation, reduce corruption, and improve the transparency of regional governing authorities, and ultimately reduce the dependency on foreign assistance in non-regime held areas. The program enlists senior advisors to initiate policy dialogue and advisory support in critical economic governance and private sector-led growth areas. Duration: 3 years (ends September 2024) $14 million award	**Private Sector Engagement:** Continued to provide technical assistance to 70 enterprises with 1,620 sustainable job opportunities, a third of which are held by women. Two thirds of the partnerships were in the agro-processing and food production sectors. **Agricultural Markets and Food Security:** Provided technical assistance to 237 farmers in Amouda and 76 farmers in Qana, where farmers reportedly witnessed a 20 percent increase in production and 10 percent reduction in wastage. Provided training to farmers raising chicken and cows in Raqqa with the aim to increase the availability of eggs and milk in the local market through increasing the beneficiaries production by 20 percent. Continued to partner with cold storage and feed producers to increase capacity, raise standards, improve quality assurance, quality, and food safety standards, as well as lower costs. Partnered with 14 livestock and animal feed producers to create new, high-quality feed formulas and adopt modern poultry breeding methods aiming to increase feed production from 100 to 400 tons per day and decrease the number of days to raise healthy broilers from 40 to 33. **Climate-smart Agriculture Technology:** Through the training provided to farmers and livestock breeders, the program worked with them to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices including integrated pest management, the use of natural fertilizers, balanced feeding, and water preservation which will contribute to improved crop quality, higher market value, and sound environmental practices. **Access to Finance:** In collaboration with the Near East Foundation's SIRAJ microfinance institution, the program is worked with farmers to provide them with the needed training to access micro loans provided by the SIRAJ Foundation. Approximately 100 farmers were able to access loans with an average of $ 1,200 per loan. The program aims to reach between 300 to 400 by the end of 2023.

Program	Activities During the Quarter
Essential Services, Good Governance, and Economic Recovery Aims to restore essential services, including power, water, health, etc in non-regime held areas in northeastern Syria. Duration: 5 years (May 2020–May 2025) $49.9 million award	**COVID-19 Vaccination Awareness:** Aimed to support the three regional health authorities in addressing COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and combating misinformation and disinformation in efforts to improve vaccine uptake. The grants included training and awareness campaigns to build trust in the COVID-19 vaccine and battle misinformation. In addition, the grants included coordination meetings and provision of IT equipment. The project trained and equipped health committees and health education offices to improve their public-facing communication about COVID-19 vaccine safety and conduct an educational campaign to combat misinformation and disinformation. **Rehabilitation of Agricultural Complexes:** Rehabilitated four agricultural complexes in Dayr az Zawr and their associated irrigation canal networks and connect the complexes to the electrical grid. Provided backup generators, replaced the irrigation pumps with all appropriate electrical and mechanical works, and cleaned and patched the irrigation canals that distribute water from the agricultural complexes to the nearby farms. The complexes are scheduled to be completed by May 2024 **Strengthening the role of the Social Affairs and Labor Offices:** Facilitated stakeholder engagement activities and coordination meetings to discuss the water and electricity service provision interventions, along with other IDP needs. **Establishment of Oxygen Bottling Plants:** Rehabilitated existing buildings in Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah and established medical-grade oxygen bottling facilities to address health facility oxygen demands to treat COVID-19 and other medical issues. The plant in Dayr az-Zawr will have a capacity of 100 cylinders per day, while the Raqqa plant will be the first in the governorate and have a capacity of 300 cylinders per day.

Source: USAID Middle East Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 6/16/2023.

APPENDIX E
State and USAID Humanitarian Assistance Programs

State-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Implementer	Activity Highlights
UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) Promotes and protects the rights of refugees and other displaced persons, provides assistance, and seek durable solutions.	Led the humanitarian response for Syrian refugees in Iraq in close coordination with humanitarian actors and government authorities, to protect and assist refugees and asylum-seekers. Supported activities for refugees, IDPs, and persons at risk of statelessness related to registration and civil documentation; protection monitoring and advocacy; legal aid; health; shelter and camp management; psychosocial support; child protection; prevention, risk mitigation, and response to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse; among other services.
International Organization for Migration Provides a comprehensive response to the humanitarian needs of migrants, IDPs, returnees, and host communities	Worked to improve the conditions for dignified and voluntary returns to areas of origin, local integration, and settlement in new locations, with assistance on civil documentation and legal issues, social cohesion support, financial assistance, health consultations, and protection monitoring and advocacy. Through the Displacement Tracking Matrix, collected data on displacement, conditions in areas of return, and main barriers to return for IDPs and returnees.
Other International Organizations Support refugees, IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable communities in Iraq with a range of humanitarian assistance and services.	Provided services to refugees, IDPs, returnees, and other vulnerable communities including support for health, mental health & psychosocial support, legal assistance, shelter, prevention and response to gender-based violence and child protection issues, among other services.
NGOs–Education Increases access to education for displaced children.	Supported education services for displaced school-aged children, which is a key need for refugee, IDP, and returnee families. Provided educational kits and materials, incentivized volunteer teachers, conducted service referrals, implemented trainings for teachers, and led targeted, evidence-based advocacy around inclusive education.
NGOs–Livelihoods and Economic Empowerments Helps refugees, IDPs and returnees develop or restore income-generating and livelihoods opportunities	Supported the restoration of income-generating and livelihoods opportunities, including building the capacity of the local government and institutions to provide services in the agricultural sector, trainings to develop key business knowledge and skills, cash grants for enterprise start-ups, and legal assistance services with livelihoods interventions to support beneficiaries' access to income.
NGOs–Protection Reduces risks for refugees and IDPs and promote their empowerment to exercise rights and access services.	Supported protection activities to reduce risk for refugees and IDPs, including gender-based violence prevention and response activities, legal assistance and awareness-raising to remove legal barriers to durable solutions for displacement-affected individuals, case management, mental health and psychosocial support services, child protection and child safeguarding training, and support for community centers and Women & Girls Safe Spaces.

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 6/16/2023.

USAID-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene	Supplied an IDP camp with water sourced through camp boreholes; provided solid waste management and desludging services; provided water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion and awareness raising sessions; distributed non-food items; and maintained water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in IDP camps.
Shelter and Settlements	Provided critical shelter upgrades and a distribution of non-food item kits to vulnerable internally displaced person households in Diyala province. The critical shelter upgrades included rehabilitations to windows, doors, ceilings, locks, corridors, hand-rails on stairs, and hand-washing basins. In addition, families received a distribution of a kit that included blankets, bedsheets, mattresses, a stove, jerry cans, a kerosene heater, an electrical heater, a kitchen set and a carpet.
Protection	Provided awareness sessions on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation; case management services; and referrals through a protection center in Ninewa province and other organizations.

Note: Activity highlights are illustrative examples and do not represent the full spectrum of USAID BHA activities conducted during the quarter. As a part of the U.S. Government response, USAID BHA funding also supports health, protection, and shelter and settlements programs for vulnerable populations in conflict-affected areas of Iraq.

Source: USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, response to USAID OIG request for information, 06/16/2023.

APPENDIX F
Ongoing Oversight Projects

Table 10 lists the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 10.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of June 30, 2023

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Army's Management of Army Prepositioned Stock-5 Equipment
To determine whether the Army accurately maintained and accounted for Army Prepositioned Stock- 5 equipment, to include at facilities that support the OIR mission, in accordance with Federal and DoD policies.

Audit of Army Oversight of the Department of Defense Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II Contract
To determine whether the Army provided oversight of and appropriately staffed the DoD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II contract in the U.S. Central Command and OIR area of responsibility to ensure the contractors fulfilled requirements.

Audit of Enhanced End-Use Monitoring of Sensitive Equipment Given to the Government of Iraq
To determine whether the DoD is conducting enhanced end-use monitoring for sensitive equipment provided to the Government of Iraq in accordance with the DoD Security Assistance Management Manual and the transfer agreement terms and conditions.

Evaluation of Combatant Command Military Deception Planning
To determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception (MILDEC) planning in support of ongoing OIR operations.

Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities in the U.S. Central Command
To determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

Evaluation of the Control and Accountability of DoD Biometric Data Collection Technologies
To determine the extent to which the DoD has ensured adequate control and accountability over technologies used to collect, store, and transmit biometric data to higher-level databases in overseas contingency operations.

Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities at Al Udeid Air Base
To determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities at Camp Arifjan
To determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

Audit of the Planning, Design, Construction, and Commissioning of the Power Plant at U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Iraq
To determine whether the Department of State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, construction, and commissioning of the central power plant at Embassy Baghdad.

Audit of Physical Security Standards for Department of State Temporary Structures at Selected Overseas Posts
To determine whether the Department of State managed the use of temporary structures at overseas posts in compliance with applicable physical security standards and procedures, including maintaining an accurate and complete inventory of temporary structures used for residential and office purposes.

Inspection of Embassy Baghdad and Consulate General Erbil, Iraq
To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil. This inspection will also produce a report with classified findings.

Audit of USAID's New Partnerships Initiative
To determine the extent to which USAID has established a framework for effectively implementing the New Partnerships Initiative as well as processes for measuring the initiative's performance and results, which has included support for religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that were victimized by ISIS.

Audit of USAID/Iraq's Economic Development Activities
To determine the extent to which USAID has generated employment among poor households and communities, strengthened economic capacity, and improved the Iraq business environment through economic development activities.

APPENDIX G
Planned Oversight Projects

Table 11 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 11.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of June 30, 2023

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Follow-up Audit of DoD's Management of Pharmaceuticals in Support of the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility
To determine whether the Military Services implemented corrective actions, to ensure accountability and safeguarding of pharmaceuticals, identified in Report No. DODIG-2020-120, Audit of Management of Pharmaceuticals in Support of the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility.

ACRONYMS

Acronym	
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CID	U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Division
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
CTS	Counterterrorism Service
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DNGO	Department of Non-Governmental Organizations
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
EUM	end-use monitoring
EEUM	enhanced end-use monitoring
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FIIA	Federal Intelligence and Investigations Agency
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FY	fiscal year
IALO	Iraqi Air Liaison Officer
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
IqAAC	Iraqi Army Aviation Command
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
ITAC	Iraqi Tactical Air Controller
ITC	Iraqi Intelligence Tactical Controller
JIOC	Joint Information Operations Center
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
JTAC	Joint Tactical Air Controller

Acronym	
KCL	Kurdistan Coordination Line
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KSF	Kurdish Security Forces
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoPA	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NMI	NATO Mission-Iraq
OC	operations command
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OSC-I	Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq
OUSD(P)	Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SANES	Self-Administration of North East Syria
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SFA	Syrian Free Army
SNA	Syrian National Army
State	Department of State
TBI	traumatic brain injury
TSO	Türkiye-supported opposition
UAS	unmanned aerial system
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command
YPG	People's Protection Units

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