OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

JANUARY 1, 2020–MARCH 31, 2020

ABOUT THIS REPORT

A 2013 amendment to the Inspector General Act established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. This legislation requires the Inspectors General of the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (DoS), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide quarterly reports to Congress on active overseas contingency operations.

The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) designated the DoD Inspector General (IG) as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). The DoS IG is the Associate IG. The USAID IG participates in oversight of the operation.

The Offices of Inspector General of the DoD, DoS, and USAID are referred to in this report as the Lead IG agencies. Other partner agencies also contribute to oversight of OIR.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out their statutory missions to:

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

- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the Federal Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, and evaluations.

- Report quarterly to Congress and the public on the operation and activities of the Lead IG agencies.

METHODOLOGY

To produce this quarterly report, the Lead IG agencies submit requests for information to the DoD, DoS, and USAID about OIR and related programs. The Lead IG agencies also gather data and information from open sources, including congressional testimony, policy research organizations, press conferences, think tanks, and media reports.

The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of formal audits, inspections, or evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the data and information provided by the agencies. For further details on the methodology for this report, see Appendix B.

CLASSIFIED APPENDIX

This report normally includes an appendix containing classified information about the U.S. mission to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

On the Cover
(Top row): A member of the Maghaweir al Thawra partner force fires a machine gun at a range at the Tanf Garrison, Syria. (U.S. Army photo); U.S. Marine Corps and Iraqi officers sign transfer documents on the Taqaddum base, Iraq (U.S. Marine Corps photo); a Syrian woman carries winter supplies that were distributed by Coalition forces and the local civil council (U.S. Army photo). (Bottom row): U.S. Soldiers load onto a CH-47 Chinook helicopter as they leave Al Qaim Base, Iraq (U.S. Army photo).

FOREWORD

We are pleased to submit this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report to the U.S. Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This report discharges our individual and collective agency oversight responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978.

The United States launched OIR in 2014 to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and to set the conditions for follow-on operations to increase regional stability. The 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, the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to promote the U.S. Government's policy goals in Iraq and Syria, during the period January 1, 2020, through March 31, 2020.

This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies and our partner oversight agencies during the quarter. During the quarter, the Lead IG agencies and our oversight partners issued 13 audit, evaluation, and inspection reports related to OIR.

This report usually includes an appendix containing classified information about OIR. This quarter, due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic and related workforce protection requirements, the Lead IG agencies did not produce the classified appendix.

Working in close collaboration, we remain committed to providing comprehensive oversight and timely reporting on Operation Inherent Resolve.

Sean W. O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense

Steve A. Linick
Inspector General
U.S. Department of State

Ann Calvaresi Barr
Inspector General
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MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL

I am pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report on the status of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR).

This quarter, the Coalition began consolidating forces to fewer bases in Iraq, which the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) stated was part of a long-term plan. This base transfer occurred amid force protection concerns sparked by escalating tensions between the United States and Iran and its proxy militias, which CJTF-OIR said led to an acceleration of the long-term transfer plan.

In addition, the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic significantly reduced training operations this quarter. Iraqi Security Forces paused training activities and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) paused operations against ISIS in response to the pandemic.

With the consolidation of forces in both Iraq and Syria since October 2019, the DoD OIG has observed a decrease in visibility for the OIR mission. CJTF-OIR in Syria reported this quarter that it has less visibility of some ISIS detention centers, as well as the training and development of SDF and local forces. CJTF-OIR reported a similar reduction in visibility of some ISF operations.

Sean W. O'Donnell

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS continued to wage a "low-level insurgency" in both Iraq and Syria this quarter, but remains unable to hold territory and continues to rely on small-arms attacks. In Iraq, these attacks were concentrated in mountainous and desert provinces north and west of Baghdad, particularly within an area of northern Iraq claimed by both the central government and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government. In Syria, the majority of attacks occurred in Dayr az Zawr, Hasakah, and Raqqah provinces.

Iraq's political process remained stalled throughout the quarter, as two different nominees for prime minister were unable secure enough support from parliament to form a new government. However, as this report was going to print, a third nominee successfully formed Iraq's first government since November 2019. The Iraqi government continued to face popular protests that subsided in March due to fears of COVID-19 and militia violence. In addition, plummeting oil prices strained the government's budget. The DoS reported that without an increase in revenue, the government is unlikely to be able to fund its ministries after April.

In Syria, CJTF-OIR reported that the OIR mission and U.S. and Coalition partner national security face "significant risk" from ISIS prisoners and supporters residing in camps for internally displaced persons. It said that the SDF faces continued difficulty guarding detention facilities and ISIS-affiliated camp residents continue to facilitate ISIS activities. CJTF-OIR and governmental and multi-national partners developed a coordinating group to address security matters in the camps and prisons; however, challenges continue for these entities to provide aid to camp residents, ensure security, and prevent the spread of ISIS ideology in the camps.

In addition to restrictions caused by COVID-19, humanitarian relief agencies operating in Iraq faced additional obstacles this quarter after provincial governments instituted new requirements for work access authorization renewals. Hundreds of relief missions were canceled or supplies could not reach their destinations. USAID reported that it continues to fund 240 stabilization projects in northeastern Syria, focused mainly on economic growth and food security, but funding for these projects remains uncertain.

With my appointment as Acting IG on April 6, 2020, I look forward to working with my Lead IG colleagues to continue to report and provide oversight on OIR and related U.S. Government activity, as required by the IG Act, and in light of the limitations imposed by COVID-19.

Sean W. O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense

U.S. Soldiers load onto a CH-47 Chinook helicopter as they leave Al Qaim Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This quarter, external factors, such as Iranian activity and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), significantly affected Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), and led to pauses or suspensions of some campaign activities. U.S. and Coalition forces paused training and operational support to the ISF for the majority of January due to force protection concerns.[1] In March, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) suspended training in Iraq to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19.[2] The Department of Defense Office of the Undersecretary for Policy, International Security Affairs (OUSD(P)/ISA) reported that the Coalition subsequently curtailed select OIR activities, including training partner forces, but the Coalition continued assisting ISF units as they conducted counter-terrorism operations against ISIS.[3] In Syria, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) leaders suspended military operations temporarily in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, urging all actors in the country to "make an immediate commitment to a humanitarian truce."[4]

In late March, however, ISIS called on followers worldwide to increase attack planning and operations as governments shifted their focus to combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Media reporting, citing counterterrorism experts, noted a "spike in extremist propaganda describing the coronavirus outbreak as being sent by God to assist the jihadist cause."[5] ISIS also encouraged its followers to "show no mercy and launch attacks in this time of crisis."[6]

Tensions with Iran and Its Proxies Strain U.S.-Iraq Security Cooperation

Tensions between the United States and Iran continued in Iraq this quarter, as Iranian proxies increased their attacks on Iraqi bases hosting Coalition forces, resulting in Coalition casualties.[7] The Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) reported that these attacks led CJTF-OIR to pause operations in early January 2020.[8] The pause followed a U.S. aerial strike that killed Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani.[9]

According to media reports and think tank analyses, Iran intensified its political and military pressure to evict the United States from Iraq following Soleimani's death. This included Iran's immediate response of firing ballistic missiles at bases housing Coalition forces in Iraq, which injured more than 100 U.S. personnel.[10]

OUSD(P)/ISA told the DoD OIG that after the January operational pause ended, CJTF-OIR resumed providing a "full range of support to the ISF," as force protection concerns allowed.[11] However, OUSD(P)/ISA also reported that tensions with Iran and its proxies affected CJTF-OIR's relationship with the ISF. The attacks from Iranian-aligned militias encouraged the Coalition to prioritize force protection and "probably sowed doubt within the ISF" about whether the Coalition would continue providing support in the future, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.[12] CJTF-OIR also reported that combined counter-ISIS operations continued after the operational pause, but not all relationships with ISF units resumed to pre-pause levels.[13]
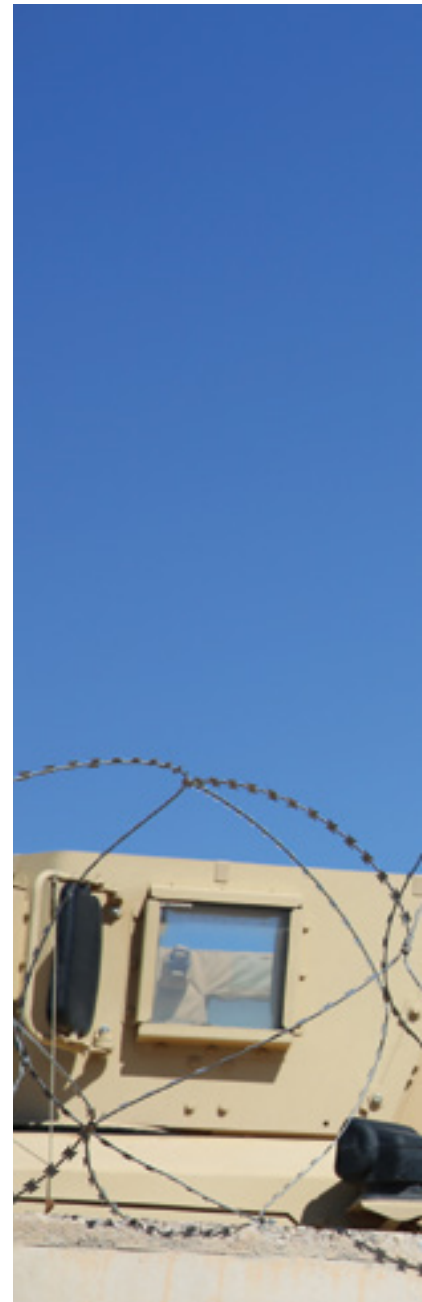
A U.S. Soldier removes concertina wire from a concrete barrier at Al Qaim Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

Coalition Forces Consolidate Bases in Iraq

In March 2020, Coalition forces transferred control of four Iraqi military bases—Al Qaim in Anbar province, Qayyarah Airfield and Ninewa Operations Center–East in Ninewa province, and K-1 in Kirkuk province—to the ISF as part of a planned troop consolidation in Iraq.[14] As the quarter ended, the Coalition was also preparing to transfer the Taqaddum Air Base, located west of Baghdad, to the ISF.[15] While the base transfers were part of a long-term transition plan, CJTF-OIR stated that increased threats from malign actors and greater force protection concerns accelerated the timing of the transfers.[16]

The bases turned over to Iraqi control will continue to serve as key operational nodes in the fight against ISIS, according to a CJTF-OIR press release.[17] CJTF-OIR reported that select

personnel from these bases would continue advising the ISF from installations in Iraq that remained under U.S. control.[18]

CJTF-OIR said that the base transfers were possible because the ISF is increasingly able to conduct independent operations against ISIS.[19] Thus, CJTF-OIR said, conditions "appear to be met" to transition to the next phase of the campaign against ISIS, which focuses on the Coalition providing more mentorship to the ISF and less support for tactical missions targeting ISIS.[20] In this phase, the ISF will lead its own training, according to CJTF-OIR.[21]

According to CJTF-OIR, the consolidation of U.S. forces in Iraq also affected operations in Syria. CJTF-OIR said that the Coalition transferred assets, including fire support and medical evacuation equipment, to sites in northeastern Syria as part of the consolidation. As a result, U.S. force strength in the Eastern Syria Security Area (ESSA) increased slightly from the previous quarter.[22] CJTF-OIR reported that troop numbers at the Tanf Garrison did not change from the previous quarter.[23]

ISIS Sustains "Low-level Insurgency" in Iraq and Syria

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS continued to wage "a low-level insurgency," but is unable to hold territory in Iraq and Syria. CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS continued to conduct primarily small arms and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in both countries.[24] In Iraq, ISIS continued to operate from deserts, mountains, and ungoverned areas claimed by both Iraq's central government and the Kurdish regional government.[25] In Syria, ISIS mainly targeted governing officials and security forces in Raqqah, Hasakah, and Dayr az Zawr provinces.[26]

CJTF-OIR reported ISIS attacks decreased this quarter following a spike in attacks conducted in response to the October 27, 2019, death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in Syria.[27] Both U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that ISIS lacks the capabilities to sustain elevated attack levels over several months.[28] USCENTCOM said the decrease in attacks in Syria this quarter was "strong evidence" that ISIS is not "making a comeback," as some other officials have stated.[29] The U.S. Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS said during the quarter that ISIS remains a threat "as an insurgency, as a terrorist operation, with some 14,000 to 18,000 terrorists between Syria and Iraq."[30]

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS is unable to generate the resources necessary to conduct large-scale attacks. These resourcing limitations are due to financial constraints and damage to ISIS command and control structures from counterterrorism operations, according to CJTF-OIR.[31] However, the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) reported that ISIS continues to generate funds through criminal activities, to move money within and out of Syria and Iraq through couriers and other money services, and has access to financial reserves in the hundreds of millions of dollars even as it works to rebuild "significantly reduced" fund-generating networks. Treasury said that ISIS's revenues in Syria remain at "historic lows."[32]

CJTF-OIR said that the base transfers were possible because the ISF is increasingly able to conduct independent operations against ISIS.

Iraq's Political Stalemate Fosters Uncertainty

The spread of COVID-19 and ongoing tension between the United States and Iran exacerbated Iraq's fragile political situation, which has been in turmoil since mass anti-government protests began in October 2019. That led to the November resignation of Iraq's prime minister, who continued in a caretaker role.[33] Since then, Iraq has been unable to form a new government despite the nomination of two prime minister candidates.[34] As of April 30, a third nominee, Iraqi intelligence chief Mustafa al Kadhimi, had not formed a government.[35] The political impasse has led to uncertainty over the future of the OIR mission and the status of U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq, according to analysts, due in large part to efforts by political factions in Iraq who seek to evict U.S. forces from the country.[36]

According to DoS cables, anti-government protests continued throughout the quarter, often with violent results.[37] In an early February cable, the DoS reported on violent clashes between militiamen loyal to Shia cleric Moqtada al Sadr and protesters in Baghdad and throughout most Shia-majority southern provinces.[38] By early March, as reported in another DoS cable, crowd sizes estimated by the Iraqi government had dropped to the lowest levels since the protests began due to fear of contracting COVID-19 and also due to violence from Sadr's supporters, among other factors.[39]

With global oil prices plummeting, Iraq experienced worsening economic conditions this quarter.[40] The country has been operating without a 2020 budget, and according to the DoS, without increased revenues, the government will be unable to fund payments to its ministries after April.[41] According to one Middle East analyst, the twin shocks of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world economy and the oil price war initiated by Saudi Arabia and Russia will stress Iraq's budget to the limit.[42] Analysts also stated that various proposed solutions would likely postpone the economic crisis, but not resolve it. These include halting investments to rebuild war-torn northern provinces, expanding oil production capacity, delaying settlement of foreign debt, and halting payments to investors in the electricity sector.[43]

Iraqi Government Restrictions and COVID-19 Pandemic Impede Humanitarian Operations

According to the United Nations, humanitarian operations were at risk of halting due to the suspension of Iraqi government authorizations for relief organizations operating in Iraq. The suspension of access authorization renewals has delayed or prevented the delivery of some life-saving humanitarian assistance to many areas of Iraq since December, according to the DoS and USAID.[44] Multiple factors—including uneven provincial-level access procedures—led to the Iraqi government in early December suspending the issuance of letters necessary for humanitarian workers to access parts of Iraq.[45]

With global oil prices plummeting, Iraq experienced worsening economic conditions this quarter.

In January, as the Iraqi government began to create new procedures for non-governmental organization (NGO) access requests, a survey conducted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs found that 88 percent of NGOs reported that the lack of authorization approvals impeded their operations. Since the beginning of December 2019, more than 3,943 humanitarian missions have been cancelled or prevented from reaching their destinations due to the suspension of national access letters, the humanitarian coordination office said.[46]

In Syria, SDF Operations Against ISIS Continue Amid Tensions with Turkey

OUSD(P)/ISA reported that northeastern Syria grew more stable this quarter following upheaval caused by Turkey's October 2019 incursion into northern Syria, and the reduction and reorientation of U.S. forces in Syria.[47] However, Turkish media reporting indicated that altercations between the Turkish military and Kurdish fighters continued in areas under Turkish control.[48] CJTF-OIR reported no further impact to defeat-ISIS operations this quarter due to the Turkish incursion, but said that ongoing tension between the Turkish military and the SDF continued to divert SDF attention and resources away from the fight against ISIS.[49]

CJTF-OIR said that U.S. forces and the SDF operating in northeastern Syria continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations and to deny ISIS access to critical petroleum infrastructure and production. The production of oil is a vital component of SDF revenue.[50] CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF is able to conduct most counter-ISIS operations autonomously.[51] However, according to CJTF-OIR, it is less able to gauge SDF capabilities than in previous quarters, in part due to a reduction in the combined joint operations area in Syria.[52]

USCENTCOM reported that the majority of Arab communities in northeastern Syria passively support the SDF and its associated civil institutions, such as the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC).[53] However, USCENTCOM also reported that these communities are under pressure from state actors in the region to realign and renounce support for the SDF; internal rivalries and poor security conditions also strain the relationships.[54]

The DIA and USCENTCOM provided differing assessments about the SDF's willingness to include Arabs in military and political discussions. USCENTCOM reported that the SDF and SDC made "great strides" toward incorporating Arab military and civil leaders, as well as Syriac Christians, into military and political deliberations.[55] However, the DIA reported that Kurdish elements of the SDF, the People's Protection Units (YPG), maintain control over leadership and decision-making positions within the SDF and SDC-led institutions, demonstrating an "unwillingness to share power with Arabs, even in the Arab-majority regions of the northeast where Arab fighters probably represent a majority of the SDF's front line forces."[56]

ISIS in Detention and IDP Camps Poses Threat to Coalition

According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF holds about 2,000 foreign fighters and some 8,000 Iraqi and Syrian fighters in approximately 20 detention centers.[57] CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF continues to be committed to physically securing the prisons, but said there remains the "risk of a mass breakout." CJTF-OIR said that this risk increases if the SDF reduces its guard force, as it did following the Turkish incursion.[58] CJTF-OIR said that ISIS prisoners pose "one of the most significant risks to the success of the [defeat-ISIS] mission," as well as a threat to U.S. and Coalition partner national security interests.[59]

In the displacement camps, an indeterminate number of ISIS supporters, living among mostly women and children, operate in what CJTF-OIR described as a "relatively permissive environment."[60] After the fall of Baghouz in March 2019, there was an influx

U.S. Soldiers dismount their vehicles for a community engagement in northeast Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

of tens of thousands of people into displaced persons camps in Syria. Since then, the DoD, DoS, and USAID have struggled to address the often competing needs of providing security, isolating ISIS members and supporters, preventing the spread of ISIS ideology, and providing for the health and welfare of camp residents—who are mostly women and children. The three Lead IG Offices of Inspector General have observed difficulties faced by the three agencies in determining how to address ISIS activity in the camps, but none has asserted authority to address the matter directly. The DoS deferred to the DoD and the SDF, which is in charge of guarding the camps, on camp security matters, stating the U.S. Government does not claim that authority.[61] USAID stated that a system for humanitarian coordination provided a forum for camp management to discuss security concerns, but

Lead IG Oversight Activities

This quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed 13 reports related to OIR. These reports examined various activities that support OIR, including: the DoD's oversight of U.S. military equipment retrograded from Syria, as well as equipment designated for vetted Syria opposition groups; CJTF-OIR's Military Information Support Operations conducted to counter ISIS in Iraq and Syria; the U.S. Army's oversight of contractor-provided base operations support services at Camp Taji, Iraq; and the U.S. Air Force's readiness related to its unmanned aircraft systems. Lead IG partner agencies also issued reports that are discussed in the Oversight section of this report. As of March 31, 2020, 24 projects were ongoing and 19 projects were planned.

The investigative components of the Lead IG and partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OIR during the quarter. The investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 32 investigations, initiated 18 new investigations, and coordinated on 120 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 and contacts 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; and abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the investigator referred 37 cases to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.

deferred to the DoS for additional information.[62] The DoD indicated that it has limited visibility into the camps and was unable to provide an estimate of the number of ISIS activists, or the number of violent incidents, within the camps.[63]

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that approximately 10,000 ISIS-affiliated foreign family members reside in a separate annex at Al Hol, two-thirds of them children under the age of 12. The DoS said that some ISIS-affiliated adult family members, from Syria, Iraq, and other countries, remain loyal to ISIS and continue to pose a threat.[64] The DIA reported that ISIS activists in the camps continue efforts to spread ISIS ideology, intimidate and recruit other residents, and maintain ISIS smuggling and wire transfer networks.[65] CJTF-OIR reported that about 2,000 foreign women (with children), who renounced their citizenship to follow their husbands to Syria, are residing in the foreigner annex at Al Hol while their countries decide on their legal status.[66] The DIA, citing SDF sources, said that ISIS activists increased attacks against camp guards this quarter and that camp authorities remain overstretched.[67] However, USAID said that it was not aware of reporting that indicates violent incidents increased this quarter, and said the situation had largely stabilized.[68]

CJTF-OIR reported that since November 2019, it no longer has a dedicated prison support mission in Syria."[69] CJTF-OIR reported that it developed the Northeast Syria Coordination Group (NESCG) to work with partner countries, agencies, and multi-national entities to address problems associated with the detention centers and displacement camps.[70]

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that the NESCG has now replaced the dedicated CJTF-OIR prison support team and while it is not permanently stationed in Syria, the NESCG is able to respond quickly to requests to support the repatriation of foreign fighters or to organize resources to assist the SDF in maintaining the facilities.[71]

CJTF-OIR States Complex Operating Environment Does Not Hinder Execution of OIR

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that a crowded, complex operating environment in northeastern Syria generated an increased number of tense interactions among adversaries this quarter.[72] Many of these interactions included forces intercepting or preventing the passage of patrols and convoys.[73] CJTF-OIR reported that personnel continued using established deconfliction mechanisms designed to mitigate risks to Coalition forces.[74]

CJTF-OIR reported that the Russian military appeared willing to continue using established deconfliction channels in the ESSA—the portion of northeastern Syria where Coalition forces operate.[75] However, according to CJTF-OIR, Russian ground and air incursions into the ESSA continued to occur on a regular basis.[76] The Russian military presence did not hinder the Coalition's intelligence collection or operations against ISIS, according to CJTF-OIR.[77]

Meanwhile, failed ceasefire agreements between the Russian and Turkish militaries led to an escalation in tensions as military operations intensified in Idlib province. As of late March, these tensions were not hindering the Coalition's ability to defeat ISIS in Syria, according to CJTF-OIR.[78] However, OUSD(P)/ISA reported it was concerned that continued violence in northwestern Syria could negatively impact OIR if an unmanageable number of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) from northwestern Syria sought refuge in SDF-held areas.[79]

Stabilization Assistance Continues but Future Funding Remains Uncertain

According to USAID, its Middle East Bureau funds approximately 240 stabilization projects in northeastern Syria. These projects focus primarily on promoting economic growth and food security via agricultural development in areas formerly controlled by ISIS.[80] According to USAID, implementing partners continue to face uncertainty due to funding limitations. With donor funds nearly expended, and the Presidential Syrian stabilization funding freeze still in place, USAID programming has decelerated pending an infusion of additional resources. According to USAID, additional donor commitments remained uncertain at the end of the quarter.[81]

> CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that a crowded, complex operating environment in northeastern Syria generated an increased number of tense interactions among adversaries this quarter.

Prior to the release of this report, USCENTCOM expressed concerns that selected data and language in this report should not be released to the public. This information included U.S. troop numbers in Syria, some ISIS attack data, and some information regarding threats posed by Iran and its proxies. CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM provided the troop numbers and information about Iran to the DoD OIG in March and Lead IG public reports have regularly included similar information. The DoD OIG agreed to remove the selected information from this public report, and there is no classified appendix to this quarterly report. The DoD OIG will address these issues more fully in the next Lead IG quarterly report.

A member of the Maghaweir al Thawra partner force fires a machine gun at a range at the Tanf Garrison, Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

COVID-19 PANDEMIC DISRUPTS OIR OPERATIONS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

The Department of Defense Office of the Undersecretary for Policy, International Security Affairs, (OUSD(P)/ISA) reported to the DoD OIG that this quarter the Coalition was managing several lines of effort, including responding to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, amid a dynamic security environment in Iraq.[1] On March 20, the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) announced that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) suspended training in Iraq to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19.[2] OUSD(P)/ISA reported that it was unlikely Coalition training activities would resume until after Ramadan, which ends on May 23, 2020.[3]

OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the Coalition remained committed to ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq through its partnership with the ISF. Coalition forces continued to collaborate with the ISF on force protection and information sharing, and assist ISF units working to combat ISIS, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.[4] Meanwhile, as of late March, some troops who deployed to the Middle East when tensions with Iran increased, remained in Kuwait after the Secretary of Defense froze the movement of all U.S. troops overseas for 60 days due the COVID-19 pandemic.[5]

OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the ISF's suspension of training in January temporarily ended the need for Coalition support to that training. As a result, several Coalition members repositioned some of their forces.[6] According to a CJTF-OIR press release from late March, Coalition members were redeploying select training personnel to their home countries.[7] Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom announced the temporary withdrawal of forces, according to government statements and press reports.[8]

In Syria, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) leaders suspended military operations temporarily in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and urged all actors in the country to "refrain from military actions and make an immediate commitment to a humanitarian truce" in late March.[9] According to media reporting, on March 30, ISIS fighters detained at an SDF detention facility in Hasakah province rioted.[10] According to some media reports, detainee fears over COVID-19 might have sparked the rioting.[11]

COVID-19 Pandemic Emboldens ISIS

Official and affiliated ISIS media outlets featured the group's perspective on the COVID-19 pandemic.[12] According to researchers, ISIS's rhetorical line evolved as the geographic scope and human toll of the pandemic became clearer. For example, as COVID-19 spread from China to Iran and Western countries, ISIS rhetoric shifted to address developments in these

U.S. Marine Corps and Iraqi officers sign transfer documents on the Taqaddum base, Iraq. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

countries.[13] In mid-March, ISIS issued a travel advisory for Europe to its fighters, directing them to avoid the region because of the COVID-19 pandemic.[14] In addition, while ISIS urged its followers to seek refuge in Allah, the group offered hygiene and social distancing tips to avoid contracting COVID-19.[15]

In late March, ISIS was calling on followers to increase attack planning and operations as governments shifted their focus to combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Media reporting, citing counterterrorism experts, noted "a spike in extremist propaganda describing the coronavirus outbreak as being sent by God to assist the jihadist cause."[16] According to media reports, ISIS claimed that the pandemic was "Allah's wrath upon the West."[17] ISIS also encouraged its followers to "show no mercy and launch attacks in this time of crisis."[18]

In early April, media reporting cited a publication from a non-governmental organization (NGO), which said that the COVID-19 pandemic was threatening the global solidarity integral to fighting ISIS. According to the report, "It is almost certainly correct that COVID-19 will handicap domestic security efforts and international counter-ISIS cooperation, allowing the jihadists to better prepare spectacular terror attacks."[19]

United States Provides more than $30 Million to Iraq and Syria for COVID-19 Response

On March 27, the DoS announced that the United States was "mobilizing all necessary resources to respond rapidly" to the COVID-19 pandemic.[20] According to the DoS, USAID and the DoS were providing an initial investment of nearly $274 million in emergency health and humanitarian assistance to help countries in need, in addition to the funding already provided to multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF. According to the DoS, of this $274 million, the DoS and USAID allocated more than $15.5 million in health and humanitarian assistance—including resources to prepare laboratories, implement a public-health emergency plan, and identify those afflicted with the disease—for Iraq and $16.8 million for Syria.[21] The DoS reported that the U.S. Government had not yet fully allocated funds for Syria as of the time of publication of this report.[22]

TENSION WITH IRAN AND ITS PROXIES PRESENTS ONGOING CHALLENGE TO U.S.-IRAQ SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

Ongoing tensions between Iran and the United States continued to manifest in Iraq this quarter. CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that "malign actors" launched indirect fire attacks against Coalition positions in Iraq. According to CJTF-OIR, the frequency and increasing lethality of these attacks forced CJTF-OIR to shift focus from fighting ISIS to force protection.[23] Statements issued by the DoD and the DoS expressly identified Iranian-backed groups, such as Kata'ib Hezbollah, as malign actors who attacked Coalition forces.[24]

The increasing hostilities and threat to Coalition forces led to a pause in partner force training and support to ISF operations against ISIS in Iraq, according to a January 5 CJTF-OIR press release.[25] In March, CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that Coalition forces were able to "reinitiate most, if not all, partnerships with success."[26]

Media reports, think tank analyses, and DoD statements indicate that the threat from Iran and Iranian-backed militias continued throughout the quarter. According to analysts, Iran intensified its political and military pressure in order to compel the United States to withdraw forces from Iraq.[27] Iranian officials and Iranian-backed actors vowed to avenge the deaths of Iranian Qods Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani and Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC) Chief of Staff Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, killed by a U.S. aerial strike at the Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.[28] Iranian-aligned factions within the Iraqi government also sought to evict U.S. forces from Iraq over the strike, but these efforts appear to have stalled due to Iraq's ongoing political crisis. Iranian proxies continued launching indirect fire attacks against Coalition forces after the deaths of Soleimani and al Muhandis, resulting in Coalition casualties.[29] Most recently, on March 11, a rocket attack on Camp Taji killed two U.S. and one British service members, according to a DoD press release.[30]

OUSD(P)/ISA told the DoD OIG that CJTF-OIR restarted its full range of support to the ISF as force protection concerns allowed, but indicated that the increase in tensions with Iran and its proxies complicated the relationship between CJTF-OIR and the ISF. According to OUSD(P)/ISA, the Coalition's prioritization of force protection diminished the amount of

support it could provide to the ISF and "probably sowed doubt within the ISF" over whether Coalition support would resume in the future.[31] CJTF-OIR also told the DoD OIG that over a 4-week period it resumed most relationships with the ISF; however, not all relationships returned to "pre-pause levels."[32]

Iraq's Political Stalemate Fosters Uncertainty

The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing tension between the United States and Iran exacerbated Iraq's already fragile political situation this quarter.[33] Since widespread anti-government protests forced Prime Minister Adil Abd al Mahdi to resign last November, Iraq has been unable to form a new government.[34] Two successive nominees advanced by President Barham Salih to replace Abd al Mahdi, who continues to serve as a caretaker prime minister, failed to form a government acceptable to Iraq's political blocs. On April 9, President Salih named a third nominee, Iraqi Chief of Intelligence Mustafa al Kadhimi.[35]

The political impasse has added uncertainty over the future of the OIR mission and the status of U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq, according to open source analysts.[36] Although Iraq's parliament narrowly passed a non-binding vote to evict foreign forces in the country on January 7 following the killing of Soleimani and al Muhandis, Abd al Mahdi indicated that he would leave the formal decision to expel U.S. and Coalition forces to his successor, according to media reports.[37]

COALITION FORCES CONSOLIDATE BASES IN IRAQ

This quarter, as part of a planned restructuring of the Coalition footprint in Iraq, U.S. force posture changed across northern and western Iraq. Coalition forces transferred control of four Iraqi military bases to the ISF and began to transfer a fifth.[38]

- **March 17:** CJTF-OIR transferred control of the Al Qaim military base, located on the Iraq-Syria border, to the ISF.[39]

- **March 26:** CJTF-OIR handed control of Qayyarah Airfield–West (Q West), located near Mosul, to Iraqi forces.[40]

- **March 29:** The Coalition handed K-1 base located near Kirkuk City over to the ISF.[41]

- **March 30:** The Coalition transferred Ninewa Operation Center–East to the ISF.[42]

- As the quarter ended, CJTF-OIR was preparing to transfer the Taqaddum Air Base, located west of Baghdad.[43]

Coalition forces transferred control of four Iraqi military bases to the ISF and began to transfer a fifth.

On March 20, CJTF-OIR stated in a press release that Coalition personnel stationed at these bases would transfer to a few larger bases in Iraq, where they would continue advising the ISF.[44] CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that while the base transfers were scheduled prior to January "due to military success against ISIS," the transfers were accelerated "in some part due to increased threats presented by malign actors."[45]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG on March 25, 2020, that the "nascent threat of malign actors" and the "change in focus from [defeat-ISIS] operations to force protection," contributed to the changes in force posture. Specifically, it said that personnel from Task Force-Iraq, a CJTF-OIR task force that works with the ISF, operating from locations outside

of Coalition bases discontinued face-to-face interaction with their Iraqi partners, and ground travel to partner locations halted.[46] CJTF-OIR reported that these changes reduced its visibility into partner force activity, noting that the ability to receive information from partnered forces "declined noticeably."[47]

Base Transfers Signal Next Phase of Campaign Against ISIS

CJTF-OIR stated in March press releases that the departure from the Al Qaim military base was possible because of the ISF's increasing ability to conduct independent operations against ISIS.[48] According to the CJTF-OIR campaign plan, the campaign against ISIS involves four phases.[49] In Phase III, the Coalition sought to liberate Mosul in Iraq and Raqqah in Syria, capitals of ISIS's self-proclaimed "caliphate," eliminate ISIS's "physical means and psychological will" to fight, and support partner forces through training, advising, equipping, and assisting. In Phase IV, the Coalition would provide security, planning, and required support to the Iraqi government and "appropriate authorities" in Syria to stabilize the region.[50]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that conditions "appear to be met" to transition from Phase III to Phase IV. In Phase IV, CJTF-OIR will provide greater mentorship to partner force leadership and less support for tactical missions targeting ISIS.[51] According to OUSD(P)/ISA, the Secretary of Defense retains the authority to determine when phase shifts occur; any shift is conditions-based.[52] When appropriate, in Iraq, ISF training sites would transition to Iraqi-led efforts under Coalition mentorship. Coalition efforts would transition from tactical leadership and training towards institutional leadership and resource programming.[53]

CJTF-OIR reported that it would assess effectiveness under Phase IV by gauging the ISF's ability to execute sustained and independent operations against ISIS and to generate forces to continue the defeat-ISIS mission.[54] This assessment can commence once the transition to Phase IV occurs.[55] The bases turned over to Iraqi control will continue to serve as key operational nodes against ISIS.[56] CJTF-OIR described the changes in U.S. force posture as an "opportunity" for the ISF to "demonstrate their capability and capacity to execute" military operations independently against ISIS from these locations.[57]

For example, according to CJTF-OIR, the Iraqi Air Force uses the Qayyarah base, located approximately 60 miles south of Mosul, as a hub to conduct air operations against ISIS locations in northern Iraq, and will continue to do so following the transfer of the base to Iraqi control.[58] Multiple ISF units, including the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), use the K-1 base, near Kirkuk City, to conduct operations against ISIS in the Hamrin and Mamah Gorah mountains that extend across Kirkuk, Salah ad Din, and Diyala provinces.[59]

Coalition and partner forces used the Al Qaim base, located in Anbar province near a key border crossing into Syria, to fight ISIS militants who exploit the surrounding desert and valleys to cross into Syria undetected, store weapons, and plan attacks.[60] Prior to the transfer to ISF control, the base also served as a staging area to fight ISIS in Syria's Dayr az Zawr province, including Baghouz, the last Syrian town liberated from ISIS in March 2019.[61]

One news report cited local Al Qaim residents saying that they were concerned that the departure of U.S. troops from the region would allow Iranian-aligned militias operating in the area to expand their presence in and around the border town.[62] According to an Iraq analyst, the Iranian-aligned militia Kata'ib Hezbollah controls the adjacent areas across the border in Syria and influences the Iraqi side as well, including areas around the Al Qaim base.[63] CJTF-OIR reported this quarter that Kata'ib Hezbollah's presence had an "uncertain and unmeasurable" effect on the fight against ISIS along the Iraq-Syria border.[64] CJTF-OIR further stated that Iranian-backed actors do not inhibit the ISF's mission to defeat ISIS as the ISF and Iranian-backed actors "are both working toward a common goal of the enduring defeat of [ISIS] and preventing [its] resurgence."[65] However, OUSD(P)/ISA stated that Iran's malign influence and threats to force protection have impacted Coalition efforts to train and equip the ISF."[66]

Forces Move from Iraq to Syria as Part of Consolidation

CJTF-OIR said that the number of U.S. forces operating in Northeast Syria, known as the Eastern Syria Security Area (ESSA) increased slightly from the previous quarter due to the transfer of additional capability.[67] CJTF-OIR said that it reorganized and reallocated some military assets, including those used for fire support and medical evacuation, across the OIR operational areas and into northeastern Syria.[68] CJTF-OIR reported that troop numbers at the Tanf Garrison did not change from the previous quarter.[69]

CJTF-OIR reported that U.S. forces continue to accomplish the mission despite a reduction in forces following the October 2019 Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria.[70] CJTF-OIR said that it and its partner forces in Syria continued to conduct operations against ISIS this quarter, and that ISIS capabilities in Syria had not increased from last quarter.[71] In addition, CJTF-OIR reported that, as with the ISF in Iraq, SDF force development in Syria

has evolved to a point that the SDF is able to handle most aspects of a counter-insurgency autonomously. CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that as of late March, conditions appeared to have been met to transition the campaign in Syria to Phase IV.[72]

However, given the instability in Syria with Turkish forces occupying parts of northern Syria and the Syrian regime seeking to regain territory with Russian and Iranian backing, the DoD OIG notes that it is unclear how long the SDF will be able to function as a dedicated counter-ISIS force and maintain the necessary containment pressure.

STATUS OF ISIS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

ISIS Sustains Operations at a Low Level

March 23, 2020, marked one year since Coalition forces defeated ISIS in Baghouz, Syria, the final battle ending the organization's territorial control in Iraq and Syria.[73] CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that, despite a brief spike in attacks in late 2019 to avenge the deaths of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and spokesman Abu Hasan al Muhajir, ISIS capabilities have remained at a "low level." It said that ISIS continues operations with small arms, improvised explosive devices (IED), and indirect fire attacks, such as those that employ mortars or rockets, in Iraq and Syria.[74]

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS remains largely relegated to remote areas and is unable to recruit from, or gain control over, local populations.[75] However, it said that ISIS is more successful in recruiting small numbers of people in displacement camps, particularly in the Al Hol camp in Syria.[76] The DIA, citing open-source reporting, said ISIS is able to conduct localized recruiting in Iraq.[77] CJTF-OIR said that it expects ISIS to focus on preserving its logistic and staging areas, and to take defensive measures to prevent security forces from disrupting activity in those areas. However, those actions are limited in scope, duration, and the number of fighters involved, indicating that ISIS lacks the resources to conduct an attack campaign, according to CJTF-OIR.[78]

USCENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie Jr. reported to Congress in March that the opinion among most of the U.S. intelligence community is that "without sustained pressure levied against it, ISIS has the potential to reconstitute in Iraq and Syria in short order, beyond the current capabilities of the United Sates to neutralize it without a capable, partnered ground force."[79]

Earlier in the quarter, several officials also stated that despite its low-level activities, ISIS is rebuilding itself as an insurgent organization. In January, Ambassador James Jeffrey, the U.S. Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, said, "We are seeing ISIS come back as an insurgency, as a terrorist operation, with some 14,000 to 18,000 terrorists between Syria and Iraq." Jeffrey also stated that the United States did not plan to withdraw its troops from Syria "in the near future."[80]

A United Nations assessment in January stated that ISIS has "begun to reassert itself" in remote areas of both Iraq and Syria, noting "increasingly bold attacks" and calls by ISIS for breaking ISIS fighters from detention facilities. It stated that ISIS exploits the porous Iraq-Syria border to move fighters.[81] A UN Secretary General's report on ISIS released on

> **CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS remains largely relegated to remote areas and is unable to recruit from, or gain control over, local populations.**

U.S. Soldiers conduct a live-fire exercise at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

February 4 stated that ISIS is "reconstituting itself as a covert network in Syria," just as it had done after losing territorial control in Iraq in 2017.[82]

According to an open source analysis, ISIS's steady stream of attacks in Syria's Dayr az Zawr and in Iraq's Diyala provinces suggest that the group's command and control structure is intact in both countries.[83] Masrour Barzani, the prime minister of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), said in a February interview that the continued failure of governance, lack of security, and ethnic tensions in both countries—the same conditions that allowed for the rise of ISIS—gives ISIS room to resurge.[84]

The January UN report said that ISIS has not been able to reconstitute its ability to launch attacks outside the conflict zones, and instead relies on attacks it inspires to demonstrate relevance externally. However, the report said that ISIS is actively working to re-establish the capacity to direct complex international operations.[85]

The DIA reported that counterterrorism pressure, along with territorial loss, have "substantially reduced ISIS's external operations capability" since its peak in 2014 to 2015, and "very likely" reduced ISIS' ability to carry out complex attacks against the U.S. homeland. The DIA reported that simple attacks by lone actors inspired by ISIS constitute "the most likely threat" to the U.S. homeland.[86]

ISIS-claimed Attacks Decrease, Returning to Average Levels

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS claimed 187 attacks in Iraq and Syria in January and February 2020. This represents a decrease from November through December 2019, when ISIS claimed 382 attacks across the combined joint operating area—an attack level CJTF-OIR said increased due to a global attack campaign to avenge al Baghdadi's death.[87]

On average, ISIS has claimed about 100 attacks per month since the loss of its territorial control in Baghouz, with 35 to 40 in Iraq and 60 to 65 in Syria, according to CJTF-OIR. It assessed that the ISIS claims are "broadly representative," of the data it collects, based on both corroboration of some attacks and changes to ISIS claims that appear to reflect actual attack trends.[88]

ISIS Raises Funds Through Kidnapping and Extortion

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that due to widespread financial constraints and some "recent impacts" to ISIS command and control structures from counter-terrorism targeting, ISIS is unable to generate resources for a larger attack campaign.[89]

The Department of the Treasury (Treasury) reported to the DoD OIG that since the U.S. withdrawal and consolidation of forces in Syria in October 2019, its ability to assess trends in ISIS financing in Syria has declined.[90] However, Treasury reported that ISIS's revenues in Syria remain at historic lows due to its lack of territorial control, which previously afforded ISIS access to populations it could extort and natural resources it could exploit. Treasury stated that ISIS continues to have access to financial reserves in the hundreds of millions of dollars even as it works to rebuild its significantly reduced revenue-generating networks.[91]

Treasury also reported that even with its territorial defeat, ISIS continues to generate funds in Syria through extortion, looting, kidnapping for ransom, and the use of front companies.[92] A February UN report said that ISIS is increasingly brazen in its revenue-producing activities in Iraq and Syria. The report stated that ISIS members are openly extorting residents in Dayr az Zawr and Hasakah regions in Syria, and establishing fake checkpoints and disguising themselves as military personnel or popular mobilization militia in Iraq.[93]

Treasury and the United Nations both reported that ISIS primarily uses cash couriers, *hawaladars*—local operators who pay out money in advance and settle accounts later, and money services businesses to move funds within and out of Syria and Iraq and through neighboring countries.[94] In particular, Treasury said that ISIS has used Turkey to facilitate money movements, as highlighted by the designation of more than 10 Turkey-based ISIS facilitators or money services businesses in the past 6 months, subjecting their property and assets to sanctions or seizure.[95]

Additional information about ISIS in Iraq is included on page 22 and about ISIS in Syria on page 49.

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ISIS Appoints New "Caliph"

On October 31, 2019, 5 days after the death of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, ISIS appointed Amir Muhammad Said Abdal Rahman al Mawla (al Mawla), also known as Hajji Abdallah, Abdul Amir Muhammad Said Salbi, and Abu Umar al Turkmani, as the new ISIS "caliph."[96] The ISIS media communique announcing al Mawla's appointment provided scant biographic details about the new leader and focused primarily on emphasizing that ISIS retained its global reach.[97] However, in the months following al Mawla's appointment, as ISIS continued messaging on the new leader and researchers dug deeper into his background, more information on al Mawla's identity became publicly available.

Some prominent scholars within the jihadist community were initially highly critical of al Mawla's appointment, citing a lack of clarity surrounding his identity and challenging the credibility of those who appointed him, in online media articles.[98] Moreover, these scholars claimed a "caliph" was largely irrelevant, since, given the loss of the territorial caliphate in Syria and Iraq, there was little for him to preside over.[99] Soon after ISIS announced al Mawla's appointment, the group began releasing pictures of its members from around the world proffering allegiance to al Mawla.[100] ISIS may have released these pictures to signal that al Mawla enjoyed widespread support and that the group remained unified after the death of al Baghdadi.

Western researchers have offered multiple theories about the motivations behind al Mawla's appointment and the initial opacity surrounding his identity. According to some researchers, initial messaging on al Mawla conformed to ISIS's well-established process for executing leadership transitions, a process meant to protect the new leader's identity immediately after his appointment.[101] Others noted the tension between the need to demonstrate effectiveness and the desire for security, which maintaining a high level of secrecy might afford.[102] One researcher, however, suggested that al Baghdadi's death caught ISIS off guard and therefore ISIS announced the installation of a successor who, despite being relatively unknown, would help ISIS maintain an outward appearance of control.[103]

By late March 2020, more biographic information on al Mawla was available to the public. According to the Counter Extremism Project, a non-governmental research organization, al Mawla is a founding member of ISIS from Tal Afar, Iraq. Al Mawla graduated from the Islamic Sciences College in Mosul, Iraq; he may have also studied Sharia at the University of Mosul.[104] In 2013, after Al Qaeda in Iraq transitioned into ISIS, al Mawla rose quickly up the ranks to become one of al Baghdadi's lieutenants.[105] Observers have commented on his brutality, allegedly encouraging the murder and enslavement of Yazidis in Iraq, and for his loyalty to al Baghdadi, who nominated him to be his successor in August 2019, according to analysts at the Counter Extremism Project.[106]

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that the appointment of al Mawla did not appear to affect ISIS internal cohesiveness in Iraq; in Syria, ISIS likely continued operations with little to no interruption after it appointed al Mawla, according to CJTF-OIR.[107] CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS conducted a global attack campaign to avenge the death of al Baghdadi.[108] However, al Mawla's role in planning and executing this attack campaign was not clear. In late January, according to media sources, an ISIS spokesperson stated that al Mawla wanted fighters to launch "a new phase" of ISIS operations by targeting Israel.[109]

ISIS Appoints New "Caliph" *(continued from previous page)*

In early February, a staff report submitted to a committee of the United Nations Security Council assessed that al Mawla might be only temporary "caliph" due to his alleged Turkmen, as opposed to Arab, ethnicity.[110] However, media reporting from late March stated that U.S. intelligence officials have credited him with helping ISIS cohere following al Baghdadi's death.[111] These intelligence officials were said to have warned that al Mawla was helping to ensure ISIS "continued its resurgence in both Iraq and Syria, while at the same time maintaining the allure of the global ISIS brand," according to the aforementioned media reporting.[112]

On March 18, the U.S. Government officially designated al Mawla as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224.[113] In its announcement of the designation, the DoS stated that "al Mawla helped drive and attempt to justify the abduction, slaughter, and trafficking of Yazidi religious minorities in northwest Iraq and oversees ISIS's global operations."[114]

EVENTS IN IRAQ

STATUS OF ISIS IN IRAQ

ISIS in Iraq Continues to Regroup

ISIS continued to wage a low-level insurgency in Iraq this quarter, according to CJTF-OIR.[115] ISIS waged this insurgency primarily in the northern and western provinces. ISIS operated from sparsely populated desert and mountainous areas, particularly in Anbar province and the Jazeerah desert. ISIS also operated from a largely ungoverned swath of territory, spanning across parts of Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah ad Din, and Ninewa provinces, that both the central Iraqi government and the KRG claim.[116] Previous Lead IG reports have discussed the challenge of securing this so-called "seam" between central government forces and those belonging to the KRG. Efforts to create joint security mechanisms and conduct operations in the "seam" have met with limited success.[117]

USCENTCOM in February described ISIS as "regrouping and reforming" in the Makhmour Mountains in northern Iraq, while the 2021 DoD budget justification for overseas contingency operations said that ISIS is expected to seek to re-establish governance in northern and western areas of Iraq.[118] CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS remains largely relegated to remote territory and is unable to recruit from or gain control over local populations.[119] However, the DIA reported that, based on open-source information, ISIS is able to recruit locally.[120]

CJTF-OIR reported that it did not observe any change in ISIS's capabilities this quarter compared to last quarter.[121] Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS in Iraq maintained freedom of movement and the ability to hide and transport fighters and materiel in rural areas, and did not appear either to grow stronger or to lose its footholds north and west of Baghdad.[122]

The DIA reported that it did not see any indication of a change in ISIS's strategy in Iraq, based on ISIS activity in Iraq this quarter and a speech by ISIS spokesperson Abu Hamzah

al Qurayshi on January 27.[123] According to media sources and organizations that track ISIS propaganda, al Qurayshi's 37-minute speech, broadcast on the ISIS propaganda channel al Furqan Media, restated the ISIS narrative of endurance in the face of hardship and strategic setbacks.[124] CJTF-OIR reported that the ISIS spokesperson reiterated the need for patience as the group wages a "protracted resistance," and called for a focus on "clandestine" activity to "spread influence" throughout the Coalition's areas of operation. CJTF-OIR said that the speech "aligns with the low-level activity" under the resurgence model that "ISIS adopted shortly before the fall of the physical caliphate in March 2019."[125]

ISIS Unable to Exploit Pause in Coalition Operations in Iraq

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS did not increase its attacks or change its targets during the Coalition's pause in operations against ISIS, which began on January 1, and lasted for approximately 1 month.[126] During a press briefing on January 23, U.S. Air Force Major General Alexus Grynkewich, the OIR Deputy Commander for Operations, said "ISIS hasn't been able to exploit any gaps or seams that may have arisen" because of the pause.[127] The DIA noted that the pause may not have been long enough to observe an increase in attacks.[128]

Major General Grynkewich said that part of the reason that ISIS was unable to exploit the pause was because the ISF continued operations against ISIS without Coalition support. He characterized the ISF operations as "fairly aggressive, even in the absence of the types of partnering that we were doing previously."[129]

CJTF-OIR Reports No Change in ISIS Tactics

The DIA reported that it did not observe any change in ISIS's tactics this quarter. It said that while ISIS conducted a greater number of moderately complex attacks in northern Diyala, the attacks conformed to ISIS's normal tactics, techniques, and procedures in the area.[130]

According to open source data compiled by the DoD OIG, ISIS claimed more than 250 attacks in Iraq this quarter. These reports indicated that ISIS continued to use assaults, IEDs, and assassinations as its primary methods of violence. It also employed snipers and mortars.[131] CJTF-OIR reported that to a much lesser extent, ISIS employed rockets, car bombs, sabotage, and kidnappings.[132]

According to DoD OIG analysis, Diyala province also experienced the most severe ISIS attacks, in addition to the highest number.

ISIS activity in Diyala outpaced the other provinces in which it is active. According to open-source data, ISIS carried out 80 attacks in Diyala, followed by Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din provinces. Baghdad province experienced slightly more than 20 attacks this quarter, however many of these attacks were unclaimed and resulted in few casualties.[133]

According to DoD OIG analysis, Diyala province also experienced the most severe ISIS attacks, in addition to the highest number. Areas around Baqubah and Khanaqin, located in central and northern Diyala province, experienced the deadliest attacks. An area of Baghdad province north of the capital suffered similarly deadly attacks.[134] Areas around Mosul and along mountainous regions in Kirkuk, Irbil, and Salah ad Din provinces also experienced frequent attacks, as well as around the town of Rutbah in Anbar province.[135]

Figure 1.

ISIS Attacks in Iraq This Quarter

ISIS Attacks in Iraq by Province
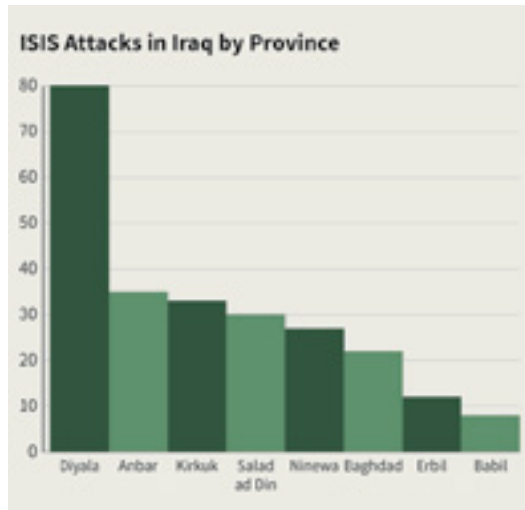
Sources: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency database (Jane's), and the Enabling Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC).

The DoD OIG's analysis of open source attack data is consistent with information that the DIA reported this quarter. The DIA stated that ISIS remains most active in the Rutbah district, the Hadr desert and Ba'aj in western Ninawa province; the Tarmiyah area north of Baghdad; northern Salah ad Din Province;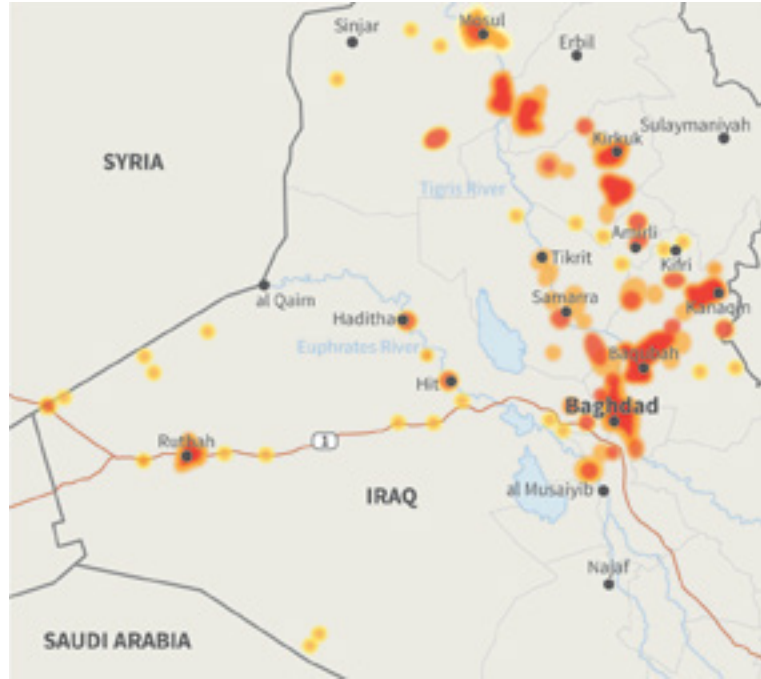 the Hawijah district of Kirkuk province; northern Diyala province; and the Makhmour, Makhul, Palkhana, and Hamrin mountains, which span several northern provinces and include areas disputed between Iraqi and Kurdish security forces.[136]

The DIA stated that ISIS does not have an "overt presence or significant local support" in any of these areas.[137] It also said that it has not corroborated ISIS claims of attacks inside cities in Iraq this quarter and said the organization remains largely relegated to remote areas, which has been the case since ISIS lost its territorial "caliphate" in Iraq.[138]

IRAQ: SELECTED KEY EVENTS, 1/1/2020-3/31/2020

JANUARY 1
U.S. forces pause operations against ISIS and training of ISF to focus on force protection; the pause lasts approximately 1 month

FEBRUARY 12
ISF launches new counter-ISIS campaign, "Heroes of Iraq," without Coalition air support

JAN — FEB

JANUARY 10
Iraqi PM requests mechanism to discuss U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq; mass protests against the Iraqi government resume after a lull

MARCH 1
Mohammad Allawi steps down as Prime Minister-designate after failing to form a government

According to the DIA, ISIS's highest-profile attacks this quarter included a January 16 car bomb that killed an Iraqi Army soldier and wounded five others in Anbar province, and a February 12 attack on a car traveling in Diyala.[139] ISIS fighters opened fire on villagers and detonated an IED targeting Iraqi Army responders who came to assist the victims.[140]

According to attack data compiled by the DoD OIG, ISIS attacks in Iraq this quarter also included a February 28 killing of an Iraqi soldier in Kirkuk, a March 21 attack in Anbar that killed two Iraqi soldiers, and a March 23 attack in Salah ad Din province that killed an Iraqi police officer and two civilians. In addition, dozens of ISIS-claimed hit-and-run attacks, IEDs, and gun battles wounded dozens of Iraqis across northern and western Iraq, as well as Babylon province, south of Baghdad.[141]

For an overview of ISIS attacks in Iraq by type, province, and intensity this quarter, see Figure 1.

ISIS EXPLOITS TERRITORY CLAIMED BY IRAQI ARABS AND KURDS

According to one Iraq analyst, ISIS "sleeper cells" remain active in Kirkuk and Diyala provinces in particular.[142] This analysis cited daily ISIS-claimed attacks in these provinces, mainly targeting the ISF and community leaders.[143] According to the analysis, ISIS activity persists in the Kirkuk provincial towns of Abassi and Zab, where a highway checkpoint manned by the ISF closes at 5 pm. As night falls, security forces, fearing ISIS attacks, leave the post, according to Iraqi expert reporting.[144]

In 2017, Kurdish security forces withdrew from disputed territories that they occupied in northern Diyala and other northern provinces.[145] The ISF retook control of the territory, but disputed areas remain largely ungoverned.[146] CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF and Peshmerga share security responsibilities in disputed territories, but "lack strong cooperation along" what CJTF-OIR referred to as "operational seams." ISIS operates along these seams and takes advantage of the lack of cooperation to avoid scrutiny from both the ISF and Peshmerga, which "want to avoid clashes with each other within disputed territory," CJTF-OIR said.[147]

According to an analysis by the Washington Institute for Near East Affairs, Diyala is also a preferred ISIS staging ground because the area is "studded with mountains, canals, groves, and other features that make hiding out and ambushes easier and conducting effective

MARCH 11
Rocket attacks on Camp Taji north of Baghdad kill three Coalition service members, including two Americans and one Briton

MARCH 19
U.S. troops withdraw from the Al Qaim military base in Anbar province; U.S. suspends training of Iraqi Security Forces

MARCH 29
U.S. forces leave the K-1 military base near Kirkuk

MAR

MARCH 17
Ex-governor of Najaf province, Adnan al Zurfi, is appointed prime minister-designate; he steps down in April

MARCH 26
U.S. troops withdraw from the Qayyarah West military base near Mosul

counter-operations more difficult." The analysis said that ISIS continued to conduct killings in Diyala as well as a number of kidnappings for ransom. Additionally, it said that Diyala is ethnically and religiously diverse, making it susceptible to divisiveness that ISIS can exploit, particularly since the Iranian-aligned Shia Badr Organization controls the province.[148] CJTF-OIR reported that Diyala, which has one of the largest concentrations of Iranian-aligned militias, is also the largest focus of attacks by ISIS within Iraq.[149]

The DIA reported that ISIS does not have an overt presence or significant local support in the disputed territories.[150] However, local leaders stated that ISIS continued to exploit the fault lines there. In February, Masrour Barzani, Prime Minister of the KRG, told a French media outlet that there was a "great possibility" that ISIS would stage a comeback in territories disputed by Iraq's central government and the KRG.[151]

ACTIONS AGAINST ISIS IN IRAQ

CJTF-OIR Reports ISF Operations Improve, Are Increasingly Independent

CJTF-OIR reported that during the operational pause in January, Coalition forces continued to advise and to communicate with ISF counterparts, particularly those conducting counter-ISIS operations.[152] Major General Grynkewich said in late January that the Coalition also continued to employ intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets and to work with the Iraqi CTS.[153]

CJTF-OIR reported that ISF units carried out increasingly independent operations against ISIS this quarter.[154] For example, CJTF-OIR stated that ISF units operating in the Kirkuk province began clearance operations in more challenging mountainous terrain. CJTF-OIR said this growing capability "could indicate that [ISF units in Kirkuk] have greater confidence in their fighting abilities."[155] CJTF-OIR also reported that the Iraqi CTS continued to conduct independent operations against ISIS, "primarily arrest, search, and investigation operations," in addition to partnered operations with Coalition forces.[156]

CJTF-OIR said that the Iraqi Air Enterprise accomplished "limited ISR activity" this quarter and that it flew all of its sorties without Coalition support.[157] However, the Iraqis did not use their U.S.-made Scan Eagle tactical unmanned aircraft systems or their Chinese-made CH-4 unmanned aircraft systems. According to CJTF-OIR, the Coalition continued advising the ISF on how to leverage its organic ISR capabilities to greater effect in support of the OIR mission.[158]

CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi Air Enterprise also continued its trend of integrating into larger ISF planning activities this quarter by employing their F-16s in support of operations. For example, during Operation "Heroes of Iraq," a new ISF campaign initiated in Anbar province in February, the Iraqi Air Enterprise twice employed F-16s to conduct "shows of force."[159]

The increase in independent ISF operations against ISIS this quarter follows a trend toward independence previously reported. Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that the "vast majority"

The increase in independent ISF action against ISIS this quarter follows a trend toward independence previously reported.

of ISF security patrols, controlled detonations, and clearance operations against ISIS were conducted independent of Coalition support or were "minimally enabled" by Coalition ISR, strike aircraft, or air weapons team support.[160] Iraqi air operations were similarly independent of Coalition support last quarter.[161]

Iraqi Security Forces Launch New Operation Against ISIS

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that in February, the ISF launched a new operation against ISIS called "Heroes of Iraq."[162] According to media sources, the operation seeks to clear areas of Anbar province that have experienced an uptick in ISIS activity, including bombings, ambushes, and kidnapping.[163] According to media reports, citing Iraqi military commanders, the Coalition and Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) did not participate in the operation, and only the Iraqi Air Force supported Iraqi ground forces.[164]

CJTF-OIR reported that the "Heroes of Iraq" campaign is expected to be conducted in eight phases. Phase I, which took place in mid-February, focused on conducting operations against ISIS in the Anbar desert and areas within the Anbar Operations Command. Operations concentrated on areas of the border with Syria and "seams" along the adjacent regional commands.[165]

CJTF-OIR reported that Phase I of Operation "Heroes of Iraq" involved elements of more than 30 brigades across several divisions, Iraqi Air Force aircraft, and border security forces. CJTF-OIR said that the ISF requested Coalition ISR and fire support for the operation. However, it reported that Task Force-Iraq support to the campaign was "rather muted" because of the U.S. operational pause and what CJTF-OIR described as the "close-hold nature" of Joint Operations Command-Iraq planning and integration of subordinate elements. CJTF-OIR said that the resulting absence of information from some Iraqi partners limited its ability to identify and then effectively develop new ISIS targets.[166]

CJTF-OIR reported that while Iraqi Army operations consisted primarily of area security missions, the Iraqi Army also conducted large-scale coordinated operations in Ninewa, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Baghdad provinces in addition to Anbar province.[167] CJTF-OIR said that ISF operations against ISIS "numbered in the hundreds, with dozens of weapons caches and ISIS fighters captured."[168] CJTF-OIR reported that in Kirkuk province, the ISF conducted more than 20 operations and 1 major clearance operation with Coalition intelligence and fire support.[169]

Coalition Forces and ISF Resume Joint Security Patrols and Raids

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that Task Force-Iraq and Special Operations Joint Task Force–OIR (SOJTF-OIR) advised, enabled, and partnered with the ISF during operations against ISIS this quarter, including security patrols and raids focused on detaining specific ISIS leaders.[170] According to CJTF-OIR, during these operations Coalition forces and the ISF killed numerous ISIS fighters and leaders, and confiscated ISIS weapons, munitions, and equipment.[171]

In his January 23 remarks, Major General Grynkewich said that the operations focused on degrading ISIS's command and control capability, financing, and logistics. He also told reporters that the Coalition has been "fairly successful in just removing those capabilities from [ISIS's] grasp."[172]

However, U.S. air support to the ISF reduced greatly in January. According to CJTF-OIR strike data, it conducted only one strike mission in January, which was an illumination mission for force protection.[173] In contrast, CJTF-OIR reported that it conducted 10 strikes against ISIS targets in Iraq in February, resulting in 16 ISIS fighters killed, 2 bed down locations and 6 defensive fighting positions destroyed, and 8 caves closed.[174] March strike figures were not available, and the DoD OIG did not have enough information to assess the impact that these operations had on ISIS's capabilities.

Ground operations took place mainly in desert areas and rugged mountainous terrain, where ISIS fighters store weapons and train.[175] During one such operation on March 9, two members of an elite unit of the U.S. Marines were killed near Kirkuk City. U.S. military officials described the area as "extremely rugged."[176] According to news reports, the Marines were accompanying and assisting Iraqi CTS forces in clearing a large cave complex when a gun battle erupted with ISIS fighters.[177] CJTF-OIR stated in a press release that the operation resulted in the deaths of 25 ISIS fighters and the destruction of nine tunnels and a training camp.[178]

Following Resumption of Operations, CJTF-OIR Initiates Partnership with Kurdish Peshmerga Units

U.S. forces also initiated partnerships with elements of the Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq's mountainous north, particularly in territory claimed by both the central Iraqi government and the KRG. CJTF-OIR reported that the Coalition's Task Force Security Force Assistance Brigade (TF SFAB) and the Finnish Training Contingent initiated partnerships with several Kurdish Peshmerga units, known as Regional Guard Brigades (RGBs).[179] Unlike other Peshmerga units, which report to one of the two key political parties that share power in the semi-autonomous region of northern Iraq run by the KRG, the RGBs are combined units intended to respond to direction from the KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga, rather than one party or the other.[180] The interactions with these RGB units began in February with the 14th RGB, which operates near the Makhmour Mountains. By early March, TF SFAB had initiated partnerships with several other RGBs along the boundary of disputed territory, which CJTF-OIR refers to as the Kurdistan Coordination Line.[181]

CJTF-OIR said that these RGBs are the most likely Peshmerga fighters to engage ISIS, as well as to interact with the ISF across disputed territory claimed by both the Iraqi central government and the KRG.[182] The development could aid efforts to fight ISIS in these areas. Much of the disputed territory remains ungoverned, and according to CJTF-OIR, ISIS "continues leveraging this area to its advantage."[183]

January Pause in U.S. Operations Hinders Relations with ISF

While CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted successful operations against ISIS this quarter, CJTF-OIR also stated that the U.S. focus on force protection reduced its ability to gain information from partner Iraqi forces.[184] CJTF-OIR reported initial confusion on the part of the ISF as to whether their leaders had granted them permission to interact with Coalition personnel.[185] According to media reports, the Iraqi government instructed the ISF not to continue collaborating with U.S. forces following the U.S. strike that killed Soleimani.[186]

Additionally, OUSD(P)/ISA reported that increased tensions surrounding the U.S. military presence in Iraq as a result of Soleimani's death "probably sowed doubt within the ISF over whether such support would resume in the future."[187] In early January, Iraq's outgoing prime minister called for discussions on the removal of U.S. troops from Iraq and Iraq's Parliament demanded U.S. troop removal in a non-binding vote.[188]

CJTF-OIR also reported that relationships with Iraqi counterparts suffered because of the pause in U.S. operations against ISIS.[189] It said that while most relationships with the ISF resumed when the pause ended, they did not resume to "pre-pause levels."[190]

CJTF-OIR reported that the impact of the pause on ISF operations against ISIS was "mixed." Some Iraqi corps-level commands continued operations aggressively, in spite of little to no Coalition force support, while other commands failed to continue operations.[191] CJTF-OIR reported that the pause "provided a clear opportunity" for Iraqi security and counterterrorism forces to "demonstrate independent capability capacity—a challenge which they rose to."[192] Iraqi commanders continued to act and the ISF continued to conduct operations without Coalition support, CJTF-OIR said.[193] In addition, it said that the pause was simply one of many "changes in partnership relationships" since the start of the OIR campaign, and "proved the resilience of the CJTF-ISF relationship."[194] However, CJTF-OIR also reported that it was difficult to ascertain the exact impact of the pause on ISF operations because Task Force-Iraq reporting remains "almost totally dependent" on its relationships with various ISF forces for information. CJTF-OIR said that as U.S. troops "withdrew and reduced their interaction with partner forces, reporting from those partners declined."[195]

PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT

Conditions "Appear to Be Met" for Transition to Phase IV of OIR

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that partner force development had evolved to allow ISF partners to "handle most aspects of a counter-insurgency autonomously."[196] Therefore, according to CJTF-OIR, the conditions to transition OIR to Phase IV, focusing on ensuring the long-term stability of Iraq, "appear to be met."[197] The Secretary of Defense, however, retains the authority to determine when to transition OIR to Phase IV, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.[198]

During Phase IV, in general, Coalition efforts would continue the shift from providing tactical leadership and training toward developing a cadre of senior staff and enabling

institutional development, according to CJTF-OIR.[199] The aim would be to build "sustainable partner capacity," an end state whereby the ISF has the ability to generate military forces that can defeat ISIS independently. According to CJTF-OIR, the term "sustainable" refers to the ISF's continual capacity, from a leadership and resource perspective, to generate capable forces over time.[200]

While CJTF-OIR stated that the conditions to transition OIR to Phase IV appear to have been met, as discussed below, the ISF still exhibited capability gaps this quarter. Furthermore, as discussed elsewhere in this report, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ISF suspended training programs in Iraq in March. Based on the uncertainty caused by COVID-19, it is unclear when training will resume in Iraq, and when the transition to Phase IV will occur.

ISF Slowly Developing a Range of Capabilities

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that this quarter, within the combined joint operations area, the CTS maintained roughly the same number of units as during the previous quarter.[201] These units were capable of conducting simple intelligence-led raids, and a small number of specialized CTS units were able to conduct reconnaissance operations. However, most CTS units were limited in their capacity to coordinate the maneuver of multiple subordinate elements in complex operations, according to CJTF-OIR.[202]

CJTF-OIR reported that there were several noteworthy attempts by ISF ground forces to clear challenging terrain this quarter, including by conducting operations in the mountainous regions around Kirkuk.[203] Other clearing activities were less successful. For example, the limited impact of Iraqi air support and Iraqi ISR during the ISF's "Heroes of Iraq" campaign, when combined with the fact that the ISF did not clear many targeted areas, may have demonstrated the ISF's lack of resolve or capabilities, according to CJTF-OIR.[204]

The ISF continued to struggle to integrate the use of ISR and fires assets into their operations, according to CJTF-OIR, which noted that synchronized integration of these assets is difficult for all military organizations.[205] While CJTF-OIR advisors continued to mentor the ISF on sustaining, requesting, and employing ISR assets, the ISF did not place the same level of emphasis on utilizing ISR assets and associated intelligence collection as Coalition forces.[206] A focus on "developing an Iraqi ISR enterprise and fire support infrastructure should continue to be of primary importance for developing the ISF," according to CJTF-OIR.[207] However, CJTF-OIR also said that those endeavoring to develop ISF capabilities should exercise caution when focusing on skill sets and capabilities that the ISF do not desire and likely cannot sustain.[208]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the ISF continued developing its human intelligence capabilities this quarter. The ISF remained most proficient at using human intelligence, as opposed to other kinds of intelligence, in support of operations.[209] Coalition mentors reported observing increasing numbers of ISF operations driven by human intelligence, leading to an increase in effective targeting of ISIS leadership, weapons caches, and support areas.[210] The ISF made modest progress in its ability to generate other types of intelligence in support of operations, according to CJTF-OIR.[211] The ISF also established a planning cycle to address intelligence priorities in an organized, analytical manner. However, CJTF-OIR assessed that

CJTF-OIR reported that there were several noteworthy attempts by ISF ground forces to clear challenging terrain this quarter, including by conducting operations in the mountainous regions around Kirkuk.

the ISF still required focused support in developing command and control capabilities, and in integrating intelligence and operational activities.[212]

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that Coalition forces employed force protection measures to secure their personnel and facilities. According to USCENTCOM, the ISF supported Coalition forces by securing areas surrounding Coalition facilities and significant transportation routes.[213] CJTF-OIR stated that beginning in late 2019, and particularly during the operational pause in early January 2020, the ISF was increasingly able to help protect Coalition forces.[214]

Specifically, CJTF-OIR said that the ISF's ability to deter and then quickly respond to rocket and mortar attacks against Coalition forces improved markedly from late December 2019 to February 2020.[215] Response times for the ISF to arrive at sites from which Coalition adversaries launched munitions, and then process materials discovered at these sites, was "measured in minutes, instead of hours," according to CJTF-OIR.[216] CJTF-OIR reported that on some occasions the ISF was onsite before Coalition forces brought ISR to bear, and that the process by which the ISF transferred suspected launch devices, such as rocket rails, into Coalition custody improved as well.[217] The DIA noted that the increase in rocket and mortar attacks against Coalition forces this quarter would suggest that the ISF's ability to deter these attacks had not significantly improved.[218]

Training Disrupted by Security Threats and Pandemic

As discussed elsewhere in this report, the Coalition instituted an operational pause during the first half of January. The pause temporarily hindered partner force development in Iraq. For example, according to CJTF-OIR, Coalition personnel at all partnered locations outside Coalition bases discontinued face-to-face interaction with their partners and curtailed ground travel to partner locations during the pause.[219]

CJTF-OIR reported that after the pause it continued developing ISF training sites, located across the country, into ISF-led Centralized Training Facilities (CTFs).[220] CJTF-OIR made significant progress this quarter in the development of CTFs, and these efforts would continue next quarter, according to CJTF-OIR.[221] CJTF-OIR reported specific actions taken to develop ISF-led CTFs and highlighted some desired end states for CTFs.[222] However, this information is classified and therefore cannot be included in this report.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, in March, the ISF suspended training to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19.[223] OUSD(P)/ISA stated that several Coalition members started redeploying training personnel from Iraq, and that the suspension of training was set to last until at least late May 2020.[224] Since the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread in Iraq, it is unclear if training will resume in late May.

OSC-I Training Programs Have Mixed Success

The Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq (OSC-I), based in Baghdad, helps the Coalition provide training and other services to the ISF. USCENTCOM stated that the OSC-I does not train the ISF directly, but rather facilitates training through Title 22 foreign military

sales programs.[225] As the executive agent for Title 22 foreign military sales funds, the OSC-I enables contractor-delivered operations and training under various contract vehicles, according to USCENTCOM.[226] The OSC-I also enables professional military education for ISF personnel who attend DoD schools, seminars, and events that expose them to U.S. training concepts and methodologies, according to USCENTCOM.[227]

USCENTCOM reported that the degree to which training enabled by the OSC-I was successful varied by program this quarter. For example, the CTS maintenance training programs were highly successful according to USCENTCOM.[228] The CTS consistently filled classes with students capable of graduating successfully and held students accountable for any disciplinary infractions. The CTS students graduated at high rates and were able to execute maintenance operations afterward.[229] What the CTS (and many other ISF organizations) lacked was a viable maintenance and supply system that would allow trainees to sustain and improve their maintenance skills after training, according to USCENTCOM.[230]

According to USCENTCOM, the OSC-I also enabled programs that were not as successful, including those designed to train the Qwat Khasah (QK).[231] The QK is a specialized light infantry, brigade-sized force under the command of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.[232] USCENTCOM reported that the QK showed little initiative to fill the small unit tactics training classes conducted at the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center in Amman, Jordan. The QK also made little effort to fill its "train the trainer" positions; as a result, the QK experienced "zero growth in its ability to train their own soldiers," according to USCENTCOM.[233] If the QK is unable to train its own soldiers effectively, it may be difficult for the ISF to become a sustainable fighting force able to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS.[234]

However, USCENTCOM noted that the OSC-I did not have visibility into, nor the ability to assess, the quantity of any other training provided to the QK.[235] CJTF-OIR reported that the QK received additional classroom training and, prior to March 2020, one of the battalions actively partnered with Coalition forces during operations.[236] According to CJTF-OIR, prior to implementation of restrictions meant to prevent the spread of COVID-19, all members of the QK attended the Iraqi-led basic training, selection, and initial commando courses before moving on to Coalition-partnered training.[237] As of early April, internal train-the-trainer initiatives had produced capable QK trainers; however, Coalition personnel supervised most of this training. QK trainers had led training only over the previous 3 to 5 months, according to CJTF-OIR.[238]

NATO Mission-Iraq: Assesses Potential New Roles

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that the NATO Mission-Iraq (NMI) is distinct from CJTF-OIR. It has a separate mandate from the Iraqi government and pursues a unique mission, which complements the OIR mission.[239] CJTF-OIR focuses on enabling the ISF to defeat ISIS; the NMI aims to build institutional capacity within the ISF.[240] Specifically, the NMI "develops a self-sustaining Iraqi training capability by training Iraqi trainers on a variety of disciplines, including countering-IEDs, explosive ordnance disposal, demining, civilian-military planning, military medicine, and vehicle maintenance."[241]

What the CTS (and many other ISF organizations) lacked was a viable maintenance and supply system that would allow trainees to sustain and improve their maintenance skills after training, according to USCENTCOM.

OUSD(P)/ISA reported that this quarter, NATO, working in conjunction with USCENTCOM, was considering options for the NMI to assume training activities that CJTF-OIR conducts. As of March, NATO and USCENTCOM had yet to reach a formal agreement and a determination of associated timelines on the transfer of training functions to the NMI.[242] OUSD(P)/ISA stated that the United States welcomed a larger role for the NMI and was awaiting decisions on the transfer of specific training functions. According to OUSD(P)/ISA, NATO was expected to complete this assessment in April 2020.[243]

Training and Equipping of ISF Unaffected by Difficulty of Vetting ISF Recruits

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF did not provide Coalition forces with data on the number of recruits the ISF investigated for terrorist activity this quarter; nor did the ISF provide information on how many recruits it rejected following an investigation.[244] Therefore, while CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF recruited more than 30,000 soldiers between 2019 and 2020, the degree to which those affiliated with terrorism joined the ISF is unclear.[245]

> **According to CJTF-OIR, terrorists infiltrating the ISF through mass recruitment efforts was a significant concern to Coalition forces.**

According to CJTF-OIR, terrorists infiltrating the ISF through mass recruitment efforts was a significant concern to Coalition forces.[246] However, according to CJTF-OIR, this concern did not affect partner force development, which the Coalition conducted with units at the local level.[247] U.S. military leaders made material divestment decisions based on the trustworthiness of the ISF commanders receiving equipment, so un-vetted recruitment had not affected divestment, according to CJTF-OIR.[248]

CTEF Requests Evolve with OIR Mission

CTEF supports the DoD's efforts to work "by, with, and through" its partners in Iraq.[249] When asked about a $100 million funding decrease and discontinuation of stipends for the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs in the FY 2021 CTEF request submitted this quarter, OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the request reflects FY 2021 changing needs and requirements of the campaign to defeat ISIS.[250]

According to OUSD(P)/ISA, funding requests in previous fiscal years focused on offensive operations to defeat ISIS's so-called "caliphate," including replacing battle-damaged vehicles, weapons, and equipment; restocking ammunition; and supporting sustainment and logistics operations. The funding request for FY 2021 reflects a transition away from offensive operations toward training and equipping for a wide-area security mission, which the Coalition is pursuing to prevent a resurgence of ISIS, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.[251]

OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the request to discontinue stipends for the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs aligned with an earlier decision to gradually reduce stipends for the Peshmerga.[252] The request was consistent with the FY 2020 CTEF budget request to provide 6 months of stipends instead of the 12 months of stipends requested in the FY 2019 CTEF budget request, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.[253] The DoD determined that funding for training, equipping, and sustainment support would be more effective than stipends to support the Peshmerga in the campaign to defeat ISIS. However, ultimately, despite the representation in DoD's congressional justification materials that stipends would not be

paid, the CJTF-OIR commander retains the authority and flexibility to determine what type of support CJTF-OIR provides partners, including whether or not to pay stipends to the Peshmerga, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.[254]

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN IRAQ

Conflict with Iranian-backed Militias Escalates

While tensions between the United States and Iran have been increasing for more than a year as Iran has sought to respond to the U.S. government's "maximum pressure campaign," the killing of a U.S. contractor in Iraq last quarter initiated a series of violent confrontations that continued into this quarter.[255] These confrontations included U.S. defensive strikes on the Iranian-backed militia Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq and Syria on December 29; the attempted storming of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad by Iranian-aligned militias and supporters on December 31; the U.S. killing of Iranian Major General Soleimani and Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC) Chief of Staff al Muhandis on January 3; and the Iranian ballistic missile attack on U.S. positions in Iraq on January 8.[256] As a result, CJTF-OIR announced on January 5 that it was focusing on force protection and pausing activity to train the ISF and support operations against ISIS.[257]
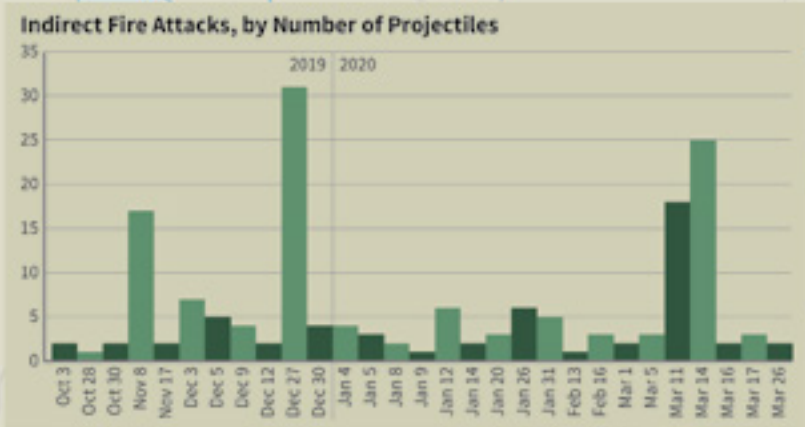
OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that CJTF-OIR began restarting its full range of support to the ISF as force protection concerns allowed this quarter.[258] However, rocket and mortar attacks in Iraq by Iranian-backed Shia militia groups continued throughout the quarter, surpassing the frequency and lethality of attacks during the previous quarter, according to open source reporting (see page 35).[259] On March 11, two U.S. and one British service members were killed and 14 others were wounded in a rocket attack on Camp Taji by Iranian-backed groups, according to the DoD. Like the December 27 attack on the K-1 Air Base that killed a U.S. contractor, U.S. forces responded with "defensive precision strikes" on five Kata'ib Hezbollah weapon storage facilities across Iraq.[260] Two days later, another barrage of at least 25 rockets struck Camp Taji, wounding three coalition troops and two Iraqis, according to an OIR spokesman.[261]

A new group, calling itself Usbat al Thairen, or the "League of the Revolutionaries," claimed responsibility for both attacks on Camp Taji in retaliation for the killing of Soleimani and al Muhandis.[262] The group, which open source analysts assessed is likely a front for established Iranian proxies in Iraq such as Kata'ib Hezbollah, released several videos threatening additional attacks on U.S. facilities in Iraq to force their withdrawal from the country.[263] Analysis by the Institute for the Study of War indicates that Iran remains intent on increasing political and military pressure against U.S. forces in Iraq, rallying a number of militias and political surrogates to form a new "resistance front."[264]

Cracks Form in Iran's Influence in Iraq

According to the DIA, the loss of Soleimani and al Muhandis has opened divisions among Iranian-aligned actors and various Shia factions in Iraq. The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that the deaths of Soleimani and al Muhandis left a void in the command and control of Iraqi Shia militias and Shia militia-affiliated political parties. According to the DIA, multiple

SUSPECTED IRANIAN-BACKED MILITIA ATTACKS ON U.S. AND COALITION FACILITIES*

Mosul

Erbil

SYRIA

Qayyarah Airfield-West

Kirkuk

K1 Air Base

Baji

Al Qaim

Tikrit

Camp Taji

Balad Air Base

Al Asad Air Base

Hit

U.S. Embassy/Green Zone

IRAN

Al Taqaddum Training Center

Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center

Baghdad

Besmaya Training Center

= Rocket Attack

= Lethal Rocket Attack

= Coalition Base Transferred to Iraq

Attacks on U.S./CJTF Facilities by Month

Indirect Fire Attacks, by Number of Projectiles

2019 | 2020

* October 2019-March 2020

Sources: See Endnotes on page 126.

other Iranian and Iraqi officials seek to fill these roles, although none is likely to achieve the level of effective control Soleimani or al Muhandis held in the near term.[265]

The DIA assessed based on press reporting that Soleimani's replacement as commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force, Esmail Ghani, is more accurately described as a bureaucrat than the charismatic leader that Soleimani was. The DIA added that Ghani is less equipped to handle the political and security aspects of the Qods-Force's Iraq portfolio because he spent much of his career focusing on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia, does not speak Arabic, and lacks Soleimani's personal connections in Iraq.[266] Open source reporting indicated that Ghani visited Iraq on March 30 in an attempt to unite Iran's surrogates and urge opposition to Adnan al Zurfi's nomination as Iraq's next prime minister.[267]

The DIA told the DoD OIG that the selection of al Muhandis's replacement within the PMC, an umbrella group of Iraqi paramilitary organizations, is also proving problematic.[268] According to the DIA, former Kata'ib Hezbollah Secretary General Abd al 'Aziz al Muhammadawi, commonly known as Abu Fadak, has been nominated as the new Chief of Staff of the PMC following al Muhandis's death, although he has not yet been officially installed in the position. The DIA said Abu Fadak is seen as Iran's choice and does not have the support of Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani and the Shia clerical leadership in Iraq, known as the *Marjaiyah*.[269] According to press reports, some Shia militias aligned with Sistani have publicly rejected Abu Fadak's selection and have expressed interest in integrating into Iraq's Ministry of Defense and separating from the PMC.[270]

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that Iran's influence on Iraqi security sector reform has waned since 2019. According to the DIA, from 2006 up to 2020, Iranian influence within Iraq's Interior Ministry and the PMC fueled competition with the Defense Ministry and CTS for funding and prestige. The DIA said that Iraqi leaders sought better control of Iran's influence on the PMC, which began in 2016 with the codification of the organization as part of Iraq's national security apparatus, and subsequent executive orders in 2019 to reinforce government authority over the militias. The DIA added that in January 2020, the Iraqi government also initiated a years-long security reform effort by transferring responsibility of domestic security from the Iraqi Army to the Interior Ministry in southern Iraq.[271]

The DIA told the DoD OIG that since October, the civil unrest that broke out across southern Iraq has been critical of Iran's pervasive influence on Iraqi governance, and included the first public objection to Tehran's manipulation of Iraq's security apparatus. According to the DIA, Iraqi demonstrators have since blamed the Iran-backed militants for killing nearly 700 and wounding more than 30,000 civilians, as well as the kidnapping and torture of protesters and aid workers supporting the protests.[272]

The DIA said that Iranian-backed militia groups are suspected of playing a key role in the violent suppression of anti-government protests as part of their effort to maintain the current political system and protect the political influence Iran has gained since 2018. The Fatah Alliance—comprising Shia militia-affiliated politicians—has been actively involved in the selection of a new prime minister and almost certainly will attempt to influence future government formation processes through the nomination of ministers sympathetic to Shia

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that the deaths of Soleimani and al Muhandis left a void in the command and control of Iraqi Shia militias and Shia militia-affiliated political parties.

militia and Iranian objectives, according to the DIA. The DIA said that Fatah also supported electoral reform laws that would impede early elections and mitigate any potential loss of influence. The DIA added that Iranian-aligned militias continue to exploit their freedom of movement across Iraq to maintain unofficial checkpoints, control border crossings, and extort local populations across the country to generate illicit revenue streams.[273]

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that members of the IRGC traveled to Iraq to advise Iraqi intelligence and security officials on the protest response, noting that open source reporting indicates that Iran provided Shia militia counter-protest teams with equipment such as secure radios. The DIA assessed based on press reporting that since October, Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi's government has leaned heavily on Iranian-backed militias within the PMC to quell anti-government demonstrators. The DIA added that Soleimani's death has not markedly detracted from Iranian-backed Iraqi Shia militias' ability to respond to the protests, which are ongoing but reduced in scale as compared to the prior quarter.[274]

In contrast, the DIA reported that Iraqi military leaders under the Defense Ministry have remained "legally and decisively apolitical," often to their detriment as Iranian-backed politicians and militants use their political influence to manipulate military leaders to act or turn a blind eye in their favor. The DIA assessed that these security leaders probably remain leery of the Iranian-backed militias, the PMC, and Iranian influence on Iraq's political sectors, all of which affect the security leaders' careers, personal safety, and the safety of their families.[275]

The DIA said that Iranian-backed militia groups are suspected of playing a key role in the violent suppression of anti-government protests as part of their effort to maintain the current political system and protect the political influence Iran has gained since 2018.

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Iraqi Government Takes Steps to Combat COVID-19

Media sources reported that in mid-March, the Iraqi government formed a crisis task force to address the COVID-19 outbreak. The task force suspended teaching at schools and universities, reduced the working hours of government institutions, and imposed a curfew.[276] In late March, the Iraqi government closed religious shrines, and prevented community prayers and other religious gatherings. The ISF subsequently prevented several religious processions from entering holy cities.[277] In addition, according to a March 30 DoS cable, PMF elements continued to cooperate on a limited scale with local law enforcement and the Iraqi military to counter ISIS operations and enforce curfews and other restrictions due to COVID-19.[278] However, other reporting alleged that militias—including Sadrist and Badr Organization PMF elements—were engaging in illicit drug and medical supply smuggling.[279]

As of late March, economic factors were complicating the response to COVID-19 in Iraq. Media reporting from late March stated that Iraq's economy was cratering on almost every front and that the Iraqi government had "resorted to asking for donations to help it weather the pandemic."[280] Media reporting from mid-March stated that the Iraqi Oil Minister, Thamer al Ghadhban, asked OPEC's head, Mohammed Barkindo, to call an extraordinary meeting to discuss reversing falling oil prices.[281] Media reporting from late March stated that the Iraqi government sent a proposal to all international oil companies asking them to reduce

their spending on developing oilfields by 30 percent, costs that would eventually be borne by Iraq, as the slump in oil prices has hit government revenues.[282] Furthermore, according to academic researchers, as of March 30, the KRG was in danger of economic collapse due to a combination of low oil prices, pandemic, incomplete economic reforms, and a lack of sovereign reserves.[283]

Iraq Names Its Third Prime Minister Candidate in 10 Weeks

Since the resignation of Prime Minister Adil Abd al Mahdi on November 29, 2019, Iraq has been unable to form a new government. Abd al Mahdi stepped down in response to massive anti-government protests that kicked off at the beginning of October, protests that were met with a violent response from the ISF and Iranian-aligned militias.[284]

Iraqi President Barham Salih named Intelligence Chief Mustafa al Kadhimi as prime minister-designate on April 9, the third person tapped to lead Iraq in 10 weeks as the country struggled to replace its government that fell in November after months of deadly public protests.[285] Al Kadhimi, if confirmed, will face numerous challenges—decades of sanctions, war, political unrest, and a growing outbreak of COVID-19—that have gone unaddressed by the caretaker cabinet since Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi's resignation.[286] During a televised speech following his nomination, al Kadhimi stated his key objectives for his government will be to fight corruption and return displaced people back home. He also said that firearms should only be in the government's hands.[287]

Al Kadhimi was nominated after the previous prime minister-designate, Adnan al Zurfi, announced he was withdrawing, having failed to secure enough support in Parliament to form a new government.[288] Al Zurfi's candidacy was in jeopardy when key Shia political parties rallied around Mustafa al Kadhimi to replace him. His chances further diminished when the main Kurdish and Sunni political blocs withdrew their support.[289] Al Zurfi would have had until April 17 to form a cabinet and obtain ratification of it with a minimum of 165 votes in parliament.[290] His major opposition came from Hadi al Ameri's Fatah bloc; however, it was never certain whether the other Shia political blocs—Sairoon, State of Law, and Hikma—would vote to confirm his government.

Al Zurfi was preceded by Tawfiq Allawi, whom President Salih named on February 1, after months of negotiation among the major Shia political decision makers, who arrived at his name after eliminating alternatives who were viewed as too closely aligned with one party or another, according to the DoS. However, without Sunni and Kurdish support, and due to the reluctance by some of his Shia backers to attempt forming a government without the buy-in of those components and the protesters, Allawi failed to muster enough support to form a government and withdrew his candidacy.[291]

Any candidate to be Prime Minister, according to Iraq observers, must have approval from Iraq's Shia, Kurdish, and Sunni communities—as well as from Iran and the United States. Media reported that ministers, political rivals, and even the United Nations' representative in Iraq attended Al Kadhimi's nomination ceremony, indicating widespread support for al Kadhimi that neither of the previous prime minister-designates had enjoyed.[292]

Pro-Reform Protests Persist Until COVID-19 Outbreak

During the quarter, the pro-reform protests that brought down the previous Iraqi government continued, often with violent results. Midway through the quarter, Amnesty International reported that the number of protesters killed since October 1, 2019, exceeded 600.[293]

By early March, Iraqi government-estimated crowd size numbers had dropped to their lowest since the protests began, according to the DoS, with only 750 people reported in Baghdad's Tahrir square and 500 to 2,500 in various Shia-majority provinces in the south. Fears of COVID-19, Sadrist violence, and confusion about the direction of government contributed to the suppression of crowd numbers.[294]

In early February, the DoS reported on violent clashes between Sadrist militiamen and pro-reform protesters. Demonstrations were conducted in Baghdad and most Shia-majority southern provinces, where thousands protested against then Prime Minister-designate Allawi and Muqtada al Sadr, describing both as Iranian agents and traitors to the protest movement.[295]

Iraq Makes Little Progress on Combatting Corruption

Iraqi government corruption is one of the primary reasons protesters took to the streets in October. Despite a slight improvement in its corruption score in 2019, Iraq continues to rank in the bottom 10 percent of countries evaluated in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index.[296]

The DoS told DoS OIG that it encourages "Iraqi officials to investigate and prosecute corruption cases."[297] Such encouragement, and technical assistance to support such efforts, have been a staple of U.S. policy since the days of the Coalition Provisional Authority, according to the Special Inspector for Iraq Reconstruction's final report.[298] However, despite the efforts, corruption continues to plague the country.[299] In 2007, a senior Iraqi judge testified before the U.S. Congress that cases could not be brought against senior officials without the approval of the Prime Minister.[300]

Iraq's reputation for corruption hinders economic growth and foreign investment in Iraq and is a contributing factor to its low ranking in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business 2020 report (ranked 172 of 190 countries). The World Bank signed a memorandum of understanding with the Minister of Finance in October 2019 that calls for reforms to improve Iraq's business environment. According to the DoS, a new government is needed to advance this work.[301]

The DoS told the DoS OIG that Iraqi officials frequently engage in corrupt practices with impunity, which is a significant impediment to improving public services and restoring essential services in conflict-affected and liberated areas, which would necessarily increase the likelihood of instability and violence.[302] When asked about efforts made to address corruption, the DoS reported that among other steps, USAID worked on procurement reform and developing standard bidding documents for public tenders that reduce opportunities for corruption.[303]

On January 1, 2020, the caretaker prime minister had a high-profile meeting with what he said would be a revived High Council for Combatting Corruption, which had, however, held some meetings in 2018, according to press reports. With the revival, however, one Iraqi parliamentarian from the Sairoon bloc, whose components made anti-corruption one of their themes, said that the council would fail because "political leaders who are involved in corruption and who will not allow the implementation of any solutions in this regard."[304] A Baghdad-based think tank's researcher noted that in 2007 a similar entity was established; it was "revived" in 2015, after a wave of anti-corruption demonstrations, and is the predecessor of the new entity.[305]

According to the DoS, over the years, a related body, the Commission of Integrity, investigated several high-profile cases, filed more than 4,783 corruption cases, and issued more than 857 arrest warrants. There were 442 convictions, including 3 ministers and 27 senior officials, although the names of those convicted remained anonymous. The commission's biannual report stated that the law allowed amnesty for more than 986 convicted persons upon repaying money they had obtained by corruption.[306] On May 9, 2019, the head of the commission, Hassan al Yassiri, submitted his resignation on the grounds that the authorities had only addressed a small number of the cases that it had referred to them.[307]

Explaining the persistence of corruption in Iraq, an Iraqi scholar has described a melding of "political" and "grand" corruption, calling it "corruption protection," a systematic attempt among corrupt agents seeking to evade accountability for primary corruption activity by preventing perpetrators of corruption from being brought to justice. The scholar also argued that despite the apparent strength of the anti-corruption framework, the multiple institutions established to fight corruption and the system of accountability can also constitute a means for "corruption protection."[308]

Falling Oil Prices Cause Iraq Government to Revise 2020 Budget

During the quarter, Iraq was hit with a mix of shocks, including COVID-19, halved oil prices, popular unrest, and ongoing militia violence. The country has been operating without a 2020 budget, limiting the ministries to monthly allocations based on the 2019 budget. Without increased revenues, Iraq will be unable to fund payments to the ministries after April.[309]

A Middle East analyst reported that the twin shocks of the effect of COVID-19 on the world economy and the current oil price war would stress Iraq's budget to the limit. While the shocks were not foreseeable, the Iraqi budget structure imbalance would have inevitably led to an economic crisis. The budget imbalance projects revenues not covering current spending, which is mostly composed of salaries, pensions, and welfare spending, totaling 85 percent of current spending. While oil revenues make up 90 percent of government revenues, 25 percent of "non-oil" income is oil related in the form of taxes on foreign oil companies and the government's share from profits from the state's oil companies.[310]

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The DoS reported that KRG officials are concerned that the Iraq Kurdistan Region's economy is close to collapsing as the KRG's oil and non-oil revenue streams fall due to decreasing world oil prices and the impact of COVID-19 movement restrictions.

According to the aforementioned analysis, the default solution for the Iraqi government would be to cancel all non-oil investment spending and resort to borrowing, explained the Middle East analyst. These measures would only postpone but not resolve the economic crisis. Under this solution, the Iraqi government would continue to function; however, it would not be able to provide reliable electricity, potable water, and sanitary sewage treatment demanded by the reform protesters. Overdue and necessary rebuilding of communities damaged by the fight to expel ISIS would be delayed further.[311]

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that efforts to draft a 2020 budget have been set back by earlier unrealistic oil price and production assumptions. The previous draft budget priced oil at $56 per barrel, with 3.88 million barrels per day average export. However, during the quarter, Iraq's oil prices dropped below $30 per barrel. According to the DoS, Iraqi officials were considering revising the 2020 oil revenue assumptions to about $30 per barrel, with 3.6 million barrels per day export, which would generate revenue of $3.24 billion per month. However, officials reported that Iraq is spending $4 billion per month for operational expenses limited to employee compensation, primarily salaries for federal and KRG government employees and state-owned enterprise employees, as well as pensions, and social welfare. Under the revised oil price and production assumptions, the Iraqi government would be unable to fund payments past April.[312]

The DoS informed the DoS OIG that should then Prime Minister-designate Adnan al Zurfi fail to form a government by the April 17 deadline, an advisory committee of senior Iraqi economic officials was considering sending the revised draft budget to the Parliament without the endorsement of caretaker Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi, who maintains he lacks authority to transmit the budget. Alternative strategies include having President Barham Salih or the Prime Minister's economic committee send the revised budget to the parliament. The advisory committee took no action following al Zurfi's withdrawal and Barham Salih's nomination of Mustafa al Kadhimi as Prime Minister-designate on April 9.[313]

KURDISTAN'S ECONOMY NEARS COLLAPSE

The DoS reported that KRG officials are concerned that the Iraq Kurdistan Region's (IKR) economy is close to collapsing as the KRG's oil and non-oil revenue streams fall due to decreasing world oil prices and the impact of COVID-19 movement restrictions. During the quarter, KRG's net income from oil exports would be $63 million per month based on $30 per barrel, as compared to $300 to $350 million per month during the first three quarters of 2019. KRG officials told the DoS that the KRG relied heavily on the Iraqi government's $384 million monthly budget transfer, which covered just over half of the KRG's $750 million per month wage bill.[314]

The DoS reported that KRG officials anticipate that operational funding deficits could exceed $300 million per month starting in April. Options to ease fiscal pressure include cuts to public sector wages and reviewing contracts with the international oil companies to reduce production costs, while seeking a debt repayment freeze from Ankara and Moscow. Going forward, the KRG will need to cut expenses without an increase in revenues or increased support from the Iraqi government.[315]

STABILIZATION

Iraqi Government's Caretaker Status Hinders USAID Programming

According to USAID, the Iraqi government's limited authority to execute new decisions while it remains under caretaker status, combined with collapsing oil prices, dramatically increases Iraq's vulnerability to a financial crisis. USAID reported to USAID OIG that, despite the government's caretaker status, USAID Mission in Iraq staff continue to meet with ministers who are in caretaker capacity, along with Iraqi government officials at lower levels. According to USAID, the Iraqi government's caretaker status slows the USAID Mission on both policy and legal reforms that are now stalled, including the Anti-Domestic Violence Law, Public Private Partnership Law, and other new decrees and orders. USAID reported that the USAID Mission in Iraq is still, however, able to meet with counterparts from other partner countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands to coordinate on common initiatives.[316]

Ordered Departure Due to COVID-19 Limits USAID Capacity to Oversee Assistance Portfolio

On January 21, 2020, USAID notified Congress of the USAID Mission in Iraq's second proposed posture adjustment in a little more than a year in response to further staffing reviews by the DoS.[317] According to USAID, this notification fulfilled the legal requirement to notify Congress of any changes in staffing in Iraq before such changes are implemented. However, for the second consecutive time, the USAID Mission's Congressional Notification was placed on hold, and remains on hold, by Congress.[318]

This most recent congressional notification reflects a USAID Mission authorized presence of no less than 8 and up to 13 expatriate personnel in country.[319] Expatriate personnel include both U.S. direct hires and non-Iraqi foreign service nationals, many of whom have been employed by the USAID Mission in Iraq for more than 10 years. USAID reported to USAID OIG that the USAID Mission in Iraq expects to fill only a small number of expatriate positions with foreign service officers within the limit established by the DoS with the balance of expatriate positions filled through other hiring mechanisms in the interim. However, USAID reported that the Mission in Iraq is also recruiting for positions to support the Mission from other locations, including Washington, DC.[320]

In response to COVID-19, effective March 25, Secretary Pompeo approved ordered departure from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Consulate General Erbil, and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center for U.S. direct hire employees who, in the Ambassador's determination, could not perform their normal functions due to increased security concerns and global travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.[321] According to USAID, at the end of the quarter, 5 staff remained in Iraq. Prior to the ordered departure from Iraq between May and November 2019, USAID had 27 personnel in Iraq to oversee and manage response activities.[322]

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Implementers Request Branding and Marking Waivers

USAID has maintained specific branding and marking guidance for Iraq in recent years. USAID policy states that "programs, projects, activities, public communications, and commodities" funded under the Foreign Assistance Act and annual appropriations acts "must be identified appropriately overseas as American aid." Waivers to this identification requirement are available, but only provided "in rare circumstances."[323] Iraq's most recent blanket branding and marking waiver was instituted in 2014 because of security concerns following the rise of ISIS. USAID withdrew the waiver in September 2018, with further branding and marking waivers to be considered on a case-by-case basis.[324]

This quarter, USAID reported to USAID OIG that several USAID Iraq implementers have requested that branding and marking requirements be waived. According to standard guidelines, implementers may suspend branding and marking once they have submitted their request to USAID and until they receive a decision from USAID.[325] USAID reported to USAID OIG that these waivers were requested because of compelling political and security concerns, particularly due to the proliferation of Iranian-supported armed actors. According to USAID, of particular concern is that many of the biggest threats in Iraq come from Iranian-backed militias, which are also on the government payroll.[326] USAID stated that affiliation with Western donors such as USAID raises the profile of humanitarian organizations. In order to minimize risk, such organizations work to minimize their visibility and conduct operations inconspicuously. USAID did state that most of their implementers are able to brand in some cases, either in areas of the country where security risks are lower or by branding lower-profile elements of their projects.[327]

USAID reported to USAID OIG that USAID-funded activities in Iraq have been consistently and fully branded over the last 2 years with few exceptions to ensure that the American people receive the full credit for assistance provided to Iraqis. According to USAID, previous broad waivers of branding, marking, and public messaging of U.S. assistance meant to strengthen the appearance of Iraqi government legitimacy and self-reliance were found to be ineffective, and instead weakened Iraqis' perceptions of U.S. engagement and influence to the benefit of Iran and other malign actors.[328]

However, beginning in January, branding and marking waivers were requested for 8 out of 16 activities due to security concerns. According to USAID, in the current operating environment there are credible concerns over U.S. affiliation, underscored by the January 3 travel warning that advised all U.S. citizens to depart Iraq immediately.[329] Moreover, due to ongoing U.S.-Iran tensions in Iraq, there are credible and legitimate concerns that branding will be used by hostile militias to target U.S.-supported organizations.[330] For example, militias have been using checkpoints in and around Bartella to question residents, control movement, and inspect mobile devices for social media posts against Abu Mahdi al Muhandis. In Qaraqosh, USAID's implementing partners have been stopped at checkpoints and questioned about their travel and associations. They also reported increased questioning at banks about the origin of their funds. Affiliation with the United States, and the U.S. Government in particular, is being perceived as negative in some areas and brings unwanted attention to partners, to the point of endangering staff carrying out USAID-funded work. According to USAID, ensuring staff, partner, and beneficiary safety

and security remain top priorities for the Mission in Iraq.[331] On April 13, USAID reported to USAID OIG that as security threats have receded, most USAID implementers that previously requested waivers have now resumed branding.[332]

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

COVID-19 Compounds Challenges for U.S. Implementers

According to USAID and the DoS's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, (PRM), the emergence of COVID-19 in Iraq has further restricted humanitarian access and presented a significant risk to internally-displaced person (IDP) and refugee camps across the country.[333] While the Iraqi government and Kurdistan Regional Government have instituted curfews, movement restrictions, and screening procedures, relief actors remain concerned that IDPs in camps could be particularly susceptible to the virus due to crowded conditions and outdated camp infrastructure. In addition, these restrictions result in delays and suspension of some humanitarian assistance and staff movements throughout Iraq. While humanitarian movements are exempt from general COVID-19-related movement restrictions, the process for relief actors to obtain the appropriate exemptions remains unclear, according to the United Nations.[334]

As of April 1, the Iraqi Ministry of Health confirmed 695 cases of COVID-19 in Iraq, 50 fatalities, and 170 patients who recovered from the virus. Approximately one in four cases are in the Kurdistan Region, the remainder in federal Iraq. The Iraqi government extended curfews and movement restrictions in federal Iraq until April 19, and has established a ministerial High Committee for National Health and Safety to help contain the outbreak of COVID-19.[335]

The confirmed caseload in Iraq doubled over the last week of March, which the World Health Organization attributes primarily to more labs opening throughout the country and increased testing. Health officials expect a continued surge in confirmed cases going forward. According to the United Nations, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society has undertaken a mass disinfection campaign throughout the country, sterilizing thousands of sites including markets, shops, residential areas, hospitals, health institutions, prisons, mosques, and shrines. Camp management actors are working with the UN-partnered Iraq IDP Information Centre on the mass dissemination of information related to COVID-19 prevention and preparedness, via text messages for families living in IDP camps.[336]

According to the think tank Chatham House, COVID-19 introduces yet another threat to Iraq's fragile political order, as the virus strains the country's weakened public health system, undercut by decades of conflict, systemic corruption, and poor governance. The Ministry of Health lacks enough intensive care unit beds; doctors, nurses, technicians, and cleaning staff; ventilators; and personal protective equipment to meet expected needs, and is struggling to procure equipment and medication. According to Chatham House, some doctors have made purchases themselves to meet the need.[337]

IRAQ: QUARTERLY FOCUS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

NINEWA, KIRKUK, AND SALAH AD DIN

Recent heavy rains and flooding have played a significant role in increasing humanitarian needs in central and northern Iraq, primarily in regions through which the Tigris River runs. At the end of 2018, torrential rainfall and flooding affected an estimated 10,000 people in Salah ad Din and 22,000 people in Ninewa, including thousands of families living in IDP camps. In March, Kirkuk and Salah ad Din provinces were most acutely impacted by severe weather, but coordination and response helped prevent any recorded fatalities.

KIRKUK

In mid-February, the World Food Program advised that due to its current funding situation, food distribution in March would begin to occur on a six-week schedule, instead of monthly. Additionally, cash assistance to IDPs was reduced by approximately $3 per individual. Anecdotal reports indicate the reduction in food assistance as having a damaging impact on some IDPs. In mid-March, the United Nations reported that in-camp IDPs in Kirkuk are reportedly beginning to skip meals to ensure that rations last longer.

BASRAH

Following more than 100,000 cases of gastrointestinal illness recorded in Basra in the summer of 2018, Iraq's Ministry of Health convened an emergency response coordinating committee to develop an approach to address water quality issues. USAID is conducting a review of 13 non-functioning water plants in Basra, which is intended to provide local authorities with information needed to procure and install parts in these plants, which will serve up to 100,000 of the city's residents.

ANBAR

Iraqi government officials and provincial authorities continue to threaten and implement evictions. In recent months, protection partners have reported camp closures and consolidations and alleged forced returns in Anbar. Following camp closures, humanitarian actors, including multiple USAID humanitarian implementers, mobilized to establish sufficient services and infrastructure to accommodate new arrivals in new camps and/or non-camp settings, including installing tents and connecting tents to the electrical grid.

Sources: Lead IG analyses based on inputs from USAID, DoS, UN, and media reports
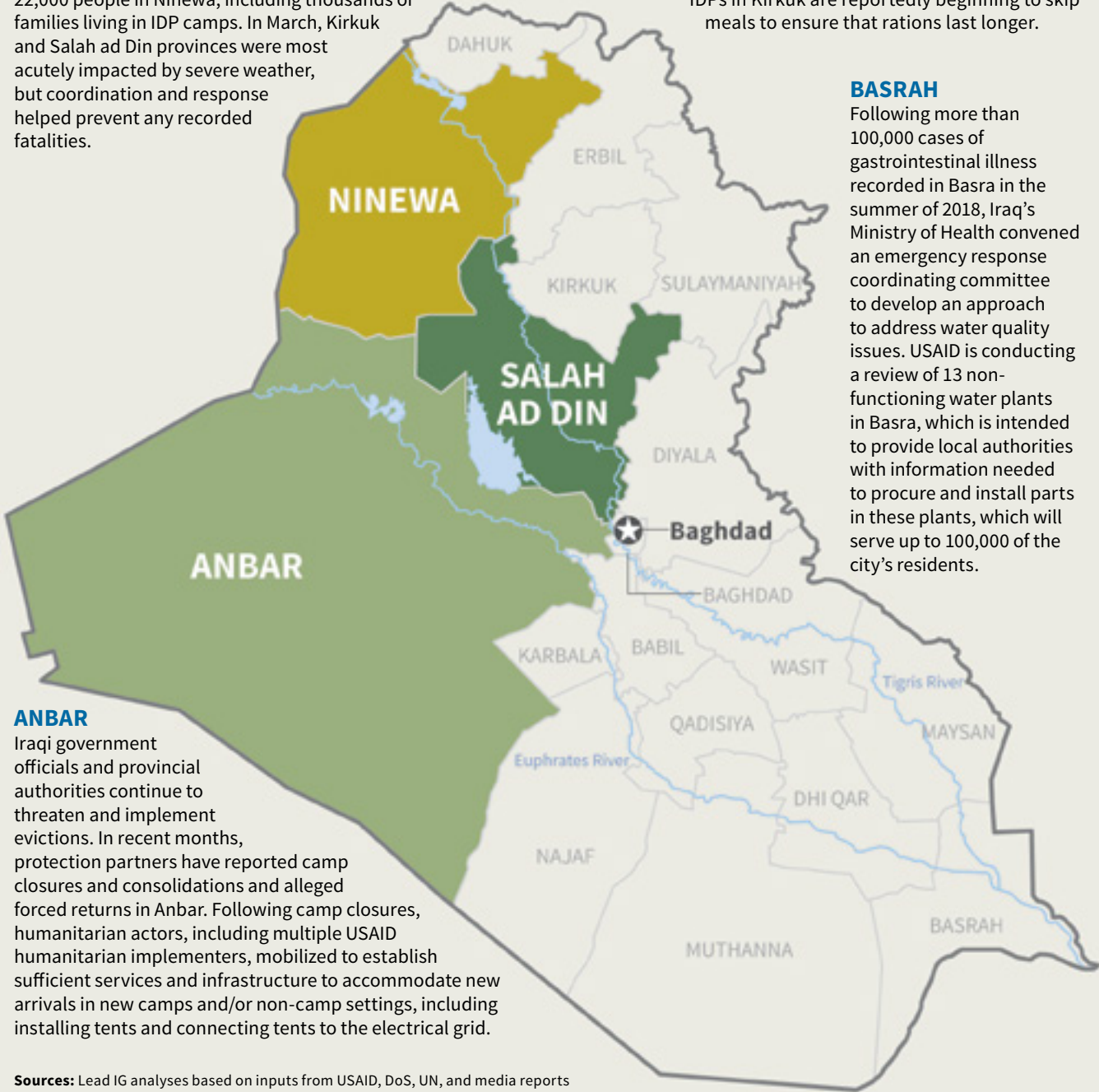
Access Constraints Continue to Impede Humanitarian Operations

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, critical relief programs supporting millions of vulnerable Iraqi households remained at risk of halting due to the suspension of Iraqi government-issued access authorizations for relief organizations operating in federal Iraq, according to the United Nations. The access suspension has delayed or prevented the delivery of some life-saving humanitarian assistance to many areas since late November.[338]

Throughout 2019, U.S. Government implementers reported the unraveling of the centrally mandated, national authority tasked with granting access letters to humanitarian organizations. This occurred because authorities in Iraq began requiring additional access authorizations. According to the DoS, this may have occurred due to a power struggle between the National Operation Center and the Department of Non-Governmental Organizations. However, provincial authorities have been far more helpful in trying to grant authority than the Iraqi government. According to the United Nations, NGOs working in Iraq were informed that the granting of authorization letters by the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Center—the Iraqi government body tasked with processing access requests—would be linked to increased reporting on NGO activities. Ongoing demonstrations against the Iraqi government added to these challenges, resulting in a temporary standstill as the government reconfigured different ministries in response to the protests.[339]

In December 2019, the monitoring center informed NGOs that it had suspended the granting of access letters until further notice. Throughout January, the Iraqi government was still establishing new procedures for NGOs to receive national level authorizations for the movement of personnel and supplies within the country. In January, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) surveyed NGO partners to estimate the impact of the administrative halt in access authorizations and found that 88 percent of respondents reported that the lack of national access authorization continued to impede their operations. Since the beginning of December 2019, more than 3,943 humanitarian missions have been cancelled, or have been prevented from reaching their destinations, according to the United Nations.[340]

According to USAID and the PRM, despite ongoing advocacy efforts from both the United Nations and the National Coordination Committee for Iraq, prior to the onset of COVID-19, the Iraqi government still did not have a permanent solution or process in place to provide access letters.[341]

IDP Returns Continue at Slow but Steady Pace

According to the DoS-funded International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix, nearly 1.4 million Iraqis remained displaced, and approximately 4.7 million IDPs returned to their areas of origin in Iraq as of February 29.[342] The DoS reported that PRM is working closely with the IOM, the UN's migration agency, and other humanitarian partners, to facilitate return of IDPs to their communities of origin. To avoid protracted displacement for large numbers of Iraqis, the U.S. Government and the humanitarian community continued to urge the Iraqi government and the KRG to allow integration as an option while working systematically to address the primary concerns of displaced persons who are not returning

Table 1.

Areas of Origin of Current IDP Caseload

Province of Origin	# of IDPs	% of Total
Ninewa	665,694	59%
Salah ad Din	106,134	11%
Anbar	133,398	11%

Source: IOM, "Displacement Tracking Matrix," January-February 2020

to areas of origin: security, lack of livelihoods, and damage to housing. The DoS reported that the humanitarian community is also looking at ways to increase host community willingness and acceptance of integrating IDPs.[343]

According to the IOM, the reasons for increased return of IDPs remain consistent. These include improvements in the security situation and the provision of services, including schools, employment opportunities, and the rehabilitation of houses in areas of origin. Moreover, the ongoing demonstrations in Baghdad and an unwillingness to move to other camps continue to be causes of return, according to the IOM.[344]

While some IDPs have returned to areas of origin due to improved security conditions and provision of services, the latest increase in some recent returns is likely due to enhanced Iraqi government efforts to close and consolidate IDP camps across Iraq during the quarter, according to USAID.[345]

According to the IOM, in terms of areas of origin, 59 percent of the current caseload of IDPs come from Ninewa province, mainly from Mosul (287,070 individuals), Sinjar (267,150) and Al Ba'aj (111,474). The second largest share of IDPs come from Salah ad Din and Anbar provinces with 11 percent each. The top districts of origin are Tooz Khurmatu (41,682 individuals), Baiji (33,006) and Balad (31,446) in Salah ad Din and Ramadi (69,948), Fallujah (50,802), and Al Qaim (12,648) in Anbar.[346]

DoS Humanitarian Programming Continues as Staffing Decreases

According to the DoS, during the quarter, PRM's staffing decrease from four to two direct-hire staff members hindered PRM's ability to monitor humanitarian programming. The loss of a second coordinator position in Baghdad reduced PRM's ability to monitor and implement its refugee resettlement program within Iraq. According to the DoS, monitoring was not greatly affected by the redeployment of the senior coordinator from Embassy Baghdad to Consulate General Erbil following the December 31, 2019, attack on the Embassy and the senior coordinator's return to the Embassy in mid-February.[347]

Despite the reduced number of direct-hire staff, the DoS reported that in January and February PRM's contract for third-party monitors and two PRM local staff members allowed PRM to maintain monitoring oversight over the more than $250 million in humanitarian programming in Iraq for both Iraqis and for Syrian refugees. The DoS reported that third-party monitors are able to perform monitoring visits for all PRM programming in Iraq. Since early March, according to the DoS, third-party monitors countrywide and Erbil-based PRM staff have been unable to follow up on planned monitoring visits due to travel and other COVID-19-related restrictions implemented by the Iraqi government and IKR authorities.[348]

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that PRM's third-party monitoring contract in Iraq is one of many tools used to monitor PRM programs. During the quarter, PRM used contracted third-party monitors primarily to reach sites that PRM direct-hire staff could not reach in person. PRM reported that the contract is meeting its purpose. During the quarter, PRM monitors were able to reach many sites, including sites in Anbar that otherwise would not have been monitored in person. However, monitors faced some of the same challenges this quarter as DoS implementing partners faced in reaching project sites due to the access letter issue. Finally, the COVID-19 outbreak caused more activities to be canceled after local governments established curfews. PRM reported that because of COVID-19, it has requested that monitors conduct beneficiary surveys for selected projects using questions PRM developed rather than directly monitoring at project sites. PRM reported that it hopes to still be able to glean useful information about project performance to date, despite the limitations on monitors' ability to see activities in person. PRM stated that third-party monitor activities are in addition to "regular" monitoring activities, including monthly or more frequent calls or visits with each partner and review of quarterly reports.[349]

According to PRM, funding to the IOM is to support facilitated returns programs for IDPs. This quarter, PRM monitored existing programs being implemented, including international organization and NGO programs funded with FY 2019 money. PRM reported that it worked closely with NGO partners, the humanitarian country team, donors, and other stakeholders to understand the impacts of the Iraqi government's change in policy on granting access letters to NGOs. In addition to monitoring current programs, PRM stated that it reviewed 45 NGO concept notes requesting funding and reviewed the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan. PRM reported that it is currently reviewing additional FY 2020 funding. The majority of PRM funding for Iraq is typically allocated in the third and fourth quarters.[350]

During the quarter, the DoS reported that PRM continued to fund programming intended to address the most significant needs of IDPs, including programs that focus on early recovery to help IDPs find durable solutions, such as local integration and safe and voluntary returns. Despite reports that security has improved for some returning IDPs, security remains one of the greatest impediments for IDPs who still wish to return to their original communities. They also have few opportunities to improve their livelihoods and damaged housing. PRM programming focused on access to employment and education directed at IDPs, returnees, and host community members. In addition, the DoS reported that PRM supported restart of agriculture work benefiting individuals and their communities.[351]

According to the DoS, PRM's work at the embassy in Baghdad included advocating to the Iraqi government for the following:

- Increased access by humanitarian organizations to the field and the establishment of an efficient system for approval of movement requests;
- Cross-border access for humanitarian staff and supplies to northeast Syria;
- Return of Iraqis from northeast Syria that would not result in increased internal displacement within Iraq; and
- Security improvements in areas of concern, including in areas with significant minority populations.[352]

Despite reports that security has improved for some returning IDPs, security remains one of the greatest impediments for IDPs who still wish to return to their original communities.

EVENTS IN SYRIA

STATUS OF OIR IN SYRIA

CJTF-OIR: Turkish Incursion Zone Stable Now, Oil Revenue Key to Stability of SDF-governed Areas

According to OUSD(P)/ISA, in October 2019, the Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria significantly disrupted the defeat-ISIS campaign and "created an even more convoluted operating environment" by allowing pro-regime forces (PRF) to expand their presence in the northeast of the country. The situation on the ground in the area of the Turkish incursion has stabilized for the time being, OUSD(P)/ISA said, adding that the DoD supports the ceasefire arrangement with Turkey in northeastern Syria.[353]

According to CJTF-OIR, the new combined joint operations area in Syria, the Eastern Syria Security Area (ESSA), spans from Dayr az Zawr in the south to the M4 Highway, which runs parallel to the Turkish border in northern Hasakah province and east to the border with Iraq.[354]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that U.S. forces continue to partner with the SDF to conduct counter-ISIS operations and to deny ISIS access to critical petroleum infrastructure in northeastern Syria.[355] According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF is participating in protecting the oil infrastructure, which CJTF-OIR said is vital for SDF revenue and economic stability in the ESSA.[356]

CJTF-OIR said that without economic stability, SDF commander General Mazloum Abdi and Syrian Democratic Council executive committee president, Ilham Ahmed, would be more likely to make financial concessions to Russia—which is pressing for access to the eastern Syria oil fields—in exchange for a political deal for the Kurdish-led administration in northeastern Syria with the Syrian regime.[357] CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that while relinquishing control of the oil fields to the Syrian regime and Russia would not be in the SDF's interests, the SDF can use its control over the oil fields as "a bargaining chip" in future negotiations. CJTF-OIR further said that there are no current Syrian regime negotiations taking place in part because the continued presence of U.S. forces offers a preferable partnership, and also because the Syrian regime's demands of turning over the oil fields and merging the SDF into the Syrian army "don't offer the SDF any benefits."[358]

After the redistribution of U.S. forces in northeastern Syria in October 2019, the DoD deployed mechanized units with Bradley fighting vehicles to provide force protection for troops guarding the oil fields."[359] The vehicles were removed weeks later.[360] In its questions to USCENTCOM this quarter, the DoD OIG sought further explanation of what led to the decision to deploy and remove the mechanized units, and the cost of doing so. The DoD OIG did not receive an answer.

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that U.S. forces continue to partner with the SDF to conduct counter-ISIS operations and to deny ISIS access to critical petroleum infrastructure in northeastern Syria.

STATUS OF ISIS IN SYRIA

ISIS Sustains Low-level Attacks, Terrorizing and Destabilizing Local Populations

According to both CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM, ISIS capabilities have not changed significantly this quarter.[361] USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that there were no substantive changes to the sophistication of ISIS operations or attacks in Syria from last quarter.[362] The DIA reported that ISIS has given no indication of a change in strategy in Syria.[363] USCENTCOM reported that based on ISIS's own claims of attacks, the terrorist group "remains degraded" in Syria.[364]

ISIS attacks included mostly small arms ambushes, IED attacks, or assassinations, according to both USCENTCOM and CJTF-OIR. ISIS directed these low-level operations primarily against SDF forces or SDF-associated local governing officials, with some operations also targeting PRF.[365] CJTF-OIR said that ISIS shifted tactics this quarter by employing small arms fire for the group's lead attack method, rather than mostly IEDs as was the case in prior quarters.[366]

CJTF-OIR said that ISIS directed roughly 80 percent of its claimed attacks against SDF and Syrian army targets during the quarter, while attacks targeting local council heads, village elders, or *Mukhtars*, and government buildings made up approximately 7 percent.[367]

While ISIS capabilities remain restricted, the DoD, United Nations, and analysts reported that ISIS sustained its structure and was continuing to terrorize the local population in northeastern Syria, despite the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi during a U.S. raid in northwestern Syria in October 2019.[368]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that al Baghdadi's death did not result in any degradation of ISIS capabilities in Syria, and ISIS likely retains an intact command and control structure, and a presence in rural regions of Coalition operating areas in Syria.[369] The Commander of USCENTCOM, General Kenneth McKenzie Jr., stated in written testimony

SYRIA: SELECTED KEY EVENTS, 1/1/2020-3/31/2020

JANUARY 1
Syrian commandos and Coalition special operations forces operating in Hasakah province capture 16 ISIS fighters in possession of weapons and terrorist-related material

JANUARY 14
SDF kills Iraqi national Abu al Ward in Dayr az Zawr province; al Ward was ISIS's finance and oil revenues chief and helped finance sleeper cells

FEBRUARY 12
Standoff involving U.S. and Russian forces near Syrian town of Qamishli leads to gunfire; incident is one of multiple standoffs between forces in NE Syria

JAN

FEB

JANUARY 2
ISIS claims to kill nine SDF fighters in a suicide vehicle bombing at SDF HQ in Dayr az Zawr

JANUARY 20
SDF and Coalition forces detain ISIS bomb maker Ali al Jalood, believed responsible for targeting military and civilians with IEDs in southern Hasakah province

to Congress in March that ISIS is focusing its efforts on rebuilding even after the loss of its leader. "Despite the death of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, ISIS remains a threat in Syria, with most of its activity focused on re-establishing networks, assassinating and intimidating local leaders and security forces and extending its influence in rural areas," he said.[370]

An analysis based on visits to Dayr az Zawr reported that ISIS is maintaining a "drumbeat of low-level violence" against local officials and has succeeded in intimidating local populations.[371] This is occurring at a time when, according to CJTF-OIR, SDF attentions are divided between fighting ISIS and addressing the Turkish forces in the north.[372] The analysis stated that ISIS members are able to move more freely, extort protection money, and operate with greater impunity in large parts of Dayr az Zawr. The analysis also stated that there has been a spike in the number of people in the region "repenting"—or seeking forgiveness from ISIS—for prior support to the SDF.[373]

Still, USCENTCOM reported that since October, and with the loss of key leaders, ISIS was more restricted in its movement between provinces controlled by Turkey, PRF, and the SDF.[374] In addition, USCENTCOM said that ISIS activities had demonstrated its limited capabilities. It reported that after al Baghdadi's death in October, ISIS carried out an escalated attack campaign. However, the number of ISIS attacks in all areas of Syria have dropped since December.[375] Both USCENTCOM and the DIA reported to the DoD OIG that this decline in the number of attacks suggests that ISIS lacks the capabilities to sustain elevated attack levels.[376] USCENTCOM further stated that this decline provides "strong evidence against an assertion of it making a comeback in Syria." [377]

According to USCENTCOM, ISIS claimed 155 attacks in Syria this quarter, compared to 345 attacks it claimed last quarter. USCENTCOM said declines occurred in every province of Syria where ISIS claims to be operating.[378] Attacks decreased by 37 percent in Dayr az Zawr compared to the previous quarter.[379] In Hasakah and Raqqa, the declines in attacks were much steeper, down 80 and 70 percent respectively. In addition, USCENTCOM reported that casualties from ISIS attacks dropped by 50 percent from 692 in the previous quarter to 343 this quarter, although the attacks were successful in claiming on average more than 2 casualties each.[380]

FEBRUARY 16
U.S.-backed Mughawir al Thawra opposition group repels rogue Iranian militia after breach of security zone around the Tanf Garrison

MARCH 4-6
Suspected ISIS UAVs drop mortars on U.S. forces in the northeast Syria oilfields

MARCH 23
One-year anniversary of the fall of Baghouz, which ended ISIS' territorial hold in Syria

MAR

FEBRUARY 15
SDF special operation forces, with Coalition forces, capture 11 ISIS suspects during raid in Thiban, east of Dayr az Zawr

MARCH 1
SDF special forces, with Coalition forces, raid ISIS hideout and arrest two high-profile ISIS fighters in Abu Hamam, Dayr az Zawr province

MARCH 13
Turkey and Russia agree to ceasefire following heavy fighting in Syria's northwestern Idlib province

ISIS Attacks Focus First on Eastern Syria

USCENTCOM reported that the greatest number of ISIS attacks this quarter took place in Dayr az Zawr province, with CJTF-OIR reporting that the majority of ISIS-claimed attacks focused in the city of Dayr az Zawr and surrounding areas, which ISIS designates as its *Al Khayr wilayat*, or province.[381]

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that since the Turkish incursion, ISIS clandestine cells have also focused operations in Hasakah province where Coalition forces are operating along with the SDF, Raqqa province, and in Aleppo province, which includes the SDF-controlled Manbij area.[382]

Even before the territorial defeat of ISIS in March 2019, the SDF had set up governing bodies and institutions in Dayr az Zawr, Raqqah, and Hasakah provinces. CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS focused its assassination attempts in these regions this quarter, mainly targeting people it considered "spies" or intelligence personnel, whom ISIS likely believed were reporting on the group's activity. ISIS also concentrated its assaults on military checkpoints in those regions.[383]

The DIA said that ISIS also operates in secondary areas in the eastern Syrian desert and in southwest Syria. It said that ISIS conducted harassing attacks against oil infrastructure and PRF in eastern Homs province, and used smuggling networks and clandestine cells in Suweidah and Dar'a provinces in southern Syria to conduct sporadic attacks and move personnel and materiel.[384]
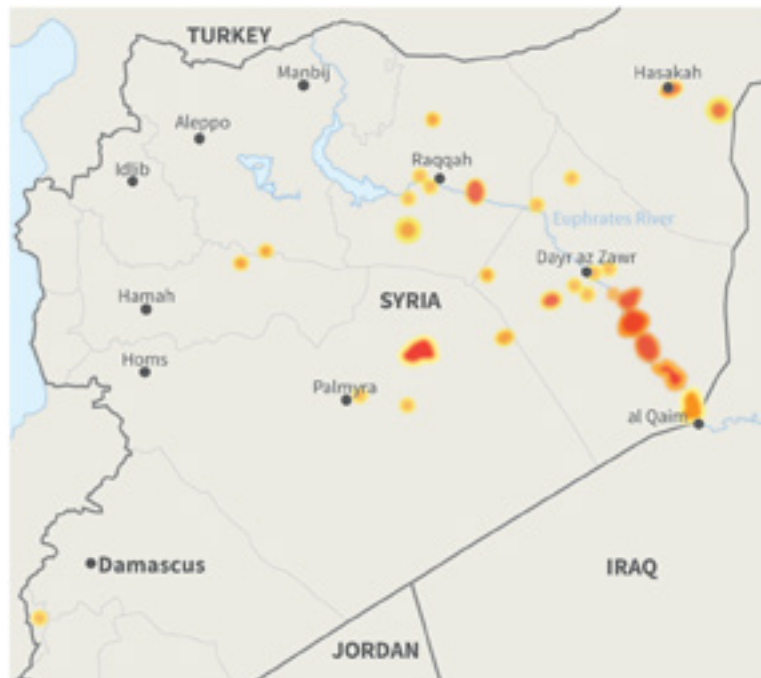
USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that outside Coalition or SDF areas of operation, ISIS maintained its capabilities, launching attacks in Homs, Aleppo, Quneitra, and Dar'a provinces.[385]

Figure 2.

ISIS Attacks in Syria This Quarter
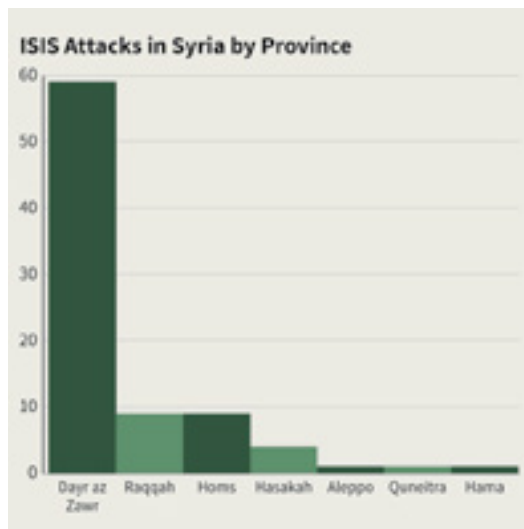
Sources: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency database (Jane's).

The DIA reported that ISIS capabilities also remained unchanged in northwestern Syria's Idlib province, where the Syrian government captured new areas once occupied by ISIS. The DIA, citing media reports, said that many ISIS members are leaving the province, while remaining members operate in clandestine cells, conducting roadside bombings, hit-and-run assaults, and assassinations. The DIA said that according to local press reporting, some ISIS fighters embedded in tribal communities to conduct attacks, in an effort to undermine security in those areas.[386]

While many ISIS attacks in Syria this quarter targeted the SDF and their affiliates, USCENTCOM reported that one of the largest was a January 22 IED and small arms ambush on a Syrian regime convoy near Rusafa, in Raqqah province. ISIS claimed that it killed more than 20 Syrian regime soldiers and captured 4 others in that attack.[387] USCENTCOM reported that ISIS conducted a similar ambush against a PRF convoy in the desert of Dayr az Zawr province on January 13. In this attack, ISIS claimed it killed 15 IRGC soldiers, destroyed an armored vehicle, disabled a tank, and seized weapons and ammunition. In addition, USCENTCOM reported that the group conducted two assassinations against SDF security officials in Aleppo province—an area where U.S. forces are not located, and where the SDF, Turkish forces, and PRF are all operating. USCENTCOM said these attacks were notable because ISIS rarely claims responsibility for operations in the province.[388]

ISIS-affiliated IDPs Step Up Attacks in IDP Camps

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that Kurdish forces have not increased their security presence at the Al Hol Camp since late 2019, and maintain approximately 400 guards at the camp. The DIA said that Kurdish leaders assert that camp authorities are overstretched and continue to press European countries to repatriate their ISIS-affiliated citizens. The DIA reported that to alleviate overcrowding and appease local Arab tribes, Kurdish leaders facilitated the return of approximately 3,000 IDPs from Al Hol back to their home communities in Syria since May 2019, with cooperation from local authorities.[389]

The DoS reported that after the Turkish incursion in October 2019, the SDF reduced security at Al Hol, which resulted in attacks on humanitarian distribution points and challenges to the distribution of aid to the foreign families annex of the camp.[390] The DIA reported that a reduction in camp services following the Turkish incursion contributed to rising discontent in Al Hol. It said that ISIS-affiliated IDPs have increased attacks against camp guards this quarter.[391] However, USAID reported to USAID OIG that reporting from implementing partners and open sources did not indicate an increase in violent incidents this quarter. USAID said that the situation had largely stabilized.[392]

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that ISIS activists within the camps, particularly Al Hol, are able to recruit men and women from vulnerable populations and indoctrinate youth.[393] The DIA said that ISIS retains a smuggling network in the camps, bringing in supplies and moving family members in and out; and female ISIS members continued to conduct operations—such as attacks against camp security personnel—in Al Hol using funds received via wire transfers.[394]

> **The DoS reported that after the Turkish incursion in October 2019, the SDF reduced security at Al Hol, which resulted in attacks on humanitarian distribution points and challenges to the distribution of aid to the foreign families annex of the camp.**

CJTF-OIR reported that about 2,000 foreign women (with children) who renounced their citizenship to follow their husbands to Syria, are residing in the foreigners' annex at Al Hol while their countries decide on their legal status.[395] According to the DoS, its Counterterrorism Bureau remains concerned with the number of displaced individuals who it says remain committed to terrorist ideologies—including that of ISIS. The DoS reported that the Counterterrorism Bureau is exploring with other bureaus ways to address "terrorist ideologies" within the camps.[396] The DoS said that the adult family members in the camps who remain loyal to ISIS include Iraqis, Syrians, and people from other countries, and they continue to pose a threat. The foreign annex houses approximately 10,000 non-Syrian or Iraqi populations of the camp from 60 countries—70 percent of whom are children under the age of 12.[397] The DoS reported that one option it has explored is the transfer of the foreign families currently residing in the Annex from Al Hol to other camps, particularly Al Roj.[398] The DoS said that moving ISIS supporters or family members to Al Roj would bolster security and it was not concerned that this could expand ISIS influence because Al Roj is located in more remote SDF-held territory.[399]

Speaking at a UN Security Council meeting in February, UN officials stated that the radicalizing of people in IDP camps was an urgent problem. Michèle Coninsx, who heads the UN's counterterrorism executive directorate, said: "This is one of the defining counterterrorism challenges of our time. Inaction now will only make our future counterterrorism harder."[400]

Additional information about addressing ISIS activity within the IDP camps is included on page 57 of this report.

ISIS Continues to Use Propaganda for Recruitment and Influence with Mixed Results

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS continues to produce propaganda to display its capabilities and to recruit future members.[401] The DIA reported that ISIS recruitment efforts were likely "low-key" because the group no longer controls territory.[402]

CJTF-OIR reported that following the Turkish incursion, ISIS claimed large, media grabbing attacks in Raqqah and the Badiyah desert against the SDF and the Syrian Army, then ran a short-lived media campaign on Telegram. CJTF-OIR said that a majority of ISIS-claimed attacks in the last 3 months of 2019 were unsubstantiated, or the perpetrators were not verified.[403]

ACTIONS AGAINST ISIS IN SYRIA

Defeat-ISIS Operations Ongoing, but SDF Focus Still Divided by Turkish Actions

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the Turkish incursion in October 2019 led to a pause in defeat-ISIS operations in northeastern Syria to allow for the drawdown and redistribution of U.S. forces. CJTF-OIR stated that since November, there has been no further impact to operations due to the Turkish incursion, and subsequently no impact to defeat-ISIS operations throughout this quarter.[404]

However, CJTF-OIR also reported to the DoD OIG that ongoing tension with Turkey along the northern Syria border continues to pull SDF forces and focus away from the fight to defeat ISIS. It added that the largest limitation facing the SDF is the rebuilding of its force numbers to compensate for the losses sustained in the Turkish incursion.[405]

According to a CJTF-OIR press release, SDF commandos began the quarter by thwarting an attempted ISIS suicide attack on December 31, then leading a Coalition-supported raid in Dayr az Zawr to disrupt a complex New Year's Day attack with car bombs against a joint Coalition/SDF base as well as civilian populations in cities of Qamishli, Hasakah, and the town of Derik in Hasakah province. The release said a separate SDF commando team captured 16 ISIS fighters in Hasakah province.[406]

CJTF-OIR reported that Special Operations Joint Task Force–OIR (SOJTF-OIR), along with its Syrian partners, conducted 14 operations against ISIS this quarter.[407] SOJTF-OIR accompanied SDF forces on nine of those missions, all in the Middle Euphrates River Valley. In addition, CJTF-OIR said that the SDF conducted unilateral security and presence patrols in the area.[408] CJTF-OIR said that the number of operations dropped from 22 last quarter, while the number of detainees it captured in these operations increased to 121 this quarter, compared with 90 last quarter.[409]

This quarter, CJTF-OIR continued to conduct air strikes in support of the counter-ISIS fight in Syria. Data released in late March showed that in the first 2 months of the year, CJTF-OIR conducted 15 strikes—7 in January, resulting in 7 "terrain denials," and 8 in February that resulted in 8 "terrain denials." As this report went to publication, figures for March were not available. CJTF-OIR said it delivered strikes by manned and unmanned aircraft, rocket-propelled and ground artillery.[410]

Northeastern Syria Communities Support SDF Counter-Insurgency Efforts, Fear Waning Influence

Part of the SDF's counter-insurgency efforts in northeastern Syria include gaining support of the local populations in areas the SDF now controls along with its governing arm, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). However, with the reintroduction of PRF and Syrian forces into parts of northeastern Syria, local populations face difficult choices.[411] USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that the majority of Arab communities in northeast Syria passively support the SDF and its associated civil institutions.[412]

However, these local populations face compounding pressures. USCENTCOM said that these communities are under pressure from state actors in the region to realign and renounce support for the SDF. The relationships are strained further by ethnic rivalry, poor security conditions, particularly in Dayr az Zawr, perceptions of neglect, and accusations against the SDF of heavy-handed security actions, USCENTCOM said.[413]

In addition, as noted previously, CJTF-OIR reported that local communities in the region face targeted attacks from ISIS fighters seeking to undermine support for the SDF.[414] The SDF has also reportedly faced backlash for its policy of forcibly conscripting young men in the areas under its control, according to media reporting.[415] The DoS, citing media reports, expressed concern over allegations that the SDF has detained Arab civil society activists—including

individuals working on U.S. funded programs—with allegations they are being targeted due to their political opposition to the SDF.[416] Open source reporting in local communities identified a loss of confidence in the SDF after the Turkish incursion and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from some of its operating areas because people saw the SDF as a "lame duck."[417]

Finally, as the Syrian civil war rages into its 10th year, OUSD(P)/ISA stated that the possibility of violence and insecurity spilling from northwestern Idlib province into the SDF-controlled northeast remains a concern with the potential of ultimately destabilizing northeastern Syria as well. OUSD(P)/ISA said that in the short term, an influx of IDPs fleeing east to escape the violence in Idlib could overload the SDF's capacity to offer humanitarian assistance. This in turn could affect defeat-ISIS operations in the northeast.[418]

The DoS reported that for now, Syrian regime forces are facing an "unprecedented military challenge" in Idlib province, and defeat-ISIS operations in northeastern Syria are not affected.[419]

A report published by a European Union-supported think tank in February found that, with the political upheaval that has unfolded in northeastern Syria, residents of the region are withholding full support for any potential government as they wait to see what plays out. However, the report found that residents have adjusted to and utilized the administrative and governing institutions that the SDF and SDC have put in place. According to the report, about 20 percent of the population are dependent on income that is directly or indirectly provided by the autonomous government.[420]

USCENTCOM reported that the majority of Arabs in northeastern Syria oppose the Syrian regime and many continue to support the SDF on the condition that the SDF includes Arab components in important discussions and provides equitable assistance to both Arab and Kurdish populations.[421] However, the DIA and USCENTCOM provided differing assessments of the SDF's willingness to involve the Arab population in government or military discussions.

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that within the SDF, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) has demonstrated an "unwillingness to share power with Arabs, even in the Arab-majority regions of the northeast where Arab fighters probably represent a majority of the SDF's front-line forces." The DIA said that the YPG's efforts to "constrain aligned Arab militias" within the SDF, appear to indicate an attempt by the YPG to "eradicate what little remained of Arab autonomy within the SDF."[422] The DIA reported that there are occasions when the YPG yielded to Arab pressure—for example, the release of some ISIS prisoners into the custody of tribal leaders. But it said that Kurdish officials control all the leadership positions and decision-making in the SDF's civilian and military councils. Arab representatives are allowed to participate as deputies but "wield little influence in SDF command decisions."[423]

However, USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that the SDF and SDC have made "great strides" over the past year in incorporating Arab military and civil leaders, as well as Syriac Christians into military and political deliberations. In addition, USCENTCOM stated that USAID and DoS-provided stabilization assistance in northeastern Syria focuses on Arab-majority areas. It said that the assistance is provided through local implementing partners operating in conjunction with municipal councils and the SDF/SDC, which "reinforces the legitimacy of these bodies and helps mitigate the pressure Arab communities face."[424]

CJTF-OIR: ISIS Detainees and IDPs Pose Threat to Coalition in Syria

One year after the territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria, CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that it faces "significant risk" to its mission in Syria from the approximately 10,000 ISIS prisoners being held in SDF detention facilities, and from some of their associated families residing amidst some 60,000 to 70,000 people at the Al Hol and other displacement camps in northeastern Syria. CJTF-OIR stated that members of these ISIS-affiliated populations are enabling ISIS communications and financial networks, helping to preserve some level of its command and control, and recruiting and radicalizing populations in what CJTF-OIR called a "relatively permissive environment."[425]

The ISIS supporters in the camps arrived amid an influx of tens of thousands of people after the fall of Baghouz in March 2019. Since then, the DoD, DoS, and USAID have struggled to address the often competing needs of providing security, isolating ISIS members and supporters, preventing the spread of ISIS ideology, and providing for the health and welfare of camp residents.[426] The Offices of Inspector General have observed difficulties the three agencies have in determining how to address ISIS activity in the camps, but none claimed authority to address the matter directly. The DoS deferred to the DoD—and the SDF, which is in charge of guarding the camps— on camp security matters, stating the U.S. Government does not claim that authority.[427] USAID stated that a system for humanitarian coordination provided a forum for camp management to discuss security concerns, but deferred to the DoS for additional information.[428] The DoD indicated that it has limited visibility into the camps and was unable to provide an estimate of the number of ISIS activists, or the number of related violent incidents, within the camps.[429]

While CJTF-OIR does not operate in the camps, the DoD states in its FY 2021 budget justification that it plans to continue to provide stipends and equipment to the SDF's Provincial/Regional Internal Security Forces to help secure these camps.[430]

In the detention centers, the SDF holds about 2,000 foreign fighters and approximately 8,000 Iraqi and Syrian fighters.[431] U.S., SDF, and UN officials have urged nations to repatriate and try their citizens, but most countries have not been willing to take back their nationals and many have stripped suspected ISIS fighters of their citizenship.[432]

In the months following ISIS's defeat in March 2019, U.S. Government and SDF officials said that the SDF could not sustain security long term at the makeshift facilities it was using to detain its new prison population. Officials said that the longer the foreign fighters were held, the more they become radicalized, and the greater potential for them to organize breakouts.[433] CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG this quarter that the SDF remains committed to providing physical security at the prisons; however, riots and ongoing small-scale escape attempts underscore the "high-impact risk of a mass breakout." CJTF-OIR said that if the SDF were to reduce its guard force, as it did following the Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria in October 2019, the risk of a breakout would increase significantly.[434]

"If not adequately addressed, these populations of [ISIS] fighters pose one of the most significant risks to the success of the [defeat-ISIS] mission, in addition to posing a threat to U.S. and Coalition partner national security," CJTF-OIR reported.[435]

CJTF-OIR: ISIS Detainees and IDPs Pose Threat to Coalition in Syria *(continued from previous page)*

CJTF-OIR reported that it developed the Northeast Syria Coordination Group (NESCG) to work with joint, interagency, and international and multinational partners in addressing problems with ISIS supporters in detention and in the camps. The NESCG is working with these partners to support the repatriation of fighters to their countries of origin where possible, particularly those from Iraq, while also working to ensure that detention facilities are sustainable—regardless of any future shift of control in the region. The group is working through SOJTF-OIR and non-governmental agencies to determine what the SDF requires to maintain its detention facilities and is soliciting funds, expertise, capabilities, and personnel from its partners.[436]

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG the NESCG replaced the dedicated CJTF-OIR prison support team in northeastern Syria.[437] CJTF-OIR reported that it no longer has a dedicated prison support team in Syria since November 2019, following the redistribution of forces after the Turkish incursion, and there has been "little or no direct access" to the SDF detention centers to make assessments.[438] CJTF-OIR said it is no longer able to track comprehensive data on the foreign fighter population or the level of security at the SDF detention centers where they are being held.[439] Instead, the Coalition relies on information from the SDF.[440] OUSD(P)/ISA stated that while the NESCG is not permanently stationed in Syria, it is able to respond quickly to requests to support the repatriation of fighters or to organize resources to assist the SDF in maintaining the facilities.[441]

General Kenneth McKenzie Jr., the Commander of USCENTCOM, reported to Congress in March that the detention of foreign fighters and ongoing attempts at radicalization in the displacement camps were parts of the same problem. General McKenzie stated that U.S. and Coalition forces were helping to mitigate prison security risks by training and equipping guards and helping construct more secure structures. However, he called those solutions "a tactical-level Band-Aid, not a long-term solution."[442]

"Military solutions do not exist for the issues of de-radicalization and repatriation of [foreign terrorist fighters]. They are international problems requiring international solutions," General McKenzie said. He added that the longer ISIS supporters are able to operate freely in the camps, the more residents are susceptible to ISIS philosophy, which could generate future terrorists. He said that the international community must act quickly to protect the United States and its allies and address problems that have "the potential to spark the resurgence of ISIS."[443]

SDF Quells Prison Riot, Maintains Control at Detention Centers

CJTF-OIR reported that it saw no change this quarter in the SDF's ability to maintain detention centers in northeastern Syria; nor did it observe evidence of any improvements in the level of perimeter security maintained at SDF detention facilities.[444]

During the Turkish incursion in October 2019, there were reports of a small number of ISIS detainees escaping. OUSD(P)/ISA reported that overall, the SDF retained control of detention facilities.[445] At the end of this quarter, a riot at an SDF detention center in Hasakah lasted for 24 hours, highlighting ongoing security concerns at SDF prisons. Media reports said that on March 29, ISIS militants began breaking down doors and digging holes in walls between cells. The rioting was brought under control the next morning, but erupted again with gunfire heard inside and ambulances called in to help the wounded.[446]

A Coalition spokesperson told reporters that CJTF-OIR provided aerial surveillance to search for escapees and monitor for a larger ISIS operation. SDF leader General Mazloum tweeted afterward that his forces were able to regain control and "avoid catastrophe," and he urged allies to "find a quick radical solution to this international problem."[447]

SDF officials quoted in open source reporting said that the Kurdish-led alliance was ready to try ISIS fighters through the local judicial system to alleviate the crisis after it could not garner support for a proposal to set up an international tribunal. It is unclear how the SDF, which is not an internationally recognized government, would conduct these trials and so far, none has started.[448]

OUSD(P)/ISA said that the DoD continues to support vetted local forces, including the SDF, in securing ISIS detention facilities under SDF control. Major areas of focus include training and equipping the SDF for specific detention-related missions and providing some support to repair and renovate SDF detention facilities that house ISIS fighters, very few of which are purpose-built detention facilities. The FY 2020 U.S. federal budget authorized funding for construction or refurbishment of SDF facilities as well as for humane treatment, while stipulating that foreign Coalition contributions to the Capital Federal funding will be prioritized for construction.[449]

USCENTCOM reported that the COVID-19 epidemic prevented site survey teams from visiting potential detention-related construction sites. It said the SDF prefers building additions to existing structures rather than constructing new prisons and future projects will be limited to expansion and improvement of existing facilities.[450]

PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT

Coalition Awareness of SDF Activity and Capacity Decreases

CJTF-OIR reported that in Syria, like in Iraq, the Coalition's partner force development had evolved to allow partners to handle most aspects of a counter-insurgency autonomously.[451] According to CJTF-OIR, its "partner forces throughout the ESSA and in the vicinity of the Tanf Garrison have demonstrated success in executing offensive operations to defeat ISIS."[452]

However, this quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that it was less aware of partner capabilities than in previous quarters due to a reduction in the combined joint operations area within the country. CJTF-OIR reported that it did not track Hzen Anti-Terror, Yekineyen Anti-terror Forces, and SDF counterterrorism operations that occurred outside the ESSA; it only tracked partners operating inside the ESSA.[453] Therefore, CJTF-OIR was unable to provide an estimate of the total number of SDF conducting operations against ISIS in Syria.[454]

CJTF-OIR reported that one of the most significant factors influencing the SDF's ability to develop its counter-ISIS capabilities this quarter was the need to compensate for losses sustained while responding to the Turkish incursion. The ongoing insecurity in northern Syria continued to pull SDF personnel and attention away from defeating ISIS in Syria, according to CJTF-OIR.[455]

OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the SDF continued maintaining control of ISIS detainees at its facilities in northeastern Syria.[456] However, as discussed elsewhere in this report, CJTF-OIR lacked direct access to some SDF detention facilities—several reside outside the ESSA—making

it difficult to assess accurately the internal security measures in place.[457] OUSD(P)/ISA reported that it is able to determine the status of detention facilities in northeastern Syria by "working through" SDF partners.[458] How OUSD(P)/ISA works through SDF partners—what types of information it receives and how frequently it communicates with them—is unclear.

Information on Partner Force Development in Syria Deemed Sensitive

In previous quarters, CJTF-OIR provided the DoD OIG with detailed information on specific actions the Coalition took to develop partner forces in Syria. CJTF-OIR deemed this detailed information on partner force development unclassified. The DoD OIG used this information to assess partner force development in Syria in its quarterly unclassified reports.

The unclassified information CJTF-OIR provided on partner force development this quarter was less detailed than in previous quarters. For example, CJTF-OIR said that due to the Turkish incursion, the SDF and Coalition forces developed new training plans for partner force development, which included current and desired end states for partner forces.[459] CJTF-OIR reported that development programs covered "a range of specialties and tiers of complexity."[460] Coalition forces provided basic training courses for all partner forces, and delivered specialized training as appropriate for the SDF, according to CJTF-OIR.[461] CJTF-OIR also reported that "all components of partnered SDF" continued receiving training and development this quarter, and that the scope of their capabilities was unique to their security responsibilities (e.g. law enforcement, offensive counter-ISIS operations, etc.).[462]

CJTF-OIR also provided classified information on partner force development in Syria this quarter. This classified information, like the unclassified information CJTF-OIR provided in previous quarters, details specific actions the Coalition took to develop partner forces. Given that CJTF-OIR now considers this type of information classified, the DoD OIG cannot use it to assess partner force development in this report.

CJTF-OIR provided the DoD OIG with its own assessment of partner force development in Syria this quarter. CJTF-OIR reported that after reorienting in the ESSA, its partner force training capabilities rose to pre-Turkish incursion levels within the ESSA.[463] CJTF-OIR therefore assessed that there had been no impact from the reduction of U.S. forces in Syria on training partner forces.[464] The DoD OIG notes that CJTF-OIR's assessment does not appear to account for the Coalition's diminished ability to develop partner forces previously being cultivated outside the ESSA.

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN SYRIA

Iran and Its Proxies Remain a Persistent Threat to Coalition and Partner Forces in Syria

The DIA and the DoS reported that Iranian-backed forces continue supporting pro-regime operations across Syria, including the Syrian regime's offensive in Idlib this quarter.[465] The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that Iran has leveraged its critical manpower, financial, and materiel aid for the Syrian regime not only to secure the survival of the Iranian-friendly regime

The DIA and the DoS reported that Iranian-backed forces continue supporting pro-regime operations across Syria, including the Syrian regime's offensive in Idlib this quarter.

The DIA told the DoD OIG that Iranian-affiliated forces also continue to maintain a presence in eastern Syria to support PRF operations against ISIS, hold recaptured territory, and to secure logistic routes from Iran to the Levant.

but also to support its broader strategic goals, including maintaining a long-term presence in Syria, protecting Shia shrines and population centers, and preserving its ability to supply Hezbollah.[466]

The DIA told the DoD OIG that based on media reporting it assessed with "low confidence" that Iran currently maintains a presence of approximately 1,500 Iranian military personnel in Syria. Additionally, the DIA assessed Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah personnel continue to lead Iranian-affiliated foreign fighters—to include several thousand Iraqi, Afghan, and Pakistani Shia, as well as local Syrian forces—that remain in a direct combat role augmenting Syrian regime forces.[467]

The DIA told the DoD OIG that Iranian-affiliated forces also continue to maintain a presence in eastern Syria to support PRF operations against ISIS, hold recaptured territory, and to secure logistic routes from Iran to the Levant.[468] USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that Iranian forces and Iraqi Shia militia groups could pursue operations targeting U.S. forces in Syria, "should they decide to do so," in response to the January 3 killing of Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al Muhandis.[469] According to news reports, in February the U.S.-backed tribal militia Mughawir al Thawra alleged that Iranian proxy forces, operating outside of the control of the Syrian regime, had attacked their position within the 55-kilometer deconfliction zone around the Tanf border crossing where U.S. forces are located.[470] USCENTCOM did not report any specific Iranian-backed attack when asked by the DoD OIG about threats to U.S. forces in Syria this quarter. However, Ambassador James Jeffrey told reporters in March that Iranian forces are "one of the major risks to the region," noting that their deployment of "long-range missiles and other weapon systems threaten U.S. partners and allies as well as U.S. military positions." Ambassador Jeffrey added that Iran is "trying to expand its own hegemonic agenda throughout the northern Levant, and this is something the United States is absolutely opposed to."[471]

Turkey Shifts Focus from Northeastern Syria to Idlib

The Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria forced the displacement of some 200,000 people. The DIA, citing UN reporting, told the DoD OIG that as of February, approximately 70,000 people remain displaced.[472] The DIA said it lacks comprehensive data about population movements in this region because the organizations that track refugee and IDP flows have not had regular access to the area.[473]

Turkish media reporting indicated that flare-ups continued this quarter between Turkish and Kurdish fighters in the areas a under Turkish control. The Turkish government does not differentiate between the YPG and the Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK, which has been waging a longtime insurgency inside Turkey.[474] The DIA reported last quarter that Turkey was vocal about its dissatisfaction with the progress to remove SDF forces from areas along the border outside its incursion zone, in line with the October 22 arrangement Turkey reached with Russia. The DIA told the DoD OIG in March that despite these statements, Turkey did not appear to be planning new or expanded military operations in northeastern Syria.[475]

CJTF-OIR reported that the presence of Russian and Syrian regime forces along the northeastern Syria border lowered the risk of another Turkish military incursion, enabling the SDF to focus on the defeat-ISIS mission.[476] CJTF-OIR also noted that for the SDF, the

existential threat it now faces is "no longer ISIS but Turkey." It said that SDF attention "is divided" between fighting ISIS and "devoting some resources to keeping an eye on Turkey and its forces in Syria," particularly in areas vacated by U.S. forces and still under SDF control.[477]

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that since late January, press reporting indicated that Turkish military efforts in northeastern Syria have shifted to Idlib, where conflict escalated between Turkish military forces and Syrian regime forces supported by the Russian military.[478] The DIA and USCENTCOM both reported to the DoD OIG that some Turkish and Turkish-supported opposition forces redeployed from northeastern Syria to help support opposition fighters battle PRF forces in Idlib.[479]

The DIA reported that there were 22,000 to 50,000 Turkish-supported opposition fighters operating in northern Aleppo province before Turkey redeployed a majority of them to Idlib in early February. It said at least 3,000 were killed in Idlib in the fighting.[480] According to the DIA, another 5,000 Turkish-supported opposition fighters deployed to Libya to support Turkish operations.[481]

Complexity of Syrian Battlefield Requires Increased Deconfliction

The DIA reported that as of March 2020, there had been a significant change to Syrian regime and Russian dispositions in northeastern Syria.[482] In late 2019, the Syrian regime deployed between 4,000 and 10,000 additional forces to northeastern Syria in order to blunt the Turkish incursion. These forces deployed primarily along the M4 Highway from Ayn Isa to Tall Tamr, and near Qamishli and Hasakah. Russia deployed at least 300 military police to conduct patrols in northeastern Syria. Russia may have also reallocated military police from northeastern Syria to assist with new patrols in Idlib, according to the DIA.[483]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that a crowded, complex operating environment in Syria, which includes multiple state and non-state actors with competing interests, generated an increased number of tense interactions among adversaries this quarter.[484] According to news reports, many of these interactions included forces intercepting or preventing the passage of military patrols and convoys.[485] However, according to CJTF-OIR, there was little it could do to prevent these interactions, and personnel continued using established deconfliction mechanisms designed to mitigate risks to Coalition forces.[486]

As of late March 2020, these interactions were not hindering the Coalition's ability to defeat ISIS in Syria, according to CJTF-OIR.[487] However, given the number of actors with competing agendas operating in northeastern Syria, the potential for unintended escalation or conflict was high, and that could impede the OIR mission.

RUSSIA INCREASINGLY PROVOCATIVE IN NORTHEASTERN SYRIA

Media reporting from January 2020 stated that the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights observed that the overlapping and shifting lines of control in northeastern Syria were producing friction among actors operating in the region. Due to this friction, tensions were increasing in the oil-rich Hasakah province where Coalition forces, the Russian military, and PRF held positions.[488]

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CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that it continued to address the Russian military presence in Syria, deemed a tactical challenge, by working through established deconfliction channels.[489] As reported last quarter, the Coalition amended deconfliction protocols due to changes in Coalition force posture in northeastern Syria and establishment of the ESSA. In late January 2020, a CJTF-OIR spokesperson stated that Coalition forces and the Russian military were continuing to deconflict movements through "pre-existing communication channels and interlocutors, in order to prevent unnecessary and unplanned military interactions, and de-escalate between forces when necessary."[490]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that as of late March 2020, the Russian military had maintained its willingness to utilize established deconfliction channels as a mechanism to reduce risk.[491] However, CJTF-OIR also reported that Russian ground and air incursions into the ESSA continued to occur on a regular basis.[492] The Russian military presence did not hinder the Coalition's intelligence collection or operations against ISIS, according to CJTF-OIR.[493]

The media reported on numerous confrontations among Coalition forces, the Russian military, the PRF, and Iranian proxies that occurred in January and February 2020, including the following incidents:

- **January 16:** U.S. personnel prevented Russian soldiers heading to the Rumeylan oil field from passing through the city of Qamishli in Hasakah province;
- **January 18:** U.S. personnel stopped a Russian convoy heading to the Rumeylan oil field;
- **January 23:** U.S. forces intercepted an unidentified Russian general in northern Syria during deconfliction operations;
- **January 25:** U.S. personnel intercepted a group of Russian military police;
- **January 28:** Russian helicopters flew very low over a U.S. checkpoint;
- **February 4:** A Russian patrol circumvented a U.S. checkpoint;
- **February 16:** The Mughawir al Thawra reported exchanging fire with the PRF and Iranian proxies in the deconfliction zone around Tanf.
- **February 19:** U.S. forces escorted a Russian patrol out of an area near eastern Qamishli after it violated deconfliction protocols; and
- **February 22:** U.S. personnel blocked the passing of a Russian patrol on the M4 Highway near Amuda.[494]

In early February, Ambassador Jeffrey told reporters that he was worried about the "troubling" increase in incidents occurring in the ESSA, according to media reporting.[495] The press, citing statements from U.S. military officers and diplomats, stated that the Russian military was "swamping" established deconfliction channels with requests to operate in the ESSA, and often ignoring U.S. objections.[496] According to CJTF-OIR, while violations of the new deconfliction protocols were concerning, it was managing these incidents while "exhibiting professionalism."[497]

An incident that resulted in a loss of life occurred on February 12, when local fighters attacked a U.S. convoy of armored vehicles at a PRF checkpoint near Qamishli. A firefight ensued, resulting in the death of one Syrian.[498] According to media reports, vehicles carrying Russian military forces arrived on the scene and mediated between the PRF and U.S. forces.[499]

Photographs and video from the scene circulated on social media and the DoD later confirmed the incident. According to CJTF-OIR, "after Coalition troops issued a series of warning and de-escalation attempts, the patrol came under small arms fire…In self-defense, Coalition troops returned fire."[500] In late February, the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, and Russian Chief of Staff, Valery Gerasimov, discussed deconfliction in Syria by telephone, according to a DoD spokesperson.[501]

TURKEY AND RUSSIA CLASH IN IDLIB

OUSD(P)/ISA reported this quarter that it was concerned violence in northwestern Syria could destabilize the entirety of northern Syria, including areas occupied by the SDF. According to OUSD(P)/ISA, an influx of IDPs into these areas could overload the Kurdish authorities' capacity to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, thereby hindering OIR activities in northeastern Syria.[502]

Media reporting stated that in January and February, PRF operations in Idlib caused mass destruction, displacing nearly a million people into Idlib's border region, where more than 800,000 IDPs were already residing in camps.[503] According to press reporting, the Turkish military deployed forces and established positions in Idlib to blunt the expansion of PRF operations northward. During this period, the PRF, supported by the Russian military, and the Turkish military engaged in a series of tit-for-tat retaliatory strikes. Tensions continued to rise as Turkish casualties mounted and the Russian military denied receiving deconfliction notices indicating the locations of deployed Turkish forces in the region, according to the press.[504] Media reporting stated that Russia and Turkey launched a series of consultations on the situation in Idlib in early and mid-February. While both sides confirmed their commitment to existing agreements, Turkey remained dissatisfied with the de-escalation zone Russia proposed.[505]

According to media reporting, the tense situation in Idlib escalated on February 28, after fighters of the Hayat Tahrir al Sham launched a large-scale attack against the PRF.[506] Media reporting stated that Russian or Syrian regime retaliatory nighttime aerial strikes, which employed precision munitions, killed at least 33 Turkish soldiers and wounded many more in the area. As the attack unfolded, the Turkish military requested that the Russian military allow Turkish helicopters access to the area in order to evacuate casualties, but Russia repeatedly denied the requests. The Turkish personnel later moved out of the area via ground transport, according to media reporting.[507]

According to the press, after the airstrikes, Turkey announced that it had engaged in consultations with NATO, as it viewed the incident as an attack on both Turkey and the international community. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, in turn, called for an immediate ceasefire in Idlib, condemning the airstrikes and offering condolences to Turkey, according to media reporting.[508]

According to CJTF-OIR, "after Coalition troops issued a series of warning and de-escalation attempts, the patrol came under small arms fire…In self-defense, Coalition troops returned fire."

Turkey publicly blamed the Syrian regime for the attack. However, according to press reporting, Turkish military officials believed the Russian military was directly involved. Turkey subsequently asked the United States to deploy two Patriot air defense batteries on its southern border to deter any future attacks by the PRF or the Russian military.[509] Russian military representatives stated publicly that Turkish military personnel should not have been at the locations struck, noting that Russian forces had constantly requested the coordinates of Turkish locations and that Turkey had not reported these personnel, according to the media.[510] According to press reporting, Russia also accused Turkish forces of directly supporting opposition fighters, including the Hayat Tahrir al Sham, providing them with Stinger man-portable air defense systems capable of downing Russian aircraft.[511]

The situation escalated as the Turkish military engaged in retaliatory strikes against the PRF. Media reporting from February 29, citing a Turkish defense official, stated that the Turkish retaliatory strikes had killed roughly 300 PRF personnel.[512] On March 1, the Turkish military launched Operation Spring Shield—an expansive UAS-led air campaign targeting PRF airbases, arms depots, heavy weapons, and air defense systems.[513] By March 3, Turkey claimed it had killed more than 2,000 PRF and destroyed a large number of its heavy weapons in Idlib province, according to press reporting.[514]

On March 5, Turkish and Russian leaders met to discuss the situation in Idlib. They subsequently announced a comprehensive ceasefire and establishment of a secure corridor spanning six kilometers on the northern and southern sides of the M4 Highway.[515] Following the ceasefire there was a lull in hostilities. Many Syrian elements assessed that the ceasefire would be short-lived, according to media reporting, but remained largely in place at the time of this report.[516]

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Instability in Syria Increases COVID-19 Threat

In late March 2020, UNICEF stated that around 460,000 people in northeastern Syria were at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 because of repeated interruptions to their main water supply.

In late March 2020, UNICEF stated that around 460,000 people in northeastern Syria were at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 because of repeated interruptions to their main water supply.[517] The Alouk water station in Ras al Ayn, a border town controlled by Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies, had not pumped water to the SDF-controlled region for days.[518]

Turkey and Turkish-backed forces took control of the Alouk water station during the Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria in October 2019. The Alouk water station serves 460,000 people in Hasakah province, including Hasakah city and three camps for internally displaced Syrians.[519] According to the DoS, public reporting indicated that either Turkish-supported Syrian Opposition forces (TSO) or the Turkish government first shut down the Alouk water station on February 25. According to DoS field contacts, the action came in response to a Russian refusal to increase the power supply from Tishreen Dam to a Turkish-held power station.[520] According to Human Rights Watch, the TSOs or Turkish authorities have interrupted water pumping several times since the start of the year, with the latest interruption on March 29, even though uninterrupted access to water is a critical element of the fight against COVID-19.[521]

During this period, the Early Warning and Alert Response Network, the only disease surveillance group operating in Idlib province, assessed that between 40 and 70 percent of the population could become infected with COVID-19, based on global transmission rates.[522] In late March, academic researchers estimated that the maximum number of COVID-19 cases that could be treated adequately in Syria was 6,500. According to the researchers, once the number of cases passes this estimated threshold of 6,500, the healthcare system would likely collapse.[523]

The Syrian regime initially asserted that COVID-19 had not reached Syria. On March 22, the Syrian regime announced the first case in the country. However, Syrian opposition websites stated that COVID-19 had arrived in Syria much earlier, and that the Syrian regime was downplaying the pandemic. The Syrian regime publicly rejected these claims, stating that the only reliable information about the virus was on Syrian Health Ministry websites.[524] However, media reporting from March 27 stated that the Syrian regime banned travel between cities and provinces, implemented a curfew, halted flights, and ordered the closure of most businesses as part of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19.[525] In late March, researchers observed that the Syrian regime had introduced several preventive measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, but assessed that the Syrian regime lacked the will and ability to deflect the threat from Iran and its proxies in Syria.[526]

On March 23, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on warring parties in conflicts across the world to lay down their weapons in support of efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19. On March 24, UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, called for a ceasefire across the whole of Syria that would allow domestic and international actors space to address the COVID-19 pandemic hitting the country.[527] In late March, the World Health Organization (WHO) sent 300 COVID-19 tests to its partner in Idlib province and reported that an additional 5,000 would be forthcoming over the following week. Personal protective equipment was being distributed to 21 health care facilities. The WHO and its partners were training 540 health workers from 180 health facilities in northwestern Syria.[528]

Syrian Civil War in Political and Military Stalemate

VIOLENCE IN IDLIB INCREASES; UNITED STATES PLACES SANCTIONS ON SYRIAN REGIME OFFICIALS

The DoS reported that attacks by Syrian regime, Russian, and Iranian forces that intensified in December 2019 caused almost one million people in northwest Syria's Idlib province to flee for their lives, exacerbating a dire humanitarian crisis. The DoS reported that the United States placed sanctions on Syrian regime officials for the regime's role in the violence.[529]

The DoS reported that Turkey's October 2019 incursion undermined the D-ISIS campaign, endangered and displaced civilians, damaged critical infrastructure, and threatened security in the area.[530] The DoS reported that Turkey's priority in northwest Syria is to prevent the Syrian regime, Russia, and Iran from conquering Idlib, the last Syrian opposition stronghold.[531] The DoS said Syrian regime takeover of Idlib would "severely undercut [the U.S.] goal of resolving the Syrian conflict in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (UNSCR 2254)."[532] The DoS reported that Turkey is adhering to the

commitments made under the October 17 Joint Turkey-U.S. Statement on Northeast Syria, which calls for improving bilateral cooperation on terrorism and supporting the resolution of the broader Syrian conflict.[533]

In a press briefing on March 10, Ambassador James Jeffrey, Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, said that the U.S. Government's goal in Syria was to discuss"…with our European and NATO colleagues" the security, humanitarian, economic and diplomatic steps to take to "encourage Russia and Syria" not to break the ceasefire.[534]

TURKISH-SUPPORTED SYRIAN OPPOSITION MAY IMPEDE KURDISH IDPS FROM RETURNING TO THEIR HOMES

The DoS said it was "concerned" that the actions of some TSO groups under the Syrian National Army umbrella have prevented the return of many displaced Kurdish residents of northeast Syria.[535] The DoS said it was particularly "troubled" by reports of property seizures, looting, and intimidation that have led to a climate of fear.[536] According to the DoS, the Syrian National Army is an umbrella structure comprising more than two dozen smaller factions of Arab and Turkmen groups in northern Syria.[537]

The activities of TSO groups have also impeded the SDF's ability to fight ISIS because SDF efforts were focused on monitoring TSO activities, thereby limiting their ability to conduct D-ISIS operations and staff ISIS detention facilities.[538] The DoS said it remained concerned about reports of TSO groups who "may have engaged in violations of the law of armed conflict in northeast Syria," and that "Turkish officials have informed us they take these allegations seriously and are supporting" the opposition Syrian Interim Government's investigation into these actions.[539] Based in Gaziantep, Turkey, the Syrian Interim Government is linked to TSO groups, and "nominally" helps to administer Turkish-controlled areas of northern Syria, according to the DoS.[540] In some cases, the DoS reported, the Syrian Interim Government has tried, convicted, and sentenced perpetrators.[541]

NO PROGRESS ON POLITICAL RESOLUTION

This quarter the DoS said the United States continued to support the political process as described in UNSCR 2254, which calls for a new constitution and UN-supervised elections, but that Russia and the Syrian regime continued to impede progress toward a political solution.[542] Although the Syrian regime agreed to form the Constitutional Committee as stipulated in UNSCR 2254, the DoS said that "additional progress must be made" for a political resolution. The DoS blamed Russia and the Syrian regime for delaying tactics that stalled the constitutional committee process and continued to urge the United Nations and like-minded partners to find a solution to the conflict under UNSCR 2254.[543] As a way to help reach agreement, the DoS stated that the release of detainees would be a confidence building measure to establish the "minimum levels of trust required for genuine political compromise."[544]

When asked what alternatives the DoS is considering if UNSCR 2254 cannot be achieved, the DoS replied that "UNSCR 2254 is currently the only way to achieve U.S. policy goals in Syria…it is widely agreed to as the only way forward by the international community."[545]

The DoS reported that Turkey is adhering to the commitments made under the October 17 Joint Turkey-U.S. Statement on Northeast Syria, which calls for improving bilateral cooperation on terrorism and supporting the resolution of the broader Syrian conflict.

STABILIZATION

Stabilization Assistance Continues but Future Funding Remains Uncertain

According to USAID, as of December 2019, its Middle East Bureau funded approximately 240 stabilization projects in northeast Syria, which primarily focus on economic growth and food security via agricultural development in areas formerly controlled by ISIS. USAID reported that it also funds electricity and power rehabilitation projects, some water infrastructure projects, and governance and capacity building. These awards range in amount from as little as $500 to as much as $2.3 million.[546]

The DoS reported that it supports a range of stabilization programs in northeastern Syria that are designed to contribute to the lasting defeat of ISIS. Programming includes, but is not limited to support for:

- removal of explosive remnants of war and IEDs;

- restoration of essential services and the resumption of basic economic activity;

- capacity building for local governing bodies and civil society organizations to enhance their capacity to resist extremists, push back against the Syrian regime, resist Iranian influence, and to play a role in stabilizing their communities;

- support for independent media to provide locally relevant and accurate information that counters Syrian regime and extremist narratives and empowers citizens, including religious and ethnic minorities;

- assistance for schools, vocational training centers, and education providers to improve education access and quality, get children back into classrooms, and help underserved individuals enter the labor market; and

- reintegration and reconciliation efforts that seek to promote community cohesion; address the specific needs of underserved populations, such as religious and ethnic minorities; and help prevent the resurgence of radical ideologies.

Active programming under these areas includes at least 65 activities totaling at least $16.8 million.[547]

Last quarter, USAID and the DoS paused some activities until the U.S. Government had determined what groups or actors were in control of territory in order to prevent aid from going to adversaries or malign actors. This quarter, according to USAID, the temporary pause on many stabilization programs ended with all activities either resuming outside of the negotiated Turkey-controlled corridor or being permanently suspended. USAID described conditions in northeast Syria as a "cautious calm" following concern and uncertainty that followed the decision to withdraw U.S. forces in October 2019.[548]

According to USAID and the DoS, implementing partners continue to face uncertainty due to funding limits. With donor funds nearly expended, and the Presidential funding freeze still in place for Syria stabilization, programming has decelerated pending additional resources. According to USAID, additional donor commitments remain pending.[549]

According to USAID, as of December 2019, its Middle East Bureau funded approximately 240 stabilization projects in northeast Syria, which primarily focus on economic growth and food security via agricultural development in areas formerly controlled by ISIS.

USAID has approximately $5 million and the DoS has $50 million in donor funds that will be obligated this year along with $16.5 million that is pending congressional notification.[550] According to USAID and the DoS, this funding will enable USAID and the DoS to continue existing stabilization assistance mechanisms in areas liberated from ISIS and to support programs that help prevent the return of ISIS.[551] According to USAID and the DoS, these amounts are expected to provide 12 to 18 months of limited programming, but activities could be ramped up to expand scope and spend faster if additional funds come online.[552] By contrast, in neighboring Iraq, USAID and the DoS have more than $1 billion in stabilization funding.[553]

STABILIZATION ACTIVITIES STOP IN AREAS CONTROLLED BY SYRIAN REGIME, TURKISH, AND RUSSIAN FORCES

This quarter the Assistance Coordination office in the Near East Asia Bureau (NEA/AC) reported that implementing partners for stabilization activities in northeast Syria moved out of areas that came under Turkish, Syrian regime, and Russian control after the Turkish incursion in the fall of 2019. Implementing partners resumed operations in other areas of northeast Syria not controlled by Turkey, the Syrian regime, or Russia. The DoS said that its Syrian partners assess the security situation daily and adjust or pause certain activities as necessary. The DoS reported that NEA partners completed existing infrastructure rehabilitation activities in Raqqah and Tabqa during the first quarter of 2020, and continue to provide capacity-building support and some operational support to maintain essential services in these areas.[554]

Due to the dynamic security situation in northeast Syria, the DoS withdrew the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team–Forward (START) personnel from Syria last year. However, the USAID and DoS staff, including those at START and the Southern Syria Assistance Platform, continued to manage and oversee stabilization and humanitarian assistance programming from the United States and U.S. embassies in the region.[555]

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Syria Ill-situated to Prepare Effectively for and Respond to COVID-19

On March 23, the Syrian government confirmed its first case of COVID-19, as fears mounted of an outbreak that could have catastrophic consequences on the war-torn country.

On March 23, the Syrian government confirmed its first case of COVID-19, as fears mounted of an outbreak that could have catastrophic consequences on the war-torn country. According to media reporting, the announcement came after insistence by the Syrian regime that Iran-backed fighters and Shia pilgrims had not already brought COVID-19 to Syria, despite reports from healthcare workers in the capital that patients had presented with symptoms consistent with COVID-19.[556] The WHO assessed that Syria's "fragile health systems may not have the capacity to detect and respond" to the pandemic.[557] On March 30, the UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs briefed the UN Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria, and stated that 10 cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed in Syria, including one death. According to the United Nations, the virus has the potential to have a devastating impact on vulnerable communities across the country. Syria's health services are extremely fragile, as only approximately half of its hospitals and primary healthcare centers were fully functional at the end of last year.[558]

According to the United Nations, as in other countries, the WHO-led response advises a focus on prevention and preparedness. That includes preparing front-line humanitarian workers, most of whom are Syrians, to interact safely with communities. According to the United Nations, UN-supported surveillance and early warning systems have been reinforced across the country, in a joint effort with the relevant authorities. The United Nations reported that preparedness and response plans have been developed and the pre-positioning of equipment and supplies, the rehabilitation of the Central Public Health Laboratory, the upgrading of available isolation units, and community engagement programs were all underway.[559]

According to the United Nations, all efforts to prevent, detect, and respond to COVID-19 are impeded by Syria's fragile health system; by high levels of population movement; difficulty in obtaining critical supplies, including protective equipment and ventilators; and by the practical difficulties of implementing isolation and protective measures in areas of displacement with high population density and low levels of sanitation services.[560]

Humanitarian Actors in Northeast Syria Face Access Restrictions and Funding Difficulties

Following the escalation of conflict in northeast Syria in October 2019, localized clashes along the Turkish-Syrian border continued throughout January despite ceasefire agreements. As of January, some 650,000 people were displaced in northeast Syria, including 70,590 people who had been displaced since October. Hasakah province, which received most of the IDPs during the fighting, saw a corresponding increase of humanitarian operations in January, according to the United Nations. On January 10, the United Nations Security Council decided not to renew the mandate to operate one of the three border crossings in northern Syria that facilitate humanitarian aid—the Al Yarubiyeh border crossing between Syria and Iraq—due to the threat of a veto by Russia. The closure of Al Yarubiyeh reduced the amount of health supplies, as the WHO had used Al Yarubiyeh as a primary conduit of supplies to northeast Syria.[561] The closure has created gaps in the health sector in northeast Syria with 40 percent of the medical aid cutoff, according to the United Nations.[562]

According to USAID, the United Nations' use of the Al Yarubiyeh crossing previously enabled the delivery of essential humanitarian supplies to support an estimated 1.4 million people in northeast Syria. As of December 2019, more than 100 medical facilities across northeast Syria were being supported by aid groups receiving a significant amount of their medical supplies from the United Nations through Al Yarubiyeh. At least 50 of those facilities relied entirely on medicines provided cross-border.[563] According to USAID, the non-UN border crossing, Faysh Khabur, is used by NGO partners to transport food, non-food items, and non-medical humanitarian aid. According to USAID, NGOs do not currently have sufficient procurement capacity to completely replace the supplies provided by the United Nations through Al Yarubiyeh, and concerns around COVID-19 are triggering precautionary measures that further limit the movement of people and goods between Iraq and Syria.[564]

According to the Northeast Syria NGO forum, the loss of Al Yarubiyeh also resulted in a $16 million funding gap for programs in the region.[565] According to the DoS, the gap largely stems from the inability of the United Nations to contribute to pooled funding mechanisms,
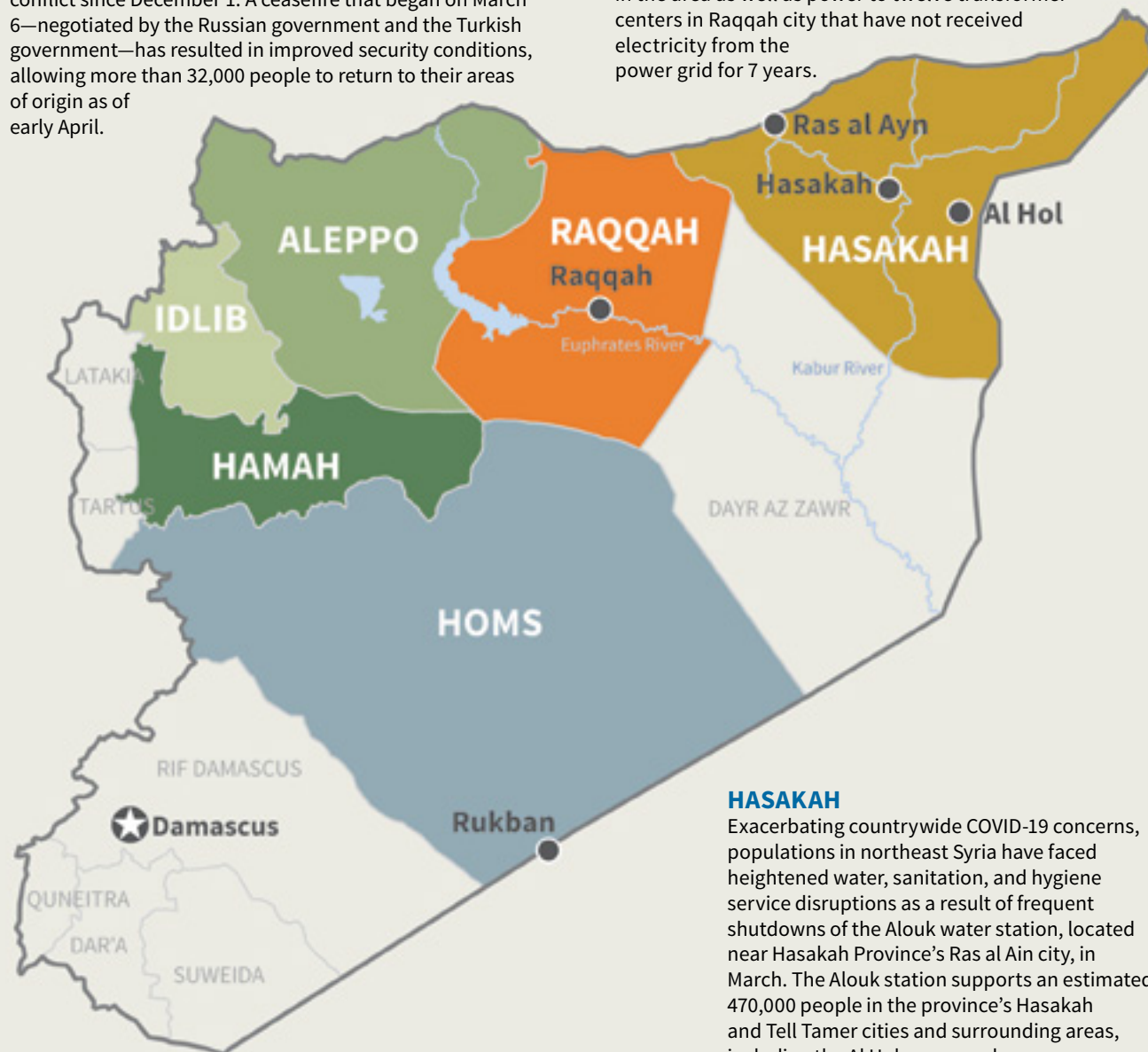
SYRIA: QUARTERLY FOCUS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

IDLIB, WESTERN ALEPPO, AND NORTHWESTERN HAMA

As of early March, nearly 2.9 million IDPs were sheltering in northwest Syria, according to the UN. The figure includes approximately 940,000 people who have been displaced by conflict since December 1. A ceasefire that began on March 6—negotiated by the Russian government and the Turkish government—has resulted in improved security conditions, allowing more than 32,000 people to return to their areas of origin as of early April.

RAQQAH

In March, with support from USAID, the Raqqa Electricity and Communications Committee (ECC) concluded repairs to power lines connecting three major power stations. The ECC utilized the increased power to supply neighborhoods in the area as well as power to twelve transformer centers in Raqqah city that have not received electricity from the power grid for 7 years.

HASAKAH

Exacerbating countrywide COVID-19 concerns, populations in northeast Syria have faced heightened water, sanitation, and hygiene service disruptions as a result of frequent shutdowns of the Alouk water station, located near Hasakah Province's Ras al Ain city, in March. The Alouk station supports an estimated 470,000 people in the province's Hasakah and Tell Tamer cities and surrounding areas, including the Al Hol camp, and serves as a critical resource for safe drinking water and sanitation services.

RUKBAN

According to the United Nations, COVID-19-related border closures have significantly restricted access to emergency medical care for an estimated 10,000 people sheltering at the informal Rukban settlement. From March 25 to 29, approximately 70 individuals voluntarily departed Rukban, and are now receiving humanitarian assistance from the WHO.

Sources: Lead IG Analyses based on inputs from USAID, UN, and media reports

Figure 3.

Number of Individuals in Syrian IDP Camps, as of March 1, 2020
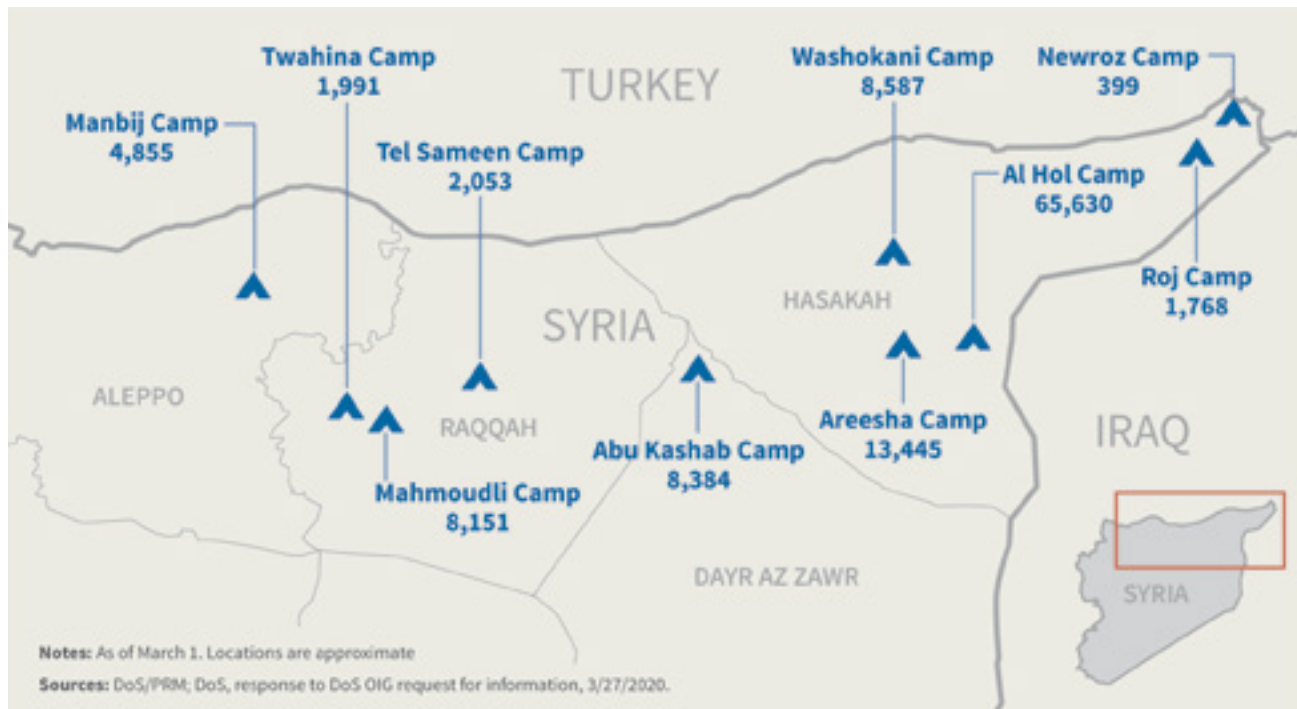
which serve as a significant funding source for NGOs operating there.[566] According to DoS/PRM, the funding gap will have consequences for health, education, and mine action programs.

The busiest field hospital in Al Hol—and the only facility dealing with burn cases and providing 24-hour services, including an intensive care unit—was scheduled to stop functioning by the end of March, but has received additional funding to keep operating until the end of August, according to the DoS. In addition, the referral desk in Al Hol was expected to shut down and a critical primary health care center providing 4,000 consultations per month in Raqqah city was expected to stop functioning by the end of April.[567]

Adolescent centers for youth (including foreign nationals), child-friendly spaces, educational activities, and case management centers are closed due to COVID-19 prevention measures. These centers continue to face funding pressures due to gaps in donor funding, and may need to reduce services when they re-open.[568]

According to the United Nations, plans to establish two mine clearance teams to conduct two non-technical surveys, to conduct contamination impact surveys, and to identify and mark explosive hazards cannot proceed. Levels of explosive remnants of war contamination in northeast Syria remain globally unprecedented and ensuring the continuation and expansion of clearance activities is one of several critical pre-conditions for restoring basic services (such as health centers and water stations) and enabling safe returns.[569]

Humanitarian Catastrophe Worsens in Idlib

According to USAID, from December 1, 2019, to March 8, 2020, a Syrian government and Russian government offensive—including airstrikes, shelling, and ground attacks—displaced more than 959,000 people from and within northwest Syria's Aleppo and Idlib provinces, including approximately 444,000 people displaced during February alone. The displacement in the 10-week period from early December to mid-February represents the single largest volume of displacement since the Syria crisis began in 2011, according to the United Nations. An estimated 81 percent of refugees are women and children, with most having been displaced multiple times.[570] Children, who are particularly vulnerable during times of displacement, represent approximately 60 percent of the newly displaced population. Numerous children have reportedly died due to recent adverse winter weather conditions, including snow and below-freezing temperatures, according to relief actors.[571]

According to USAID, despite a vigorous international relief effort, the surge in humanitarian needs in northwest Syria continues to outpace relief agencies' collective ability to meet them, as hostilities continue to impede assistance efforts. Damage to civilian infrastructure—including bakeries, hospitals, markets, schools, and power and water plants—is further exacerbating IDPs' vulnerabilities and forcing humanitarian organizations to relocate activities. Several USAID partners were forced to suspend or partially suspend some activities in conflict-affected areas of Idlib and Aleppo; however, partners with more mobile programming—including food and relief commodity distributions—relocated their distribution points to areas receiving new arrivals.[572]

The United Nations reported that shelter conditions for the recently displaced were of high concern due to winter weather conditions, as approximately 48 percent of IDPs are housed in emergency shelters, such as tents, and approximately 16 percent of IDPs are in sub-standard shelters, such as unfinished or abandoned buildings. The sudden influx in displacement, particularly northward to overcrowded areas near the Syria-Turkey border, has strained existing humanitarian services, having exceeded even the largest planning figures, according to USAID. Partners report that formal camps such as Atmeh are at capacity and while humanitarian organizations have significantly ramped up their distributions of critical supplies and service delivery, the pace and number of displacements has strained the

$55 million
Since 2013, USAID has provided more than $55 million to fund the Syria Civil Defense

32 attacks
This quarter, the Syrian Civil Defense reported 32 attacks from the Syrian regime and their allies on their teams and centers that resulted in 2 deaths of and 31 injured SCD volunteers

122,000 lives
Since 2013, the Syria Civil Defense has saved more than 122,000 lives in Syria. Since 2016, they have responded to more than 35,500 attacks, provided first aid more than 75,000 times, responded to nearly 10,000 fires, and conducted more than 8,000 awareness-raising activities

Source: USAID/ME Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/23/2020.

capacity and resources. Overall, the United Nations estimated that there were nearly 2.9 million IDPs in northwest Syria as of February 2020.[573]

In early March, the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria released a report focusing on events of July 2019 to January 2020, particularly attacks by military forces on civilian targets such as medical facilities. The report documented war crimes committed by the Syrian government, including indiscriminate airstrikes and the use of cluster munitions in civilian areas.[574]

The findings of another UN report, prepared by the UN Headquarters Board of Inquiry established to investigate allegations that facilities on the UN deconfliction list were destroyed as a result of military operations, were made public on April 6. The report "found it highly probable" that several strikes investigated "had been conducted by the Government of Syria and/or its allies" but then stated that the evidence was "not sufficient for it to reach" conclusive findings.[575] Prior media reporting stated that such strikes were attributable to the Russian Federation.[576]

Informal Settlements

PRM deferred to the DoD on security issues surrounding informal settlements and security shortfalls.[577] According to an NGO report released in January 2020, there are 11 formal and large informal camps for IDPs and refugees in Hasakah and Raqqah provinces in northeast Syria, with a combined population of 27,000 households.[578] The IDP population steadily increased this past quarter in Newroz and Tuwayhinah camps. According to USAID, implementing partners have also increased their response to meet additional needs in these informal camps.[579]

SUPPORT TO MISSION

Ordered Departure and Restricted Operations Limit Mission in Iraq's Activities

On March 25, Secretary Pompeo approved an ordered departure from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the Consulate General in Erbil, and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center for U.S. direct hire employees, as determined by the Chief of Mission, who cannot perform their normal functions due to increased security concerns and global travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although U.S. Government contractors are not categorized as employees for evacuation purposes, the longstanding DoS policy offers contractors the same evacuation opportunities and assistance as members of the official U.S. community.[580]

According to the DoS, the U.S. Mission in Iraq has been operating at a minimum staffing posture since last year and constantly evaluates its procedures and operations in light of continued threats and ongoing events. Not only have personnel and facilities been under threat from indirect fire at the embassy compound, but there have also been threats against mission supply routes, U.S. Government travelers using the Baghdad International Airport, DoS aircraft, locally employed staff, and Iraqi officials working with the mission. Recently, the COVID-19 crisis has presented a different kind of vulnerability, particularly due to the compound-style environment at both the embassy compound and Baghdad Diplomatic

Overall, the United Nations estimated that there were nearly 2.9 million IDPs in northwest Syria as of February 2020.

Support Center. According to the DoS, while the embassy already has taken steps to mitigate some of these vulnerabilities, many persist.[581]

The December 31 assault on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad compound by Iranian-backed militias caused severe damage to the main Baghdad Embassy Compound access points and rendered the Consular Compound Access Control unusable. The DoS reported that Visa Services in Baghdad are expected to be closed to the public for another 12 to 18 months. The embassy said it has identified low-cost solutions so that it may restart limited American Citizen Services. Over the long term, staffing adjustments, including adding positions to Consulate Erbil, would allow the Mission in Iraq to manage the current workload changes, the DoS said.[582]

The DoS reported that the Iraqi government instituted a curfew in Baghdad and Erbil, and the Baghdad International Airport was closed until March 24 for commercial flights. The embassy is not permitting outside visitors, meetings, or events on the compound, unless they are deemed critical by the Front Office. Currently, all access to the country, including for construction teams, is being scrutinized. Construction work on Erbil's New Consulate Compound continues but at a reduced rate. Manpower is limited to workers in the main camp, construction material deliveries have been completely shut down, concrete production has ceased, and travel restrictions prevent most personnel movement.[583]

Baghdad as seen from a Spanish Army helicopter as its flies over the city during a mission in January. (U.S. Air Force photo)

Assessing Impact of Military Financing and Training Assistance

In response to a DoS request that it assess its Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) programming, the embassy noted that the FMF and IMET are part of a considerable U.S. strategic effort to build an effective, civilian-controlled, self-sustaining ISF. According to the DoS, paramount to this endeavor is professionalization, which entails an effort to increase the ISF's ability to sustain security investments made to date. Because counter-ISIS combat operations have transitioned to low-intensity operations, FY 2019 FMF will be directed at:

- reducing dependence on contracted logistics services;
- filling critical capability gaps;
- professional military education;
- select combat system upgrades/modernization;
- limited combat loss replacement for major combat systems; and
- defense institution building and security sector reform.[584]

The U.S. Embassy in Iraq assessed that substantial changes to the FMF and IMET programs would be considered, in consultation with the Bureaus of Political-Military Affairs and Near Eastern Affairs, if there were significant failures by the Iraqi government to protect sensitive U.S. technology, protect the diplomatic mission, or demonstrate an interest in maximizing the benefit available from a given program. Also, if the ISF were determined to have committed gross violations of human rights, then OSC-I would be prohibited from implementing U.S. security assistance to those units.[585]

At the end of the quarter, the DoS reported that the ISF had not used all available IMET funding. Until such time as the ISF utilized all available IMET funds, OSC-I will not consider requesting additional funds.[586] Increased utilization of IMET funds by the ISF or cost sharing by the Iraqi government would justify a request for increased IMET funding.[587]

Audit Finds Flaws in Contracts for Base Support in Iraq

During the quarter, the DoD OIG completed an audit of the Army's management of contractor-supported services at Camp Taji, a facility near Baghdad that has been the site of rocket attacks by Iranian-backed militias. Camp Taji was turned over to the Iraqi government in 2013, but U.S. troops share the facility with the ISF, and the U.S. Army has awarded contracts for services, including base security, lodging, meals, potable water, emergency, and fire response. The DoD OIG made several recommendations to address poorly defined contract requirements that had led to CJTF-OIR overpaying $116 million to the contractor, as well as to address possible environmental hazards from improper waste disposal in burn pits. More details are contained in the Oversight section of this report on page 84.

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies' strategic planning efforts; completed, ongoing, and planned Lead IG and partner agencies' oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; Lead IG investigations; and hotline activities from January 1 through March 31, 2020.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Pursuant to Section 8L of the Inspector General Act, 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 2020 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. That oversight plan is updated each year.

The FY 2020 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for Operation Inherent Resolve, effective October 1, 2019, organized OIR-related oversight projects into three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations and Security Cooperation; 2) Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development; and 3) Support to Mission. The strategic plan was included in the FY 2020 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations.

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 Africa, Southwest Asia, Southeast Asia, and 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 (GAO), and the OIGs from the Departments of Justice, the Treasury, Energy, and Homeland Security.

The most recent meeting of the Joint Planning Group in February 2020 featured Christopher P. Maier, who leads the DoD's Defeat–Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Task Force. Mr. Maier spoke about the role of the Defeat-ISIS Task Force in the U.S. Government's campaign to achieve an enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.

FY 2020 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 these missions. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

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

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development focuses on 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 food, water, medical care, emergency relief, and shelter to people affected by crisis
- Assisting and protecting internally displaced persons and refugees
- 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. Some oversight staff from the Lead IG agencies are stationed in offices in Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, and Germany. Oversight teams from these offices and from offices in the United States travel to Iraq, Kuwait, and other locations in the region to conduct fieldwork for their projects.

However, the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic reduced the Lead IG agencies' ability to conduct oversight on projects related to overseas contingency operations. Due to the evacuation of many deployed staff and country-imposed travel restrictions, some oversight projects by Lead IG agencies have been delayed or deferred. The Lead IG agencies reported that their personnel will be able to conduct some work while teleworking and practicing social distancing, but may consider adjustments in project scope of work or in timelines for completing the oversight work.

Despite these restrictions and limitations, which were imposed relatively late in the quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed 13 reports related to OIR during the quarter. These reports examined various activities that support OIR, including: the DoD's oversight of U.S. military equipment retrograded from Syria, as well as equipment designated for vetted Syria opposition groups; Combined Joint Task Force-OIR's (CJTF-OIR) Military Information Support Operations (MISO) conducted to counter ISIS in Iraq and Syria; the Army's oversight of contractor-provided base operations support services at Camp Taji, Iraq; the Air Force's readiness related to its unmanned aircraft systems; and Department of State (DoS) oversight of fuel management at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Turkey and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. Lead IG partner agencies also issued reports related to internal controls and accounting for security-related equipment, transportation of personnel, and physical and financial management of fuel distribution at Air Force installations supporting the OIR mission; and the Department of Justice's (DoJ) policies, procedures, and practices for monitoring inmates with ties to domestic and foreign terrorism, and efforts to prevent further radicalization.

As of March 31, 2020, 24 projects related to OIR were ongoing and 19 projects related to OIR were planned.

Final Reports by Lead IG Agencies

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of United States Military Equipment Retrograded from Syria
DODIG-2020-075; March 31, 2020

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoD secured and accounted for the U.S. military equipment retrograded from Syria.

The U.S. military withdrew theater-provided equipment (TPE) from Syria through the retrograde process of moving equipment from a forward location to a restoration program or another location to satisfy a different requirement. TPE is non-unit equipment owned by U.S.

Army Materiel Command that is available for issue to units in Southwest Asia, and includes items such as vehicles, laptops, and communication devices. The TPE retrograded from Syria did not include any lethal equipment. As of August 2019, the Army had retrograded 1,124 pieces of TPE, valued at $45.6 million, from Syria.

The DoD OIG determined there were instances where the Army did not properly account for U.S. military equipment retrograded from Syria. From the universe of 1,124 pieces of TPE valued at $45.6 million, the DoD OIG reviewed TPE retrograded from Syria as of August 2019 through the Erbil Redistribution Property Accountability Team (RPAT) facility and selected a statistical sample of 192 pieces of TPE valued at $6.9 million. Of the 192 pieces of TPE in the sample selected, the DoD OIG found that the Army properly accounted for 113 pieces of TPE, valued at $2.8 million. However, the DoD OIG found that 79 of the 192 pieces of TPE, valued at $4.1 million, were not properly accounted for as required by DoD and Army policies. The 79 pieces of TPE not accounted for properly consisted of 69 pieces that were not accounted for while in transit and 10 pieces found on installation that were not entered in the accountability system. However, the DoD OIG verified the existence of all equipment in the sample, with the exception of 14 pieces of TPE that were in use by units in SWA, and determined that the Army did not lose any of the TPE in the sample. Although the Army did not lose any of the TPE, the DoD OIG statistically projected that the Army did not continuously account for 559 pieces of TPE from the universe of 1,124 pieces of TPE. TPE that is not accounted for while being transferred is at an increased risk of loss. In addition, if the Army does not enter found-on-installation equipment into the accountable property systems of record, Army officials have less visibility of the available equipment to make supply-chain decisions. By properly accounting for TPE in an accountable property system of record, the Army can reduce the risk of asset loss. Adequately accounting for TPE will also provide the Army better TPE visibility and improve asset management. Improvements in TPE accountability will positively impact future equipment retrogrades from Syria and retrogrades from other future contingency locations.

In addition, regarding the security of U.S. military equipment retrograded from Syria, the DoD OIG determined that the Army properly secured storage facilities at Camp Arifjan that contained U.S. military equipment retrograded from Syria. The DoD OIG determined that the Army followed the physical security requirements for Army property as stated in Army Regulation and the Army Prepositioned Stock–Kuwait and Qatar Security Plan. Because the Army properly secured the storage facilities at Camp Arifjan, the DoD OIG determined that the Army did not lose any TPE in the sample of items that were retrograded from Syria and stored at Camp Arifjan facilities.

During the audit, the DoD OIG held discussions with RPAT personnel and the Commander of the 401st Army Field Support Battalion–Southwest Asia regarding transferred TPE and found-on-installation accounting discrepancies identified during the audit. The Erbil RPAT personnel resolved Internet connectivity problems by entering TPE transfers into an in-transit status in the Army War Reserve Deployment System to ensure TPE was continuously accounted for. In addition, RPAT personnel took immediate action to account for found-on-installation equipment still located at the RPAT facility. Further, the Commander issued a memorandum to RPAT personnel in December 2019 reiterating

the need to follow existing guidance to account for found-on-installation equipment. Management actions taken addressed the concerns the DoD OIG identified; therefore, the report contained no recommendations.

Audit of the Army's Base Life Support Contract for Camp Taji, Iraq

DODIG-2020-069; March 18, 2020

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether CJTF-OIR and the Army ensured that the contractors provided base operations support services at Camp Taji, Iraq, in accordance with contract requirements.

After Coalition forces withdrew from Iraq, the Iraqi government took control of Camp Taji and authorized one contractor sole operation of the camp's facilities. By 2014, the security situation in Iraq had deteriorated and U.S. military presence in the country increased. Camp Taji was identified as a base of operations from which the Iraqi Government, the DoD, and Coalition partners could perform their mission to defeat ISIS. Subsequently, the Army awarded contracts in 2015 and 2019 for services such as base security, billeting, lodging, meals, potable water, emergency response, fire response and prevention, hazardous material storage, and electric power generation.

The DoD OIG identified weaknesses in the Camp Taji base life support (BLS) contract terms and performance work statement requirements. Therefore, the DoD OIG expanded the scope of the audit to determine whether CJTF-OIR included DoD and Army criteria related to BLS services in the contract and to determine whether the Army awarded the Camp Taji BLS contract in accordance with Federal and DoD contracting criteria.

The DoD OIG determined that for the Camp Taji BLS contracts, CJTF-OIR did not define DoD and Army-specific requirements for BLS services; the 408th Contracting Support Brigade and Army Contracting Command-Rock Island each awarded contracts that caused CJTF-OIR to pay for services that it did not use; and CJTF-OIR's contract oversight personnel did not verify the accuracy of the contractor's invoices. As a result of poorly defined contract requirements, inadequate pricing structure, and lack of invoice oversight, CJTF-OIR paid $116 million more than necessary for the Camp Taji BLS contracts from 2015 to 2018. In addition, in the absence of a contract requirement to dispose of solid waste in accordance with U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) environmental guidance, the contractor continued to use its commercially available, and Iraqi government-approved, solid waste disposal method of dumping solid waste at a site in the Camp Taji Amber Zone, which the Iraqis would later burn in open pits.

Among other recommendations, the DoD OIG recommended that the CJTF-OIR Commander review and update the performance work statement to include DoD and Army requirements that are applicable to BLS services at Camp Taji; and review the actions of the logistics officials responsible for developing Camp Taji BLS requirements and take appropriate action, if warranted, to hold the necessary officials accountable or to improve generation of future contract requirements. The DoD OIG recommended that, to verify the accuracy of the Camp Taji population reported by the contractor, the Camp Taji Base Operations Support-Integrator (BOS-I) Officer in Charge use the CJTF-OIR personnel status reports for BOS-I's daily occupancy tracker to ensure CJTF-OIR is paying for the

correct number of personnel; implement and use common access card readers to track personnel who enter or depart Camp Taji; and include steps in the quality assurance surveillance plan or standard operating procedures to ensure all staff members with responsibilities related to the contractor population are coordinating their activities.

CJTF-OIR initially disagreed with the DoD OIG's recommendations regarding reviewing and updating the performance work statement to include all DoD and Army requirements that are applicable to BLS services at Camp Taji, as well as the recommendation regarding performing a review of the actions of the logistics officials. However, CJTF-OIR did state that, after the installation of incinerators is completed, CJTF-OIR will update the performance work statement to add a requirement to dispose of solid waste through incineration.

CJTF-OIR agreed with the DoD OIG recommendations to improve BOS-I's tracking of Camp Taji's population, but did not address the specifics of the DoD OIG recommendation to formally document overlapping responsibilities related to the contractor population to ensure oversight personnel coordinate their activities. The DoD OIG requested additional comments. Subsequent to the final report issuance in March, the CJTF-OIR Commander agreed with all DoD OIG recommendations and provided a comprehensive reply in April for DoD OIG consideration in closing out all recommendations against CJTF-OIR in the report. At the time of publication, this was still under review by the DoD OIG. The full report is unclassified, for official use only and the publicly released report is redacted.

Evaluation of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve's Military Information Support Operations
DODIG-2020-065; February 25, 2020

The DoD OIG evaluated whether CJTF-OIR effectively planned and executed MISO conducted to counter ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

MISO is designed to develop and convey messages and devise actions to influence select foreign groups and to promote themes to change those groups' attitudes and behaviors. These information support operations influence foreign attitudes and beliefs about U.S. diplomatic, informational, military, and economic power and resolve. MISO is integrated with the U.S. embassy's country-wide and geographic combatant commander's theater-wide priorities and objectives to shape the security environment to promote bilateral cooperation, ease tension, and deter aggression. In 2014, the Joint Staff directed USCENTCOM to provide a Military Information Support Team at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to advise and assist the Iraqi Ministry of Defense with MISO competencies. USCENTCOM also provided internet-based MISO for CJTF-OIR and the USCENTCOM area of responsibility. Between 2016 and 2019, USCENTCOM and CJTF-OIR also developed campaign plans and operation orders with MISO tasks to counter ISIS. CJTF-OIR efforts included processes for disseminating MISO products and a methodology to assess MISO impact on ISIS propaganda.

The DoD OIG determined that U.S. forces in Iraq planned and executed MISO in accordance with joint doctrine and also coordinated MISO with Coalition forces, the Government of Iraq, and DoS. However, after the defeat of ISIS's physical caliphate in May

2019, U.S. forces and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad did not initiate the required coordination to transition messaging responsibility from the DoD to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. As a result, the DoD OIG found that there is an increased risk that the U.S. Government will not be able to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in the Iraqi information environment after OIR has concluded. Additionally, the lack of coordination of information activities between the DoD and the DoS could produce inconsistent U.S. Government messaging in a post-OIR Iraq.

Management neither agreed nor disagreed and stated that the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy considers transition of post-OIR military information support operations, and broader information operations, to be an operational-level planning function best led by the Combatant Command. The DoD OIG redirected the recommendation to USCENTCOM and a response was pending at the time the report was issued.

The full report is classified and the publicly released report is redacted.

Audit of the DoD's Accountability of Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund Equipment Designated for Syria
DODIG-2020-061; February 13, 2020

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoD properly accounted for and stored Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund equipment designated for Syria (CTEF-S) from procurement through divestment in accordance with guidance.

Divestment refers to the transfer of ownership and accountability of equipment from the DoD to the DoD-approved vetted Syrian opposition. The U.S. Government strategy to counter ISIS directed the DoD to conduct a campaign to degrade, dismantle, and ultimately defeat ISIS. The focus of the DoD's strategy to counter ISIS is to work with the vetted Syrian opposition and the Iraqi Security Forces to build key security force capabilities, help professionalize security forces in Syria and, in Iraq, and to promote long-term stability in these countries and the region.

The DoD OIG determined that Special Operations Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (SOJTF-OIR) personnel did not account for $715.8 million of budgeted CTEF-S equipment from procurement through divestment for FY 2017 and 2018 in accordance with DoD Instruction 5000.64 and Army Regulation 735-5. Additionally, 1st Theater Sustainment Command (1st TSC) personnel did not properly store or secure CTEF-S equipment a warehouse in Kuwait in accordance with DoD guidance, Army regulations, or SOJTF-OIR standard operating procedures. For FY 2020, the DoD requested a budget of $173.2 million for weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and other CTEF-S equipment. Without accurate accountability records, such as inventory records and hand receipts, SOJTF-OIR personnel could order equipment that SOJTF-OIR already has in stock, risking unnecessary spending of CTEF-S funds and further overcrowding the Kuwait warehouse. Furthermore, the DoD OIG found that SOJTF-OIR and 1st TSC personnel placed thousands of CTEF-S weapons and sensitive equipment items at greater risk of loss or theft. Without conducting consistent inventories and ensuring proper security for CTEF-S equipment, the 1st TSC could not determine whether items were lost or stolen, which could delay the initiation of an investigation.

A Green Beret demonstrates how to fix a firing malfunction on an assault rifle to partner force soldiers of the Mughawir al Thawra, at the Tanf Garrison, Syria.
(U.S. Army photo)

The DoD OIG recommended that the Commander of SOJTF-OIR develop a central repository system for all documentation required to support CTEF-S equipment requested on the memorandum of requirement through the entire divestment process. The DoD OIG also recommended that the Commander of SOJTF-OIR develop guidance for the proper disposal of CTEF-S unserviceable equipment stored at the Kuwait warehouse. Additionally, the DoD OIG recommended that the Commander of the 1st TSC complete a physical security inspection periodically, but no less than every 18 months, and ensure corrective action is taken to fix new and existing security issues identified. Management agreed with the recommendations.

The full report is classified and the publicly released report is redacted.

Evaluation of Weather Support Capabilities for the MQ-9 Reaper

DODIG-2020-059; February 5, 2020

The DoD OIG evaluated whether Air Force officials followed the normal acquisition process to develop and deliver weather support capabilities for the MQ-9 Reaper.

Weather support capabilities provide near-real time weather conditions and observations, enhancing forecasting, pilot situational awareness, mission planning and execution, and command and control of the unmanned aircraft system. However, the DoD OIG found that the Air Force did not validate the requirement for the capabilities.

The DoD OIG determined that, between FYs 2010 and 2016, the Air Force spent $17.7 million in overseas contingency operations funding to develop enhanced weather

support capabilities for the MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aircraft system, instead of using research, development, test, and evaluation funds.

As a result, the Air Force wasted $17.7 million dollars in overseas contingency operations funding developing a capability that was not needed and never delivered. The Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Cyber Effects Operations, responding for the Commander of the Air Combat Command, agreed with the recommendation to share the results of the study conducted for MQ-9 weather tolerance activities with the other Services.

The Air Force's Auditor General agreed with the recommendation to conduct a review of Air Force Components' use of Overseas Contingency Operations funding to develop innovation projects and stated that a follow-up audit is expected to be completed on September 30, 2021.

The full report is unclassified, for official use only and the publicly released report is redacted.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Mission Turkey and Embassy Beirut Fuel Oversight and Payment Process
AUD-MERO-20-19; January 30, 2020

The DoS OIG conducted this audit to determine whether DoS oversight officials adequately ensured that contractor-provided fuel at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Turkey and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, met contract terms and conformed to Federal regulations and DoS guidance. U.S. diplomats in Turkey and Lebanon are intimately involved in activities that affect security and development in Syria and Iraq.

The DoS OIG found that oversight of fuel contractors at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Turkey and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut needed improvement to ensure compliance with contract terms. Specifically, the DoS OIG determined that contracting officers did not always appoint contracting officer's representatives to oversee fuel contractors, nor did they properly accept fuel from the contractors. Also, the DoS OIG found that contracting officers did not develop and implement quality assurance surveillance plans to ensure that contractual requirements were met, and they did not maintain complete contract files. The DoS OIG also found that DoS officials did not conform with Federal regulations and guidance regarding fuel payments at these locations. Specifically, the DoS OIG found that oversight officials did not verify that invoices included all of the required information to make them proper or to certify them for payment, and they did not always verify that prices complied with contract terms.

The DoS OIG made 33 recommendations to officials in Turkey and 11 recommendations to officials at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut to improve contract oversight and payment procedures and to safeguard against improper payments. On the basis of the response from DoS officials in Turkey, the DoS OIG considered all 33 recommendations resolved pending further action at the time the report was issued. Because officials from the U.S. Embassy in Beirut did not respond timely to the draft of the report, the DoS OIG considered all 11 recommendations unresolved at the time the report was issued.

Final Reports by Partner Agencies

AIR FORCE AUDIT AGENCY

Security Forces Equipment and Training 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, Jordan
F2020-0004-RA0000; January 21, 2020

The Air Force Audit Agency (AFAA) conducted this audit to determine the sufficiency of the condition and quantity of security forces' individual protective and deployable equipment and whether security force personnel have received necessary training on equipment needed to perform mission requirements.

The 332nd Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron provides security and force protection at the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing (AEW), Jordan. As part of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 332nd AEW provides air power to support USCENTCOM throughout the region, including in the CJTF-OIR area of operations.

Security forces personnel receive, account for, and maintain individual protective and unit equipment to accomplish their mission. As of November 2019, the 332nd Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron maintained 307 pieces of individual protective and unit equipment valued at over $875,000. This equipment included helmets, ballistic vests, plates, eye protection, and hearing protection.

The AFAA reviewed the quantity and condition of security force personnel's individual protective and equipment and whether personnel received training on unit equipment to perform mission requirements. The AFAA determined that security forces personnel were equipped and trained to meet mission requirements. However, the AFAA found that security forces personnel did not properly account for 44 (41 percent) of 107 items valued at approximately $268,000. Accurately accounting for equipment provides visibility over assets essential to the Air Force mission and helps reduce the potential for loss, theft, or misuse of assets. As a result, the Air Force risks not being able to account for assets essential to the Air Force mission, increasing the potential for loss, theft, or misuse of assets.

The AFAA made three recommendations to the 332nd AEW Commander to improve the effectiveness of equipment accountability: add the 44 unaccounted for unit equipment items to accountable records; ensure all equipment custodians receive appropriate training on their responsibilities; and establish oversight procedures to identify and address equipment discrepancies.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

Ground Fuels, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, Southwest Asia
F2019-0007-RA0000; January 28, 2020

The AFAA conducted this audit to determine whether U.S. Air Forces Central Command personnel account for ground fuel charges, payments and reimbursements; establish physical controls over fuel pumps; and record fuel disbursements.

Ground fuels primarily consist of unleaded gasoline and diesel fuel needed for mission and quality of life functions. Effective management of ground fuels is critical to accomplishing missions in the U.S. Air Forces Central area of responsibility, including in the CJTF-OIR area of operations. In FY 2019, the 332nd AEW, Jordan, received 1.4 million gallons of fuels, valued at almost $4 million.

The AFAA determined that 332nd AEW personnel properly accounted for ground fuel issues and receipts and physically controlled fuel pumps. However, the AFAA found that 332nd AEW personnel did not account for ground fuel billings, limiting the effectiveness of managing ground fuels reimbursements, decreasing transparency and providing less assurance that both Air Force and customer funds are used efficiently.

The AFAA made three recommendations to the 332nd AEW Commander to improve management of ground fuels reimbursements, to establish 1) support agreements with the Army (for fuel issued to Army vehicles) that adequately address ground fuel support; 2) oversight procedures governing ground fuel reimbursements; and 3) procedures to ensure personnel submit fuel usage for reimbursements.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

Channel Airlift Operations 379th Air Expeditionary Wing Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar
F2020-0006-RA0000; January 27, 2020

The AFAA conducted this audit to determine whether Air Force personnel maximize the use of the Patriot Express, when available, including justifying commercial transportation, analyzing the frequency of channel airlift operations, and developing accurate fares for these operations.

As part of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 379th AEW provides air support to USCENTCOM throughout the region, including in the CJTF-OIR area of operations.

Channel airlift is the transportation of passengers on aircraft chartered from the commercial air industry. The DoD purchases all seats on the charter, called the Patriot Express, whether used or not. Defense Transportation Regulation requires that the Patriot Express must be used for international official travel unless there is a documented negative critical mission impact, regardless of whether commercial air transportation is less expensive or more convenient for the traveler. When seats on chartered aircraft go unused and a traveler flies instead on a separately booked commercial flight, the U.S. Government pays twice for air travel. From June 2018 through June 2019, 379th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron personnel booked 4,115 passengers on the Patriot Express channel airlift flights, and 15,516 passengers on commercial flights.

The AFAA determined that 379th AEW personnel did not maximize the use of the Patriot Express when available, and improperly authorized commercial transportation for 20 (30 percent) of 66 travelers reviewed. Furthermore, the AFAA found that personnel did not obtain and enter complete information, such as Customer Identification Code or other billing information, into the travel system for 6 (50 percent) of 12 travelers reviewed. As a result, the DoD is at risk of paying unjustified travel expenses, and the Air Force is at risk of not receiving appropriate compensation for transportation services.

The AFAA recommended that the 379th AEW Commander direct travel arrangers to obtain a non-availability notice from the travel system or commander's signed documentation from the traveler detailing the negative critical mission impact of using the Patriot Express before booking commercial air.

Management agreed with the recommendation.

Ground Fuels, 379th Air Expeditionary Wing Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar
F2020-0005-RA0000; January 27, 2020

The AFAA conducted this audit to determine whether U.S. Air Forces Central Command personnel account for ground fuel charges, payments and reimbursements; establish physical controls over fuel pumps; and record fuel disbursements at the 379th AEW Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar.

A U.S. Air Force pilot and crew chiefs perform a preflight check on a U.S. Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. (U.S. Air Force photo)

As part of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 379th AEW provides air support to USCENTCOM throughout the region, including in the CJTF-OIR area of operations.

Fuel is needed for mission and quality of life functions, and effective management of ground fuels is critical to accomplishing U.S. Air Forces Command Central missions in the area

of responsibility. At Al Udeid Air Base, vehicle identification link keys track fuel issued to registered vehicles. For the fourth quarter of FY 2019, the 379th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron managed fuel used by base organizations totaling 1,249,349 gallons, valued at over $3.66 million.

The AFAA determined that 379th AEW personnel did not effectively manage ground fuel in one of two areas reviewed. In general, the AFAA found that personnel accurately recorded and tracked fuel disbursements: a review of 268 fuel transaction records found only minor discrepancies. However, the AFAA found that personnel did not adequately control fuel keys to accurately account for fuel charges. As a result, the Air Force is at risk of potential loss of funds due to unauthorized use.

The AFAA recommended that the 379th AEW Commander direct fuel management personnel to perform and document quarterly master vehicle lists reconciliations, and to establish a standard repeatable internal control process and procedures to validate fuel key usage and encoding.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

Channel Airlift Operations 386th Air Expeditionary Wing Southwest Asia
F2020-0003-RA0000; January 15, 2020

The AFAA conducted this audit to determine whether Air Force personnel at the 386th AEW maximize the use of the Patriot Express when available, to include justifying commercial transportation, analyzing the frequency of channel airlift operations, and developing accurate fares for these operations.

As part of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 386th AEW provides air support to USCENTCOM throughout the region, including in the CJTF-OIR area of operations.

Channel airlift is the transportation of passengers on aircraft chartered from the commercial air industry. The DoD purchases all seats on the charter, called the Patriot Express, whether used or not. From June 2018 through June 2019, 386th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron personnel booked more than 2,000 passengers on Patriot Express channel airlift flights, and more than 400 passengers on commercial flights.

The AFAA determined that 386th AEW personnel did not maximize the use of the Patriot Express when available, including justifying commercial transportation for only 34 (53 percent) of 64 travelers. Furthermore, the AFAA determined that AEW personnel did not obtain complete travel orders or input required reimbursement data for 27 (49 percent) of 55 travelers. As a result, the DoD is at risk of paying unjustified travel expenses, and the Air Force is at risk of not receiving appropriate compensation for transportation services.

The AFAA made two recommendations to improve channel airlift operations: that the 386th AEW Commander 1) ensure travel arrangers conduct appropriate training for obtaining and entering a customer code when booking passengers on the Patriot Express, and 2) perform periodic reviews of travel orders.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

Ground Fuels, 386th Air Expeditionary Wing Southwest Asia
F2020-00083-RA0000; January 28, 2020

The AFAA conducted this audit to determine whether U.S. Air Forces Central Command personnel properly account for ground fuel charges, payments and reimbursement; established physical controls over fuel pumps; and record fuel disbursements.

As part of the U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 386th AEW provides air support to USCENTCOM throughout the region, including in the CJTF-OIR area of operations.

Ground fuels primarily consist of unleaded gasoline and diesel needed for mission and quality of life functions. Effective management of ground fuels is critical to accomplishing missions in the U. S. Air Forces Central Command area of responsibility. In FY 2019, the 386th AEW received 2.9 million gallons of ground fuel, valued at almost $8 million.

The AFAA determined that 386th AEW personnel did not account for ground fuel billings, and did not physically control fuel pumps. As a result, the Air Force is at risk of receiving inadequate accounting for fuel billings. Furthermore, inadequate physical controls over fuel places the Air Force at greater risk for theft or misuse of ground fuels. For example, the AFAA determined that the 386th AEW did not have full visibility over 2,877,833 gallons of fuel, valued at approximately $7 million, dispensed between 2017 and 2019.

The AFAA made eight recommendations to the 386th AEW Commander to improve the effectiveness of ground fuels management, including establishing procedures to obtain ground fuel expenditure reports; support agreements with the Army addressing ground fuel support (for fuel provided to Army units); and oversight procedures for documenting ground fuel issuances and credit transactions.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Monitoring of Inmate Communications to Prevent Radicalization
Audit Division 20-042; March 25, 2020

The Department of Justice (DoJ) OIG conducted this audit to review the Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BoP) policies, procedures, and practices for monitoring inmates with known or suspected ties to domestic and foreign terrorism; and efforts to prevent further radicalization among its inmate population.

As of March 2018, the DoJ's BoP had more than 500 incarcerated inmates with a known nexus to domestic or international terrorism (terrorist inmates). BoP policy requires that all social communications of terrorist inmates be monitored. The DoJ OIG determined that the BoP had not identified all terrorist inmates in its custody and thus did not adequately monitor the communications of all terrorist inmates.

The DoJ OIG's report contained information considered law enforcement sensitive. The publicly released version of the report redacted that information. However, the public version

of the report stated that some terrorist inmates were linked to an unnamed foreign terrorist organization, other inmates who had pledged allegiance to ISIS in external communications or who were otherwise radicalized by the group's propaganda. The DoJ OIG determined that inmates whose communications should have been monitored had shared radicalizing material with other inmates, including radical Islamic recruiting videos and other radical literature.

Although the BoP, in 2005, began to provide the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) with a list of soon to be released inmates, the DoJ OIG determined that BoP did not take appropriate steps to ensure that information about all formerly incarcerated terrorists was provided to the FBI.

The DoJ OIG also determined that terrorist inmates who had been placed under measures requiring 100-percent live communication monitoring by the FBI, were not being monitored effectively because of technological limitations. Further, the DoJ OIG determined that between January 2015 and December 2017, the BoP had not monitored or only partially monitored thousands of communications of high-risk inmates, including terrorist inmates not under a special administrative measures directives; did not review thousands of inmate emails, some of which contained potentially concerning language; and permitted terrorist inmates to communicate with unknown or un-vetted contacts.

The DoJ OIG made 19 recommendations to improve the BoP's accounting for, monitoring of, and security over terrorist inmates. Those recommendations included that the BoP work with other organizations within DoJ to determine an accurate population of international and domestic terrorists incarcerated at, or in transit to, its institutions; review the quality of the telephone monitoring equipment at institutions requiring the monitoring of terrorist inmates; and to review monitoring policies for terrorist inmates to better ensure that all communications between terrorist inmates and their visitors are sufficiently monitored.

Management agreed with all recommendations.

Ongoing Oversight Activities

As of March 31, 2020, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 24 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 4 describes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 2 and 3, contained in Appendix E, list the title and objective 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 Military Services' pre-deployment training to counter an adversary's use of unmanned aircraft systems is done in accordance with the geographic combatant commands' operational requirements.

- The **DoD OIG** is evaluating U.S. Central Command's civilian casualty evaluation and reporting procedures to determine if there are accurate accounts of potential civilian casualties resulting from OIR airstrikes.

- The **DoS OIG** is evaluating whether the Bureau of Counterterrorism's programs and operations are meeting DoS goals and expectations.

Ongoing Projects by Strategic Oversight Area
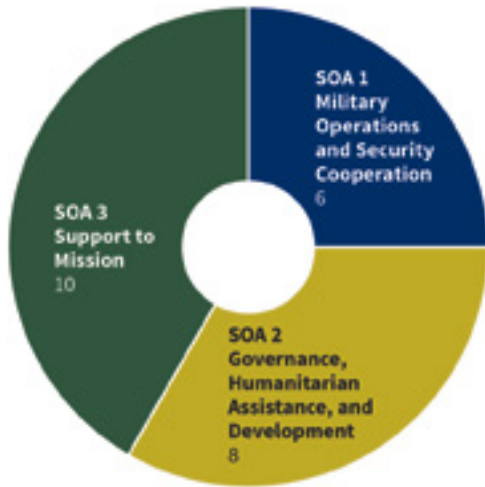
- The **GAO** is evaluating U.S. Government assistance to Iraq's Ministry of Interior to determine the amount and objectives of this assistance to the Ministry of Interior and its forces.

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- The **DoS OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether Federal assistance awards provided by the Global Engagement Center align with its statutory mandate and authority and whether the Global Engagement Center has monitored those awards in accordance with Federal requirements, DoS policies and guidance, and the terms and conditions of each award.

- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine what corrective actions a Syria response implementer has taken to remedy internal control weaknesses and known gaps identified by USAID OIG investigations.

- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to assess USAID's management of its transition strategy for humanitarian assistance in Iraq and oversight of its humanitarian assistance and stabilization activities.

SUPPORT TO MISSION

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Military Services properly stored, tracked, and safeguarded pharmaceuticals at locations supporting overseas contingency operations.

- The **DoS OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoS considered established procedures, guidance, and best practices to adjust the size and composition of the U.S. Missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether USAID has taken action to prevent and detect sexual exploitation and abuse; and to assess USAID's process for responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

- The **Army Audit Agency** is conducting an audit to determine whether Army units performed maintenance on theater provided equipment to meet readiness and potential contingencies, and whether theater provided equipment meets readiness and capabilities for future contingencies.

Planned Oversight Projects

As of March 31, 2020, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 19 planned projects related to OIR. Figure 5 describes the planned projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 4 and 5, contained in Appendix F, list the project title and objective for each of these projects. The following highlights some of these planned projects by strategic oversight area.

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

- The **DoD OIG** intends to evaluate whether tactical signals intelligence processing, exploitation, and dissemination support is sufficient to satisfy OIR priority intelligence requirements.

- The **Treasury OIG** intends to evaluate whether the Office of Terrorist Financing and Intelligence actions are meeting Treasury's responsibilities to disrupt ISIS funding.

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoS Office of Global Women's Issues has tailored its programs to meet its goals of helping women be more prepared for, and able to participate in, decision-making processes related to conflict and crisis.

- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoS is effectively identifying, assessing, and managing risks before awarding funds to international organizations, and whether the DoS is ensuring that funds are managed and spent to further U.S. goals and objectives.

SUPPORT TO MISSION

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoD protects arms, ammunition, and explosives transported by sea in accordance with the Defense Transportation Regulation.

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems

- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether DoS and U.S. Mission Iraq personnel properly accounted for property.

- The **Army Audit Agency** intends to evaluate whether base operations support in Kuwait and Qatar meets mission needs.

Figure 5.

Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area

SOA 1
Military Operations and Security Cooperation
2

SOA 2
Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development
4

SOA 3
Support to Mission
13

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 Lead IG agencies used investigators in Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as in Germany and Washington, D.C., to conduct OIR-related investigations. However, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, DCIS has temporarily removed investigative personnel from Afghanistan and Qatar, and is continually monitoring the health and welfare

ACTIVITY BY FRAUD AND CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIVE WORKING GROUP

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE
As of March 31, 2020

Pie chart categories:
- Counter Proliferation 2%
- Other 2%
- Projects 3%
- Theft 18%
- Corruption 21%
- Trafficking In Persons 3%
- Procurement Fraud 49%
- Program Irregularity 3%

OPEN INVESTIGATIONS BY WORKING GROUP MEMBER*

Bar chart values:
- DCIS: 55
- USAID OIG: 24
- Army CID: 24
- DoS OIG: 12
- AFOSI: 5
- NCIS: 0

SOURCES OF ALLEGATIONS

Pie chart categories:
- DoS 5%
- NCIS 1%
- U.S. Army 9%
- DoD/USAID Hotline 18%
- DCIS 13%
- CENTCOM 7%
- USAF OSI 9%
- Other 14%
- USAID 10%
- Army CID 14%
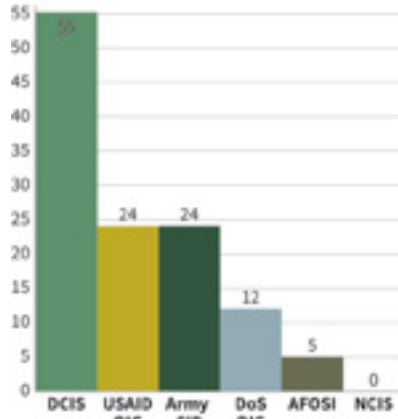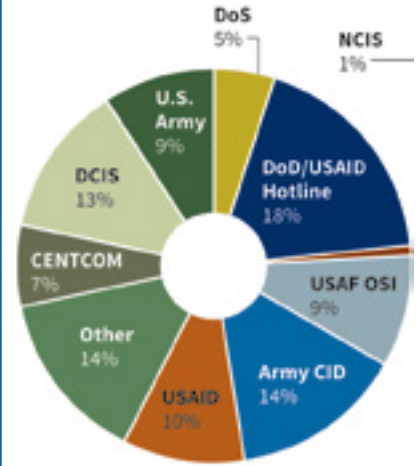
OPEN INVESTIGATIONS*
120

Q2 FY 2020 BRIEFINGS

Briefings Held	79
Briefings Attendees	906

Q2 FY 2020 RESULTS

Arrests	—
Criminal Charges	—
Criminal Convictions	—
Fines/Recoveries	—
Suspensions/Debarments	—
Contract Terminations	—
Personnel Actions	—
Administrative Actions	—

PRIMARY OFFENSE LOCATIONS

Map locations: Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia

Horizontal bar chart by location (BAHRAIN, IRAN, IRAQ, JORDAN, KUWAIT, LEBANON, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, SYRIA, TURKEY, UAE) with categories: Procurement Fraud, Bribery, Program Fraud, Trafficking in Persons, Theft, Other
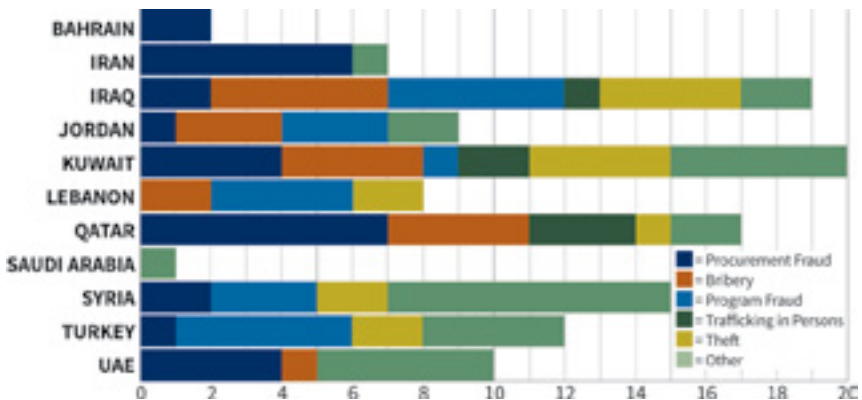
*Some investigations are joint with more than one agency and some not joint with any other agency. Therefore, the total number of Joint Open Cases may not equal the total number of Open Cases. Open Cases as of 3/31/2020.

of the personnel performing DCIS's mission in the USCENTCOM and U.S. Africa Command areas of operation. DoS OIG investigators based in Frankfurt have been teleworking from their residences. USAID investigators have been similarly affected by the outbreak.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO OIR

During this quarter, investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 32 investigations, initiated 18 new investigations, and coordinated on 120 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations.

The Lead IG agencies and partners continue to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS, the DoD OIG's investigative and criminal division), the DoS OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. This quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 79 fraud awareness briefings for 906 participants.

The Dashboard on the previous page depicts activities of this Working Group.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO LEGACY CASES

The Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies have 10 ongoing "legacy" investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the designation of OIR.

Hotline

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts 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. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the DoD OIG investigator referred 37 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations.

As noted in Figure 6, the majority of the cases opened during the reporting period were related to personal misconduct, reprisal, criminal allegations, and personnel matters.

Figure 6.

Hotline Activities

Procurement/Contract Administration 7%
Security 4%
Waste 1%
Personal Misconduct/Ethics Violations 25%
Reprisal 10%
Criminal Allegations 13%
Safety Matters 18%
Personnel Matters 22%

A U.S. Army AH-64 Apache scans the area for ISIS militants near Iraq's Makhmur mountains. (U.S. Army photo)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Classified Appendix to This Report

This unclassified report normally includes a classified appendix that provides additional information on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). Due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

APPENDIX B
Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

This report complies with sections 2, 4, and 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, which requires that the designated Lead Inspector General (IG) provide a quarterly report, available to the public, on an overseas contingency operation. The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) designated the Department of Defense (DoD) IG as the Lead IG for OIR. The Department of State (DoS) IG is the Associate Lead IG for the operation.

This report contains information from the three Lead IG agencies—DoD Office of Inspector General (OIG), DoS OIG, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) OIG—as well as from partner oversight agencies. This report covers the period from January 1 through March 31, 2020.

To fulfill its congressional mandate to produce a quarterly 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 formal audits, inspections, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or requests for information to Federal agencies.

INFORMATION COLLECTION

Each quarter, the Lead IG agencies gather information from the DoD, DoS, 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.

OPEN-SOURCE RESEARCH

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

- Congressional testimony
- Press conferences and official U.S. Government briefings
- United Nations reports
- Reports issued by nongovernmental organizations and think tanks
- Media reports

Materials collected through open-source research provide information to describe the status of the operation and help the Lead IG agencies assess information provided in their agency information collection process.

REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD OIG, as the Lead IG, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies. The Lead IG agencies then provide those offices that provided information with opportunities to verify and comment on the content of the report.

Each OIG coordinates the review process with its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask their agencies to 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. Each Lead IG agency participates in reviewing and editing the entire quarterly report.

APPENDIX C
Department of Justice Prosecutions

Since 2014, the Department of Justice (DoJ) has charged more than 175 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS. During the same period, the DoJ has obtained more than 135 convictions; the remaining cases are pending. These figures include individuals who could be described as foreign terrorist fighters or homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS, as well as those who may have assisted the conduct of foreign terrorist fighters or homegrown violent extremists or obstructed investigations, or cases which otherwise involved an identified link to ISIS.

The following examples include details on indictments, convictions, or sentences related to foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists related to ISIS activity from January 1 through March 31, 2020:

- **In January 2020, in the Eastern District of New York, Asia Siddiqui** was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Siddiqui and her co-defendant, Noelle Velentzas, previously pleaded guilty to a charge of teaching or distributing information pertaining to the making and use of an explosive, destructive device, or weapon of mass destruction in furtherance of a planned federal crime of violence. Between approximately 2013 and 2015, Siddiqui and Velentzas planned to build a bomb for use in a terrorist attack in the United States. In furtherance of their plan, the defendants taught each other chemistry and electrical skills related to creating explosives and building detonating devices, conducted research on how to make plastic explosives and how to build a car bomb, and shopped for and acquired materials to be used in an explosive device. They discussed similar devices used in past terrorist incidents like the Boston Marathon bombing, Oklahoma City bombing, and 1993 World Trade Center attack and researched potential targets of an attack, focusing on law enforcement and military-related targets.

- **In March 2020, in the Western District of Missouri, Robert Lorenzo Hester Jr.** was sentenced to nearly 20 years in prison. Hester had previously pleaded guilty for his role in actively attempting to plot a mass casualty attack with persons he believed were members of ISIS, but who were actually undercover law enforcement employees. Hester obtained items that he believed to be bomb components, including boxes of roofing nails intended to maximize the number of casualties. As the plea agreement cites, throughout the investigation Hester expressed his interest in and exhibited his willingness to commit violence in support and on behalf of ISIS.

- In addition, five people have been transferred to the United States from Syria to face federal criminal charges related to terrorism since 2014.

APPENDIX D

Department of the Treasury and Department of State Actions Against Terrorist Financing

Under Executive Order 13224, as amended, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of State have global terrorism authorities to target activities of extremist groups, including ISIS. The Department of the Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence and its Office of Foreign Assets Control work to disrupt the ability of terrorist organizations to fund their operations. The DoS's Bureau of Counterterrorism leads DoS activities to counter terrorist finance and to designate Specially Designated Global Terrorists and Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY DESIGNATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Since 2014, the Secretary of the Treasury has designated a total of 95 individuals and entities providing support to ISIS pursuant to Executive Order 13224.

This quarter, the Secretary of the Treasury made no new designations. No individuals or organizations sanctioned for providing support to ISIS were removed from the sanctions list during this reporting period.

In addition to designations, the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) leverages its participation and influence to develop a shared understanding of the threat posed by ISIS, as well as to encourage countries to take action within their jurisdictions and in coordination with others to disrupt ISIS financing and facilitation. During the quarter, Treasury met with Coalition partners in Copenhagen to reaffirm the Coalition's shared determination to continue the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, Treasury continued to work with interagency and Coalition partners, including the Iraqi government, to prioritize identifying ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders, disrupting its financial facilitation networks in Iraq, and designating ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and elsewhere.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE DESIGNATIONS

This quarter, the Secretary of State designated four individuals and one group as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT). In addition, the Secretary of State, under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, designated one group—the same group that he designated as a SDGT—as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

The Secretary of State's SDGT designations during the quarter were:

- **Qays al Khazali and his brother Laith al Khazali, co-leaders of Asa'ib Ahl al Haq.** According to the DoS, Asa'ib Ahl al Haq is an Iran-backed, militant organization that has claimed responsibility for more than 6,000 attacks against U.S. and Coalitions forces since its creation in 2006. Asa'ib Ahl al Haq was also designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization during the quarter.

- **Ahmad al Hamidawi, Secretary General of Kata'ib Hizballah,** an Iran-backed SDGT group active in Iraq and Syria.

- **Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal Rahman al Mawla,** also known as Hajji Abdallah, the new leader of ISIS.

APPENDIX E
Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 2 and 3 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 2.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agency, as March 31, 2020

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Evaluation of U.S. Central Command's Kinetic Targeting Processes and Reporting Procedures
To evaluate U.S. Central Command's target development and prosecution processes, as well as post-strike collateral damage and civilian casualty assessment activities.

Audit of Pre-Deployment Training on Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems
To determine whether the Military Services conducted pre-deployment training to counter an adversary's use of Unmanned Aerial Sytems in accordance with the operational requirements of the geographic combatant commands.

Audit of the Cybersecurity of DoD Additive Manufacturing Systems
To determine whether DoD Components are securing additive manufacturing systems and data to prevent unauthorized changes and ensure integrity of design data.

Audit of Management of Pharmaceutical Inventories in Support of Overseas Contingency Operations
To determine whether the Military Services properly stored, tracked, and safeguarded pharmaceuticals at its overseas locations supporting overseas contingency operations, including OIR.

Evaluation of Combatant Command Counter Threat Finance Activities in Support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. European Command Priorities
To determine whether U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command are planning and executing counter threat finance activities to impact adversaries' ability to use financial networks to negatively affect U.S. interests.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Global Engagement Center's Execution of its Mandate to Coordinate Federal Government Efforts to Counter Disinformation and Propaganda Designed to Undermine the United States
To determine whether Federal assistance awards provided by the DoS Global Engagement Center align with its statutory mandate and authority and whether the Global Engagement Center has monitored those awards in accordance with Federal requirements, DoS policies and guidance, and the terms and conditions of each award.

Inspection of United States Mission to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland
To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, including programs that provide assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq and Syria.

Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism
To evaluate the programs and operations of the Bureau of Counterterrorism.

Audit of the Approach Used to Adjust the Size and Composition of Missions Afghanistan and Iraq
To determine whether the DoS used established procedures, guidance, and best practices in its approach to adjust the size and composition of the U.S. Missions in Afghanistan and Iraq and has aligned resources invested at these missions with established U.S. Government foreign policy priorities.

Audit of the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations Approach to Identifying and Communicating Construction Project Risks, Best Practices, and Lessons Learned
To determine whether the DoS administered the design and construction contract for the New Office Annexes at Embassies Amman and Nairobi in accordance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation and whether the contractor fulfilled the contract terms and conditions.

Audit of DoS Post Security Program Reviews
To determine whether the DoS Bureau of Diplomatic Security manages the Post Security Program Review process in accordance with DoS policies and guidelines.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of USAID's Oversight of Selected Implementer Delivering Humanitarian Assistance in Response to the Syrian Crisis
To determine what corrective actions the selected Syria-response implementer has taken to remedy internal control weaknesses identified by investigations; and if USAID eliminated oversight gaps identified by investigations of the selected Syria-response implementer.

Audit of USAID/Iraq Activities
To assess USAID's management of its transition strategy for humanitarian assistance in Iraq; and USAID's oversight of its humanitarian assistance and stabilization activities.

Audit of USAID's Initiative Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
To determine to what extent USAID has taken action to prevent and detect sexual exploitation and abuse; and to assess USAID's process for responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Audit of USAID's Workforce Transformation and Data Use
To determine how USAID accounts for its workforce; evaluate how USAID uses information to strategically plan and make workforce decisions; and assess how Human Resources Transformation Strategy activities support strategic workforce planning.

Audit of USAID's Self-Reliance Initiative
To determine to what extent are USAID's self-reliance metrics incorporated into its development programming strategy and identify the challenges USAID faces in implementing development activities as envisioned under the Journey to Self-Reliance Initiative.

Audit of USAID's Contract Termination Practices
To assess USAID's procedures guiding acquisition award terminations, and selected acquisition awards were terminated in accordance with established requirements.

Table 3.

Ongoing Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agency, as of March 31, 2020

AIR FORCE AUDIT AGENCY

Security Forces Equipment and Training (Kuwait)
To determine the sufficiency of the condition and quantity of security forces' individual protective and deployable equipment and whether security force personnel have received necessary training on equipment needed to perform mission requirements.

Channel Airlift Operations (Turkey)
To determine if Air Force personnel maximize the use of the Patriot Express when available, to include justifying commercial transportation; as well as analyze channel operation frequencies and develop accurate tariff rates.

Disbursements for Contingency Operations (Turkey)
To determine whether personnel determined cash holding requirements; accounted for and executed disbursements; and maintained disbursement supporting documents in accordance with guidance.

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Expeditionary Contracting Material Weakness
To determine whether the Army has taken necessary actions to mitigate risks associated with the expeditionary contracting material weakness.

Reach-Back Contracting Support
To determine whether the Army has an effective plan, procedures, and organizational structure in place to directly provide contracting support during contingency/expeditionary operations.

Audit of Theater Provided Equipment Maintenance and Reset
To determine whether units performed maintenance on theater provided equipment to meet readiness and potential contingencies; and whether the Army's reset of theater provided equipment meets U.S. Army Central Command's readiness and capabilities for future contingencies.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

U.S. Assistance to Iraq's Ministry of Interior
To determine the amounts and objectives of U.S. assistance to the Ministry of Interior and its forces; the extent to which U.S. agencies have assessed their assistance to the Ministry of Interior and its forces, and the results of the assessments; and the extent to which the DoD and the DoS have vetted the Ministry of Interior and its forces for gross violations of human rights and associations with terrorist groups or groups associated with the Iranian government.

APPENDIX F
Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 4 and 5 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects.

Table 4.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agency, as of March 31, 2020

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Evaluation of Tactical Signals Intelligence Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination Support to OIR and OFS
To determine whether Theater Support Activity's Tactical Signals Intelligence Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination support is sufficient to satisfy OIR and OFS priority intelligence requirements.

Evaluation of the Use of Geospatial Intelligence Collection for Operation Inherent Resolve
Contact DoD OIG Evaluations for more information.

Audit of DoD Oversight of Base Operations Support Contract at Balad Air Base in Iraq
To determine whether the DoD protects arms, ammunition, and explosives transported by sea in accordance with the Defense Transportation Regulation.

Audit of Entitlements and Allowances for Processing for Military Service Reserve Deployments
To determine whether the deployment process resulted in accurate and timely entitlements and allowances for deployed members of the military service Reserves.

Audit of Unmanned Systems Cybersecurity Controls
To determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems.

A***udit of the U.S. Army Central Command's Modernized Enduring Equipment Set in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility***
To determine whether the Army's implementation of the modernized enduring equipment sets in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility is meeting mission goals.

Follow Up Audit of the U.S. Army's Management of the Heavy Lift VIII Contract to Meet Changing Middle East Mission
To determine whether the Army implemented corrective actions in response to six open recommendations in Report No. DODIG-2017-095, "U.S. Army's Management of the Heavy Lift 7 Commercial Transportation Contract Requirements in the Middle East," June 26, 2017. In addition, to determine whether the Army implement the corrective actions before issuing the Heavy Lift VIII contract.

Evaluation of U.S. Special Operations Command Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center
To determine whether U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center provides U.S. combatant commanders the increased capability to conduct Internet-based information operations globally.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of New Consulate Construction-Erbil, Iraq
To determine whether the DoS Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations has effective quality assurance processes in place to ensure that the contractor builds U.S. Consulate General Erbil to contract specifications.

Audit of Property Accountability of U.S. Mission Iraq
To determine the extent to which the DoS and U.S. Mission Iraq's policies, procedures, controls, and personnel were in place and operating as intended to ensure property was accounted for properly.

Audit of DoS Management of Awards to International Organizations
To determine whether DoS efforts to identify, assess, and manage risks before awarding funds to international organizations are effective; and assess whether DoS policies, processes, and guidance for monitoring awards to international organizations are effective in ensuring that funds are managed and spent to further U.S. goals and objectives.

Audit of DoS Implementation of National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security
To determine whether the DoS Office of Global Women's Issues has tailored applicable DoS engagements and program to help women be more prepared for, and able to participate in, decision-making processes related to conflict and crisis; established metrics and targets to evaluate, measure, and report DoS performance; and created a process to modify or redirect program resources on the basis of performance that informs resource allocation and planning.

Inspection of Embassy Doha, Qatar
To evaluate the programs and operations of Embassy Doha, Qatar.

Audit of Construction of New Embassy Compound Ankara
To determine whether the DoS administered the design and construction contract for New Embassy Compound Ankara in accordance with Federal acquisition regulations and whether the contractor fulfilled the contract terms and conditions.

Compliance Follow-up Review on Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Selection of Contracting Officer Representatives
To determine whether the recommendations of an earlier DoS OIG audit report are being efficiently and effectively implemented.

Audit of Use of Sole Source Contracts in Overseas Contingency Operations
To determine whether acquisition policy was followed in awarding sole source contracts; there were urgent and compelling needs to justify awarding sole source contracts; the DoS is paying more by having sole source contracts than it would pay if contracts were competitively awarded.

Inspection of the Bureau of Medical Services
To evaluate the programs and operations of the Bureau of Medical Services.

Table 5.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agency, as of March 31, 2020

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Base Operations Support–Area Support Groups Kuwait
To determine whether base operations support management and oversight at long term contingency locations in Kuwait and Qatar efficiently and effectively met mission needs; and determine whether base operations support personnel had adequate training and experience to oversee necessary services.

| DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL |
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**Terrorist Financing and Intelligence Actions to Disrupt ISIS' Finances**
To determine whether Terrorist Financing and Intelligence's actions are meeting Treasury's responsibilities to disrupt ISIS financing.

ACRONYMS

Acronym	
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force-OIR
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
CTF	Centralized Training Facility
CTS	Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
DoS	Department of State
ESSA	Eastern Syria Security Area
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
IMET	International Military Education and Training
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Iran)
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	Refers to DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG
NMI	NATO Mission Iraq
OCHA	U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Acronym	
OCO	Overseas Contingency Operation
OFDA	U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OSC-I	Offfice of Security Cooperation–Iraq
OUSD(P)/ISA	The Department of Defense Office of the Undersecretary for Policy, International Security Affairs
PMC	Popular Mobization Committee
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRF	Pro-Syrian Regime Forces
SAC	Syrian Arab Coalition
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SOJTF-OIR	Special Operations Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve
START	Syrian Transition Assistance Response Team
Treasury	U.S. Department of the Treasury
TSO	Turkish-supported Syrian Opposition
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR 2254	United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U. S. Central Command
WHO	World Health Organization
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units
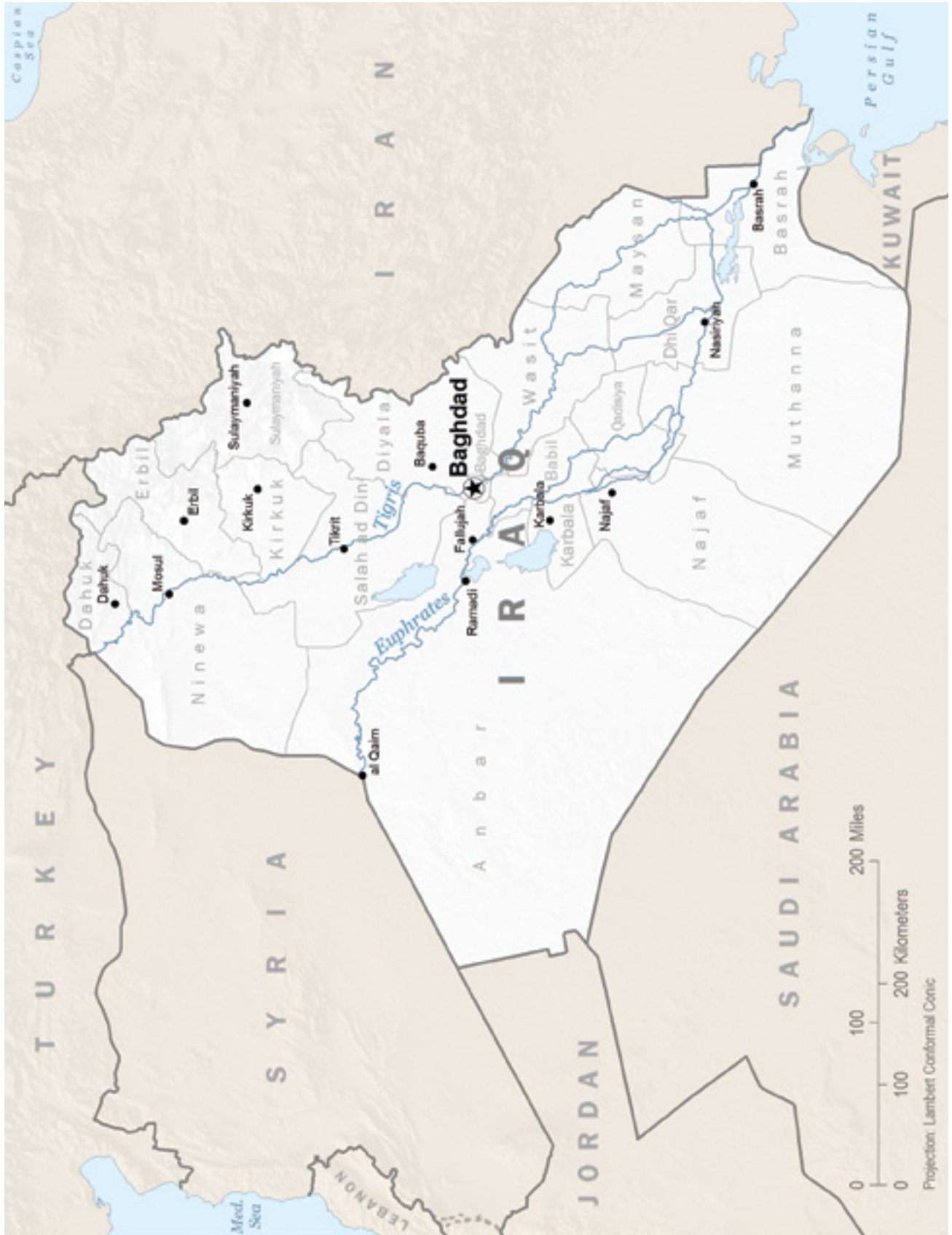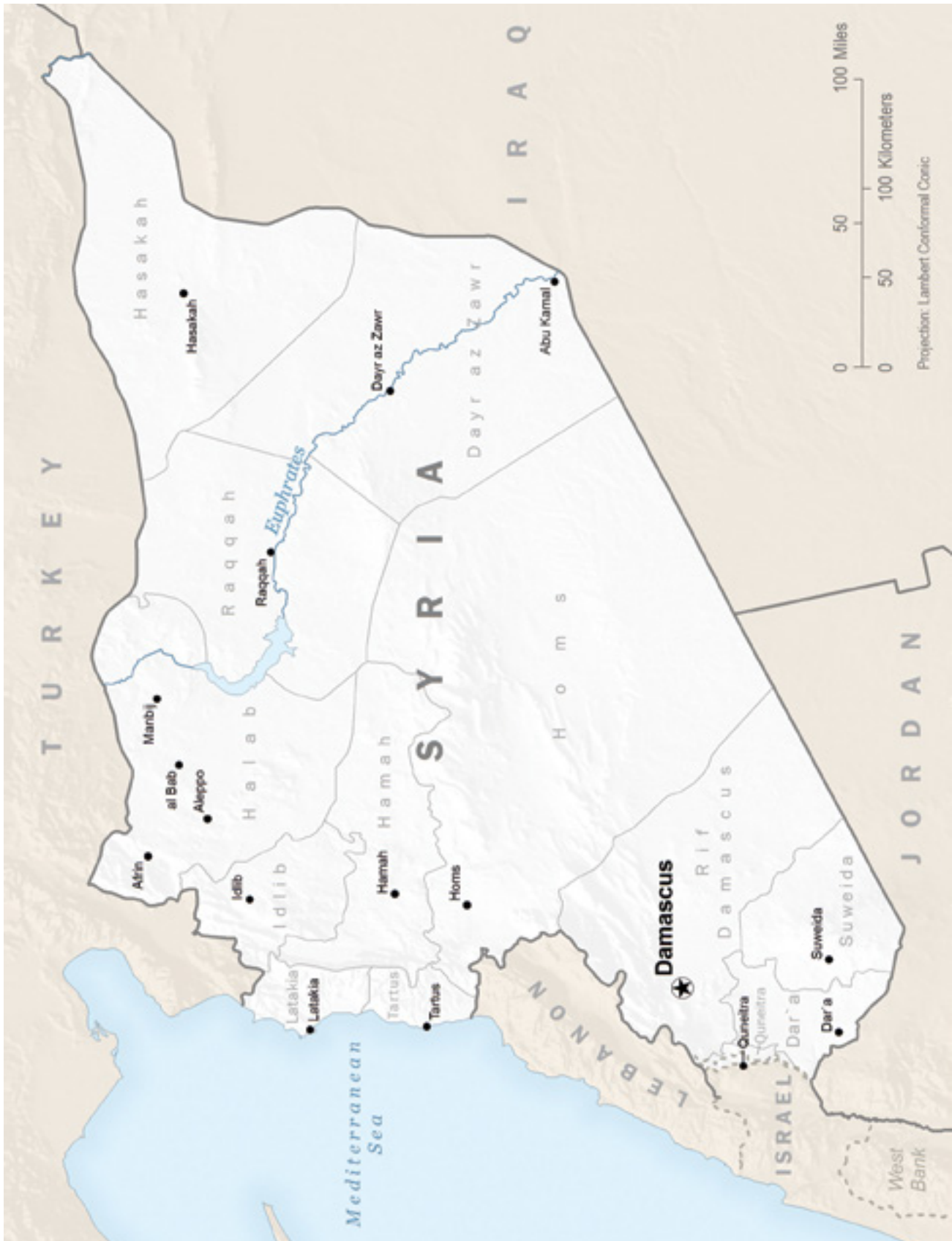
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