



# OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



JULY 1, 2019–OCTOBER 25, 2019

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

In January 2013, legislation was enacted creating the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. This legislation, which amended the Inspector General Act, 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 overseas contingency operations.

The DoD Inspector General (IG) is designated as the Lead IG for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). The DoS IG is the Associate IG for OIR. The USAID IG participates in oversight for 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 contingency operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the Federal Government in support of the contingency operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, and evaluations.
- Report quarterly to Congress and the public on the contingency 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 also includes an appendix containing classified information about the U.S. mission to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The Lead IG provides the classified appendix separately to relevant agencies and congressional committees.

#### On the Cover

(Top row): U.S. Soldiers and Marines drive a joint light tactical vehicle in Syria (U.S. Marine Corps photo); A girl stands in the annex of the Al Hol camp (Human Rights Watch photo); U.S. and Turkish military forces conduct the third combined joint ground patrol inside the security mechanism area in northeast Syria. (U.S. Army photo). (Bottom row): Iraqi Security Forces soldiers react to a training IED during a culminating training exercise at Camp Taji, Iraq. (U.S. Army Reserve photo); A member of the SDF demolishes a YPG fortification in northeast Syria (U.S. Army photo).

## FOREWORD

We are pleased to submit this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report on Operation Inherent Resolve. This report discharges our individual and collective agency oversight responsibilities pursuant to sections, 2, 4, and 8L of the Inspector General Act.

The United States launched Operation Inherent Resolve (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.

Due to the significant events that took place in Syria in October 2019, the Lead IG agencies considered it essential to report on these developments in this report and how they impact the OIR mission. This report therefore discusses the events set in motion by the October 9 Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria, the withdrawal and redeployment of U.S. forces in Syria, the response by Syrian partner forces that had been fighting ISIS, and how ISIS is reacting to these developments.

In examining these recent events, the Lead IG agencies received additional information from the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (DoS), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and that information is also presented in this report and the classified appendix. As of the time of completion of this report in mid-November, these events continued to unfold, and questions remained regarding how the fight against ISIS in Syria will proceed and be affected. The next Lead IG report will follow up on those questions and continuing developments and provide more detailed information about these dynamic events and the impact on OIR.

The report also discusses the key developments of the quarter, as well as the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG Offices of the Inspector General and our partner oversight agencies during the period from July 1, 2019, through September 30, 2019.

Working in close collaboration, we remain committed to providing comprehensive oversight and timely reporting on this contingency operation.



Handwritten signature of Glenn A. Fine in black ink.

**Glenn A. Fine**  
Principal Deputy Inspector General  
Performing the Duties  
of the Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Defense



Handwritten signature of Steve A. Linick in black ink.

**Steve A. Linick**  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of State  
and the  
U.S. Agency for Global Media



Handwritten signature of Ann Calvaresi Barr in black ink.

**Ann Calvaresi Barr**  
Inspector General  
U.S. Agency for International  
Development



## MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL



**Glenn A. Fine**

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

On October 9, Turkey launched air and ground operations against Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG) positions in northeastern Syria. The incursion set in motion a series of actions that affected the OIR mission against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), including the U.S. relationship with the Kurds and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria, and control of territory in northeastern Syria. Although these events occurred outside the quarter ending September 30, 2019, the Lead IG agencies considered it essential to report on these events in this report, and we sought additional information from relevant U.S. Government agencies regarding these events.

As discussed in this report, just prior to the Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria, the United States withdrew its forces from the border. Following the Turkish incursion, the United States ordered the withdrawal of its remaining forces in northeastern Syria, leaving U.S. troops at the At Tanf Garrison, a desert outpost near the Jordanian border. At the end of October, the United States announced that it would deploy U.S. troops to Dayr az Zawr province to help ensure that the U.S.-backed SDF, which includes the YPG, retains control of oil fields there.

As also discussed in this report, the departure of U.S. troops damaged the United States relationship with the SDF, whose leader stated publicly that the SDF views the withdrawal of U.S. troops as a betrayal. The withdrawal and redeployment of U.S. troops has also affected the fight against ISIS, which remains a threat in the region and globally. For example, U.S. Central Command reported to the DoD OIG that prior to the Turkish incursion and subsequent drawdown of U.S. forces, ISIS clandestine cells in Syria had been continuing to reconstitute networks and carry out attacks on the SDF and pro-regime forces.

After the Turkish incursion, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported to the DoD OIG that with SDF and U.S. operations against ISIS in Syria diminished, ISIS was likely to exploit the reduction in counterterrorism pressure to reconstitute its operations in Syria and expand its ability to conduct transnational attacks. The DIA also stated that absent counterterrorism pressure, ISIS would likely have more freedom to build clandestine networks.

The DIA also reported that ISIS probably will attempt to free ISIS members detained in SDF-run prisons and family members living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Additionally, according to the DIA, ISIS will likely have the "time and space" to target the West and provide support to its global branches and networks, and in the longer term, ISIS will probably seek to regain control of some Syrian population centers and expand its global footprint. The DIA also said that the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi on October 26 would likely have little effect on the ability of ISIS to reconstitute.

Moreover, the DoS and USAID reported that the arrival of Syrian regime and Russian forces to northeastern Syria would likely impact U.S. goals for a peaceful resolution to the Syrian civil war. Fighting between the various forces also created new waves of displaced people, emptied at least two IDP camps near the border, and resulted in the escape of less than 200 ISIS detainees who were being

held in SDF-run prisons, according to Combined Joint Task Force-OIR (CJTF-OIR). Additionally, the departure of U.S. troops compelled the DoS to order the departure of U.S. stabilization staff from Syria for a second time.

With regard to OIR in Iraq, CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS continued this quarter to solidify and expand its command and control structure in Iraq, although it had not increased its capabilities in areas where the Coalition was actively conducting operations against ISIS. Protests against the Iraqi government have also spread in Baghdad and the south. In response, the Iraqi government security forces used tear gas, water cannons, and live fire against the protesters. These widespread protests highlight the significant governance challenges confronting Iraq.

The fight against ISIS, and the conditions in Syria and Iraq, remain fluid. We will continue to report on these developments, and the status of the fight against ISIS, in future OIR reports.

Finally, my colleagues and I thank the dedicated employees of each Lead IG agency who conduct this important oversight work, both in the United States and abroad.



**Glenn A. Fine**

Principal Deputy Inspector General

Performing the Duties of the Inspector General

U.S. Department of Defense











U.S. soldiers secure a Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle to a C-17 Globemaster III at the Kobani Landing Zone, Syria. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Due to the events that occurred in Syria after the quarter ended on September 30, the Lead IG agencies considered it essential to report on the developments in October, and how they affect the Operation Inherent Resolve mission and efforts by ISIS to resurge. The Lead IG agencies therefore sought additional information from the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the United States Agency for International Development as of October 24, 2019, and that information is presented in this report. Where warranted, the Lead IG agencies continued to update evolving events through open source reporting until this report was completed in mid-November.*

### EVENTS IN SYRIA

#### TURKEY'S INCURSION INTO SYRIA IMPACTS THE OIR MISSION

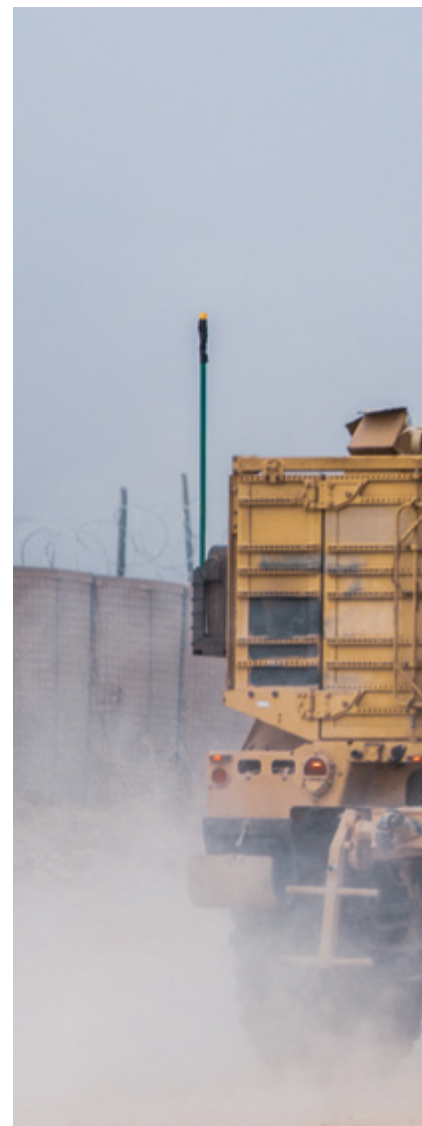
On October 9, Turkey launched air and ground operations against Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG) positions in northeastern Syria. The incursion followed an October 6 telephone conversation between President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in which President Erdogan informed President Trump that he intended to launch a long-planned incursion.<sup>1</sup> The incursion set in motion a series of actions that affected the Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) mission against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS); the U.S. relationship with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the United States' most reliable partner in Syria; and the control of territory in northeastern Syria.

In October, the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy/International Security Affairs (OUSD(P)/ISA) reported to the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) that, following that telephone conversation, the Department of Defense (DoD) drew down a small number of U.S. forces from the immediate border area in Syria due to the "imminent threat" posed by the anticipated arrival of Turkish forces.<sup>2</sup> After Turkish forces crossed into Syria, the DoD was directed to plan for a full withdrawal of U.S. forces from northeastern Syria.<sup>3</sup> OUSD(P)/ISA said that the U.S.-backed SDF, an umbrella of forces that includes the YPG, "temporarily paused" operations against ISIS to enable YPG fighters to confront the Turkish incursion.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Syrian regime forces and Russian forces moved in to fill the void created by departing U.S. forces.<sup>5</sup>

On October 19, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper announced that some forces withdrawn from Syria would redeploy to Iraq to fight ISIS in Syria from there.<sup>6</sup> However, according to a statement issued on October 23, the Iraqi government stated that incoming U.S. forces would have to depart within 4 weeks.<sup>7</sup> Secretary Esper subsequently stated that U.S. forces would only transit through Iraq.<sup>8</sup> According to Secretary Esper, a few hundred U.S. soldiers would remain at the At Tanf Garrison, a desert outpost in southern Syria near the Jordanian border where the U.S. has been training a tribal force called the Mughawir al Thawra.<sup>9</sup>

These developments raised concerns that the SDF would no longer be willing or able to continue operations against ISIS as its fighters focused attention on confronting the Turkish



**U.S. Soldiers and Marines drive a joint light tactical vehicle at an undisclosed location in Syria. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)**





**The DIA said that a reduction in counterterrorism pressure “will provide the group with time and space to expand its ability to conduct transnational attacks targeting the West.”**

incursion.<sup>10</sup> The events also raise questions about how the United States planned to achieve its stated policy goals in Syria with Russian and Syrian regime forces controlling areas of northeastern Syria vacated by departing U.S. troops.<sup>11</sup>

With SDF and Coalition operations against ISIS in Syria diminished, U.S. military, intelligence, and diplomatic agencies warned that ISIS was likely to exploit the reduction in counterterrorism pressure to reconstitute its operations in Syria.<sup>12</sup> The DIA said that a reduction in counterterrorism pressure “will provide the group with time and space to expand its ability to conduct transnational attacks targeting the West.”<sup>13</sup> At the time that U.S. forces began to withdraw, they had been advising, assisting, equipping, and training Syrian partner forces to conduct counterterrorism and clearing operations against ISIS. The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and the Combined Joint Task Force-OIR (CJTF-OIR) reported that clandestine ISIS cells in Syria had been carrying out attacks during the reporting period ending September 30, 2019.<sup>14</sup>

In the initial wake of the drawdown, Ambassador James Jeffrey, the Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, testified

to the House Foreign Affairs Committee that, “if those troops are withdrawn fully, a very important tool we had to keep ISIS under control will be gone.”<sup>15</sup>

According to White House statements, on October 17, after Turkish forces had pushed several miles into northeastern Syria, Turkey agreed to a U.S. 5-day brokered “pause” in fighting against the YPG. The agreement stipulated that YPG forces would leave designated areas along the Syrian border with Turkey. The United States and Turkey also agreed to safeguard religious and ethnic minority communities and increase cooperation to detain ISIS fighters.<sup>16</sup>

The Department of State (DoS) reported that on October 23 Turkey announced a permanent halt to operations. The announcement coincided with an agreement reached by Turkey and Russia to remove the YPG from additional positions in northeastern Syria near the border with Turkey and to begin joint Turkish-Russian border patrols.<sup>17</sup> However, according to media reports, fighting continued.<sup>18</sup> The DoS reported that as of October 25, the SDF was in discussions with the Syrian regime and Russia to withdraw its forces from this expanded area.<sup>19</sup>

However, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from northeastern Syria did not end U.S. troop presence in that part of the country. During a press conference on October 25, Secretary Esper said that a contingent of U.S. troops would deploy to Dayr az Zawr province to “deny ISIS access to oil revenue.”<sup>20</sup> OUSD(P)/ISA said the troops would support the SDF, which controls oil fields in the province, and prevent ISIS from exploiting the fields.<sup>21</sup>

**A checkpoint abandoned by Syrian Democratic Forces after Turkish military operations began outside Ras al-Ayn, Syria. (Voice of America photo)**





Figure 1.

**Syria-Turkey Border Areas of Influence or Presence, as of October 15, 2019****SYRIAN AND RUSSIAN FORCES MOVE INTO NORTHEASTERN SYRIA**

Turkey's incursion precipitated the movement of Syrian regime and Russian troops across northeastern Syria.<sup>22</sup> According to media reports, as of the end of October, Turkey had deployed troops in three areas between two border towns in northeastern Syria, effectively undermining a prior U.S.-Turkish arrangement to create a so-called safe zone, or "security mechanism," there.<sup>23</sup>

In response to the Turkish incursion, Syrian regime forces and Russian forces moved into several towns, including Manbij, Tabqa, and Ayn Issa. The DIA reported that Russian forces also moved into some areas near the Turkish border to patrol the front line between Syrian regime forces and Syrian opposition forces supported by Turkey.<sup>24</sup>

The DIA said that the movement of these pro-regime forces continued until October 22, when Russia and Turkey reached a long-term agreement to create a security zone and conduct joint patrols in an expanded area that included the territory to the east and west of where the previous U.S.-Turkey "security mechanism" had been established.<sup>25</sup>

For an overview of where forces were located in Syria as of October 18, 2019, following the Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria and the withdrawal of U.S. troops there, see Figure 1.

## ISIS EXPLOITS TURKISH INCURSION AND DRAWDOWN OF U.S. FORCES

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that, according to open sources, ISIS exploited the Turkish incursion and subsequent drawdown of U.S. troops to reconstitute capabilities and resources within Syria and strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad.<sup>26</sup> The DIA also reported that without counterterrorism pressure, ISIS will probably be able to more freely build clandestine networks and will attempt to free ISIS members detained in SDF-run prisons and family members living in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, according to the DIA, ISIS will likely have the “time and space” to target the West and provide support to its 19 global branches and networks.<sup>28</sup> In the longer term, ISIS will probably seek to regain control of some Syrian population centers and expand its global footprint, the DIA said.<sup>29</sup>

The DIA also reported that the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was killed during a raid conducted by U.S. special operations forces in Syria on October 26, 2019, would likely have little effect on ISIS’s ability to reconstitute. The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that, in its assessment, ISIS is “postured to withstand” al-Baghdadi’s death, and probably will maintain “continuity of operations, global cohesion, and at least its current trajectory.”<sup>30</sup> Open-source analysis also stated that al-Baghdadi’s death was a significant blow to ISIS but would not likely end the ISIS threat.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the Turkish incursion and U.S. troop withdrawal, USCENTCOM reported that ISIS clandestine cells had been continuing to reconstitute networks and carry out frequent attacks on the SDF and local government officials, particularly in Dayr az Zawr province.<sup>32</sup> This is



**ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a video released in April 2019 prior to his death during a U.S. special operations forces raid in Syria in October 2019. (Video capture)**



**During the quarter, which ended September 30, 2019, the SDF had participated in more than 50 partnered operations, detaining more than 200 ISIS fighters and affiliates and seizing small arms, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and IED-making materials, and documents.**

the same province where the Administration said it was considering sending U.S. troops to help the SDF secure oil fields.<sup>33</sup> The CJTF-OIR reported that the province will likely remain an “area of interest” to ISIS due in part to its central geographic location that allows ISIS to dispatch fighters into Iraq.<sup>34</sup>

### **SDF COMMITS TO CONTINUE OPERATIONS AGAINST ISIS**

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG on October 25 that U.S. forces will continue to conduct operations against ISIS in Syria “as capabilities and authorities allow, from inside Syria or elsewhere.”<sup>35</sup> According to congressional testimony from Ambassador Jeffrey, the SDF commander, General Mazloum Abdi, committed to continue working with U.S. forces against ISIS.<sup>36</sup> However, as of the completion of this report in mid-November, it was unclear how many of the roughly 100,000 SDF forces were still conducting counter-ISIS operations in northeastern Syria.

Prior to the Turkish incursion and the ensuing temporary pause in SDF operations against ISIS, CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the SDF had conducted counter-insurgency raids and clearance operations against ISIS in several provinces in northeastern Syria.<sup>37</sup> During the quarter, which ended September 30, 2019, the SDF had participated in more than 50 partnered operations, detaining more than 200 ISIS fighters and affiliates and seizing small arms, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and IED-making materials, and documents.<sup>38</sup> In October, according to OUSD(P)/ISA, the SDF “temporarily paused” operations against ISIS as YPG fighters moved north to confront the Turkish incursion.<sup>39</sup>

### **DIA: OTHER FORCES UNLIKELY TO PRIORITIZE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS**

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that other forces that have moved in northeastern Syria are unlikely to prioritize fighting ISIS. The DIA said that pro-regime forces had not conducted operations against ISIS in the areas that they had moved into, and that these forces probably prioritize limiting Turkey’s incursion into Syria over counterterrorism operations against ISIS.<sup>40</sup> The DIA said that although Syrian regime forces regularly clash with ISIS, the Syrian regime forces probably do not have the will to carry out meaningful operations against ISIS, and will probably also give priority to reclaiming territory from Turkey over operations against ISIS.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, citing western think tank reports, the DIA reported that Turkish-backed Syrian militias also had not carried out any counterterrorism operations against ISIS since the Turkish incursion in October and were unlikely to do so.<sup>42</sup> The DIA said that some militias backed by Turkey previously helped to smuggle ISIS fighters across borders and probably maintain low-level tactical ties to ISIS.<sup>43</sup> The DIA said that these militias primarily focus on fighting the Syrian regime and the SDF, which they view as terrorists aligned with insurgents in Turkey.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the DIA said that Russian public statements have not focused on plans to counter possible ISIS threats in Syria.<sup>45</sup>

The DoS told the DoS OIG that the areas in which regime and pro-regime forces had advanced were largely free of significant ISIS presence due to counterterrorism pressure on ISIS from the SDF.<sup>46</sup>

According to USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, who funds aid agencies working in Al Hol, security at the camp has remained relatively stable since the Turkish incursion into Syria. (Voice of America photo)



## TURKISH INCURSION RESULTS IN ISIS PRISON ESCAPES AND CREATES INSTABILITY IN IDP CAMPS

CJTF-OIR said that, as of October 24, likely fewer than 200 ISIS prisoners had escaped from SDF-run prisons that were holding approximately 10,000 in the wake of Turkey's incursion into northeast Syria.<sup>47</sup> The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that, according to media reports, despite the escapes, the SDF intended to maintain control of the ISIS detention centers in northeast Syria, albeit with fewer prison guards.<sup>48</sup> The DoS reported that two high-profile ISIS detainees held in SDF-run prisons were moved to Iraq.<sup>49</sup>

However, the SDF has warned that it could not indefinitely hold thousands of ISIS prisoners in detention centers across northeast Syria.<sup>50</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF are entirely reliant on U.S. and Coalition support to fund ISIS detention operations.<sup>51</sup> Both the SDF and the United States had been urging countries to repatriate and prosecute their citizens as a way to reduce the burden on the SDF of holding so many detainees.<sup>52</sup> So far, most countries have been reluctant to repatriate their citizens.<sup>53</sup> At least eight countries, including the United States, have publicly acknowledged repatriating ISIS suspects in SDF custody, the DIA reported.<sup>54</sup> The DoS reported that many countries that have repatriated ISIS fighters from Syria have requested not to be publicly identified.<sup>55</sup>

According to news reports and humanitarian aid organizations, when Turkey crossed into Syria, thousands of residents and humanitarian aid providers fled Ayn Issa, an IDP camp housing approximately 13,000 people near the border.<sup>56</sup> News reports also stated that more than 800 foreign individuals thought to have ties to ISIS, including women and children, may have been among those who fled. The DoS reported that the incursion also forced the evacuation of residents of the Mabrouka IDP camp in Hasakah province.<sup>57</sup> The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reported that both camps were evacuated due to nearby hostilities and the families there were either relocated to nearby camps or fled further south.<sup>58</sup>



**According to the DoS and USAID, stabilization and humanitarian efforts continued throughout the quarter, but the Turkish incursion and withdrawal of U.S. troops has hindered those efforts.**

According to OUSD(P)/ISA, as of October 24, the SDF continued to provide security at Al Hol, a large IDP camp south of Ayn Issa, but in “a more limited fashion” since the Turkish incursion into Syria.<sup>59</sup> However, OUSD(P)/ISA said that ISIS supporters in the camp could exploit the decreased security posture, but said that it has limited knowledge of the camp because there are no U.S. forces stationed there.<sup>60</sup> According to USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which funds aid agencies working in Al Hol, security at the camp has remained relatively stable since the Turkish incursion into Syria.<sup>61</sup>

### **U.S. STABILIZATION PERSONNEL ARE AGAIN WITHDRAWN FROM SYRIA**

According to the DoS and USAID, stabilization and humanitarian efforts continued throughout the quarter, but the Turkish incursion and withdrawal of U.S. troops has hindered those efforts.<sup>62</sup> The DoS reported that it directed personnel deployed to the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team-Forward (START-Forward), a stabilization program in Syria, to leave the country again. The START-Forward personnel had just returned to Syria in July, after a 6-month absence following the earlier U.S. troop withdrawal.<sup>63</sup> In October, the U.S. Administration authorized additional expenditures of \$50 million in stabilization assistance to protect ethnic and religious minorities and advance human rights and accountability in Syria.<sup>64</sup>

USAID and the DoS reported that the United States continued providing humanitarian assistance in northern Syria during the quarter and into October, although the unstable security situation complicated aid delivery.<sup>65</sup> Humanitarian needs have continued to grow in northern Syria, as the civil war and the Turkish incursion caused displacement, civilian casualties, and widespread destruction of civilian and humanitarian infrastructure.<sup>66</sup>

### **EVENTS IN IRAQ**

#### **ISIS CONTINUES TO REBUILD, BUT STRUGGLES TO SYNCHRONIZE EFFORTS OR ACQUIRE TERRAIN**

OUSD(P)/ISA told the DoD OIG that the drawdown of U.S. forces in Syria did not result in changes to the OIR mission in Iraq, or to ISIS’s activity in Iraq.<sup>67</sup> It reported that the Coalition remains committed to partnering with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) units against ISIS and bolstering their capacity to eventually suppress ISIS on their own.<sup>68</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS continued this quarter to solidify and expand its command and control structure in Iraq, although it had not increased its capabilities in areas where the Coalition was actively conducting operations against ISIS.<sup>69</sup> CJTF-OIR also reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS combat power remains in restricted terrain and unpopulated areas where there is little to no local security presence.<sup>70</sup> USCENTCOM said that ISIS attacks are designed to destabilize the security environment and embarrass the Iraqi government.<sup>71</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS’s long-term focus remains the reestablishment of a “caliphate.”<sup>72</sup> Despite this activity, CJTF-OIR said that ISIS in Iraq remains decentralized and struggles to synchronize efforts, acquire terrain, and garner public support. CJTF-OIR also said that ISIS is unable to carry out large-scale attacks and maintains minimal forces in areas of Iraq where the Coalition operates.<sup>73</sup>



## ISF CANNOT HOLD TERRITORY IN ISIS SUPPORT ZONES

CJTF-OIR stated that a reduction in significant ISIS attacks this quarter demonstrated the tangible results of ISF clearance operations against ISIS. However, according to CJTF-OIR, the ISF does not have a large enough force to control large desert areas.<sup>74</sup> The ISF has also been unable to retain control of territory cleared of ISIS in Salah ad Din province, and has limited access to ISIS support zones in both Salah ad Din and Diyala provinces.<sup>75</sup> The ISF remains “largely unwilling or incapable of holding terrain in the mountains and central and southern wadis of Kirkuk province,” CJTF-OIR said.<sup>76</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that the ministerial staff and headquarters of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), Iraq’s elite U.S.-trained special operations force, had “dramatically improved” its ability to conduct counterterrorism operations against ISIS.<sup>77</sup> CJTF-OIR also stated that the CTS continued to conduct unilateral operations, including arrests, warrant searches, and collection gathering.<sup>78</sup> However, the ISF continues to lack key capabilities required to fight ISIS.<sup>79</sup>

For instance, the ISF generally continues to lack “operational reach” into less populated areas and its ability to “find and fix” a target is “a major shortfall” in capabilities, CJTF-OIR said. It also said that the ISF exploitation capability is “virtually non-existent” without Coalition assistance.<sup>80</sup> CJTF-OIR said that most commands within the ISF will not conduct operations to clear ISIS insurgents in mountainous and desert terrain without Coalition air cover, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and coordination.<sup>81</sup> Despite ongoing training, CJTF-OIR said that the ISF has not changed its level of reliance

Iraqi Security Forces soldiers react to a training IED during a culminating training exercise at Camp Taji, Iraq. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

on Coalition forces for the last 9 months and that Iraqi commanders continue to request Coalition assets instead of utilizing their own systems.<sup>82</sup>

## TENSIONS WITH IRAN AND SUSPECTED ISRAELI AIRSTRIKES COMPLICATE OIR IN IRAQ

According to media reports, suspected Israeli airstrikes on Iranian-aligned militia bases in Iraq in July and August elicited a rebuke from Iraqi parliamentarians and resulted in Iraqi government-imposed air restrictions on all foreign aircraft flying over Iraqi airspace, including Coalition aircraft.<sup>83</sup> Media reports stated that as many as four airstrikes targeted bases in Iraq belonging to Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) militias aligned with Iran.<sup>84</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that the restrictions had “negative effects on air enterprise D-ISIS mission support,” and that the impacts included “reduced observation and monitoring time by ISR assets.”<sup>85</sup> The DoS reported that the air restrictions hurt the Coalition’s ability to counter the ISIS threat in Iraq by reducing the ability of the Coalition to use ISR assets to observe and monitor ISIS activity.<sup>86</sup>

On July 1, 2019, Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abd al Mahdi issued another government decree ordering the full integration of PMF units into the ISF.<sup>87</sup> According to the DIA, some PMF brigades followed the decree by shutting down headquarters and turning in weapons, but several Iranian-aligned groups refused to comply.<sup>88</sup> In an assessment provided to the DoD OIG, the DIA said that Iranian-affiliated groups within the PMF are unlikely to change their loyalties because of the new order.<sup>89</sup>

## ABSENCE OF EMBASSY STAFF HINDERS U.S. SUPPORT TO IRAQ AS PROTESTS AGAINST THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT ERUPT

Since Secretary of State Michael Pompeo ordered all non-emergency U.S. Embassy personnel to leave Iraq last quarter, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil have reduced total staffing to 352 from 563 direct hire U.S. citizens and Foreign Service nationals. In addition, approximately 1,000 contractor staff left the country, with 2,962 remaining. According to the DoS, the ordered departure, extended through November 9, has affected all operations of Mission Iraq, and has limited the Mission’s ability to help Iraq become a more resilient, independent, democratic country, and to support counter-ISIS efforts.<sup>90</sup>

Protests, which soon turned violent, erupted October 1 in Iraq largely over the inability of Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi’s government to create jobs, improve public services such as water and electricity, and end the endemic corruption plaguing the country.<sup>91</sup> Demonstrators also came out to protest Iranian influence in Iraq, in particular Iran’s influence in Iraqi security institutions.<sup>92</sup> Starting in Baghdad with more than 5,000 young protesters, the demonstrations promptly turned violent when government security forces used tear gas, water cannons, and live fire to disperse the demonstrators.<sup>93</sup> The protests expanded to the south, breaking out in the Shia holy city of Karbala and then further south to Basrah, Najaf, Diwaniyah, and Nasiriyah.<sup>94</sup> Prominent Shia clerics Muqtada al-Sadr and Ammar al Hakim, and Grand Ayatollah al Sistani, announced their support for the protesters’ demands, criticizing the Prime Minister, the Iraqi government, and the political parties.<sup>95</sup>

**Protests, which soon turned violent, erupted October 1 in Iraq largely over the inability of Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi’s government to create jobs, improve public services such as water and electricity, and end the endemic corruption plaguing the country.**



These widespread protests highlight the governance challenges that confront Iraq. The DoS reported that the protests are occurring in primarily Shia-majority areas of the country and against a Shia-dominated government, and that it remains “highly unlikely” that ISIS—a Sunni extremist group—will be able to exploit the instability caused by the protests to recruit from a Shia civilian population.<sup>96</sup>

The DoS-ordered departure for Mission Iraq affected USAID as well, reducing its staff by 80 percent, to five expatriate personnel in Baghdad, which later increased to six.<sup>97</sup> This quarter, USAID officials reported to the USAID OIG that staff reductions associated with the ordered departure have had significant adverse effects on program planning, management, and oversight activities in Iraq, where USAID manages a \$1.16 billion assistance portfolio.<sup>98</sup>

Through its Iraq Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Initiative, USAID has awarded 14 grants ranging from \$528,500 to over \$90 million to encourage the voluntary returns of internally displaced persons through stabilization, health, and economic development programs.<sup>99</sup> However, USAID reported that political and security issues continue to inhibit voluntary returns.<sup>100</sup> The DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) partners also reported working in more than 140 locations with religious or ethnic minority populations. These PRM-supported programs focus on livelihoods; education, including school rehabilitation; protection; mental health and psychosocial services; social cohesion and capacity building; legal assistance; and quick-impact revitalization projects.<sup>101</sup>

Similar obstacles inhibit the safe and voluntary returns of IDPs more generally, including ongoing insecurity, damaged or destroyed housing and infrastructure, and a lack of basic services, according to USAID. Mutual distrust and resentment between different social groups, frequently stemming from suspicion of membership in or collaboration with ISIS, have raised concerns about threats, intimidation, and possible violence against families seeking to return home.<sup>102</sup>

**This quarter, USAID officials reported to the USAID OIG that staff reductions associated with the ordered departure have had significant adverse effects on program planning, management, and oversight activities in Iraq, where USAID manages a \$1.16 billion assistance portfolio.**

## LEAD IG OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

The Lead IG and partner agencies conducted oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; investigations; and hotline activities from July 1 through September 30, 2019.

### AUDITS, INSPECTIONS, AND EVALUATIONS

The Lead IG and partner agencies completed seven audit, evaluation, and inspection reports related to OIR from July 1 through September 30, 2019. These reports examined various activities related to OIR, accountability for government property for contracts supporting contingency operations worldwide; transportation, security and safety programs at U.S. diplomatic facilities abroad; and humanitarian and development assistance programs. Table 1 lists the released reports by agency.

Table 1.

**Oversight Reports Issued this Quarter**

Report	Release Date
<b>DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL</b>	
<i>Audit of Air Force Accountability of Government Property and Oversight of Contractual Maintenance Requirements in the Contract Augmentation Program IV in Southwest Asia</i> DODIG-2019-103	July 18, 2019
<b>DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL</b>	
<i>Audit of Cost Management of Embassy Air in Afghanistan and Iraq</i> AUD-MERO-19-33	September 20, 2019
<i>Evaluation of the Antiterrorism Assistance Explosive Detection Canine Program—Health and Welfare</i> ESP-19-06	September 10, 2019
<i>Management Assistance Report: Safety and Security Infractions at U.S. Embassy Beirut, Lebanon Require Immediate Attention</i> AUD-MERO-19-34	July 19, 2019
<b>U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL</b>	
<i>Audit of Direct Costs Incurred and Reported by Family Health International in Iraq under USAID Cooperative Agreement AID-267-LA-13-00001, July 1, 2014, to November 6, 2015</i> 8-267-19-006-D	September 26, 2019
<i>Independent Audit Report on Verification of Direct Cost Billed by The QED Group, LLC (QED) under USAID Contract No. AID-267-C-13-00001, Advancing Performance Management (APM), July 1, 2015, through March 31, 2017</i> 8-267-19-005-D	September 26, 2019
<i>USAID's Award Oversight Is Insufficient to Hold Implementers Accountable for Achieving Results</i> 9-000-19-006-P	September 23, 2019

During this quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their oversight partners had 28 ongoing and 21 planned oversight projects for OIR.

## 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 United Arab Emirates, as well as in Germany and Washington, D.C., to conduct their OIR-related investigations.

During this quarter, investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 11 investigations, initiated 10 new investigations, and coordinated on 135 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations.









A member of the SDF demolishes a YPG fortification in northeast Syria. (U.S. Army photo)

# OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

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## OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

*Due to the events that occurred in Syria after the quarter ended on September 30, the Lead IG agencies considered it essential to report on the developments in October, and how they affect the Operation Inherent Resolve mission and efforts by ISIS to resurge. The Lead IG agencies therefore sought additional information from the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the United States Agency for International Development as of October 24, 2019, and that information is presented in this report. Where warranted, the Lead IG agencies continued to update evolving events through open source reporting until this report was completed in mid-November.*

### **Turkish Incursion into Northeastern Syria Disrupts the ISIS Fight**

On October 6, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan informed President Donald Trump in a telephone call that Turkey would launch a long-planned offensive into northeastern Syria, setting in motion a series of events that affect Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR).<sup>1</sup> Turkey's stated goal was to push back Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) from the Syrian border.<sup>2</sup> The YPG,



**U.S. Soldiers and Marines withdraw from an undisclosed location in Syria. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)**

the main fighting force in the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), were vital to the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) “caliphate” in northeastern Syria. However, Turkey views the YPG as an extension of Kurdish militants waging a decades-long violent insurgency in Turkey.<sup>3</sup> The White House issued a statement on October 6 that it did not support the incursion, but that U.S. troops would not be involved and would leave the “immediate area.”<sup>4</sup>

On October 9, Turkey launched an air and ground offensive against YPG positions in northeastern Syria. In a Twitter post on the same day, President Trump announced that he had ordered approximately 50 U.S. forces to leave positions along Syria’s border with Turkey.<sup>5</sup>

The Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy/International Security Affairs (OUSD(P)/ISA) reported to the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) on November 6 that as Turkish forces advanced across the border, U.S. forces were directed to plan for a full withdrawal from northeastern Syria.<sup>6</sup>

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported to the DoD OIG on October 23 that as U.S. forces withdrew from the border region over the next few weeks, Russian and Syrian regime forces moved into select areas that the U.S. troops had vacated.<sup>7</sup>



According to Kurdish officials, these developments undermined the relationship between the United States and the SDF, which viewed the U.S. decision to withdraw troops as a betrayal.<sup>8</sup> These events also raised questions whether the SDF would be willing or able to continue operations against ISIS or guard ISIS detention centers as they focused on countering the Turkish incursion.<sup>9</sup>

In the days that followed the incursion, some units of the SDF paused operations against ISIS and moved to the border to respond to Turkish forces and their Syrian militia allies.<sup>10</sup> Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) reported to the DoD OIG on October 24 that less than 200 of the approximately 10,000 ISIS prisoners in SDF-run detention centers has escaped, and that most of the prisons remained guarded and secured.<sup>11</sup> Media reports also said that ISIS family members were among occupants who fled internally displaced persons (IDP) camps during the incursion.<sup>12</sup>

On October 13, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper stated publicly that President Trump had ordered the “deliberate withdrawal” of U.S. forces from northeastern Syria.<sup>13</sup> Secretary Esper later said some of the troops withdrawing from Syria would redeploy to Iraq. Subsequently, the Iraqi government announced that incoming U.S. troops could only transit through the country and could not stay.<sup>14</sup> Secretary Esper then stated that U.S. troops would only transit through Iraq temporarily.<sup>15</sup> On October 13, the SDF announced an agreement with the Syrian regime to allow regime forces to move into northeastern Syria.<sup>16</sup>

On October 17, after Turkish forces had made significant advances into Syria, the United States and Turkey issued a joint statement announcing a pause in fighting. The Department of State (DoS) reported to the DoS OIG on November 5 that Turkey had committed to freezing its advance to allow the SDF to withdraw from the area occupied by Turkish forces.<sup>17</sup> The DoS reported that on October 23, Turkey announced a permanent halt to operations. This coincided with an agreement reached by Turkey and Russia to remove the YPG from an expanded area and to begin joint border patrols.<sup>18</sup> The DoS reported that as of October 25, the SDF was in discussions with Russia and the Syrian regime on pulling its forces back from this expanded area.<sup>19</sup> However, reports of fighting between Turkish forces, their Syrian militia allies, regime forces, and the YPG continued.<sup>20</sup> According to media reports, as of mid-October, Turkey was continuing offensive operations, clashing with both the SDF and Syrian regime forces.<sup>21</sup>

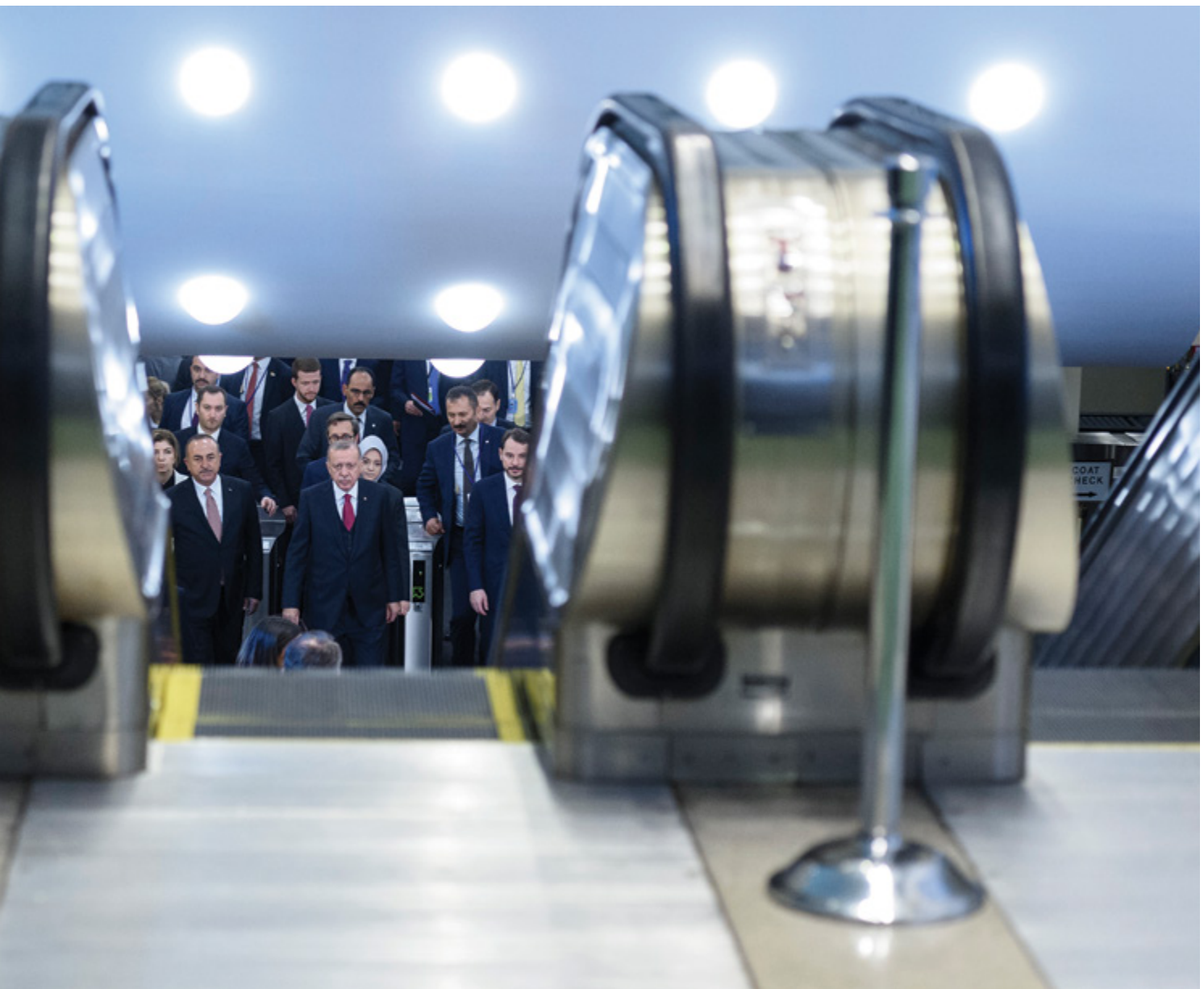
On October 24, in a speech in Brussels, Secretary Esper said that Turkey’s incursion jeopardized the gains made against ISIS in northeastern Syria.<sup>22</sup> Secretary Esper also said that the United States would continue to partner with the SDF in operations to defeat ISIS, and that the SDF was continuing to guard ISIS detention centers and some IDP camps.<sup>23</sup>

On October 24, Secretary Esper announced that a contingent of “mechanized,” or armored, U.S. forces would deploy to Syria’s Dayr az Zawr province to secure Kurdish-held oil fields from being exploited by ISIS.<sup>24</sup> By the end of October, as U.S. troops continued their drawdown from the border region, news reports said that hundreds of U.S. forces, along with armored infantry carriers, had deployed to the eastern Syrian province.<sup>25</sup>

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG on October 25 that, “U.S. Forces will continue partnered operations against ISIS in Syria as capabilities and authorities allow.”<sup>26</sup>



**Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrives at the 74th General Assembly at U.N. headquarters in New York on September 24, 2019. (UN photo)**



OUSD(P)/ISA did not state where these operations would occur, how many of the approximately 100,000 SDF forces would continue counter-ISIS operations, or what capabilities and authorities would be necessary. OUSD(P)/ISA also stated that the DoD is considering retaining a small ground presence in select locations in northeastern Syria that could facilitate more effective operations against ISIS.<sup>27</sup>

On November 1, OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that U.S. forces had begun “deploying and repositioning additional assets” that included both mechanized and “other type forces” in the Dayr az Zawr area. Furthermore, OUSD(P)/ISA stated that the United States was “temporarily holding” its ground in northeast Syria to continue to fight ISIS and deny it “access to critical resources.”<sup>28</sup>

As of mid-November, when this report was complete, Lead IG agencies have been unable to obtain unclassified data on the number of U.S. forces that had withdrawn from Syria; how

many forces had redeployed from other parts of Syria to the Dayr az Zawr area; and how many new forces had deployed into the Dayr az Zawr area to help the SDF secure the oil fields. Furthermore, there was no information available regarding the number of U.S. forces that were continuing to partner with the SDF in areas outside of Dayr az Zawr.

The events of October raise questions regarding the OIR mission to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, and who would participate in that mission.<sup>29</sup> The Lead IG agencies will report in more detail on these questions in the next quarter’s report.

More information on the Turkish incursion into Syria is contained in the classified appendix.

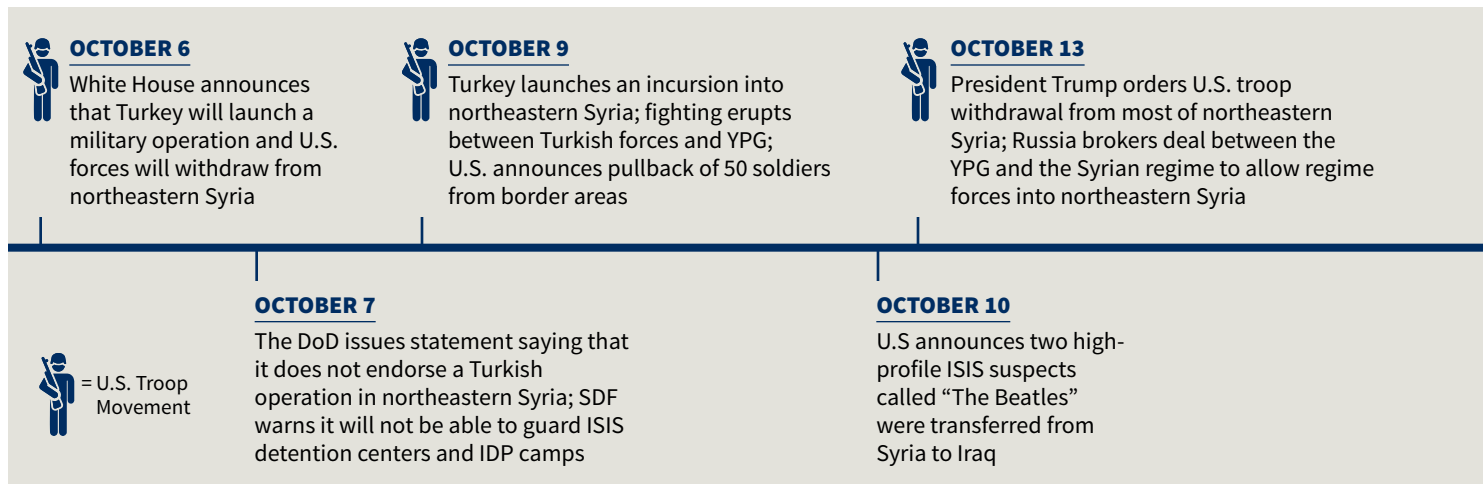
### ISIS Exploits Turkish Incursion and Drawdown of U.S. Forces

At the time that United States ordered the withdrawal of forces from Syria on October 9, U.S. troops were working with the SDF and other Syrian partner forces to conduct counterterrorism and clearing operations against ISIS in northeastern Syria. However, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) reported to the DoD OIG just prior to the order to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria that ISIS in Syria was continuing to rebuild networks and carry out attacks.<sup>30</sup> USCENTCOM also reported that without consistent counterterrorism pressure ISIS would likely be able to rebuild and carry out more sophisticated operations.<sup>31</sup> CJTF-OIR said that ISIS’s long-term focus remained the reestablishment of its so-called “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria.<sup>32</sup>

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS has exploited the Turkish incursion and subsequent drawdown of U.S. troops from northeastern Syria to reconstitute its capabilities and resources both within Syria in the short term and globally in the longer term.<sup>33</sup> Citing open-source reporting, the DIA said that ISIS has activated sleeper cells to increase attacks against the SDF.<sup>34</sup> In the short term, absent counterterrorism pressure, ISIS will probably operate more freely across areas of northeastern Syria to build clandestine networks and

Figure 2.

#### Timeline of October Events





**On October 23, the DIA reported to the DoD OIG that it assessed that ISIS would likely also use the security vacuum in northeastern Syria to target the West because it will likely have more “time and space” to plan attacks and provide support to its 19 global branches and networks.**

will attempt to free members detained in SDF-run prisons, the DIA said.<sup>35</sup> According to news reports, ISIS claimed responsibility for two car bomb attacks in the aftermath of Turkey’s invasion into Syria: one on October 11 in the city of Qamishli, and one the next day at an SDF-run prison holding ISIS detainees in the city of Hasakah, which forced the SDF to send reinforcements to the prison to prevent an escape.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, on October 23, the DIA reported to the DoD OIG that it assessed that ISIS would likely also use the security vacuum in northeastern Syria to target the West because it will likely have more “time and space” to plan attacks and provide support to its 19 global branches and networks.<sup>37</sup> In the longer term, the DIA assessed that absent counterterrorism pressure in Syria, ISIS would probably have an opportunity to regain control of some Syrian population centers and to be better postured to launch external attacks and expand its global footprint.<sup>38</sup>

The DIA also told the DoD OIG that ISIS’s initial public response to the Turkish incursion and U.S. troop drawdown from northeastern Syria was limited to acknowledging the events in its weekly newspaper, al Naba.<sup>39</sup> ISIS also criticized the SDF for failing to anticipate the U.S. decision to remove troops.<sup>40</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS released “limited and ineffective” propaganda celebrating U.S. forces withdrawing from areas of northeastern Syria.<sup>41</sup>

More information on ISIS activity following the Turkish incursion and drawdown of U.S. forces is contained in the classified appendix.

### ISIS Detainees Escape from Some SDF-run Detention Centers

On October 24, CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that less than 200 of approximately 10,000 ISIS prisoners had escaped from SDF-run prisons after Turkey’s incursion into northeastern Syria, and that the majority remained in prison.<sup>42</sup> OUSD(P)/ISA reported that two high-profile ISIS detainees held in SDF prisons had been moved to Iraq.<sup>43</sup> Media reports said the prisoners part of a British ISIS cell known as “the Beatles” responsible for the beheading of several western hostages.<sup>44</sup>



#### OCTOBER 21-22

Defense Secretary Esper states that U.S. forces departing Syria will operate from Iraq; Iraqi officials say U.S. forces coming from Syria must leave Iraq within 4 weeks

#### OCTOBER 23

President Trump lifts sanctions imposed on Turkish government agencies and officials on October 14 following Turkey’s incursion into Syria

#### OCTOBER 27

President Trump announces that ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a U.S. Special Forces operation in Syria’s Idlib province

#### OCTOBER 17

Vice President Pence announces a pause in fighting between Turkey and the YPG; Iraq Ministry of Defense says it captured ISIS fighters and families crossing from Syria after escaping SDF custody

#### OCTOBER 22

Defense Secretary Esper says more than 100 ISIS prisoners escaped from detention centers in Syria; Russia and Turkey announce agreement to halt Turkey’s advance and remove YPG from the border



#### OCTOBER 24

U.S. announces it will deploy new forces to guard Kurdish-controlled oil fields in eastern Syria

On October 23, the DIA, citing press reporting, reported to the DoD OIG that the SDF intended to maintain custody of the ISIS detention centers in northeastern Syria, but had significantly reduced security at the facilities due to the Turkish incursion. The DIA assessed that should the SDF lose territory to Turkey, it would likely transfer its detainees to Syrian regime control.<sup>45</sup>

However, U.S. officials stated for months prior to Turkey’s incursion into Syria that the SDF warned that it could not indefinitely hold more than 10,000 ISIS prisoners in detention centers across northeastern Syria, including 8,000 Iraqis and Syrians and approximately 2,000 foreign fighters.<sup>46</sup> CJTF-OIR said that the continued detention placed an undue burden on the SDF and that the longer the ISIS fighters remain in detention, the greater the potential for prison breaks and radicalization.<sup>47</sup> In mid-September, ISIS released an audio recording calling on followers to break prisoners free or bribe guards to release them.<sup>48</sup>

More information on ISIS detainees and IDF prisons is contained in the classified appendix.

### U.S. Officials: SDF Will Likely Continue to Fight ISIS

As noted earlier in this report, OUSD(P)/ISA stated to the DoD OIG on October 25 that U.S. forces would continue partnered operations against ISIS in Syria as capabilities and authorities allow, and that the DoD was looking at options to retain a small ground presence in select location in northeastern Syria to facilitate counter-ISIS operations.<sup>49</sup> OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG on Nov. 1 that U.S. forces had begun “deploying and repositioning additional assets” in the Dayr az Zawr area to continue to fight ISIS and deny it “access to critical resources.”<sup>50</sup>

In testimony before Congress on October 22 and 23, Ambassador Jeffrey stated that the SDF was still detaining ISIS prisoners and conducting stabilization operations against ISIS along the Euphrates, where U.S. forces remain.<sup>51</sup> Ambassador Jeffrey said that the United States had been working for some time on plans to continue partnering with the SDF to fight ISIS even after U.S. forces departed, so there were plans in place, which are “largely still in effect.”<sup>52</sup> Although SDF leadership warned repeatedly at the launch of Turkey’s incursion that it might not be able to continue to fight ISIS if it had to confront a Turkish assault, Ambassador Jeffrey testified that the SDF leadership messaged a commitment to continue working with the U.S. forces.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, Ambassador Jeffrey testified that the incursion had worked to “scramble the entire security system in the northeastern. That’s going to have a big impact on fighting ISIS.”<sup>54</sup> He stated that if a full U.S. withdrawal from Syria occurs, “a very important tool we had to keep ISIS under control will be gone.”<sup>55</sup>

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG on November 5 that SDF and Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) officials have emphasized that an October 13 cooperation agreement reached with the Syrian regime in the wake of the U.S. pullout related only to security and did not address outstanding political issues.<sup>56</sup> The DIA, citing regional press reporting, told the DoD OIG that the agreement addressed short-term battlefield concerns within the 30-km area south of Syria’s border with Turkey following Turkey’s advance.<sup>57</sup>

More information on SDF operations against ISIS is contained in the classified appendix.

**U.S. officials stated for months prior to Turkey’s incursion into Syria that the SDF warned that it could not indefinitely hold more than 10,000 ISIS prisoners in detention centers across northeastern Syria, including 8,000 Iraqis and Syrians and approximately 2,000 foreign fighters.**

**U.S. and Turkish military forces conduct the third combined joint ground patrol inside the security mechanism area in northeast Syria, October 4, 2019. (U.S. Army photo)**



## Turkish Incursion Scuttles U.S.-Turkey Security Mechanism Arrangement

Turkey's October incursion into northeastern Syria upended an arrangement reached in August between U.S. and Turkish military elements to create a "security mechanism" in Syria along its border with Turkey. The arrangement sought to allay Turkey's security concerns by creating a zone between the Syrian towns of Tel Abyad and Ras al Ayn that would be free of YPG fighters and jointly patrolled by U.S. and Turkish forces.<sup>58</sup>

In September, the United States and Turkey had begun joint patrols and the YPG began withdrawing forces from the zone and dismantling its fortifications there. U.S. officials said that by creating the zone, they hoped to address Turkey's concerns regarding the YPG and allow the SDF to concentrate on the fight against ISIS.<sup>59</sup> Turkey views the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated terrorist group that has been conducting a decades-long insurgency in Turkey.<sup>60</sup>

In the absence of a safe zone, Turkey had been massing forces and heavy warfighting equipment along its border with Syria and threatening to attack unless the YPG forces withdrew.<sup>61</sup> In 2018, Turkey launched two small operations into Syria to remove Kurdish groups, and in both instances the YPG, which is the main fighting force in the SDF, paused its fight against ISIS to send its fighters to confront Turkey's actions in northern Syria.<sup>62</sup>

When the United States and Turkey began implementing the security mechanism in August 2019, top U.S. and SDF officials said that they believed that the joint mechanism had substantially reduced the potential for a Turkish invasion.<sup>63</sup> However, at the UN General Assembly on September 24, Turkish President Erdogan said that Turkey demanded the YPG's removal from areas east of the Euphrates River and intended to establish a 19-mile-deep "peace corridor" that would run along 300 miles of the border. He also threatened to resettle 1 to 2 million of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey into the newly created border corridor even though many of the refugees came from other areas.<sup>64</sup>

Turkey's incursion on October 9 involved shelling across the border with northeastern Syria and a Turkish ground offensive in the portion of the border that the SDF had cleared for the security mechanism. An SDC official testified before Congress on October 23 that this "good faith" effort had left the SDF defenseless against the Turkish attack.<sup>65</sup> For an overview of the security mechanism, see Figure 1 on page 5.

More information on the security mechanism is contained in the classified appendix.



## Turkey's Incursion Precipitates Syrian Regime and Russian Troop Movements in Northeastern Syria

The Turkish incursion led to many other troop movements in northeastern Syria. The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that Syrian and Russian forces moved in to fill the vacuum created by departing U.S. troops. The DIA said that pro-regime forces moved into the towns of Manbij, Tabqah, Ayn Issa, and Kobane, and established checkpoints along many of the roads in between.<sup>66</sup> Syrian forces expanded from their pre-existing locations at Hasakah and Qamishli to Tal Tamr and checkpoint positions along the eastern parts of the M10 Highway that runs across northeastern Syria.<sup>67</sup>

The October 17 pause in the Turkey advance, negotiated by a team led by Vice President Pence, resulted in a joint statement between the United States and Turkey, in which Turkey committed to safeguard religious and ethnic minorities and to increase cooperation to detain ISIS fighters. The arrangement further provided that Turkish forces would “freeze in place” in Syria, and that the YPG and SDF would withdraw from the central portion of the safe zone. After the withdrawal was complete, Turkey announced a permanent halt to operations on October 23.<sup>68</sup>

The DIA said that pro-regime troop movements continued until October 22—the same day that Russia and Turkey reached a long-term agreement to create a security zone to the east and west of areas where the United States and Turkey had previously agreed to create the “safe zone.”<sup>69</sup> According to the DIA, Russia and Turkey agreed to remove all YPG forces to the depth of 32 kilometers along the northeastern Syria border outside of the zone encompassed in the U.S.-Turkey arrangement, and to conduct joint patrols west and east of Tal Abyad and Ras al Ayn, respectively.<sup>70</sup>

The DIA also said that Russian forces moved into some areas near the Turkish border, including areas near Manbij, where Russian military police were patrolling the front line between pro-regime and Turkish-backed forces to ensure deconfliction, and in Tabqa.<sup>71</sup>

Although the situation remained fluid as of the time of completion of this report, some reporting indicated that as of October 25, the YPG had removed forces from areas of Turkey's incursion in accordance with the U.S.-brokered ceasefire and it was negotiating with Russia and the Syrian regime on terms for a withdrawal away from the border.<sup>72</sup> In the days that followed, media reports said the SDF had reached an agreement with Russia and the regime and had pulled some of its forces back from the border in compliance.<sup>73</sup> However, as of October 25, SDF officials were issuing warnings that Turkey was continuing to fire on the SDF, despite the agreements, and the SDF officials stated that the SDF would “exercise its right to legitimate self-defense.”<sup>74</sup>

More information on troop movements is contained in the classified appendix.

## Other Forces Unlikely To Focus on ISIS Fight

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG on October 23 that other forces operating in northeastern Syria are not likely to conduct significant operations against ISIS. The DIA said that pro-regime forces have not conducted counter-ISIS missions in areas that they recently reclaimed from the SDF in the wake of the Turkish incursion and U.S. troop pullout. The DIA also said that Syrian and regime-backed forces probably prioritize reclaiming territory captured by Turkey and blocking positions to limit Turkey's advance over counterterrorism operations.<sup>75</sup>



**SDF commando cadets clear a room during military operations in urban terrain training in Syria. (U.S. Army photo)**

In addition, the DIA said that although pro-regime forces regularly clash with ISIS in parts of southeastern Syria, they likely lack the will to carry out meaningful operations to ensure an enduring defeat of ISIS in northeastern Syria.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, the DIA said that Syrian opposition forces who joined the Turkish incursion had not carried out any counterterrorism operations against ISIS since the start of the offensive and were unlikely to do so. Citing open source reporting, the DIA said that some of the militias backed by Turkey had previously helped smuggle ISIS fighters across opposition-held territory and probably maintain low-level ties to ISIS because they share a similar, strict interpretation of Sharia law.<sup>77</sup> The Turkish-backed militia take direction and support from Turkey and focus primarily on fighting the Syrian regime, the DIA said.<sup>78</sup>

### **Coalition Efforts in Syria Uncertain Following Turkish Incursion and U.S. Troop Withdrawal**

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG on October 23 that Coalition partners in Syria were reassessing their presence based on the U.S. drawdown of forces from Syria and the Turkish incursion.<sup>79</sup> OUSD(P)/ISA said that Coalition members have expressed concerns over how these events will affect the effort to defeat ISIS.<sup>80</sup> However, OUSD(P)/ISA said that the United States remains committed to sustaining a Global Coalition to defeat ISIS and discussions were under way to determine the best way forward and ensure continued Coalition support.<sup>81</sup>

According to the DoS, Secretary Pompeo will convene a Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS) Foreign Ministerial Small Group meeting in Washington, D.C. on November 14 to discuss next steps with key troop-contributing Coalition partners.<sup>82</sup>

Additional information about Coalition forces in Syria is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

Pre-raid compound image, October 26, 2019. (DoD image)



## ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi Dies in U.S. Raid on October 26

On October 26, U.S. special operations forces conducted a raid in northwestern Syria, which resulted in the death of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. According to the DIA, al Baghdadi had led ISIS as emir since 2010, becoming its “caliph” in 2014.<sup>83</sup> Although it remains unclear the extent to which al Baghdadi’s death would affect ISIS’s longer term ability to resurge in Syria and Iraq, the USCENTCOM Commander, General Kenneth McKenzie, said in a press briefing on October 30 that while ISIS might be “a little disrupted, the removal of al Baghdadi would not mark the end of ISIS.”<sup>84</sup>

“ISIS is first and last an ideology, so we are under no illusions that it’s going to go away just because we killed Baghdadi. It will remain,” General McKenzie stated. He said that the DoD expects ISIS will take some time to choose a new leader and during that time the group’s actions might be “a little disjointed” as well as dangerous, and some will try to carry out retribution attacks. He added that while the DoD does not expect “a bloodless future,” it does think that ISIS will become less effective over time.<sup>85</sup>

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG on November 8 that in its assessment, ISIS is postured to withstand the death of its caliph and probably will maintain group cohesion and at least its current trajectory, continue to project continuity and resilience, particularly in support of its ongoing expansion.<sup>86</sup>

The DIA also stated that five days after the death of al Baghdadi, ISIS publicly confirmed his death, and announced Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al Qurashi as the new “caliph.” The DIA said that ISIS’s declaration of a new caliph, as opposed to only an emir, underscores the group’s belief that the global caliphate remains intact despite its wholesale loss of territory in Iraq and Syria. The DIA added that ISIS also claimed in a statement that the group continues to expand globally, pointing to its presence in Europe and Africa. ISIS’s branches and networks are already beginning to pledge their allegiance to the new caliph, demonstrating the group’s global cohesion, the DIA said.<sup>87</sup>

Open-source reporting in the aftermath of the news of al Baghdadi’s death indicated that while ISIS followers were dubious that the leader was dead, online operatives called him a martyr and said the holy war will continue. Citing an encrypted online messaging platform



used by ISIS, the Middle East Media Research Institute reported that one pro-ISIS channel declared that the holy war is not dependent on one man, but on creed.<sup>88</sup>

Analysts differed on the impact of the ISIS leader's death. A former senior counterterrorism official agreed with the ISIS messaging that while al Baghdadi's death poses a setback for the organization, the jihadist ideology encouraging a widespread network of followers is likely to live on without al Baghdadi.<sup>89</sup> Other analysts writing for the Rand Corporation said that al Baghdadi was a "cult of personality," particularly when it came to recruiting foreign nationals, so his death could diminish recruitment as well as centralized command and control. They predicted that the long-term survival of ISIS—and its ability to inspire and recruit globally—will depend on choosing the right successor.<sup>90</sup> A Middle East expert with the London-based think tank Chatham House assessed that the immediate future of ISIS was more dependent on whether ISIS gets support from local Arab tribes who reject the SDF, and whether U.S. forces and the international Coalition remain in northeastern Syria.<sup>91</sup>

In the next quarter, the Lead IG will further examine the impact of al Baghdadi's death on ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

### The DoS Says U.S. Policy on Syria Remains Unchanged but Subject to Review

Since fall 2018, the United States has sought three primary goals in Syria: the enduring defeat of ISIS; the removal of all Iranian-led forces and proxies from the country; and the conclusion of UN-led political process to resolve the civil war, which calls for constitutional reform and free and fair elections in Syria.

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In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on October 22, Ambassador Jeffrey said that Turkey's October 9 offensive into northern Syria did not change U.S. policy in Syria. However, he said that the invasion did threaten the achievement of U.S. objectives by "undermining the D-ISIS campaign, risking endangering and displacing civilians, destroying critical civilian infrastructure, and threatening the security" of the region.<sup>93</sup> In separate testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ambassador Jeffrey described Turkey's military offensive as a "significant setback" in the fight against ISIS.<sup>94</sup>

Ambassador Jeffrey also stated that in light of the recent events, U.S. Syria policy could change. In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ambassador Jeffrey said that the Trump Administration was looking anew at how it could achieve its strategic goals in light of the drawdown of U.S. forces. "What we are doing now is to urgently determine what our future policies are in the enduring defeat of ISIS and we are considering options for our forces."<sup>95</sup>

Shortly before the Turkish incursion, the UN-led peace process had taken a step forward with the formation of a Constitutional Committee, made up of 50 representatives each from the Syrian regime, the opposition, and civil society. The committee formation, which was under discussion with the Syrian regime since late 2015, was a key goal of negotiators seeking to end Syria's 8-year civil war.<sup>96</sup> On September 26, Ambassador Jeffrey had called the committee formation a symbolic step that may provide "a glimmer of hope." However, he said it did not mark the end of the civil war—the regime is still seeking military victory and still benefits from Iranian and Russian support.<sup>97</sup>

# THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

The sections that follow report more fully on events that occurred in the quarter ending September 30, 2019.

## EVENTS IN SYRIA

### STATUS OF ISIS IN SYRIA

#### Prior to Troop U.S. Withdrawal, ISIS Was Continuing to Reconstitute

Prior to the U.S. troop withdrawal and the Turkish incursion, USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS cells had been continuing to reconstitute networks and carry out frequent attacks on the SDF and local government officials during the quarter.<sup>98</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that Dayr az Zawr, an oil-rich province (where it was announced in mid-October that U.S. troops would remain following the withdrawal of forces from other parts of northeastern Syria), was “an area of interest for ISIS” due to its previous control of territory along the Euphrates River Valley and because the valley’s central geographic location allows ISIS to dispatch fighters into Iraq.<sup>99</sup>

USCENTCOM also stated in September 2019 that ISIS had been growing its capability to support “hybrid military operations” and to conduct them “when consistent counterterrorism pressure is absent.”<sup>100</sup> USCENTCOM said consistent counterterrorism pressure had likely limited ISIS’s ability to rebuild in northeastern Syria and to thwart the kind of larger-scale attacks that it carried out this quarter in other areas of Syria, where pro-Syrian regime forces are in control.<sup>101</sup> In those areas, particularly in Homs province and the Badiya Desert, ISIS launched a number of attacks that increased in pace and severity, sometimes inflicting significant losses on pro-Syrian regime forces and discouraging those forces from pursuing ISIS fighters into what USCENTCOM called “ISIS safe zones.”<sup>102</sup>

According to USCENTCOM, ISIS was also able this quarter to assemble somewhat larger groups in isolated areas to attack and overrun pro-Syrian regime forces’ outposts, and to ambush convoys, including Russian ones on occasion.<sup>103</sup> USCENTCOM assessed during the quarter that ISIS intended to expand its presence in the Badiyah Desert to maintain its freedom of movement throughout southern and eastern Syria.<sup>104</sup> USCENTCOM also assessed



U.S. Forces instruct Syrian Democratic Forces commando cadets on how to clear a room during urban operations training. (U.S. Army photo)

### SYRIA: SELECTED KEY EVENTS, 7/1/2019-9/30/2019

#### AUGUST 7

Turkish and U.S. officials agree to a “security mechanism” in northern Syria that includes a joint operations center in southern Turkey

#### SEPTEMBER 5-8

Turkish and U.S. forces conduct first joint helicopter and ground patrols

#### SEPTEMBER 16

ISIS releases an audio recording of leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi calling on followers to storm ISIS detention centers and IDP camps in Syria where ISIS family members reside





that ISIS senior leadership provides direction for attacks, but local ISIS elements plan, resource, and carry out attacks autonomously in close proximity to where they are planned.<sup>105</sup>

ISIS also became “more assertive” this quarter in its use of intimidation tactics to extort funds and other resources from the local populace along the Middle Euphrates River Valley, rather than “simply lying low,” according to USCENTCOM.<sup>106</sup> USCENTCOM reported that while crop burning tapered off as the harvest in Syria concluded, both crop burnings and assassinations of local officials intimidated the local populace into at least acquiescence with ISIS’ activities and presence in the areas where they occurred.<sup>107</sup> USCENTCOM also reported that it had “nothing to suggest” that ISIS intimidation tactics has translated into active support for ISIS in places where it did not exist previously, but said that support for ISIS might develop “if local officials are unable or unwilling to address local needs and grievances.”<sup>108</sup>

More information on the status of ISIS in Syria is contained in the classified appendix.

#### SEPTEMBER 23

UN announces constitutional committee formation without SDF

#### SEPTEMBER 24

Erdogan declares at UN General Assembly intent to create 30-kilometer safe zone along southern border with Syria

#### SEPTEMBER 30

ISIS women clash violently with guards at an annex reserved for foreigners at the al Hol IDP camp in northeastern Syria

SEP



## ACTIONS CONDUCTED AGAINST ISIS IN SYRIA

### SDF Keeps Pressure on ISIS

CJTF-OIR said that the SDF's ability to target ISIS members during the quarter in conjunction with Coalition forces and partnered intelligence had placed pressure on the ISIS networks and degraded ISIS capabilities.<sup>109</sup> According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF had conducted counter-insurgency raids and clearance operations this quarter in ISIS support zones near major population centers in Raqqah, Hasakah, Dayr az Zawr, and some more remote villages.<sup>110</sup> By the end of the quarter, the SDF had participated in more than 50 partnered operations, detaining more than 200 ISIS fighters and affiliates and seizing small arms—including rifles, shotguns, and handguns, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and IED-making materials, and documents.<sup>111</sup>

In total, CJTF-OIR reported that between July 1 and Sep. 2, the SDF detained more than 300 ISIS fighters and members during partnered and unilateral operation, and killed 8 ISIS fighters and members. In addition, the SDF disposed of some 760 pounds of explosives in its seizing of more than 260 devices, including vehicle and motorcycle bombs.<sup>112</sup>

As of the end of the quarter, CJTF-OIR said that the SDF had been recruiting additional personnel—particularly new recruits for the Arab element of the SDF, the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC)—to conduct security and information gathering operations among the majority local Arab population as part of its efforts to fight ISIS.<sup>113</sup>

More information on SDF activity against ISIS is contained in the classified appendix.

### U.S. and SDF Continue to Urge Countries to Repatriate their Citizens

The SDF and the U.S. Government had been urging countries to repatriate and prosecute their citizens as a way to reduce the burden on the SDF and ensure that hardened ISIS prisoners do not return to the battlefield.<sup>114</sup> The DIA told the DoD OIG in November that at least eight countries, including the United States, have publicly acknowledged repatriating male ISIS detainees from SDF custody—most recently Italy.<sup>115</sup> OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the Iraqi government announced this quarter that it had begun to repatriate its citizens held in detention in Syria.<sup>116</sup> However, according to the DoS, many countries have been reluctant to take back their ISIS-affiliated citizens.<sup>117</sup>

The DoS stated that a proposed solution of establishing an international tribunal to try ISIS detainees as an alternative would not solve the core problem, mainly because a tribunal would take years to bring the large number of ISIS suspects to justice. The DoS also said that the most effective way to ensure accountability and prevent ISIS fighters from going free is for countries to take back and prosecute their citizens for crimes, rehabilitate and reintegrate where appropriate, and monitor for future ISIS activity.<sup>118</sup>

**The SDF and the U.S. Government had been urging countries to repatriate and prosecute their citizens as a way to reduce the burden on the SDF and ensure that hardened ISIS prisoners do not return to the battlefield.**

### SOME COUNTRIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES TAKE BACK ISIS CIVILIANS FROM CAMPS

In addition to suspected ISIS fighters in SDF detention, many more ISIS-affiliated foreigners are located within internally displaced camps in northeastern Syria. Some, like many of the foreigners in Al Hol, arrived at the end of the March, when ISIS lost its last territorial holdings in Syria. These include wives of ISIS fighters and their children.<sup>119</sup>

While some foreign governments have taken back their citizens from Syrian camps, European governments have been reticent to receive their citizens from Syria, largely due to concerns regarding their ability to successfully prosecute those suspected of ISIS ties.<sup>120</sup> The SDF and U.S. Government maintain that repatriation is the best solution.<sup>121</sup>

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG in September that the SDF had released ISIS-affiliated Syrian camp families to local tribal sponsors who pledged to reintegrate them into their communities. In July, 125 women and children from 30 Al Hol families suspected of ISIS affiliation were released to Manbij tribal elders and 110 Syrian women and children returned to Dayr az Zawr in August.<sup>122</sup> According to USAID, there are many inconsistencies with how this process works and it is not clear if the model will continue to operate in the wake of the Turkish incursion.<sup>123</sup>

Some Iraqis have returned home as well. However, according to humanitarian organizations, concerns remained that Iraq might abuse or unfairly try returnees.<sup>124</sup> USAID reported on October 1 that repatriation discussions with the Iraqi government—whose citizens account for approximately 30,000 residents of Al Hol—had stalled.<sup>125</sup>

More information on ISIS detainees in SDF-run detention centers is available in the classified appendix.



A young boy walks among the tents at Al Hol Camp. (Human Rights Watch photo)

## ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN SYRIA

### Iran Entrenches Itself in Syria

According to media reports, Iran's presence and behavior in Syria did not change significantly following the Turkish incursion. Iran's foreign minister publicly objected to Turkey's establishment of military posts inside Syria, saying that it violated Syria's integrity.<sup>126</sup> USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that Iran continued to maintain a presence in Syria and to conduct operations in support of the Syrian regime and its own strategic objectives.<sup>127</sup>

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that Iran's presence in Syria supports Iran's strategic objective of securing the regime from external threats. CJTF-OIR said that Iran seeks to have a dominant position in the region, particularly in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, and that Iran's strategic goals in a post-conflict Syria include retaining access to Hezbollah in Lebanon, maintaining the ability to strike Israel from Syrian territory, maintaining a military presence and military influence in Syria, and recouping investment through securing economic and security contracts in Syria.<sup>128</sup>

Open source analysis stated that part of Iran's effort is developing military infrastructure and securing land routes in Syria to enable Iran to support its proxy forces and project influence into Syria and Lebanon.<sup>129</sup>

The congressionally appointed Syria Study Group stated in its September 2019 report that despite hundreds of Israeli air strikes and U.S. sanctions aimed at dislodging Iranian presence, "Iran continues to entrench itself in Syria."<sup>130</sup>

Although the bulk of Iranian-commanded forces were concentrated in the western half of Syria prior to the U.S. withdrawal, some Iranian forces and Iranian-backed militias were positioned in close proximity to U.S. and partner forces in northeastern Syria, as part of the Iranian goal of forging ground lines of communication from the Iraqi border to Damascus, according to media reporting.<sup>131</sup>

In September 2019, USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that despite ongoing tensions between the United States and Iran, there was no specific increase in threat to U.S. forces in Syria from Iran this quarter. However, USCENTCOM assessed that Iranian backed forces in Syria might look to target U.S. military personnel or its partner forces in Syria, if they view the U.S. as complicit in Israeli strikes on its forces in Syria.<sup>132</sup>

Open source reporting indicated that Israel struck a number of Iranian-linked arms depots near the Syrian border town of Abu Kamal, a town on the Iraqi border, in late September.<sup>133</sup> Local press reports stated that Syrian government forces opened fire on residents in Dayr az Zawr province in September who were protesting the large presence of Iranian-backed militias in the area and calling for the SDF and U.S.-led Coalition to "liberate" their villages.<sup>134</sup>

More information on Iranian activity in Syria is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

**In September 2019, USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that despite ongoing tensions between the United States and Iran, there was no specific increase in threat to U.S. forces in Syria from Iran this quarter.**



## ISIS Propaganda Offers Window into Its World View

In the wake of news of al Baghdadi's death, ISIS leaders urged their followers to continue in the path of jihad, proclaiming that their movement did not depend on the fate of one man. According to a U.S.-based press monitoring organization that follows ISIS's encrypted social media postings, ISIS said that the fight will continue "until Judgement Day," and that the "Islamic State shall remain."<sup>135</sup> It urged followers not to believe "infidel" news sites.<sup>136</sup>

The postings reflected early analyses of the repercussions of al Baghdadi's death. ISIS experts warned that while al Baghdadi's death was a significant blow to the ISIS organization, ISIS would remain a threat to Syria, Iraq, and the larger world community.<sup>137</sup> They described al Baghdadi as a "powerful tool" for ISIS, to give the organization an identifiable figurehead, but that the direction ISIS takes depends more on local Syrian dynamics than on whether its leader is alive or dead.<sup>138</sup>

In September 2019, prior to al Baghdadi's death, the DIA reported to the DoD OIG that while ISIS no longer controlled territory in Iraq or Syria, its leaders continue to believe that the group is on an upward trajectory and that time is on their side to create a new Islamic "caliphate."<sup>139</sup> That view has been advanced by ISIS's media wing since ISIS fighters lost the last territorial stronghold in March 2019 and dispersed to carry out clandestine operations in Syria and Iraq. In videos, audio statements, and its weekly newsletter, *al Naba*, ISIS seeks to portray itself as a resilient "defender of the Sunnis," according to CJTF-OIR and the DIA.<sup>140</sup> Through these outlets, ISIS disseminates the idea that it has stabilized its operations in Iraq and Syria and will survive in the long term.<sup>141</sup>

The DIA also reported that ISIS continues to manage its global branches and networks from Iraq and Syria, and that its leaders provide strategic guidance "in an attempt to shape branches' and networks' priorities and align them with ISIS's overall objectives." The DIA said that ISIS leadership believes that this strategy will "help ensure the group's long-term survivability and reinforce the organization's narrative of global reach and presence."<sup>142</sup>

USCENTCOM this quarter described ISIS propaganda as "very adept," despite the loss of territory, and that ISIS's ideology continues to retain its appeal and attract supporters worldwide. USCENTCOM said that alongside this messaging campaign, ISIS has been waging clandestine attacks against multiple forces in Iraq and Syria that are intended to demonstrate its battlefield resilience and are likely to attract new foreign recruits, though not at prior levels.<sup>143</sup>

However, CJTF-OIR reported that there has been a "significant degradation" in the quality and quantity of ISIS propaganda over time and that ISIS propaganda was at its "lowest levels ever."<sup>144</sup>

The DIA reported that in the last year ISIS has publicized its "global media and attack campaigns" from Africa to East Asia, peddling the "theme" that it has stabilized operations within Iraq and Syria following sustained territorial losses, and that its fortunes are set to improve.<sup>145</sup> According to media sources, in September, ISIS leader al Baghdadi reiterated these themes with the release of an audiotape in which he exhorted adherents to be patient and avenge ISIS losses.<sup>146</sup> According to media sources, in the audio tape, al Baghdadi exhorted believers to fight "whether they win or lose."<sup>147</sup>

*(continued on next page)*

## ISIS Propaganda Offers Window into its World View

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ISIS's messages “project strength and the pursuit of vengeance” and encourage solidarity across the organization in an effort to galvanize supporters and entice new followers “among vulnerable Sunni populations,” the DIA said. Still, the DIA said that some developments offer clues to the group’s relative weakness. For instance, ISIS publishes most of its official publications only in Arabic now because ISIS lost a number of key personnel in its foreign language translation departments.<sup>148</sup>

The DIA reported that ISIS media campaigns demonstrate that ISIS remains effective at shaping media narratives and current events to benefit its agenda. ISIS launched three multi-day media campaigns portraying what the DIA said were a series of disparate attacks across Iraq, Syria, and the globe, as a cohesive effort from its so-called “caliphate.” The DIA said that ISIS supporters contributed to the messaging effort, allowing ISIS to reach broader audiences in more languages and project continued strength in Syria.<sup>149</sup>

The DIA also reported that ISIS attempts to influence several audiences within Iraq: the Sunni population it claims to defend, the Iraqi government, it aspires to supplant, and the international community it wants to remind of its resiliency. However, the DIA reported that the group remains largely unpopular in Iraq, especially with Iraqi Sunnis, with reports of displaced persons accused of ties to ISIS being ostracized and prevented from returning to their homes. Despite the erosion of popular support, Sunni grievances, reconstruction delays, and the potential for Shia overreach persist, which ISIS will likely attempt to exploit.<sup>150</sup>

## CAPACITY BUILDING OF PARTNER FORCES

### U.S. Continues to Equip the SDF, but Training Is Suspended

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG in October that the U.S. forces temporarily suspended training programs in October in areas of Syria that were affected by the Turkish incursion.<sup>151</sup> CJTF-OIR said that as of October 24, the SDF “remained open to training,” and that in the event that the situation in northeast Syria should stabilize, the SDF would likely have the ability to continue training.<sup>152</sup> The Lead IG agencies will report next quarter on relations between the SDF and the Coalition, and whether training has resumed.

Prior to the Turkish incursion, U.S. and Coalition forces had been training and equipping the SDF and other partner forces to enable them to hold territory and conduct counterinsurgency operations against ISIS in northeast Syria. CJTF-OIR reported that as of the end of the quarter the SDF remained in need of additional personnel, training, and equipment to conduct counterinsurgency operations against ISIS.<sup>153</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported in September that the limited number of U.S. forces on the ground in Syria—due to a previous drawdown completed last quarter—had reduced the number of U.S. trainers available to work with the SDF and other partner forces. As a result, the SDF provided most of the training to its forces, with U.S. forces providing support in the form of Mobile Training Teams at SDF posts on a rotational basis.<sup>154</sup> CJTF-OIR stated that from these posts, U.S. forces were providing training for commando teams, prison guards, counter-IED techniques, and other specialty skills that the SDF lacks.<sup>155</sup> CJTF-OIR said that training could not be conducted as quickly as new recruits were being generated. The

SDF trains its own forces with U.S. forces providing support in the form of Mobile Training Teams, which conduct training at SDF posts on a rotational basis. Prior to the temporary suspension of training, CJTF-OIR had been supporting the SDF's efforts to increase SAC recruits to enable the SAC to carry out static operations, such as manning checkpoints, and to conduct counter insurgency operations.<sup>156</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that as of the end of the quarter, total SDF end strength was approximately 100,000, and that the desired end strength was 110,000. This total included 30,000 SDF, 35,000 Internal Security Forces (InSF), which operates as a wide-area security force in areas cleared of ISIS, and 45,000 Provincial Security Forces, which functions akin to the U.S. National Guard, according to CJTF-OIR.<sup>157</sup>

CJTF-OIR also reported in September that it had expected to recruit additional InSF to replace YPG personnel, who were to be withdrawn from areas near the Turkish border as part of a negotiated "security mechanism" agreed to in August 2019 by the United States and Turkey.<sup>158</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that they had planned to set up training sites at Ras al Ayn and Tel Abyad—the two border towns that marked the edges of the "security mechanism"—to facilitate InSF training.<sup>159</sup>

### **CJTF-OIR Provides Stipends, Weapons, and Other Material to Syrian Partner Forces**

CJTF-OIR reported in October that programs to equip the SDF and partner forces in Syria were not suspended following the drawdown of U.S. troops.<sup>160</sup>

During the quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that the SAC received AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades, shotguns, and other weapons.<sup>161</sup> The primary purpose of U.S. support to the SDF was to enable it to continue the fight against ISIS. The primary purpose of support to the InSF and the Mughawir alThawra (MaT) was force generation and training to increase their ability to conduct wide-area security in support of counter-insurgency efforts against ISIS.<sup>162</sup>

Support provided during the quarter also included stipends, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, medical supplies, and security materials to the SAC, the InSF, and the MaT, a small force that operates around the At Tanf Garrison where a small contingent of U.S. forces are stationed near the Jordanian border.<sup>163</sup>

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG in September that it inventories, logs, and records equipment before it transfers the materiel to Syrian partner forces. It reported that the DoD transfers items to the vetted elements of the SDF by letter of offer and acceptance, including serial numbers where applicable. Transferred equipment is accounted for by photo evidence or visual inspection by U.S. Special Operations Forces' advise and assist teams, and the frequency of these inspections is based on operational tempo. CJTF-OIR said that serial number inventories are periodically conducted for sensitive items, in accordance with memoranda of agreement.<sup>164</sup>

**CJTF-OIR reported that as of the end of the quarter, total SDF end strength was approximately 100,000, and that the desired end strength was 110,000.**



## The Double Crisis at Al Hol

The Al Hol IDP camp in northeastern Syria has presented the international community with an unprecedented humanitarian and security challenge since April 2019. At that time, the population of the camp swelled from 9,000 to more than 70,000 as many people fled the fighting in Baghouz, ISIS's last stronghold in the Middle Euphrates River Valley in Syria.<sup>165</sup> According to the United Nations, there was an overwhelming number of women and children—among them unaccompanied minors and pregnant girls—who arrived at Al Hol desperate and injured, requiring specialized services that were not immediately available in the camp.<sup>166</sup>

According to the United Nations and USAID, women and children make up approximately 94 percent of the camp population, and children under the age of 12 make up 65 percent of the population.<sup>167</sup>

The sudden and unexpected growth of the camp by more than 600 percent in the wake of the March 2019 territorial defeat of the ISIS "caliphate" created an extreme humanitarian crisis, with reports emerging of overcrowding and inadequate medical services.<sup>168</sup> At the same time, the rapid influx of some 60,000 people presented a major security risk, with ISIS wives, agitators, and recruiters mixed in with civilians who had fled the violence.<sup>169</sup> In September 2019 the United Nations referred to Al Hol as a quagmire.<sup>170</sup> On September 24, the DIA reported to the DoD OIG that security in Al Hol was fragile and the camp remained a permissive environment for ISIS to intimidate, exert control, and recruit.<sup>171</sup>

### ISIS SEEKS TO EXPLOIT CONDITIONS AT AL HOL

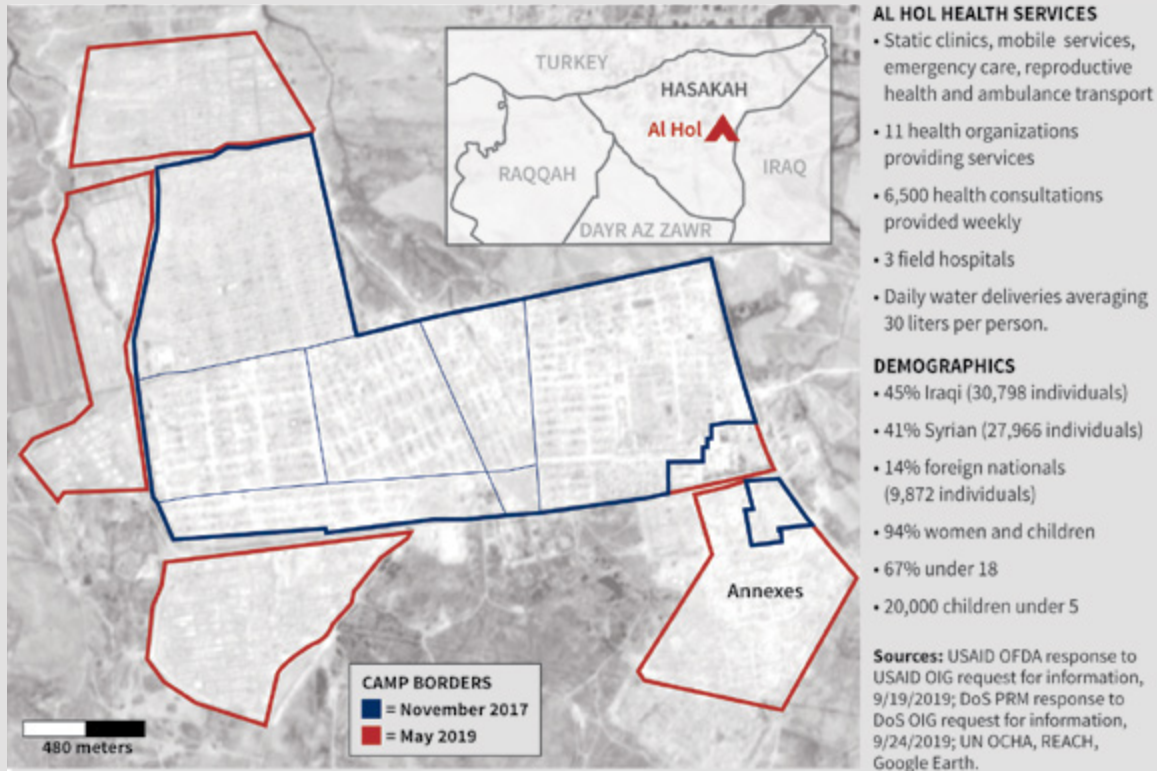
This quarter, the DoS's implementing partners reported a tense security situation in Al Hol, particularly in the more restrictive annex where approximately 10,000 foreigners—mostly women and children—were being held.<sup>172</sup> According to USAID, the foreign national population in the camp is perceived to pose a greater security risk because many had travelled to join ISIS and stayed until the very end of its reign, suggesting a greater level of radicalization.<sup>173</sup>

Days before the Turkish incursion, the SDF's top commander warned that his forces were having trouble containing the increasingly violent behavior of extremists in the camp, particularly in the annex, where the foreign women and children reside. The SDF commander said that ISIS was regrouping and reorganizing in the camp.<sup>174</sup>

The DoS also reported to the DoS OIG in September that local authorities had legitimate security concerns at Al Hol and the DoS supported efforts by the SDF to detain ISIS fighters and facilitators who may have infiltrated the camp.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, USAID said that the civilian nature of an IDP camp, including the high percentage of small children, and the limited capacity of security actors to identify and remove agitators—largely due to a lack of female detention facilities in the region—added to security concerns.<sup>176</sup>

Both USCENTCOM and OUSD(P)/ISA reported in September that ISIS had exploited the overstretched security to establish support networks, enforce ISIS's version of Sharia law, and preserve a human dimension of the ISIS "caliphate."<sup>177</sup> A Washington Institute report indicated that, in a subsection of the foreigner's annex, the most extreme elements in the camp have segregated themselves and tried to establish control over the rest of the annex to propagate the laws of the Islamic State.<sup>178</sup> The DIA added that overcrowding and poor access to basic services created openings for ISIS supporters to exert control, and enabled ISIS recruiting, crime, corruption, and violence.<sup>179</sup>

In September, the DIA cited reports of ISIS-affiliated women threatening and conducting attacks against guards and other residents, violent fights between residents of differing nationalities, and proliferation of ISIS ideology. According to the DIA, in a July incident, an ISIS-affiliated pregnant woman was found



dead, having apparently been beaten and tortured. In August, an ISIS woman stabbed a guard and was subsequently concealed by the crowd, evading arrest, the DIA reported.<sup>180</sup> The DIA reported that the SDF had relocated some of the most active ISIS-affiliated instigators to other camps, but that probably increased ISIS activity at other camps.<sup>181</sup>

The humanitarian crisis has exacerbated this persistent instability, the DIA said, making it a permissive environment for ISIS recruiting and smuggling.<sup>182</sup> The DIA said that relieving crowding and addressing basic needs is likely to diminish ISIS control.<sup>183</sup> According to USAID, while humanitarian actors have made significant steps to address these needs, full access and unhindered humanitarian programming is key to improving conditions.<sup>184</sup>

#### HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES SCALE UP TO MEET NEEDS

In response to the influx of new arrivals into Al Hol in April, the humanitarian community surged capacity to the camp to seek to address the crisis, in particular by increasing medical services and provisions for the camp, according to the DoS.<sup>185</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that while there was a high rate of child mortality early on, because of the poor condition of the population departing Baghouz, mortality rates for children under five in the camp have remained within international standards since May 2019.<sup>186</sup> UN officers in late August assessed that health conditions had improved and become more stable, but the situation remained concerning.<sup>187</sup>

In September, the DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), USAID OFDA, and USAID Office for Food for Peace (FFP) asserted that conditions across Al Hol improved this quarter.<sup>188</sup> USAID Office of

*(continued on next page)*

## The Double Crisis at Al Hol *(continued from previous page)*

U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) said that 3 hospitals were operational and 11 health organizations provided an average of 6,500 consultations weekly. These services included static clinics, mobile services, emergency care, reproductive health, and ambulance transport for more advanced care.<sup>189</sup>

According to USAID, its partners, including WHO, also deployed mobile health teams, pre-positioned medical supplies, conducted immunizations, trained health workers to treat severe malnutrition, and provided emergency health kits and other supplies.<sup>190</sup> USAID OFDA reported that the water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions also improved this quarter.<sup>191</sup>

The largest gap in humanitarian needs remained in the foreign families' annex, where because of security concerns, humanitarian organizations have not been able to set up 24-hour medical care, leaving the residents without access to emergency health services (including obstetrics) during the evening hours.<sup>192</sup>

USAID reported in October that because of demand outside the camp due to the Turkish incursion, some health services had decreased. According to USAID, distributions of monthly food rations in Al Hol's annex continued despite the incursion, but delays in transportation have slowed the distribution of winter items in the camp.<sup>193</sup>

### **TURKISH INCURSION LEADS TO REDUCED SECURITY AT AL HOL**

After the Turkish incursion, the SDF reduced its security presence at Al Hol, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.<sup>194</sup> Even before Turkey launched its offensive, the DIA reported to the DoD OIG on September 24 that the SDF could not retain adequate control of camps because it redeployed many personnel to confront pro-Syrian regime and Turkish forces that had massed along the border.<sup>195</sup> OUSD(P)/ISA reported that it expected that "ISIS supporters are exploiting the decreased security posture," but that the DoD had no presence at Al Hol and therefore its visibility is limited.<sup>196</sup>

According to USAID, START-Forward and DoD representatives met with security and humanitarian partners active in the camp to discuss proposed security solutions for bolstering security while preserving the humanitarian character of the camp.<sup>197</sup> According to media reports, some Al Hol residents engaged in a small-scale riot after the Turkish incursion. As of the completion of this report in mid-November, there had been no observed attempts to breach the camp's perimeter.<sup>198</sup> USAID reported to USAID OIG in early November that non-governmental organization (NGO) actors present within the camp said that despite small-scale insecurity, the overall camp remained calm.<sup>199</sup>

### **DE-RADICALIZATION ACTIVITIES UNLIKELY IN CAMP SETTING**

According to the DoS and USAID, the longer residents remain in Al Hol the more likely they are to be radicalized.<sup>200</sup> Interagency conversations are ongoing and USAID reported that the DoD expressed interest in de-radicalization activities within the camp.<sup>201</sup>

According to USAID, while implementing partners provide psychosocial services for traumatized children, these are not de-radicalization programs.<sup>202</sup> USAID said that attempts to implement de-radicalization programs could further stoke the ire of the camp's population, endangering humanitarian operations and staff. According to USAID, the scale, location, and citizenship diversity of the Al Hol population are unique and there is no precedent—for the United States or anyone else—of instituting de-radicalization programming under these conditions.<sup>203</sup>



Ambassador Jeffrey stated that, “anything that allows Russian forces or Assad to move into other areas is a problem for us in trying to find a decent and democratic solution to the overall Syrian crisis.”

## DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### The October Turkish Offensive Raises Additional Concerns about Prospects for Peaceful Resolution to Syrian Crisis

Ambassador Jeffrey testified on October 22 that U.S. objectives continue to include resolution of the Syrian conflict on terms favorable to the United States and allies, and in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.<sup>204</sup> However, with respect to the Turkish-Russian agreement to conduct joint patrols in the border zone, Ambassador Jeffrey stated that, “anything that allows Russian forces or Assad to move into other areas is a problem for us in trying to find a decent and democratic solution to the overall Syrian crisis.”<sup>205</sup>

The Lead IG agencies plan to report next quarter on how the events of October 2019 have affected that peace process. As noted below, one development did occur this quarter.

### Committee Forms to Rewrite Syria’s Constitution

The UN-led peace process took a long-awaited step this quarter. After 2 years of negotiations, a Syrian constitutional committee formed, including 50 members each of representatives of civil society, the opposition, and the government.<sup>206</sup>

In late September, Ambassador Jeffrey stated that the creation of the constitutional committee was “symbolic” and may represent “a glimmer of hope” for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. It “is not the end of the efforts by Assad to get a military victory...or even the efforts of Iran and Russia to support him,” he stated.<sup>207</sup> A spokesperson for the Syrian opposition’s High Negotiations Committee expressed some pessimism about the process, saying that, “if the regime’s concern is to hold on to the seat of power, no effort will lead to any solution.”<sup>208</sup>

However, a spokesperson for the SDF criticized what he characterized as a lack of Kurdish representation on the committee, noting that the Kurdish-led administration in northeastern Syria was “totally left out of the process.”

### Tensions between Arabs and Kurds Inhibit Local Governance

The Turkish offensive into northeast Syria may exacerbate existing tensions between the majority Arab population and the Kurdish-majority SDF and its civilian wing, the SDC in some areas of northeastern Syria. During the quarter, the local population and the SDC struggled to find common ground on authority over local governance structures, equitable sharing of resources, conscription in some areas, the friction resulted in protests and violence. Even before the Turkish offensive, experts issued reports during the quarter that described significant conflict between Arabs and Kurds, noting that the Kurds frequently overruled decisions made by Arab leaders.<sup>209</sup> The bipartisan Syria Study Group of the U.S. Institute for Peace, directed by Congress to make recommendations regarding Syria policy, stated that local Arab leadership complained about lack of local authority, the YPG’s “heavy-handed” approach to governing, and inequitable resource sharing.<sup>210</sup>

These reports contrasted with other views stated by U.S. officials. DoS officials told the DoS OIG that the Arab population in northeast Syria was generally at ease with the current political disposition, and residents in general were satisfied with their services from local government institutions though they acknowledged that more work was needed.<sup>211</sup> Prior to the Turkish incursion and U.S. troop withdrawal, CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that with Coalition and U.S. forces support, the SDF had throughout the quarter ending September 30 worked to restore security in northeastern Syria and had enjoyed reasonable success in gaining the confidence of the mostly Arab populations under its control.<sup>212</sup>

However, the building of strong, cohesive local governance structures suffered from ongoing conflict. During the quarter, ISIS killed senior civilian and military leaders, and posted death threats in public places, according to the DoS.<sup>213</sup> The DoS reported to the DoS OIG in September that SDF clearance operations to root out ISIS sleeper cells at times caused friction with local populations angered by civilian casualties and perceptions of heavy-handed tactics or corruption by the security forces.<sup>214</sup> As a result, according to the International Crisis Group, “some tribes...increasingly refuse to cooperate in anti-ISIS actions and are pulling out of SDF security structures.”<sup>215</sup>

The Lead IG will report next quarter on how the events of October 2019 have affected local governance in areas in northeast Syria formerly held by ISIS.

### **Turkish Offensive Poses Risks to Stabilization, Humanitarian Efforts**

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that due to the “dynamic security situation,” in early October the DoS moved its Syria Transition Assistance Team (START) personnel out of Syria, although most DoS and USAID assistance activities continued. The DoS stated it will be difficult to address urgent humanitarian needs “in the current environment of instability” in northeastern Syria.<sup>216</sup>

The United Nations reported in late October that it was assessing the humanitarian implications of the rapid political and military developments in northeastern Syria because of the Turkish incursion.<sup>217</sup> As of October 24, humanitarian organizations were finalizing planning that outlines the implications of these changes and agreements on the protection of civilians, displacement dynamics, and humanitarian access.<sup>218</sup> The DoS stated that all parties in the conflict, including Turkey, need to ensure that humanitarian access throughout Syria is not delayed.<sup>219</sup>

According to USAID, in October, humanitarian organizations continued to conduct emergency response activities in areas of northeastern Syria that were still accessible. These response activities included distributing emergency multi-purpose cash transfers, providing food to new IDP arrivals, providing basic health services, facilitating the transfer of in-camp IDPs to camps outside of affected areas, providing tents for the relocation of affected IDP camp residents, and providing emergency water trucking.<sup>220</sup> As of October 24, the DoS and USAID reported that all implementing partner staff were accounted for, though several remain displaced.<sup>221</sup>

The DoS stated in November that the Turkish offensive displaced approximately 215,000 people at the height of the crisis, though some have since returned to their homes, and there remains a great need for shelter, food, water, and other necessities.<sup>222</sup> According to USAID,

**During the quarter, ISIS killed senior civilian and military leaders, and posted death threats in public places, according to the DoS.**

relief actors reported that many people returned to their areas of origin after the initial offensive, though the situation remained “fluid and volatile.”<sup>223</sup> As of October 24, the United Nations estimated that nearly 99,200 people in northeastern Syria remained displaced by the Turkish military offensive. The United Nations reported that given the difficulty of verifying information in a conflict zone, the civilian death toll was unclear.<sup>224</sup>

According to DoS and USAID, the Turkish incursion also increased the number of refugees seeking shelter in Iraq, with more than 14,000 arrivals as of the time of publication.<sup>225</sup>

In October, the Administration authorized \$50 million in U.S. Government stabilization assistance to protect ethnic and religious minorities and “advance human rights and accountability,” and requested that donor governments contribute additional money to support “stabilization programming to secure the enduring defeat of ISIS and humanitarian assistance to respond to critical needs” in Syria.<sup>226</sup> The U.S. Government also announced \$4.5 million to the White Helmets, a Syrian civil defense group.<sup>227</sup>

## Approximately 800 ISIS Family Members Among those Who Flee Ayn Issa Camp

Ayn Issa is a camp in Raqqa governorate located approximately twenty miles south of the Turkish border.<sup>228</sup> Prior to Turkish incursion, the camp held nearly 13,000 individuals, approximately half of whom were internally displaced Syrians.<sup>229</sup> According to an NGO, a foreign annex at the camp housed 249 women and 700 children linked to ISIS.<sup>230</sup> According to USAID, on October 13, as hostilities and shelling drew near the site, camp residents and staff fled the attacks.<sup>231</sup> According to media reporting, the SDF reported that nearly 800 women and children fled the section of Ayn Issa camp holding foreign nationals.<sup>232</sup> According to an NGO, the majority of those who fled were children, and many of them remain unaccounted for.<sup>233</sup>

The SDF also reported that amidst nearby air bombardment from Turkey, “mercenaries” attacked the camp and ISIS sympathizers within the camp in turn attacked camp guards and opened the gates.<sup>234</sup> According to media reporting, the SDF said that it did not have enough guards to prevent an escape, and that 60 to 70 guards remained, compared to the 700 who usually secure the camp.<sup>235</sup> The DoS reported that non-governmental organization partners have reported less drastic reductions.<sup>236</sup>

According to USAID, implementing partners support the growing needs of Mahmoudli camp where many households from Ayn Issa have relocated. Distributions have taken place amid continued provision of essential in-camp services, such as bread distributions, water trucking, and latrine cleaning. USAID humanitarian partners have also provided cash support to IDPs fleeing to locations of origin to purchase essential items.<sup>237</sup>

**According to media reporting, the SDF said that it did not have enough guards to prevent an escape, and that 60 to 70 guards remained, compared to the 700 who usually secure the camp.**



## Stabilization Assistance Programs Continue Despite Oversight Challenges

The DoS said that during the quarter ending September 30, START, the Southern Syria Assistance Platform (SSAP), and START-Forward continued their stabilization assistance and early recovery initiatives for communities liberated from ISIS in northeastern Syria.<sup>238</sup> START and SSAP stabilization activities operate “almost exclusively with Coalition contributions,” according to the DoS.<sup>239</sup>

According to the DoS, during the quarter, START and SSAP continued to assess the progress of stabilization activities from remote locations including the United States, Turkey, and Jordan, and at times from Syria.<sup>240</sup>

This quarter, stabilization programming was coordinated through the Turkey-based START and the Jordan-based SSAP interagency platforms. The combined DoS-USAID START-Forward Team that had been embedded with the U.S. military inside Syria returned to Syria in early July after a 6-month drawdown, according to the DoS.

The DoS stated in September that START-Forward met with implementing partners and other contacts to oversee stabilization efforts and to assess stabilization needs and program impacts. While START-Forward was unable to conduct project site visits, the team members worked closely with the DoD Civil Affairs teams and the Deputy Special Envoy to Defeat ISIS, who visited projects and verified specific activities.<sup>241</sup>

According to the DoS, it evaluated the ongoing Syria stabilization programs using results monitoring plans, established in cooperative agreements with implementers, who reported on those results quarterly.

In addition, the DoS Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) provided weekly reports on challenges and activities. Third-party evaluations on NEA-funded Syria projects in northeastern Syria found that partners met program goals. The DoS reported that it intends to hire independent monitors to verify these outputs and outcomes.<sup>242</sup>

The U.S. Government also provides a “small amount of funding” for efforts throughout northwestern Syria, including the UN’s Independent Impartial International Mechanism, the Syrian Civil Defense (White Helmets), and chemical weapons mitigation measures.<sup>243</sup>

## USAID Stabilization Assistance Restores Power in Northeast Provinces but Continued Assistance in Question

Since 2018, USAID has supported local authorities in rehabilitating major electrical infrastructure in northeast Syria, particularly in areas formerly under ISIS control. According to USAID, months after the territorial defeat of ISIS, electricity was restored to rural areas in liberated communities in the northeast. As of September 30, with USAID support, the Dayr az Zawr Civil Council rehabilitated a critical power station and transmission lines, restoring power to 6 large towns and 19 villages in the province and providing approximately 150,000 people with power from the grid for the first time in several years.<sup>244</sup> According to USAID, the Civil Council then connected agricultural infrastructure, industrial shops, and drinking water pumping stations to the grid.<sup>245</sup>

**According to UN analysis of satellite imagery, the recent conflict has destroyed 17 entire villages located in southern Idlib and northern Hama provinces.**

According to USAID, following the Turkish incursion, some USAID stabilization programs suspended activities due to a rapidly deteriorating security environment. As of the end of October, some stabilization programming has resumed in Raqqa, Dayr az Zawr, and elsewhere in the northeast where security permits.<sup>246</sup>

According to USAID, contracting officers began notifying partners to temporarily suspend activity in Raqqa governorate, with some exceptions around critical agriculture work in the midst of the winter wheat sowing season. USAID reports that activities in Dayr az Zawr will continue for now, as there is little to no regime presence.<sup>247</sup>

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

### Displacement and Civilian Casualties Continue in Idlib

As of August 31, the humanitarian situation in the provinces of Hama and Idlib in northwestern Syria continued to deteriorate.<sup>248</sup> Between April and the end of August, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented the killing of more than 500 civilians while information provided by local sources indicated that as of August 23, more than 1,000 civilians may have been killed, including approximately 180 children and 145 women.<sup>249</sup>

In addition, violence resulted in the widespread destruction of civilian and humanitarian infrastructure, including homes, hospitals, schools, bakeries, and water stations.<sup>250</sup> According to UN analysis of satellite imagery, the recent conflict has destroyed 17 entire villages located in southern Idlib and northern Hama provinces.<sup>251</sup> Between May 1 and August 18, airstrikes and shelling resulted in approximately 630,000 displacements in northwest Syria.<sup>252</sup> In August alone, more than 72,000 displacements were recorded. According to USAID, continued shelling and airstrikes in northwest Syria, particularly in civilian-populated areas, resulted in increased deaths and injuries, and led to high levels of trauma and psychosocial support needs among survivors.<sup>253</sup>

According to the United Nations, patterns of displacement largely remained the same, with most people moving north towards the border with Turkey.<sup>254</sup> In addition to immediate shelter needs, water, sanitation, and hygiene needs increased in step with heightened displacement, which included safe drinking water, solid waste management, community latrines, wastewater management, and hygiene kits.<sup>255</sup> Protection concerns remained an issue in the northwest as the threats from airstrikes, mines and explosives continued.<sup>256</sup>

### In Idlib and Hama, Attacks on Health Facilities Continue and Humanitarian Needs Persist

According to USAID, from July 1 to 25, eight attacks on health facilities were recorded in northwest Syria, killing and injuring patients, medical staff, and first responders, and limiting the availability of health care services for vulnerable populations remaining in the area, according to the United Nations. Since the assault began, Russian and Syrian government airstrikes and shelling damaged at least 36 health facilities—of which 7 had been de-conflicted with Russia—and 7 ambulances.<sup>257</sup> Media reporting stated that on July 30, the UN Secretary-General authorized an inquiry into attacks on civilian infrastructure including

A girl stands in the annex of the Al Hol camp. (Human Rights Watch photo)



hospitals, clinics, and schools. UN Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, said the inquiry would investigate whether GPS coordinates provided by the United Nations to Russia in order to ensure the hospitals' protection were used to target them.<sup>258</sup>

According to USAID, during the quarter the humanitarian community continued to provide emergency food assistance, basic household items, sanitation services, critical health services, temporary shelter including rehabilitation of collective shelters, and protection services. However, according to the United Nations, ongoing violence prevented humanitarian actors from reaching people in need in areas directly affected by the conflict.<sup>259</sup>

Humanitarian partners also responded to newly displaced persons by providing support through food, emergency health, shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene activities. USAID reported that its implementing partner, the UN World Food Programme (WFP), provided emergency food assistance to approximately 110,900 new IDPs in August and another 67,600 in September.<sup>260</sup> The WFP also reported that its general food assistance response reached 1 million people in September, the highest number in a single month of cross-border assistance since the operation was authorized in July 2014.<sup>261</sup>

In addition, according to USAID, in August 2019, USAID partner UN World Health Organization (WHO) continued to provide health care to displaced populations in northwest Syria, where ongoing conflict damaged health care infrastructure and severely limited the availability of health care services.<sup>262</sup> According to USAID, WHO supported seven mobile teams and two primary health care facilities in Idlib to provide critical medical services to IDPs and supports five surgical units and five ambulances.<sup>263</sup>

The DoS Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau supports UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has also provided protection services, including psychosocial support services across Aleppo and Idlib provinces in August as part of multi-sector assistance in northwest Syria. The DoS partner UNHCR provided almost 42,000 people items such as water and hygiene kits from May to July. In August, the UNHCR distributed 904 emergency kits and 1,072 tents. In July, UNHCR and other Protection Cluster members provided psychological first aid to more than 6,000 Syrians. Another PRM partner treated an average of 1,900 patients monthly, including support to the only neonatal unit in Idlib. The same partner provides mine risk education and food assistance in Idlib, including meals through the Idlib collective kitchen, which serves 7,000 meals daily.<sup>264</sup>



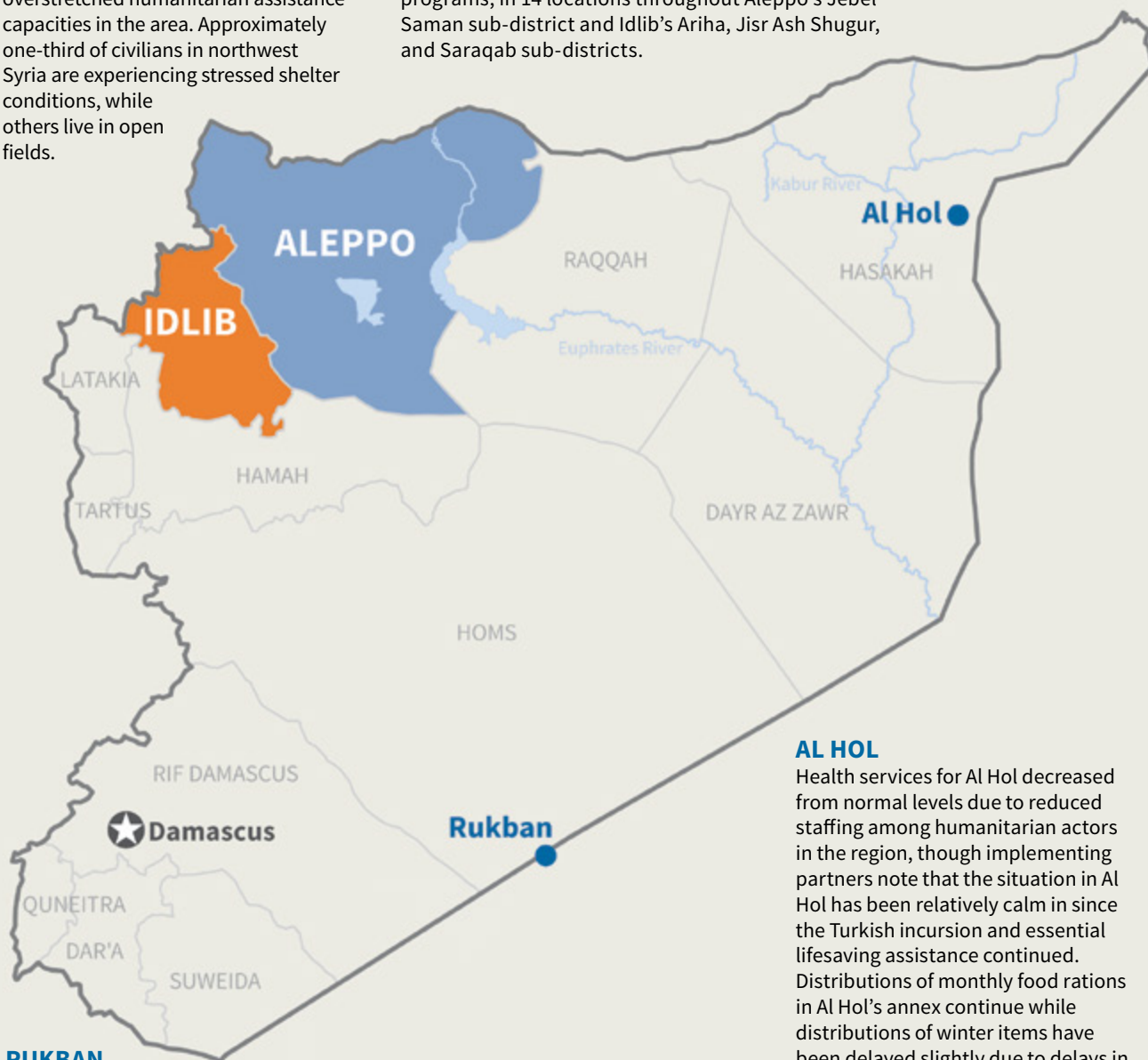
# SYRIA: QUARTERLY FOCUS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

## IDLIB

According to USAID, the majority of IDPs fled toward and shelter in Idlib's Dana sub-district, resulting in overcrowded IDP camps and informal settlements, and overstretched humanitarian assistance capacities in the area. Approximately one-third of civilians in northwest Syria are experiencing stressed shelter conditions, while others live in open fields.

## ALEPPO

According to the UN, because of ongoing hostilities in northwest Syria, six protection actors suspended services in mid-July, including psychosocial support and case management, child protection services, and parenting programs, in 14 locations throughout Aleppo's Jebel Saman sub-district and Idlib's Ariha, Jisr Ash Shugur, and Saraqab sub-districts.



## RUKBAN

According to USAID, in September the UN and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) distributed food and nutritional items via a convoy of 22 trucks to approximately 15,000 people in Rukban and surrounding areas. The UN and SARC continue to facilitate the departures of families who wish to leave voluntarily for regime-controlled areas. As of September 12, approximately 15,000 people remained at Rukban.

## AL HOL

Health services for Al Hol decreased from normal levels due to reduced staffing among humanitarian actors in the region, though implementing partners note that the situation in Al Hol has been relatively calm in since the Turkish incursion and essential lifesaving assistance continued. Distributions of monthly food rations in Al Hol's annex continue while distributions of winter items have been delayed slightly due to delays in transportation of supplies to the camp as of October 23.

**Sources:** USAID response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/19/2019; DoS, DoS Cable 19 STATE 480775, 10/14/2019; USAID Syria Desk, "Syria Update: 10/24," received 10/25/2019.

## EVENTS IN IRAQ

On October 19, Secretary Esper stated that U.S. forces withdrawing from Syria would redeploy to Iraq. From there, they would continue to conduct counterterrorism activities against ISIS in Syria.<sup>265</sup> However, according to media reports, the Iraqi government subsequently said that U.S. forces coming from Syria did not have permission to remain in Iraq and would have to leave within 4 weeks of their arrival.<sup>266</sup> The DoD later stated that the U.S. redeployment of forces from Syria to Iraq would be temporary.

OUSD(P)/ISA told the DoD OIG in October that while several factors will affect final decisions, there may be possibilities for some support previously designated for Syria to assist D-ISIS efforts in Iraq instead.<sup>267</sup>

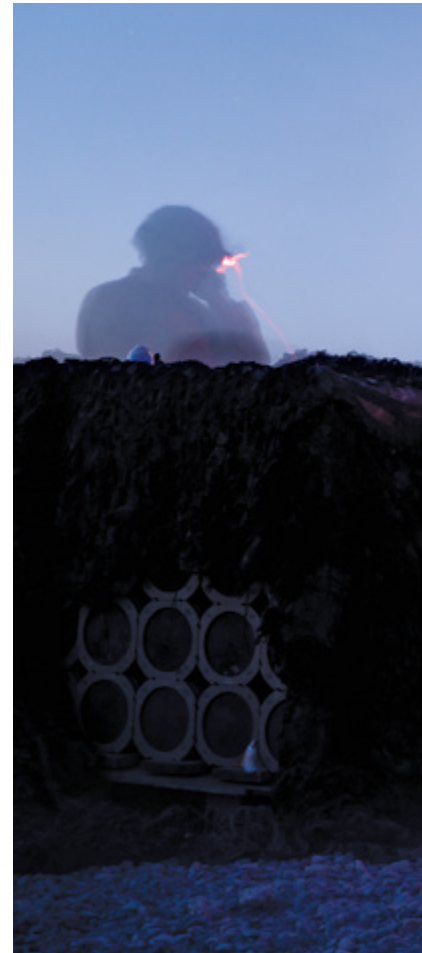
## STATUS OF ISIS IN IRAQ

### ISIS Continues to Rebuild

The drawdown of U.S. forces in Syria after the end of the quarter did not result in any changes to the OIR mission in Iraq, or any changes in ISIS activity in Iraq, according to the D-ISIS Task Force.<sup>268</sup> According to CJTF-OIR, however, ISIS continued this quarter to solidify and expand its command and control structure in Iraq, but had not increased its capabilities in areas where the Coalition was present.<sup>269</sup> CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS continued to regroup in desert and mountainous areas where there is little to no local security presence. USCENTCOM said that ISIS attacks are designed to destabilize the security environment and embarrass the Iraqi government.<sup>270</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS’s long-term goal remains the reestablishment of a “caliphate.”<sup>271</sup> To that end, ISIS carried out 154 primarily small-scale attacks, such as roadside bombs and assassinations, in Iraq, this quarter. However, DIA reported to the DoD OIG that it did not concur with that number, and said that it assessed that the database from which it was derived contained an incomplete accounting of ISIS attacks during the quarter.<sup>272</sup>

CJTF-OIR said in September that ISIS was incapable of conducting large-scale attacks and maintains minimal forces in Coalition areas of operation.<sup>273</sup> USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG no information on the numbers of foreign fighters joining ISIS in Iraq, but said that it judged the numbers to be minimal due to ISIS’s reduced physical footprint and ISIS’



Soldiers fire a M777 towed 155 mm Howitzer on Qayyarah West Airfield, Iraq. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

### IRAQ: SELECTED KEY EVENTS, 7/1/2019-9/30/2019

#### JULY 1

Iraqi Prime Minister issues another decree to integrate PMF forces into the ISF, giving the PMF until July 31 (later extended) to comply; several Iranian-aligned militias refuse

#### JULY 19

First of several suspected Israeli drone strikes in Iraq targets a PMF munitions depot near Baghdad

#### AUGUST 25

Apparent ISIS mortar fire kills 6 and wounds 9 in soccer field in Kirkuk province

#### AUGUST 26

The Fatah Coalition, a bloc of Iranian-aligned parties in Iraq’s Parliament, calls for U.S. forces to leave Iraq

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own publicly-stated preferences for prospective foreign fighters to stay home to conduct attacks in their own countries.<sup>274</sup>

USCENTCOM reported this quarter that ISIS networks in Iraq conducted disruptive operations against Iraqi Security Force (ISF) hold forces in several Sunni-majority provinces north and west of Baghdad.<sup>275</sup> ISIS also carried out several, mostly small-scale attacks in Baghdad, but had difficulty penetrating the ISF's security cordon around the capital with any consistency.<sup>276</sup> USCENTCOM said that these clandestine attacks were designed to destabilize the security environment and undermine and embarrass the Iraqi government.<sup>277</sup> CJTF-OIR said that the threat from ISIS against U.S. troops in Iraq had not increased this quarter, and that ISIS displayed little intent to engage U.S. forces.<sup>278</sup>

#### SEPTEMBER 21

PMF announces restructuring, removes PMF deputy Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and makes him PMF chief of staff

#### SEPTEMBER 27

Iraqi Prime Minister removes deputy commander of elite Counterterrorism Service

#### SEPTEMBER 30

Iraq reopens al-Qaim border crossing with Syria, a former ISIS stronghold now manned by the ISF and Iranian-aligned PMF

SEP



CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS in Iraq conducted both attacks of opportunity, such as improvised bombs and hit-and-run attacks, and attacks designed to intimidate or gain influence, such as assassinations, kidnappings, and sniper attacks.<sup>279</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that the number of provincial districts reporting ISIS activity expanded this quarter.<sup>280</sup> It said that Diyala province and areas of southeastern Ninewa province, in particular, experienced increased ISIS activity, while ISIS activity in Anbar, Kirkuk, and Salah ad Din provinces had subsided.<sup>281</sup> However, the DIA reported that it does not concur that activity in Anbar, Kirkuk, and Salah ad Din provinces had subsided, and said that it characterized it as having “leveled off.”<sup>282</sup>

Despite this activity, CJTF-OIR said that ISIS in Iraq remains decentralized and “struggles to synchronize efforts, acquire terrain, and garner public support.”<sup>283</sup> It said that ISIS is incapable of conducting large-scale attacks and maintains minimal forces in areas of Iraq where Coalition forces operate.<sup>284</sup> CJTF-OIR also said that ISIS is not in advanced stages of insurgency.<sup>285</sup>

The DIA reported that ISIS cannot exploit major cities in Iraq, such as Mosul and Baghdad.<sup>286</sup> However, the DIA also reported that it has “not observed any substantial degradation in any aspect of ISIS’s insurgency” this quarter.<sup>287</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS support zones in Iraq are limited to areas where the ISF has little operational reach or presence.<sup>288</sup> CJTF-OIR said that ISIS maintains only a “transient status” near population centers and that its support comes from rural Sunni areas.<sup>289</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS’s combat power also remained confined to restricted terrain and unpopulated areas where ISF maintains little to no security.<sup>290</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS also continued to move fighters across the Iraq-Syria border this quarter.<sup>291</sup> CJTF-OIR previously reported that ISIS exploits a porous border to move from Syria to Iraq to help fortify ISIS’s command and control operations in Iraq.<sup>292</sup>

More information on the status of ISIS during the quarter is contained in the classified appendix.

## **ACTIONS CONDUCTED AGAINST ISIS IN IRAQ**

### **CJTF-OIR: ISF Conducts Clearing Operations, but Cannot Hold Territory and Has Limited Access to Key Provinces**

According to open media sources, the ISF continued an offensive campaign against ISIS called Will of Victory this quarter. CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted operations to secure populated areas and carrying out limited but targeted clearance operations in sparsely populated ISIS support zones.<sup>293</sup> According to media sources and the UN humanitarian information portal, Reliefweb, the ISF launched the fourth phase of the campaign in August 2019 and the fifth phase in September, with the aim of clearing ISIS in western Anbar province.<sup>294</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF also carried out patrols and clearance operations in the Hamrin Mountains and the Jazeera Desert.<sup>295</sup> In all, CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted roughly 124 clearance operations against ISIS this quarter, during which Iraqi forces killed approximately 13 ISIS fighters and captured approximately 123 of them.<sup>296</sup>



**Iraqi Border Guard Forces move tactically during an explosive ordnance disposal class at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)**

CJTF-OIR said that the ISF actions against ISIS, which have been ongoing in provinces north and west of Baghdad, appeared to have had tangible results as evidenced by a reduction in significant attacks conducted by ISIS this quarter. Previous operations in Diyala and Ninewa provinces reduced the need for the ISF to conduct small-scale, disruptive clearance operations against ISIS in those areas, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>297</sup> CJTF-OIR reported that occasional ISF operations have resulted only in the temporary disruption of ISIS facilitation routes and support zones.<sup>298</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF does not have a large enough force to control large desert areas, and that the ISF needs to be on the ground to secure the Jazeera Desert.<sup>299</sup> According to media sources, the Anbar operation, which includes desert areas, seeks to clear ISIS militants from nearly 43,000 kilometers.<sup>300</sup> ISF hold forces also remain inadequate in some areas. CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF has not been able to retain control of territory cleared of ISIS in Salah ad Din province, and has limited access to ISIS support zones in both Salah ad Din and Diyala provinces.<sup>301</sup> CJTF-OIR said that ISF operations in Diyala were limited in part due to the province's "close proximity" to the Iranian border.<sup>302</sup> Additionally, the ISF remains "largely unwilling or incapable of holding terrain in the mountains and central and southern wadis of Kirkuk province," CJTF-OIR said.<sup>303</sup>

The ISF also has incomplete control of the border with Syria, with CJTF-OIR reporting "gaps/holes". CJTF-OIR said that these gaps or holes exist despite permanent Iraqi Border Guards and Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) units stationed along the border, which includes a long stretch that runs through the Jazeera Desert.<sup>304</sup> Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that the porous border had allowed ISIS fighters coming in from Syria to strengthen ISIS command and control nodes in Iraq.<sup>305</sup> The DoS reported that the Coalition continued to partner with the Iraqi government and the ISF to enhance border security.<sup>306</sup>

U.S. forces continued to partner with the ISF in some operations against ISIS, including most notably this quarter a joint airstrike of ISIS positions on an island in the Tigris River south of Mosul. According to news reports, in September, Coalition and Iraqi forces dropped 80,000 pounds of bombs to destroy what CJTF-OIR said was a "major transit hub" for ISIS

**The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service stages vehicles in preparation for operations in northern Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)**



moving from Syria into northern Iraq.<sup>307</sup> Following the attack, the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (CTS), Iraq's elite U.S.-trained special operations force, found weapons caches on the island.<sup>308</sup> It was unclear what the long-term effect of the bombing might be on ISIS ability to transit clandestinely between Iraq and Syria.

Separately, CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS continued this quarter to conduct both unilateral and Coalition-supported operations to conduct arrests and searches, and to gather information during operations against ISIS.<sup>309</sup> It reported that the CTS has “dramatically improved their ability to integrate, synchronize, direct, and optimize counterterrorism operations” to defeat ISIS and that CTS brigades have been able to sustain unilateral operations against ISIS.<sup>310</sup>

However, on September 29, according to news reports, Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abd al Mahdi abruptly removed Lt. Gen. Abdul-Wahab al Saadi, the CTS's second-in-command, and transferred him to the Ministry of Defense.<sup>311</sup> News reports said that al Saadi was on good terms with U.S. forces, which trained the CTS, and popular among many Iraqis who credit him with successfully leading several battles against ISIS, including in Mosul.<sup>312</sup> Some news sources said that Iraqis blamed Iran for al Saadi's removal.<sup>313</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported on October 14 that its relationship with the CTS was the “strongest it has been at any point since the campaign against ISIS began in 2014,” and credited the CTS's director, General Talib Shegati Kinani, for what CJTF-OIR said was the CTS's strong influence within the Iraqi government. CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS remains Iraq's most effective and reliable “weapon” in the fight against ISIS, and said that the force had a reputation as Iraq's “premier, apolitical, non-sectarian, and multi-ethnic national counterterrorism crisis response force.”<sup>314</sup>

In October, CJTF-OIR reported that al Saadi's removal was too recent to provide an assessment of impact, but that it had not seen any “measureable negative impact” to the CTS's operational tempo or effectiveness related to his departure. CJTF-OIR described al Saadi as the CTS's “most effective and visionary commander.”<sup>315</sup>

More information on ISF activity against ISIS during the quarter is contained in the classified appendix.



## ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN IRAQ

### Tensions with Iran and Suspected Israeli Airstrikes Complicate OIR This Quarter

According to media reports, suspected Israeli airstrikes on Iraqi bases belonging to Iranian-aligned militias this quarter exacerbated ongoing tensions between the United States and Iran and complicated the OIR mission.<sup>316</sup> The press reports stated that as many as four airstrikes targeted PMF positions, drawing sharp rebuke from Iraqi parliamentarians, some of whom called for the removal of U.S. forces from Iraq. The Iraqi government subsequently imposed air restrictions on foreign aircraft flying over Iraqi airspace, including Coalition aircraft.<sup>317</sup> CJTF-OIR and the DoS reported that the air restrictions hurt the Coalition's ability to counter the ISIS threat in Iraq, specifically reducing observation and monitoring by ISR assets.<sup>318</sup> The DoS also told the DoS OIG that the U.S. Embassy engaged with the Iraqi government to minimize the effects of the air restrictions on counter-ISIS operations and to counter calls to expel the U.S. forces from Iraq.<sup>319</sup>

USCENTCOM reported that threats against U.S. forces from Iranian-aligned forces increased this quarter.<sup>320</sup> Citing media reports, USCENTCOM said that Iranian-backed militias may view the United States as complicit in the Israeli strikes, which targeted Iraqi militia bases allegedly housing Iranian weapons.<sup>321</sup> USCENTCOM said that Iranian-aligned forces—many of whom are PMF units—could also threaten U.S. troops should Iran “choose to respond kinetically” to U.S.-imposed economic sanctions.<sup>322</sup>

The DIA reported in September that perceived U.S. provocations or interference in Iraqi affairs could lead to retaliation by Iranian-aligned militias within the PMF.<sup>323</sup> The deputy head of the PMF, Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, blamed Israel and the United States for an August 22, 2019, airstrike near the al Balad airbase north of Baghdad, which news reports said Israel conducted. Al Muhandis said that the PMF would hold “American forces” responsible for this airstrike.<sup>324</sup> According to news reports, Falih al Fayadh, the PMF's chief and Iraq's National Security Advisor, said that the Iraqi government had yet to determine who had carried out the blast and that he wanted to avoid being caught in the middle of U.S.-Iranian tensions.<sup>325</sup> According to news reports, on September 30, Iraqi Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi said that investigations found that Israel had carried out the targeting of some PMF positions.<sup>326</sup> Grand Ayatollah Kazim al Haeri, a leading Iran-based Shia cleric followed by many Shia Iraqis, issued a fatwa forbidding the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq.<sup>327</sup> In September, the DIA said that it did not observe any specific attack preparations in response to the fatwa.<sup>328</sup> However, PMF units warned that foreign aircraft flying in Iraqi airspace would be treated as “hostile,” according to news reports.<sup>329</sup> On at least three occasions between August 22 and September 11, the PMF claimed to have fired upon and deterred unidentified drones flying above their bases in Baghdad, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din.<sup>330</sup>

**USCENTCOM reported that threats against U.S. forces from Iranian-aligned forces increased this quarter.**

Despite increased tensions, a DIA assessment provided to the DoD OIG in September said that the PMF's actions against ISIS remain a “net positive” because PMF units, both Iranian-aligned ones and those not aligned with Iran, participate in ISF clearing operations in Iraq. The DIA said that PMF brigades affiliated with several Iranian-aligned militias have participated in the months-long “Will of Victory” operation this quarter.<sup>331</sup>

More information on Iranian activity and Israeli airstrikes in Iraq is contained in the classified appendix.

## **Iraq Again Orders PMF to Integrate with ISF; Some Iranian-aligned PMF Units Refuse**

On July 1, 2019, Iraqi Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi issued another government decree ordering the full integration of PMF units—an estimated 130,000 to 150,000 personnel—into the Iraqi armed forces.<sup>332</sup> According to open-source analysts, the order sought to clamp down on some PMF units’ “mafia-like” economic activities and stop unauthorized attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and on neighboring states” by PMF units.<sup>333</sup> According to media sources, for more than a year, the Iraqi government has sought to integrate the PMF into the ISF, with partial success.<sup>334</sup> A similar decree issued in March 2018 by former Prime Minister Haider al Abadi was never implemented.<sup>335</sup>

Responses to the decree, which was to be implemented by July 31, 2019, exposed differences between factions, or units, within the PMF.<sup>336</sup> According to the DIA, some PMF brigades shut down headquarters and turned in weapons, while others—among them Iranian-aligned groups designated by the U.S. Government for human rights abuses this quarter—refused to comply.<sup>337</sup> However, the DIA also reported that in its assessment Iran supported the integration of the PMF into the ISF because integration would help to legitimize PMF units that act as key levers of influence on Iran’s behalf.<sup>338</sup>

The DoS reported very slow implementation of the decree.<sup>339</sup> The DIA reported that it did not observe any significant changes to PMF operations following the order.<sup>340</sup> The integration of the PMF has already resulted in PMF units receiving government pay equal to their ISF counterparts, which the DIA said relieves some of Iran’s economic burden of supporting certain PMF militias.<sup>341</sup>

In an assessment provided to the DoD OIG in September, the DIA said that Iranian-affiliated groups within the PMF are unlikely to change their loyalties because of the new order.<sup>342</sup> Conflicting public statements by officials within the Iraqi government, religious establishment, and the PMF demonstrated diverging allegiances and an internal power struggle over control of the PMF. For instance, according to media reports, PMF chief al Fayadh publicly rebuked al Muhandis this quarter for statements blaming the United States and Israel for the unexplained explosions at PMF bases and for his announcement that the PMF would establish its own air force.<sup>343</sup> According to media reports, a representative of Iraq’s most senior Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani, issued a statement calling for all weapons to come under control of the Iraqi state, challenging Iranian influence over Iraqi militias.<sup>344</sup>

According to open-source analysts, on September 17, Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi announced a restructuring of the Iraqi Joint Operations Command-Iraq’s senior military command structure to incorporate the PMF under the formal chain of command and removed al Muhandis as deputy of the PMF.<sup>345</sup> According to media reports, al Muhandis was reassigned as the PMF’s chief of staff, although it remains unclear how much authority he will hold.<sup>346</sup>

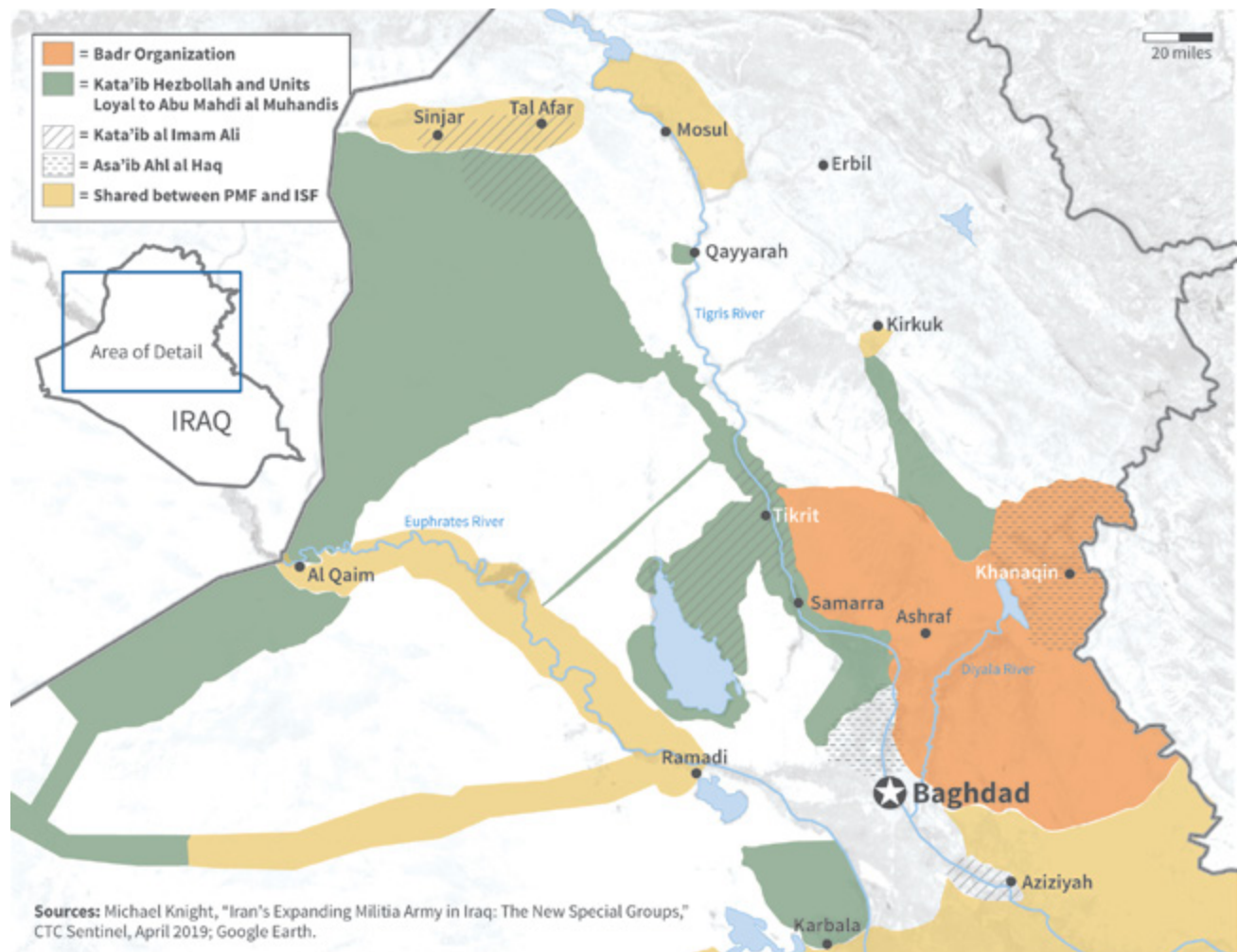
More information on PMF integration into the ISF is contained in the classified appendix.

### PMF Units, Including Iranian-aligned Ones, Maintain ‘Influence’ over Specific Areas of Iraq

According to an analysis published by West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), PMF units backed by Iran maintain “areas of influence” in central and northern Iraq and have grown from approximately 4,000 personnel in 2010, to more than 80,000 registered members in 2019.<sup>347</sup> These units include established Iranian-aligned militias such as Kata’ib Hezbollah and Units Loyal to Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, the Badr Organization, and Asa’ib Ahl al Haq, and newer ones such as Kata’ib al Imam Ali.<sup>348</sup> The DIA told the DoD OIG that the groups that are not responsive to Iran are less likely to be capable, trained, and well equipped.<sup>349</sup> Iranian-aligned PMF units have also joined forces to form the second-largest political bloc in Iraq’s parliament.<sup>350</sup> For an overview of selected Iranian-aligned PMF militias and where they operate in Iraq, see Figure 3.

Figure 3.

#### Areas Where Select Iranian-aligned Militias Operate in Iraq, September 2019





According to press reporting, Iranian-aligned PMF units operate throughout central Iraq, including in Iraq's Sunni-majority areas and places where ISIS is still most active.<sup>351</sup> For instance, the Badr Organization maintains influence in areas of Diyala province, while the Kata'ib Hezbollah is present mainly in areas of Anbar and Ninewa provinces along the border with Syria as well as in the largely populated areas of Salah ad Din province. Controlling these key strategic points allows Iranian-aligned militias, most prominently Kata'ib Hezbollah, to control cross-border smuggling and commerce and move military vehicles into Syria without inspection by Iraqi customs, according to the CTC report.<sup>352</sup> These Iranian-aligned militias operate their own regional commands and dominate former military bases, energy infrastructure, and commercial property that support the PMF's economic and political activity.<sup>353</sup>

The CTC reported that Kata'ib Hezbollah controls the city of Jurf as Sakr, southwest of Baghdad, where it prevents other security forces from operating. Former Sunni residents are barred from returning to Jurf as Sakr, and Kata'ib Hezbollah are reported to operate a private prison holding more than 1,000 detainees extra-judicially.<sup>354</sup> Human rights groups have found that since 2014 many Iranian-backed militias operate their own checkpoints throughout central and northern Iraq where arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial executions occurred without repercussions from the Iraqi government.<sup>355</sup> Meanwhile, the Alas and Pulkhana oilfields north of Baghdad are under the control of Iranian-aligned militias, which open source analysis suggests are being used to divert oil to Iran.<sup>356</sup>

## CAPACITY BUILDING OF PARTNER FORCES

### Despite Years of U.S.-funded Training, the ISF Still Lacks Key Capabilities to Fight ISIS

U.S. forces have been training the ISF since OIR began in 2015, with the goal of creating a self-sufficient, sustainable, and independent fighting force capable of fighting ISIS. Towards that end, U.S. forces have trained Iraq's elite CTS, its army, Federal Police, Border Guards, and other units. For the last two years, U.S. forces have undertaken a sub-operation called Operation Reliable Partnership that seeks to build up ISF overall capabilities and tactical superiority over ISIS.

This quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that training has resulted in ISF capabilities to conduct security operations in and around population centers and to assault a target once the target is identified.<sup>357</sup> However, CJTF-OIR also identified the ISF's ability to "find and fix" a target as a "major shortfall," and said that its exploitation capability is "virtually non-existent" without Coalition assistance.<sup>358</sup> CJTF-OIR said that most commands within the ISF will not conduct operations to clear ISIS insurgents in mountainous and desert terrain without Coalition air cover, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and coordination.<sup>359</sup> Instead, ISF commands rely on the Coalition to monitor "points of interest" and collect ISR for them.<sup>360</sup> Despite ongoing training, CJTF-OIR said that the ISF has not changed its level of reliance on Coalition forces for the last 9 months and that Iraqi commanders continue to request Coalition assets instead of utilizing their own systems.<sup>361</sup> According to CJTF-OIR, the ISF continues to rely on Coalition ISR due to cultural factors and this reliance needs to end.<sup>362</sup>

**This quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that training has resulted in ISF capabilities to conduct security operations in and around population centers and to assault a target once the target is identified.**



**Iraqi Security Forces soldiers react to simulated explosion during a training exercise. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)**

In addition to this general reliance on the Coalition, the level of capability of different ISF forces varies, sometimes from one unit to another, and often despite specific training. For instance, CJTF-OIR said, some CTS units are well-equipped, led, and supported, while others are “virtually combat ineffective.”<sup>363</sup> A CTS unit located in southern Iraq has been “largely neglected and not utilized” because of its geographic location, CJTF-OIR said. Overall, gaps remain among all CTS units in intelligence collection assets, intelligence data fusion, and logistics.<sup>364</sup> The CTS also lacks secure data communications systems, which undermines its ability to rapidly share intelligence within the organization and communicate securely via phone or email with one another or with the Coalition.<sup>365</sup>

Citing other examples, CJTF-OIR reported that although the Federal Police has begun utilizing mortars while conducting clearance operations against ISIS, its use of mortars remains “largely inaccurate even after Coalition training.”<sup>366</sup> This quarter, the ISF command in Anbar province did “not show a major increase in fires capability,” or use its own drones, relying instead on the Coalition’s unmanned aerial systems, CJTF-OIR said.<sup>367</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS remains unable to execute operations quickly against ISIS. It said that the CTS’s highly centralized command and control structure contributed to its inability to take decisive action against ISIS because tactical units do not have much freedom to act swiftly on local intelligence.<sup>368</sup> The CTS’s ability to conduct operations is “undermined by micro-management from the operational and strategic level,” CJTF-OIR said.<sup>369</sup>

For information on ISF capability is contained in the classified appendix.

### **Coalition Looks to Transition Training Facilities to Iraqi Control**

CJTF-OIR reported that multiple trainings occurred this quarter aimed at making the ISF self-reliant and able to train itself without Coalition support. Towards that end, CJTF-OIR has gradually transferred training facilities to ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga control and will continue to do so throughout 2020. As facilities are transferred, CJTF-OIR personnel will assume a mentoring role, and will no longer directly deliver training. Additionally, ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga instructors are being further qualified as ‘master instructors,’ who will be qualified to train the trainers, which will enable them to teach and qualify new instructors without Coalition input.<sup>370</sup>

CJTF-OIR said that this quarter it completed training Iraqi mobile training teams that will provide specific instruction on key intelligence capabilities to ISF battalion intelligence officers and their leadership.<sup>371</sup> It said that the plan is to enable Iraqi instructors to provide 50 percent of the intelligence course instruction, with the goal of enabling Iraqis to provide 80 percent of course instruction by December 2019 and 95 percent by April 2020.<sup>372</sup> The end goal is to make the program self-sustainable and no longer reliant on Coalition support, CTJF-OIR said.<sup>373</sup>

CJTF-OIR reported that it has trained more than 4,000 ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga personnel to deliver military training to their peers and subordinates. The training is largely focused on basic skills, such as weapon handling, marksmanship, patrolling, checkpoints, and vehicle drills, as well as urban combat and clearance operations.<sup>374</sup> CJTF-OIR said that the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga have enough instructors but are not yet self-reliant because they lack a mechanism to schedule units for training and for managing their pool of trained instructors. As a result, they still rely on Coalition forces to provide this function.<sup>375</sup>

Separately, CJTF-OIR reported that the Coalition trained 3,235 Iraqi Army, 1,829 Iraqi Police, 480 Iraqi Border Guards, and 4,764 from the Kurdish Peshmerga in the first two months of this quarter. CJTF-OIR estimated that 15,000 ISF personnel will be trained by the end of the quarter.<sup>376</sup> CJTF-OIR said that the training was at the unit level and included training on basic skills directly relevant to defeating ISIS. The training was delivered by Coalition trainers.<sup>377</sup>

More information on Coalition efforts to transfer training facilities to Iraqi control is in contained in the classified appendix.

**CJTF-OIR reported that it has trained more than 4,000 ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga personnel to deliver military training to their peers and subordinates.**

## DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### Embassy Staff Reductions Hinder OIR-Related Activities

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil have operated at significantly reduced staffing levels affecting all sections of their operations since the May 14 directive to conduct an ordered departure of all non-emergency personnel. The ordered departure from Mission Iraq, which includes Embassy Baghdad, the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, and U.S. Consulate Erbil, extended through November 9 following reports of continued violence and potential threats to Chief of Mission personnel. Given Mission Iraq's goals to help defeat ISIS and build a stronger Iraq, the reduced staffing has limited the ability of the embassy to help Iraq become a more resilient and independent democratic country.<sup>378</sup>

USAID underwent some staffing reductions even before the ordered departure. At the start of FY 2019, USAID maintained an authorized level of 26 expatriate staff and 19 Iraqi nationals in Baghdad in order to plan, manage, and oversee development, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance programs in Iraq.<sup>379</sup> After a review directed by the Secretary of State to determine how best to reduce the Mission's expatriate footprint while continuing to fulfill existing priorities, authorized USAID expatriate personnel decreased to 20.<sup>380</sup> There has been a second review since then, which has yet to be finalized.<sup>381</sup>

Under the May 14 ordered departure of non-emergency personnel, USAID staff in country reduced to five expatriate personnel in Baghdad, an 80 percent reduction. This quarter, USAID/OTI's Country Representative received authorization to return to Erbil to provide critical support.<sup>382</sup> The effects of these reductions are discussed further below.

In total, as of October 3, there were 352 direct hire U.S. citizens and Foreign Service Nationals under Chief of Mission security responsibility, down from 563 on the day before the ordered departure. Further, according to the DoS, recruitment and retention of more than 500 locally employed staff necessary for embassy and consulate operations suffered due to rigorous pre-employment and periodically updated security vetting requirements and the resignations of local employees who receive special immigrant visas after completing a period of service.<sup>383</sup> Since May 14, approximately 1,000 contractors departed the country under the ordered departure, leaving 2,962 contractors in country, of which 1,483 were U.S. contractors and 1,479 were third-country nationals.<sup>384</sup> The DoS OIG assesses that the DoS will implement revised and lower staffing levels for Mission Iraq after the DoS finalizes a zero-based staffing review.

More information about the threat reports is contained in the classified appendix.

### **Ordered Departure Slows the Required Vetting of ISF Personnel**

CJTF-OIR reported that the ordered departure of U.S. personnel from Iraq temporarily delayed the vetting of individuals within the ISF for ties to terrorist organizations, which the DoS conducts when a foreign force is to receive U.S. funding.<sup>385</sup> According to CJTF-OIR, these delays ranged from 6 weeks to up to 75 business days and “severely affected” the training and equipping of ISF personnel.<sup>386</sup> To ameliorate the effects of a reduced U.S. Embassy staff, CJTF-OIR said that all vetting requests for training of Iraqi personnel and transfers of equipment to the ISF are submitted three months in advance.<sup>387</sup>

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad reported that the May 14 ordered departure has had a negligible impact on the vetting of Iraqi security forces for gross violations of human rights as required by the Leahy law. The Embassy reported no specific allegations of gross violations of human rights against the Iraqi Army or Federal Police during the quarter.<sup>388</sup>

More information about the ordered departure is contained in the classified appendix.

### **Violent Protests Erupt Demanding Jobs, Basic Public Services, End of Corruption**

One year after a summer of violent protests in Basrah over the government’s failure to provide jobs, electricity and clean water, and to end corruption, Iraqi youth again led large-scale demonstrations in Iraq seeking meaningful jobs, improved public services such as water and electricity, and an end to endemic corruption. The protesters faulted the al Mahdi government for failing to make meaningful progress on providing jobs and services.<sup>389</sup> These widespread protests highlighted Iraq’s longstanding governance failures that the government must address to help eliminate the conditions that gave rise to ISIS and previously al Qaeda in Iraq.

The demonstrations, organized on social media, started around October 1, and were unusual in a country where rallies are typically called for by politicians or religious figures.<sup>390</sup> However, prominent Shia clerics Muqtada al Sadr and Ammar al Hakim quickly announced their support for the protesters’ demands while criticizing the Prime Minister.<sup>391</sup> Iraq’s senior Shia cleric, Ayatollah al Sistani, endorsed the protests and issued a stark warning that “the people will come back even stronger” unless the government takes “clear and immediate steps” before it is too late. Ayatollah al Sistani singled out the Iraqi government and political parties for their failure to fight corruption.<sup>392</sup>



The demonstrations began in Baghdad with more than 5,000 young men protesting at Baghdad's Tahrir Square on October 1. Government security forces used tear gas, water cannons, and live fire to disperse the demonstrators.<sup>393</sup> The protests quickly expanded to the south, erupting in the Shia holy city of Karbala and then further south to Basrah, Najaf, Diwaniyah, and Nasiriyah.<sup>394</sup>

In an attempt to contain the spread of anti-government protests, the Iraqi government suspended access to social communications networks, including Face Book Messenger and WhatsApp.<sup>395</sup> The Prime Minister declared a curfew in Baghdad and three southern cities, which the protesters ignored. Confrontations between the protesters and government security forces grew even more violent before ending on October 7. An Iraqi government committee appointed by Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi reported that Iraqi security forces killed 149 people and more than 3,000 wounded, with more than 70 percent of the deaths caused by shots to the head or chest, as of October 22.<sup>396</sup>

### **Southern Iraq Sees Few Improvements in Jobs and Public Services**

The Iraqi government made little progress during the quarter to improve public services, provide jobs, and rehabilitate energy and water infrastructure in Basrah and neighboring southern provinces, as highlighted by the violent protests in central and southern Iraq discussed earlier.<sup>397</sup>

Iraq competes with its neighbors for water, particularly Iran and Turkey. Both countries have developed plans to build large dams to store water from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, with the potential of depriving Iraq, located downriver on both rivers, of needed water resources. According to media reports, Iraq does not have the financial capacity and planning ability to undertake large-scale dam projects. Further, major construction requires a stable country without the levels of financial and administrative inefficiency and corruption plaguing Iraq. In Iraq, even paving a small road can take months, possibly years, to complete.<sup>398</sup>

The DoS told the DoS OIG that it maintained diplomatic pressure on Iraq to diversify its energy production to reduce reliance on electricity imports from Iran.<sup>399</sup> According to media reports, in September the Iraqi government made some progress toward concluding contracts with international companies to expand domestic electricity generation, including announcing a "fast track plan" for a \$3 billion upgrade of the national electricity distribution grid.<sup>400</sup> The government also approved a loan agreement with international lenders to finance construction of 13 secondary substations and purchase 35 high voltage transformers.<sup>401</sup> Iraq also signed a framework agreement to link it to the Gulf Cooperation Council power grid initially providing 500 megawatts to Basrah from Kuwait for the summer of 2020, with an ultimate goal of 2,000 megawatts.<sup>402</sup>

### **The Kurdistan Regional Government Must Share Oil with Iraq's Central Government or Face Federal Budget Cuts**

According to media reports, the Kurdistan Regional Government has not abided by its agreement under the 2019 federal budget to provide 250,000 barrels of oil per day to Iraq's State Organization for Marketing of Oil. The Iraqi government, however, has met its 2019 budget obligations by sending the KRG its share of the budget, including payment of the

salaries for the KRG government employees. Iraqi President Barham Salih, who is Kurdish, traveled to Erbil in late September to deliver a stern warning to the KRG leadership that its share of the 2020 budget would be cut, including the salaries of the KRG employees, if the region fails to turn over a portion of its oil to the state oil corporation.<sup>403</sup>

According to the DoS, both governments are trying to improve their relations. Iraqi President Salih hosted leadership meetings this quarter between the Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish communities to begin to reconcile their differences. President Salih also led a group of Iraqi officials from the Sunni and Shia communities outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to attend the inauguration of KRG President Nechirvan Barzani.<sup>404</sup>

## HUMANITARIAN, DEVELOPMENT, AND STABILIZATION ASSISTANCE

### Staffing Reductions at U.S. Embassy Threaten to Significantly Reduce Oversight of \$1.16 Billion USAID Portfolio

Since the ordered departure of U.S. personnel from Iraq in May 2019, USAID has had on average 6 expatriate staff in country versus 26 at the start of 2019. Some of the USAID personnel previously based in Iraq have been evacuated to Washington, DC, while a small group operates out of satellite offices in Germany.<sup>405</sup> USAID reported that relocating third country nationals—many of whom have more than 10 years of experience working with Embassy Baghdad—to other overseas posts has proven particularly complicated, and remains a significant challenge.<sup>406</sup> USAID employees are charged with planning, managing, and overseeing a \$1.16 billion portfolio of development, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance programs.<sup>407</sup>

This quarter, USAID officials reported to USAID OIG that staff reductions associated with the ordered departure have had significant adverse effects on program planning, management, and oversight activities in Iraq.<sup>408</sup> There is no longer USAID humanitarian staff present on a permanent basis in Iraq; on August 31, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) began conducting all humanitarian program management remotely.<sup>409</sup> USAID continues to manage a \$430 million humanitarian assistance portfolio in Iraq.<sup>410</sup> Because of the ordered departure, USAID staff are monitoring humanitarian programs remotely via phone calls and implementers reports, as well as through temporary duty deployments. USAID OFDA and FFP staff are participating remotely in key in-country meetings.<sup>411</sup> According to USAID, under these conditions, staff are only able to engage in the bare minimum coordination with other parts of the U.S. Government, with Government of Iraq, and other parts of the international community.<sup>412</sup>

An added complication is that staff operating remotely work Monday-Friday, while Baghdad and Erbil operate Sunday-Thursday, effectively losing one workday each week.<sup>413</sup> Further, all USAID expatriate staff members, including third country nationals and direct hires, entering Iraq must first be approved by the DoS, which USAID reports to be a slow and opaque process.<sup>414</sup> Remaining USAID staff in Baghdad and Erbil reported to USAID OIG that in addition to, and instead of, their assigned duties, they were spending 30 to 100 percent of their time on staffing configurations associated with the drawdown.<sup>415</sup>

Since the ordered departure of U.S. personnel from Iraq in May 2019, USAID has had on average fewer than 6 expatriate staff in country versus 26 at the start of 2019.

These staff reductions have occurred in the context of a significant increase in programming and required oversight. In April 2019, the chargé d'affaires announced an additional \$100 million in stabilization assistance for Anbar province.<sup>416</sup> In September, USAID Administrator Green announced over \$7 million in new financial assistance to support ethnic and religious minorities displaced by genocide.<sup>417</sup> Administrator Green also announced in September a \$4.1 million award under USAID's New Partnership Initiative (NPI), a tool to provide assistance directly to local organizations and allow more opportunities for organizations to work with USAID. The NPI structure relies on in-country expertise from USAID personnel to train local organizations on the requirements of receiving U.S. funding.<sup>418</sup> According to USAID, this is particularly challenging given that awards to local organizations require increased involvement and there is uncertainty surrounding USAID's relocation of third-country nationals.<sup>419</sup>

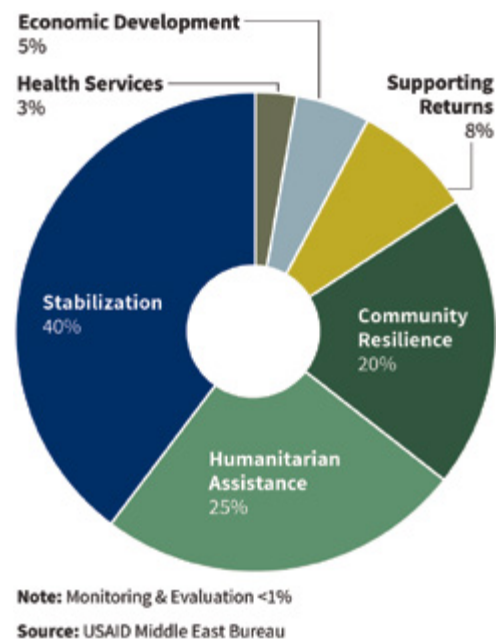
As of mid-November, USAID is responsible for managing a \$1.16 billion assistance portfolio in Iraq that contributes directly to DoS's objectives identified in the Integrated Country Strategy for Iraq: countering Iran, defeating ISIS, and supporting religious and ethnic minorities to recover from genocide.<sup>420</sup> The staffing reductions coupled with the large portfolio create uncertainty as to how programs will be overseen remotely and whether USAID will have access to a regional platform to support its oversight activity.<sup>421</sup> Uncertainty around staffing levels also raises questions about USAID's continuing ability to effectively oversee its high-priority, high-risk portfolio.<sup>422</sup>

### Minority Assistance Remains Top USAID Iraq Priority

The United States has allocated more than \$400 million to support religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that have been the victims of ISIS genocide, including Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims. This assistance focuses on humanitarian assistance, stabilization, and promoting the safe return of religious and ethnic minorities to their communities of origin. In October 2017, Vice President Pence announced that the United States would shift away from funding UN agencies and instead work with faith-based groups and private organizations to support these efforts.<sup>423</sup>

According to USAID, since October 2017, USAID has sought to fund activities that assist in the voluntary return of IDPs in the Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa areas of Iraq, and to encourage those who are already in their communities to remain.<sup>424</sup> evolving to include more non-traditional aid organizations to advance religious and ethnic minority programming. In support of this aim, USAID has use a variety of procurement approaches such as Broad Agency Announcements (BAA). According to USAID, BAAs are a procurement tool that allows USAID to collaborate with the private and public sectors when facing a development challenge that does not have a clear solution and there appears to be an opportunity for innovation.<sup>425</sup> As of September 2019, 4 of 14 minority assistance awards were created through the BAA approach.<sup>426</sup>

Figure 4.  
Ethnic and Religious Minority Assistance



Through its Iraq Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Initiative, USAID has awarded 14 grants ranging from \$528,500 to more than \$90 million to encourage the voluntary returns of internally displaced persons through stabilization, health, and economic development programs.<sup>427</sup> The following table represents awards under USAID’s Iraq Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Initiative and shows the distribution by office, amount, and type of activity.<sup>428</sup>

The religious minority assistance targets a variety of sectors including stabilization, health, and economic development. The largest percentage of funding is for stabilization (40 percent).<sup>429</sup> See Figure 4.

Table 2.

**Awards Under USAID’s Iraq Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Initiative**

USAID Office	Activity Name	BAA (yes/no)	Amount (\$)	Summary of Activity
<b>OFDA and FFP</b>	Humanitarian Assistance	No	90,317,788	Shelter, livelihoods, protection
<b>OTI</b>	Iraq Community Resilience Initiative	No	66,300,000	Community-based development
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	Improving Health Services and Outcomes in the Ninewa Plains	No	4,000,000	Restoring quality of care in health facilities
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	Safe Return	Yes	4,538,535	Mental health and psychosocial support
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	Displaced Population in Ninewa Plains and West Ninewa	Yes	27,500,000	Social cohesion to support returns
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	Durable Solutions for a Cohesive and Diverse Ninewa Plains	Yes	4,969,376	Vocational and leadership skills
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) –Mosul	No	69,700,000	Rehabilitation of public infrastructure
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	FFS in the Ninewa Plain and Western Ninewa Province	No	58,920,359	Water, health, education, and electricity
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	Building Community Resilience in Ninewa Post-ISIS	Yes	5,006,996	Address policy actions related to returns
<b>USAID Mission in Iraq</b>	Middle East North Africa Investment Initiative (MENA II)	No	9,000,000	Economic development
<b>USAID Middle East Regional Bureau</b>	Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response (GRPR)-Learning and Pilots	No	5,000,000	Address gender-based violence
<b>USAID Middle East Regional Bureau</b>	Transitional Assistance to IDPs in Erbil, Iraq	No	6,800,000	Shelter and food assistance
<b>USAID Middle East Regional Bureau</b>	Primary and Secondary Health Support to Northern Iraq	No	528,500	Deliver quality healthcare services

Source: USAID



## Award Profile: Community-led Programming Continues but Political and Security Issues Hinder Progress of Returns

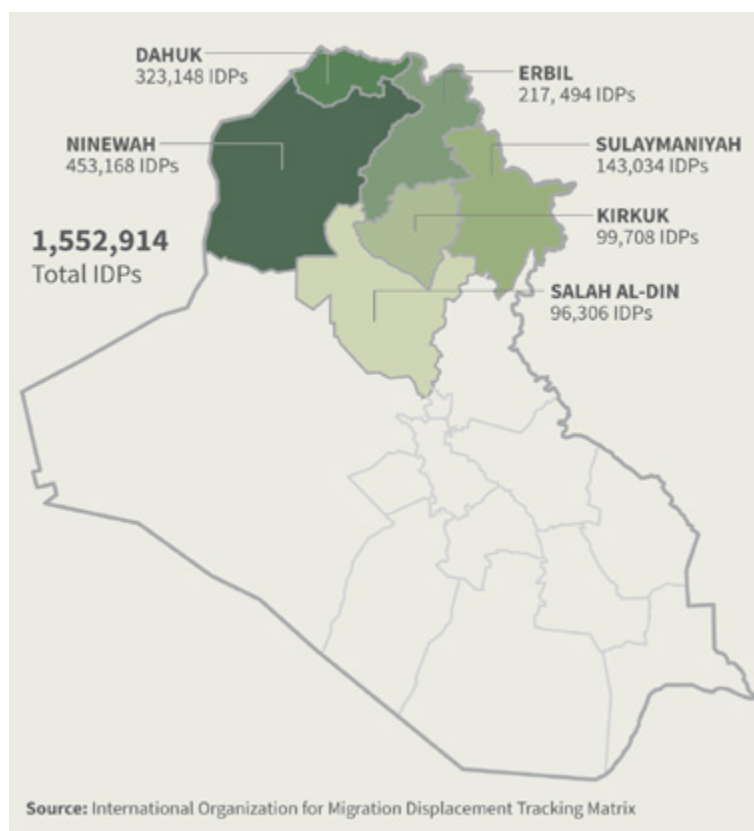
In 2018, USAID awarded the International Organization for Migration (IOM) \$9.5 million with the goal to examine whether investment in community-led programming in minority areas with low return rates could reduce barriers to return and increase the rate and sustainability of returns. As noted in the table above, as of Q4, the “Displaced Population in Ninewa Plains” award has increased from \$9.5 million to \$27.5 million. To achieve this, USAID reported that project partners combined short- and long-term approaches to programming that focused on livelihoods, economic independency, and psychosocial and administrative support to create an environment for the return of IDPs to their areas of origin in Ninewa Plains and West Ninewa.<sup>430</sup> Thus far, according to USAID, IOM has identified and designed tools needed for the project, conducted a quantitative assessment to define beneficiary needs, and produced a community plan through community consultation. On an ongoing basis, IOM provides access to community-based psychosocial support via the following ongoing activities:

- Training public officials in Sinjar and Hamdanya to respond to needs of returnees and address triggers of tension and division
- Setting-up psychosocial and emotional support services in Sinjar and Hamdanya through a mobile team and weekly presence at the general hospital
- Providing for community-based and family support activities enhancing positive interaction between community members (e.g. vocational training, sports, creative activities) in Hamdanya, Telkief and Sinjar

USAID reported that during the quarter, numerous IOM funded activities took place, including group counseling and psychosocial support awareness with 100 women; English language learning for 40 youth ages 15-25; a domestic violence and abuse self-help group for 60 women; and computer skills training for 40 schoolteachers.<sup>431</sup> Information available to USAID OIG did not indicate how or whether these activities had the effect of reducing barriers for minority IDPs to return home.

Figure 5.

### Number of IDPs in Iraq, as of August 31, 2019



**According to USAID, relief agencies and returnees report that several areas of Iraq remain uncondusive to returns due to ongoing insecurity, damaged or destroyed housing and infrastructure, and a lack of basic services.**

In addition to these small-scale programmatic activities, the IOM award also supports the Displacement Tracking Matrix, which provides ongoing data collection, analysis, and dissemination of reporting on the number of returns and IDPs. According to USAID, investments in community resilience programming such as those under the IOM program have enabled returns of IDPs.<sup>432</sup> For example, according to the DTM, at the end of October 2017 there were 2.6 million returns and 3.1 million IDPs throughout Iraq. By the end of August 2019, reported returns exceeded 4.35 million and IDPs had dropped to 1.5 million.<sup>433</sup> It is unclear from the data what percentage of the approximately 1.6 million returnees were from religious and ethnic minority groups, and whether the community-led activities enabled the returns or simply correlate with the returns.

Despite these programs, there are still barriers to returns. For example, according to USAID, these efforts are constrained by political and security problems, which need to be addressed by security and diplomatic engagement with local authorities, in addition to USAID influence. For example, in Sinjar, a lingering dispute between political leaders in Erbil and Baghdad has created a vacuum of governance with at least seven different armed actors operating in the area and no reliable government of Iraq staff to administer oversight and payments to local government employees like teachers. Increased diplomatic engagement is required to move this situation in Sinjar forward, according to USAID.<sup>434</sup> The longer these barriers remain in place, the more significant the questions grow about the potential effectiveness of these assistance efforts.

### **AUTHORITIES DRIVE IDP MOVEMENTS THROUGH CAMP CLOSURES AND PREVENTION OF RETURNS IN NINEWA AND ANBAR**

According to USAID, relief agencies and returnees report that several areas of Iraq remain uncondusive to returns due to ongoing insecurity, damaged or destroyed housing and infrastructure, and a lack of basic services. Despite these concerns, according to the United Nations, the Iraqi government continues to consolidate and close IDP camps.<sup>435</sup>

According to the IOM, local authorities must address several problems to ensure that the return of IDPs in West Mosul in Ninewa province does not trigger new cycles of intercommunal conflict. IOM identified mutual distrust and resentment between different social groups that frequently stems from suspicion of membership in or collaboration with ISIS as the foremost problem in this area.<sup>436</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, since August 23, local authorities have forcibly expelled more than 2,000 Iraqis from camps for displaced people in Ninewa province, largely due to perceptions of ISIS-affiliation.<sup>437</sup>

In early July, Iraq's National Security Council passed "Resolution 16." According to Human Rights Watch, the resolution orders people from areas other than Ninewa—currently at least 38,040 people—to leave Ninewa-based camps. It also mandates that security forces develop a database of residents and isolate families who are perceived as ISIS-affiliated.<sup>438</sup>

Throughout Iraq, relief agencies continue to express concern regarding the use of threats and intimidation toward IDPs, the presence of military personnel in IDP camps, and restrictions on movement and access to services, all intended to pressure populations to relocate.<sup>439</sup> The IOM reported that in Anbar province, security forces obstructed

approximately 70 percent of locations in Falluja and approximately 50 percent of those in Ramadi, preventing families from returning due to perceived affiliation to extremist groups.<sup>440</sup>

### Iran-Aligned PMF Units Intimidate USAID Implementers and Discourage Iraqi Youth from Participating in USAID Programs

USAID reported signs of efforts to intimidate and influence humanitarian and stabilization activities by Iran-aligned PMFs. This quarter, USAID Iraq received reports of PMF units asking for detailed information about members, staff, and project sites from partners that feature USAID branding and marking. USAID said this trend has been observed across provinces.<sup>441</sup> On September 17, four heavily armed members of the PMF 30th Brigade made an unannounced visit to the office of a USAID-supported Iraq non-governmental organization and demanded access to its files on activities and members. Staff refused and ordered them to leave.<sup>442</sup>

A PMF unit, the Shabak Militia, posted a warning message on Facebook directing Iraqi youth not to engage in a USAID-funded business skills program.



A PMF unit, the Shabak Militia, posted a warning message on Facebook directing Iraqi youth not to engage in a USAID-funded business skills program.

Iran-backed PMFs occasionally provide humanitarian assistance, according to USAID. For example, when Basrah faced severe water and power shortages in summer 2018, several Iranian entities began delivering generators, water pumps, and publicly advertising that the assistance was from Iran. USAID staff noted that Iranian-backed PMFs can access communities more easily than the U.S. Government.<sup>443</sup>

According to the Congressional Research Service, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and IRGC-Quds Force leaders often characterize Iran’s support for regional allies as humanitarian aid. According to media reporting, in April, Iran and Iraq signed a deal for exchange of humanitarian assistance.<sup>444</sup>

## SUPPORT TO MISSION

### Federal Government Begins FY 2020 under Continuing Resolution

The Congress did not complete action on the FY 2020 appropriations bills by September 30. Consequently, the House of Representatives and U.S. Senate approved a continuing resolution, Public Law 116-59, which the President signed into law on September 27, allowing the DoD, DoS, and USAID to continue operating at the FY 2019 enacted levels until November 21 or the enactment of an appropriation law for FY 2020.

More information on funding to the OIR mission is contained in the classified appendix.









Iraqi Federal Police officers check a building during a training exercise at the Besmaya Range Complex, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

# OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

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- Investigations and Hotline Activity..... 77

## 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 July 1 through September 30, 2019.

### 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 October 2014, upon designation of the DoD IG as the Lead IG for OIR, the three Lead IG agencies developed and implemented a joint strategic oversight plan for comprehensive oversight of OIR. That oversight plan is been 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*. Lead IG oversight reporting for ongoing and planned projects will be reflected under these updated strategic oversight areas beginning next quarter.

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 occurred in August 2019. Guest speakers were Matthew Nims, deputy director of the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP), and Danielle Mutone-Smith, head of the USAID FFP Policy, Partnerships, Program and Communications office. Nims and Mutone-Smith spoke on the challenges of providing humanitarian assistance in conflict zones across the globe, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and throughout Africa.



**FY 2020  
Comprehensive  
Oversight Plan  
for Overseas  
Contingency  
Operations**

## FY 2020 Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

### MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

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

- Conducting unilateral and partnered counterterrorism 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 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.

This quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed seven reports related to OIR. These reports examined various activities that support OIR, including accountability for government property for contracts supporting contingency operations worldwide; transportation, security, and safety programs at U.S. diplomatic facilities abroad; and humanitarian and development assistance programs. As of September 30, 2019, 28 projects were ongoing and 21 projects were planned.

### Final Reports by Lead IG Agencies

#### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

##### ***Audit of Air Force Accountability of Government Property and Oversight of Contractual Maintenance Requirements in the Contract Augmentation Program IV in Southwest Asia***

DODIG-2019-103; July 18, 2019

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the Air Force accounted for government-furnished property (“government property”) and provided oversight of contractual maintenance requirements in the Air Force Contract Augmentation Program (AFCAP) IV in Southwest Asia.

In June 2015, the Air Force Installation Contracting Agency awarded eight AFCAP IV contracts to provide logistic and sustainment support to deployed forces executing contingency operations worldwide. Four of the eight AFCAP IV contracts provide services such as dining facilities, vehicle maintenance, and engineering in support of OIR to sustain U.S. personnel at locations throughout Southwest Asia. For example, Air Force installations in Qatar and United Arab Emirates provide combat support to U.S. and Coalition forces to carry out the OIR mission. The audit focused on four task orders in the contract, valued at nearly \$96 million.

Through AFCAP IV, the Air Force uses contractors to provide base construction, and logistic operations, including dining facility and food services, and vehicle maintenance operations to support U.S. personnel and Coalition involved in OIR. Each AFCAP IV contract requires contractors to create and maintain separate, complete records of all government property identified in the contract.

The DoD OIG determined that the Air Force did not account for government property under the four AFCAP IV task orders reviewed, which pertained to activities to be performed in

Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. For example, Air Force accountable property officers did not include 2,081 of 2,091 known AFCAP IV government property items or their associated dollar value in Air Force accountable records.

As a result of the Air Force's lack of accountability and oversight of government property items provided to contractors in Kuwait, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates, the Air Force does not know the value of government property provided to contractors, has no oversight of the property, and cannot hold the contractors accountable for how they manage government property, including property damage and losses.

The DoD OIG found that the Air Force also did not verify that AFCAP IV base support or dining facility contractors performed contracted services for routine maintenance and repairs on government property. As a result, the Air Force does not have assurance that the base support contractors in Qatar performed preventive maintenance on at least \$20.6 million of government property, which could impair Air Force operations in Southwest Asia.

The DoD OIG made several recommendations, including that the chief of the Air Force Installation Contracting Agency's 772nd Enterprise Sourcing Squadron Contracting Division establish government property accountability training for procuring contracting officers, and to require procuring contracting officers to coordinate with the accountable property officers and AFCAP IV contractors to jointly verify the government property provided in each task. The DoD OIG also recommended that the principal director of the Defense Pricing and Contracting Division in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment make existing government property training resources mandatory for all contracting personnel.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

## **DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

### ***Audit of Cost Management of Embassy Air in Afghanistan and Iraq***

AUD-MERO-19-33; September 20, 2019

The DoS OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the fees collected by the Aviation Working Capital Fund cost center were sufficient to cover all costs required to sustain DoS air operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The DoS Embassy Air program was established in 2009 to provide aviation support to Embassies Kabul and Baghdad. Since 2012 in Afghanistan and 2011 in Iraq, Embassy Air operations have been funded through the Aviation Working Capital Fund, which is overseen by the DoS Aviation Governing Board. For FY 2019, the estimated costs of Embassy Air services totaled roughly \$321.7 million, almost \$170 million in Afghanistan and \$152 million in Iraq.

The DoS OIG found that despite having the authority to operate the fund on either a reimbursable or non-reimbursable basis, the Aviation Governing Board incrementally increased Embassy Air ticket fees with the goal of covering a larger percentage of operational costs through ticket fee collections. The Aviation Governing Board's decision to raise prices caused ridership to decline. To avoid paying the higher prices, some passengers

used other means of transportation such as military air or commercial aviation, causing Embassy Air services to become significantly underused. Moreover, the higher cost of ticket fees harmed embassy operations. Some officials stated that their bureaus could not afford ticket fees and that, as a result, they were unable to conduct site visits related to their projects and programs. Finally, the DoS OIG found that the frequency of Embassy Air flights and the number of aircraft in country were not routinely adjusted to align with demand. Until this is done, the DoS will continue to pay for significant costs associated with Embassy Air operations that are underused in addition to paying the costs associated with alternative modes of transportation.

The DoS OIG made three recommendations to the Aviation Governing Board intended to help ensure that ticket fees, flight schedules, and Embassy Air aviation assets in Afghanistan and Iraq are routinely reviewed and adjusted to provide effective support to embassy operations and mission. Management concurred with all three recommendations.

### ***Evaluation of the Antiterrorism Assistance Explosive Detection Canine Program—Health and Welfare***

ESP-19-06; September 10, 2019

The DoS OIG conducted this evaluation in response to a hotline complaint. The complainant alleged that the DoS was providing explosive detection canines to foreign partner nations without the proper follow-up to ensure that the canines were receiving adequate healthcare. The DoS OIG initiated this evaluation to determine whether the DoS effectively managed the health and welfare of dogs in the Explosive Detection Canine Program. Under OIR, dogs from the program have played a critical role protecting the United States' Middle East partners in the fight against ISIS.

The DoS OIG identified a range of problems with the program. First, the DoS lacked overall policies and standards to govern the program. The DoS routinely provides canines to foreign partners without binding agreements that outline standards for minimum care, retirement, and use of the canines, and the DoS conducts health and welfare follow-ups infrequently and inconsistently. Second, the DoS OIG confirmed ongoing concerns regarding the program in Jordan, where health and welfare problems for canines have persisted for years. The DoS provided canines to the Jordanian government before those concerns were resolved. In one example, an April 2016 observation visit to Jordan revealed dogs dying of disease and heat-related illness, dogs with hip dysplasia, inadequate kennels, overworked dogs, and “barely existent” kennel sanitation.

Additionally, the DoS didn't plan adequately to ensure that Jordan's canines program could become self-sustaining or that funding would be consistently available to protect the dogs already provided. Finally, the DoS could not provide the DoS OIG with detailed information about canines in programs other than in Jordan.

As a result of these shortcomings, the DoS lacked assurance that partner nations are maintaining at least a minimum level of care necessary for the dogs to perform the explosive detection tasks assigned.

The DoS OIG recommended that the DoS to develop and implement a strategic plan that addresses the health and welfare of canines in Jordan; conduct follow-up health and welfare checks more frequently; develop and implement a plan to address canine retirement and adoption; develop and negotiate written agreements related to the canine program with partner nations; and develop and implement policies and procedures for all aspects of the canine program, including health and welfare. The DoS concurred with four recommendations in their entirety and partially concurred with the fifth recommendation, which remained unresolved as of the time the report was issued.

***Management Assistance Report: Safety and Security Infractions at U.S. Embassy Beirut, Lebanon Require Immediate Attention***

AUD-MERO-19-34; July 19, 2019

This report examined whether DoS oversight personnel in Lebanon implemented adequate controls to ensure that the fuel contractor performed acquisition, storage, and distribution of fuel in accordance with contract terms, Federal regulations, and DoS guidance, and whether the bureaus adhered to policies and procedures to ensure the safety and security of post personnel. The U.S. Embassy in Beirut conducts a variety of activities supporting OIR, including humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The report is classified. A summary of this report with its findings and recommendations is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

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

***USAID's Award Oversight Is Insufficient to Hold Implementers Accountable for Achieving Results***

9-000-19-006-P; September 25, 2019

USAID OIG conducted this audit of USAID's award management to determine whether implementers delivered award results as initially intended, and to assess USAID's award management process. USAID uses contracts and grants to implement programs worldwide, including in Iraq and Syria.

USAID OIG determined that USAID's award oversight process is insufficient to hold implementers accountable for achieving results for programs. For example, almost half of awards ending in FYs 2014, 2015, and 2016 did not achieve expected results, but implementers were generally paid full amounts, even on underperforming awards. This occurred because execution of the award management process lacks the rigor needed to ensure results are achieved. Specifically, USAID OIG found pervasive problems in selection, monitoring, and assessment of implementers; competing award management roles and responsibilities; and poor recordkeeping practices.

USAID OIG made 10 recommendations to strengthen the award management process and enforce accountability of those charged with award oversight. Based on information provided to USAID OIG in response to the draft report, six recommendations are closed, and four are resolved but open pending completion of planned activities.



On September 30, the USAID Administrator issued an agency-wide notice detailing the audit report and its recommendations, adding that the audit offers an opportunity to assess and improve USAID policies, procedures, and programs.

***Audit of Direct Costs Incurred and Reported by Family Health Internationals in Iraq under USAID Cooperative Agreement AID-267-LA-13-00001, July 1, 2014, to November 6, 2015***

8-267-19-006-D; September 26, 2019

USAID contracted with the Defense Contract Audit Agency to determine if direct costs incurred and reported by Family Health International in Iraq comply with the award terms and conditions pertaining to accumulating and reporting of incurred amounts. The audited award was for a USAID Iraq stabilization program that Family Health International implemented.

The contracted audit firm performed an audit that covered \$21,000,295 in direct incurred costs for the period from July 1, 2014, to November 6, 2015. The contracted audit firm expressed an adverse opinion and questioned \$5,136,140 in unsupported costs resulting from material noncompliance related to lack of adequate supporting documentation. The contracted audit firm was not able to continue all of the necessary audit procedures due to scope limitations resulting from a lack of real-time labor testing; adequate and reliable labor accounting systems; and in-country financial and banking services. USAID OIG's report recommended that USAID Iraq determine the allowability, and collect as appropriate, \$5,136,140 in questioned unsupported costs and any applicable indirect costs.

***Independent Audit Report on Verification of Direct Cost Billed by The QED Group, LLC (QED) under USAID Contract No. AID-267-C-13-00001, Advancing Performance Management (APM), July 1, 2015 through March 31, 2017***

8-267-19-005-D; September 26, 2019

USAID contracted with the Defense Contract Audit Agency to verify direct costs billed by the QED Group, LLC (QED) under USAID contract AID-267-13-00001, Advancing Performance Management, July 1, 2015 through March 31, 2017. The QED Group is a consulting firm that provides services for USAID, including for democracy and governance programs in Iraq.

The contracted audit firm issued a qualified opinion and concluded that QED's claimed direct costs for the period audited were allowable, allocable, and reasonable in accordance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation, USAID and DoS regulations, and contract terms. There were no recommendations.

## Ongoing Oversight Activities

As of September 30, 2019, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 28 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 6 describes the ongoing projects by FY 2019 strategic oversight area. Ongoing projects carried into FY 2020 will be reorganized under the new strategic oversight areas.

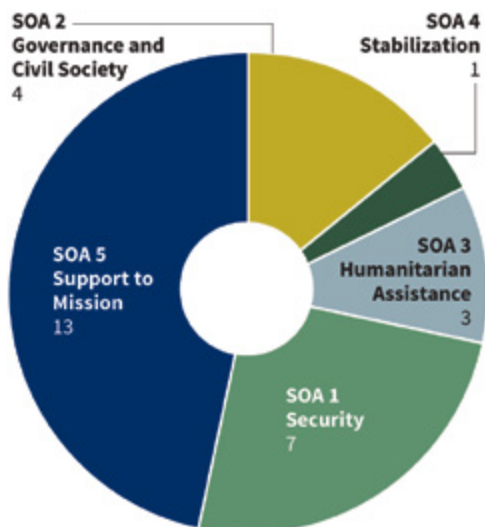
Tables 3 and 4, contained in Appendix E, list the title and objective for each of these projects. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by FY 2019 strategic oversight area.

### SECURITY

- The **DoD OIG** is evaluating whether Combined Joint Task Force-OIR effectively planned and executed military information support operations to counter ISIS in Iraq and Syria.
- 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 reporting procedures to determine if there are accurate accounts of potential civilian casualties resulting from OIR airstrikes.
- The **DOJ OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Bureau of Prisons' policies, procedures, and practices for monitoring inmates with known or suspected ties to domestic and foreign terrorism as well as its efforts to prevent further radicalization among its inmate population.

Figure 6.

### Ongoing Projects by FY 2019 Strategic Oversight Area



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

### GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- The **DoS OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Global Engagement Center has demonstrated progress in countering foreign-state and non-state actors' propaganda and misinformation, including from violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria.
- The **DoS OIG** is evaluating whether the Bureau of Counterterrorism's programs and operations are meeting DoS goals and expectations.

### HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

- **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.

## STABILIZATION

- **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

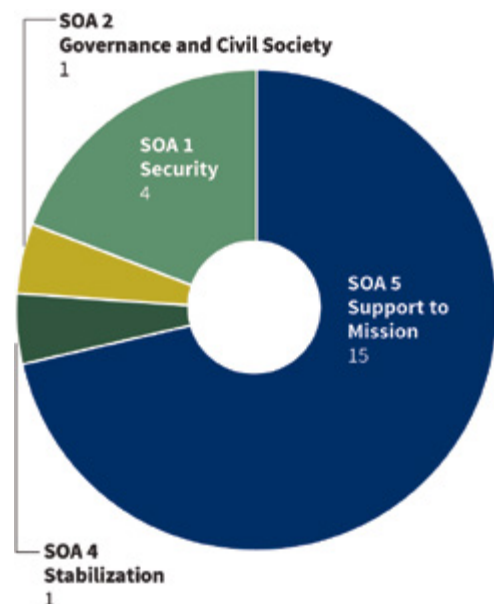
The Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies are conducting audits related to contracting, combat readiness, and internal controls.

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD accounted for Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund equipment designated for Syria from procurement through divestment.
- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Army developed adequate controls to ensure proper oversight of base operations support services at Camp Taji, Iraq.
- 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 fuel acquisition, storage, and distribution in Turkey and Lebanon are performed in accordance with contract terms and Federal regulations.
- 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 Missions 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 in its programs supporting humanitarian assistance in countries such as Iraq and Syria.
- 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 September 30, 2019, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 21 planned projects related to OIR. Figure 7 describes the planned projects by FY 2019 strategic oversight area. Planned projects carried into FY 2020 will be reorganized under the new strategic oversight area categories.

Figure 7.  
**Planned Projects by FY 2019 Strategic Oversight Area**



Tables 5 and 6, contained in Appendix F, list the project title and objective for each of these projects. The following highlights some of these planned projects by FY 2019 strategic oversight area.

### SECURITY

- The **DoD OIG** intends to evaluate whether tactical signals intelligence processing, exploitation, and dissemination support is sufficient to satisfy OIR priority intelligence requirements.
- The **DoS OIG** intends to evaluate whether the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's antiterrorism assistance programs and operations are meeting DoS goals and expectations.
- 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

- 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.

### HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

- 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, including for humanitarian assistance programs in Iraq and Syria.

### SUPPORT TO MISSION

- 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.

## 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 United Arab Emirates, as well as in Germany and Washington, D.C., to conduct their OIR-related investigations.

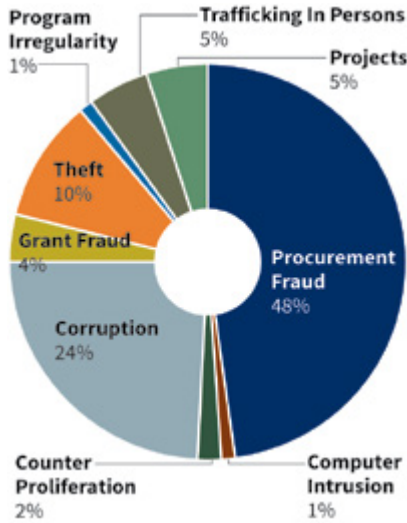
### INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO OIR

During this quarter, investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 11 investigations, initiated 10 new investigations, and coordinated on 135 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations.

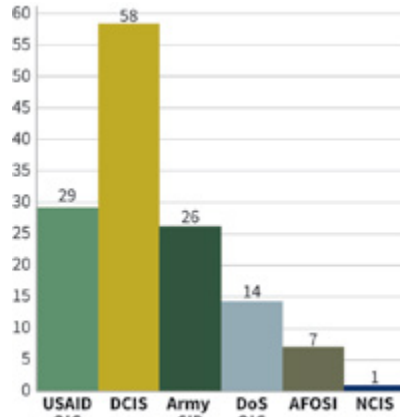


# ACTIVITY BY FRAUD AND CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIVE WORKING GROUP

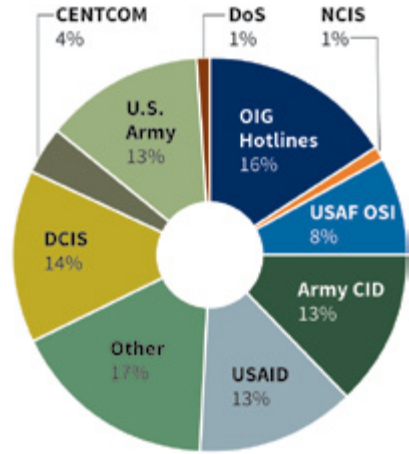
OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE  
As of September 30, 2019



## OPEN INVESTIGATIONS BY WORKING GROUP MEMBER\*



## SOURCES OF ALLEGATIONS



OPEN INVESTIGATIONS\*  
**135**

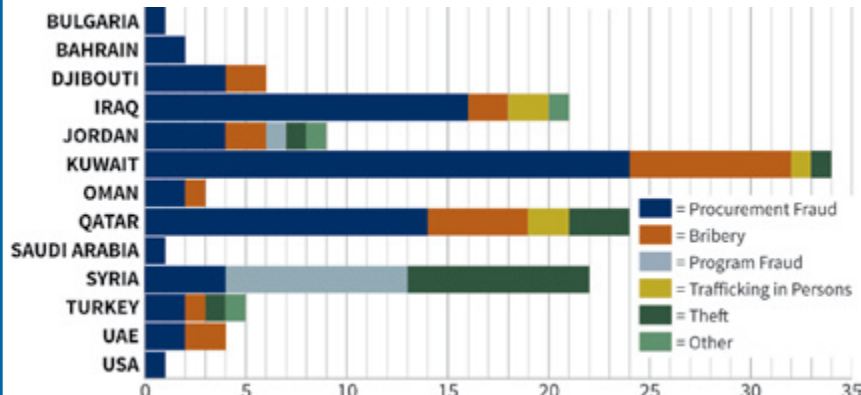
## Q4 FY 2019 RESULTS

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

## Q4 FY 2019 BRIEFINGS

Briefings Held	19
Briefings Attendees	292

## PRIMARY OFFENSE LOCATIONS



\*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 9/30/2019.

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 19 fraud awareness briefings for 292 participants.

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

In other outreach, USAID OIG’s Office of Investigations on September 30 led discussions on investigating allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse as part of the Syria Investigations Working Group. The discussions included oversight professionals from multiple international donor agencies and U.N. organizations that implement humanitarian assistance programs in countries such as Syria.

**INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO LEGACY CASES**

DCIS has 10 ongoing “legacy” investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the designation of OIR.

Figure 8.

**Hotline Activities**



**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 investigator referred 59 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations.

As noted in Figure 8, the majority of the cases opened during the reporting period were related to procurement/contract administration, criminal allegations, personal misconduct, and personnel matters.





An Iraqi Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon conducts a training mission over Iraq. (U.S. Air Force photo)

## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

# Classified Appendix to this Report

This unclassified report includes a classified appendix that provides additional information on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), as noted in several sections of this report. The appendix will be delivered to appropriate government agencies and congressional committees.

## APPENDIX B

# Methodology for Preparing 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 Department of Defense (DoD) IG is the designated 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 July 1 through September 30, 2019.

To fulfill its congressional mandate to produce a quarterly report on OIR, the Lead IG gathers 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, or 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 gathers information from 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.

Various DoD, DoS, and USAID offices participated in information collection for OIR this quarter.

### 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, 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 sends 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 160 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS. Over the same time period, the DoJ has obtained more than 130 convictions; the remaining cases remain pending. These numbers 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. DoJ prosecutions resulted in people being sentenced, convicted, or pleading guilty during this quarter.

The following examples include details on indictments, convictions, or sentences related to foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists related to ISIS activity from July 1 to September 30, 2019:

- **On July 8, in the Southern District of Texas, Kaan Sercan Damlarkaya** pleaded guilty to attempting to provide material support to ISIS. Damlarkaya attempted to join and support ISIS from August 2017 until his arrest in December 2017. Damlarkaya also provided information to ISIS supporters about the use of machetes, homemade construction of an automatic weapon, and how to build and use explosive materials. Damlarkaya had numerous conversations online with many individuals he believed to be fellow ISIS supporters. Damlarkaya described his intentions to travel overseas to fight for ISIS in Syria or Afghanistan. Damlarkaya added that if he was unsuccessful in joining ISIS overseas, he would conduct an on attack on non-Muslims in the United States and that it was his “dream” to be a martyr.
- **On August 7, in the Eastern District of Wisconsin, Yosvany Padilla-Conde** was sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment. On April 22, Padilla-Conde pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting another individual’s attempt to provide material support or resources to ISIS. Padilla-Conde agreed to assist and did assist another individual in his attempt to join ISIS by traveling from Wisconsin through Mexico to Syria and Iraq. Padilla-Conde also swore allegiance to ISIS and expressed his intent to travel to the Middle East in videos which were sent to an undercover employee of the FBI, who Padilla-Conde believed was an ISIS recruiter. On October 5, 2016, Padilla-Conde and the other individual were traveling through Texas to the U.S.-Mexico border in order to accomplish their plan to join ISIS, when law enforcement arrested them.
- **On August 15, in the Eastern District of New York, Azizjon Rakhmatov** pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to ISIS. According to court filings, Rakhmatov’s co-defendants Abdurasul Juraboev and Akhror Saidakhmetov planned to travel to Syria to fight on behalf of ISIS. Rakhmatov and co-defendant Abror Habibov discussed providing their own money to cover Saidakhmetov’s travel expenses and to purchase a firearm for Saidakhmetov

once he arrived in Syria. Rakhmatov also agreed to collect money from others to fund Saidakhmetov's travel. On the day before Saidakhmetov's scheduled departure, Rakhmatov transferred \$400 into co-defendant Akmal Zakirov's personal bank account to facilitate Saidakhmetov's travel to and expenses in Syria. Juraboev, Saidakhmetov, Habibov, and Zakirov have previously pleaded guilty. Juraboev and Saidakhmetov each were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Habibov and Zakirov are awaiting sentencing.

- **In addition, on September 24, in the Eastern District of New York, Dilkhayot Kasimov** was found guilty of conspiracy and of attempting to provide material support to ISIS. The evidence at trial established that Kasimov's co-conspirators, Abdurasul Juraboev and Akhror Saidakhmetov, planned to travel to Syria to fight on behalf of ISIS, and Kasimov provided money to help fund Saidakhmetov's travel and expenses. On the evening of Saidakhmetov's scheduled departure in February 2015, Kasimov drove to John F. Kennedy International Airport, met Saidakhmetov and handed him \$1,600 in cash on behalf of himself, co-conspirator Abror Habibov and others. As noted above, co-conspirators Juraboev, Saidakhmetov and Habibov, as well as co-conspirators Akmal Zakirov and Azizjon Rakhmatov, have previously pleaded guilty. Juraboev and Saidakhmetov were each sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Habibov, Zakirov, and Rakhmatov are awaiting sentencing.
- **On August 28, in the District of Montana, Fabjan Alameti** pleaded guilty to charges of making false statements involving international terrorism to the FBI. According to court records, Alameti traveled to Bozeman in March 2019 and agreed to speak with an FBI agent. During that interview, Alameti said he had never talked about traveling overseas to fight for ISIS and that he had never wanted to hurt any Americans or anyone in the military, or words to that effect. The statements were false because Alameti used a Facebook account and communicated with others that he wanted to travel overseas and fight for ISIS because he wanted to die a martyr's death. Alameti also communicated with others about targeting people in the United States and identified targets as gay night clubs, a federal building and an Army recruiting center.
- **On September 23, in the Western District of Missouri, Robert Lorenzo Hester, Jr.** pleaded guilty to attempting to provide material support to ISIS. According to the plea agreement, multiple confidential sources reported to the FBI that Hester had posted a variety of material on multiple social media accounts. Hester indicated that he had converted to Islam, expressed animus toward the United States, and posted photos of weapons and the ISIS flag, among other material, suggesting an adherence to radical Islamic ideology and a propensity for violence. Hester established an apparent willingness to act on the statements that he made online. Hester agreed to meet and subsequently did meet on numerous occasions with an undercover employee of the FBI, who Hester believed was a terrorist operative.
- In addition, one person had been transferred to the United States from Iraq to face federal criminal charges since 2014. Five people have been transferred to the United States from Syria to face federal criminal charges related to terrorism since 2014, including two during the reporting period.

The DoJ also provided information on DoJ activities to strengthen the rule of law overseas to help counter ISIS. The FBI participates in an overseas joint task force established to assist with the synchronization of efforts among U.S. Government entities and foreign partners to address the terrorism problems emanating from the conflict zone. The FBI works with DoD personnel and foreign partners to coordinate law enforcement actions and lead law enforcement efforts to counter ISIS. In addition, DOJ anticipates that a new legal attaché will be assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in November 2019 to assist in the facilitation of Rule of Law and other Department initiatives.

The DoJ stated that during the quarter, as a result of the continuing ordered departure from Embassy Baghdad, the DOJ's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program operations has been managed from Washington, D.C. In attempt to limit the activity of ISIS in the region, the DOJ's

Iraq partners have continued a DoS-funded program to develop strong, sustainable law enforcement capacity. From July 1 to September 30, the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program partnered with interagency partners to train Iraqi Ministry of Interior officers on the following six courses:

- **Financial Crimes Investigations Train-the-Trainer** in Sterling, Virginia. The course provided investigators with the skills necessary to deliver financial investigation courses.
- **Basic Criminal Analysis Train-the-Trainer** in Sterling, Virginia. The course provided new and existing trainers with the skills necessary to deliver basic criminal analysis courses.
- **Cell Phone Extraction** at the Ministry of Interior Crime Lab in Baghdad. The course provided investigators with the training necessary to complete a forensically sound acquisition of digital evidence from cell phones and other mobile devices.
- **Digital Evidence** at the Ministry of Interior Crime Lab in Baghdad. The course provided instruction on digital evidence, including on how to seize evidence from computer hard drives, compact disks, DVDs, thumb drives, and other media, among other topics.
- **DNA Statistics** at commercial facilities in Torrance, California utilizing genetic analyzer maintenance. This training for the Ministry of Interior Criminal Evidence Investigation Directorate provided instruction on genetic principles needed to provide relevant statistics for the presentation of DNA evidence in a court of law.
- **DNA Mixtures of Interpretation** at commercial facilities in Torrance, California. This follow on course for the Ministry of Interior Criminal Evidence Investigation Directorate provided further instruction on DNA Analysis and Methods.

## APPENDIX D

# Treasury and State Department Actions Against Terrorist Financing

The Department of the Treasury has global terrorism authorities to target activities of extremist groups, including ISIS. Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence and Office of Foreign Assets Control disrupt the ability of terrorist organizations to fund their operations. Since 2014, Treasury has designated a total of 86 individuals and entities providing support to ISIS pursuant to Executive Order (EO) 13224. On September 10 the White House announced amendments to EO 13224 (EO 13886, Modernizing Sanctions to Combat Terrorism) that allow the U.S. Government to better identify and designate perpetrators of terrorism worldwide. The enhancements include new designation criteria that allows the U.S. Government to more efficiently target leaders, and new authorities to place secondary sanctions against foreign financial institutions that facilitate financial transactions for any person sanctioned under the original order.

Treasury officials reported the following notable designations were made this quarter:

- **Marwan Mahdi Salah Al-Rawi (Al-Rawi):** Al-Rawi is identified as Chief Executive Officer for Redin Exchange, a Treasury-designated entity associated with Hamas. In late January 2018, Treasury-designated ISIS financial facilitator, Walid Talib Zughayr al-Rawi, was aware of an approximately \$500,000 financial transaction of Redin Exchange administrator Marwan al-Rawi.
- **Saksouk Company for Exchange and Money Transfer (Saksouk):** Saksouk handled fund transfers on behalf of Syria-based ISIS members.



- **Al Haram Foreign Exchange Co. Ltd. (Al Haram Exchange):** Al Haram Exchange was involved in an ISIS financial transfer between Syria and Belgium.
- **Al-Khalidi Exchange (Al-Khalidi):** Al-Khalidi is an ISIS-affiliated hawala financial exchange office.
- **Al-Hebo Jewelry Company (al-Hebo):** Al-Hebo was involved in an ISIS scheme to convert gold into cash to benefit ISIS sleeper cells in Iraq and Syria.
- **Muhamad Ali al-Hebo (Muhamad):** Muhamad, al-Hebo's owner, was involved in procuring precious metals to enable ISIS to produce its own ISIS coinage.
- **Mohamad Ameen (Ameen):** Ameen is a recruiter for ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K).
- **Almaida Marani Salvin (Salvin):** Salvin was sanctioned for providing financial facilitation and logistical support to members of ISIS-Philippines.
- **Muhammad Ali Sayid Ahmad (Ahmad):** Ahmad participated in training provided by ISIS, including sniper training and reconnaissance training.

In addition to the above designations, 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.

United States co-chairs, along with Saudi Arabia and Italy, the Counter ISIS Finance Group (CIFG), a working group of the Defeat ISIS Coalition, which convenes 54 members and observers, twice per year, to share information and coordinate multilateral actions that target ISIS's global financial networks, including in Iraq and Syria. The next meeting of the CIFG will be November 19 and 20, 2019 in Luxembourg.

No individuals or organizations sanctioned by Treasury for providing support to ISIS were removed from the sanctions list during this reporting period.

In addition, the DoS designated Hurras al-Din, an al Qa'ida-affiliated group in Syria, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). The DoS also designated as SDGTs 12 leaders of previously designated groups, including Hisbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, ISIS, ISIS-Philippines, ISIS-West Africa, and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

DoS officials announced actions during the quarter against ISIS-affiliated individuals listed below to deny resources to plan and carry out attacks.

- **Hajji Taysir:** Hajji Taysir is an ISIS senior leader and the ISIS Wali of Iraq; he is believed to have ordered IED attacks in the region.
- **Abu Abdullah ibn Umar al-Barnawi:** Abu Abdullah ibn Umar al Barnawi, Amir of ISIS-West Africa, was previously active in Boko Haram.
- **Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan:** Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan is the amir of ISIS-Philippines and is the mastermind behind the January 27, 2019 Jolo City cathedral bombing that killed 23 and wounded 109.
- **Hurras al-Din:** Hurras al-Din is an al Qa'ida-affiliated jihadist group that emerged in Syria in early 2018 after several factions broke away from Hayat Tahrir al Sham.
- **Faruq al-Suri:** Syrian national Faruq al-Suri, also known as Abu Humam al-Shami, is the leader of Hurras al-Din and a former al-Nusra Front military commander in Syria.

## APPENDIX E

# Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 3 through 4 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects.

Table 3.

### Ongoing Oversight Projects by Lead IG Agency, as of September 30, 2019

#### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

##### ***Audit of DoD's Accountability of Equipment Designated for Syria***

To determine whether the DoD accounted for Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund equipment designated for Syria from procurement through divestment.

##### ***Audit of Jordan Border Program***

To determine whether the Defense Threat Reduction Agency is ensuring that the contractor-provided equipment, training, and sustainment meet the Jordan Border Security Program requirements.

##### ***Audit of U.S. Military Equipment Retrograde from Syria***

To determine whether the Army has planned and accounted for the retrograde of U.S. military equipment from Syria.

##### ***Audit of the Army's Oversight of the Base Operations Support Services Contract for Camp Taji, Iraq***

To determine whether the Army developed adequate controls to ensure the contractor is providing the base operations support services at Camp Taji, Iraq, in accordance with contract requirements.

##### ***Evaluation of CJTF-OIR's Military Information Support Operations***

To determine whether CJTF-OIR effectively planned and executed military information support operations to counter ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

##### ***Evaluation of Air Force Implementation of Weather Support Capabilities on Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)***

To determine whether the Air Force has implemented weather support capabilities on the MQ-1 and MQ-9 UAS.

##### ***Audit of Pre-Deployment Training on Counter UAS***

To determine whether the Military Services conducted pre-deployment training to counter an adversary's use of UAS in accordance with the operational requirements of the geographic combatant commands.

##### ***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.

##### ***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.

##### ***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.

**DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****Audit of Fuel Acquisition and Distribution in Lebanon and Turkey***

To determine whether DoS contract oversight personnel in Lebanon and Turkey have implemented adequate controls to ensure that the fuel contractors performed acquisition, storage, and distribution of fuel in accordance with contract terms, Federal regulations, and DoS guidance, and whether the relevant DoS bureaus are adhering to fuel safety policies and procedures to ensure the safety and security of post personnel.

***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 the DoS Global Engagement Center has demonstrated progress toward achieving its statutory mission of leading, synchronizing, and coordinating U.S. Government efforts to counter foreign-state and non-state actors' propaganda and misinformation.

***Inspection of United States Mission to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva***

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva.

***Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism***

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

***Audit of the Staffing Review Processes for U.S. Mission Iraq and U.S. Mission Afghanistan***

To determine whether the DoS used established procedures, guidance, and best practices in its approach to adjust the size and composition of Missions Afghanistan and Iraq and has aligned resources invested at these Missions with U.S. priorities.

**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.

Table 4.

**Ongoing Oversight Projects by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of September 30, 2019**

<b>AIR FORCE AUDIT AGENCY</b>
<b><i>Air Force Office of Special Investigations Emergency and Extraordinary Expense Funds</i></b> To determine whether Air Force Office of Special Investigations officials effectively managed and accounted for emergency and extraordinary funds at deployed locations.
<b><i>Contract Management, 39th Air Base Wing, Turkey</i></b> To determine whether personnel managed contracts in accordance with guidance.
<b>ARMY AUDIT AGENCY</b>
<b><i>Expeditionary Contracting Material Weakness</i></b> To determine whether the Army has taken necessary actions to mitigate risks associated with the expeditionary contracting material weakness.
<b><i>Reach-Back Contracting Support</i></b> To determine whether the Army has an effective plan, procedures, and organizational structure in place to directly provide contracting support during contingency/expeditionary operations.
<b><i>Audit of Theater Provided Equipment Maintenance and Reset</i></b> 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 Center Command's readiness and capabilities for future contingencies.
<b>DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL</b>
<b><i>Audit of the Bureau of Prisons' Counterterrorism Efforts</i></b> To review the Bureau of Prisons' policies, procedures, and practices for monitoring inmates with known or suspected ties to domestic and foreign terrorism and its efforts to prevent further radicalization among inmate populations.
<b>GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE</b>
<b><i>Evaluation of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq Activities</i></b> To conduct independent analysis of the DoD and DoS plan to transition the activities conducted by Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq but funded by the DoD to another entity or transition the funding of such activities to another source, as required by Public Law 114-328.
<b><i>U.S. Assistance to Iraq's Ministry of Interior</i></b> To determine the amounts and objectives of U.S. assistance to the MoI and its forces; the extent to which U.S. agencies have assessed their assistance to the MoI and its forces, and the results of the assessments; and the extent to which DoD and DoS have vetted the MoI and its forces for gross violations of human rights and associations with terrorist groups or groups associated with the government of Iran.



## APPENDIX F

# Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 5 through 6 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects.

Table 5.

### Planned Oversight Projects by Lead IG Agency, as of September 30, 2019

#### 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.

***Audit 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 DoD 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. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. European Command have established the capabilities to conduct counter threat finance; to deny, disrupt, or defeat and degrade adversaries' ability to use global financial networks.

***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 Compound 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 the Erbil consulate according to contract specifications.

***Audit of the 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 the DoS's 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.

***Audit of Construction of New Office Annexes at Embassies Amman and Nairobi***

Audit of construction of new office annexes at embassies Amman and Nairobi.

***Inspection of Embassy Doha, Qatar***

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

***Inspection of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Office of Training, Office of Antiterrorism Assistance***

To evaluate the programs and operations of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Office of Training, Office of Antiterrorism Assistance.

***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.

***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 Office Representatives***

To determine whether the recommendations of an earlier DoS OIG audit report are being efficiently and effectively implemented.

Table 6.

**Planned Oversight Projects by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of September 30, 2019**

**ARMY AUDIT AGENCY**

***Base Operations Support–Area Support Groups Kuwait and Qatar***

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 TREASURY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

***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.

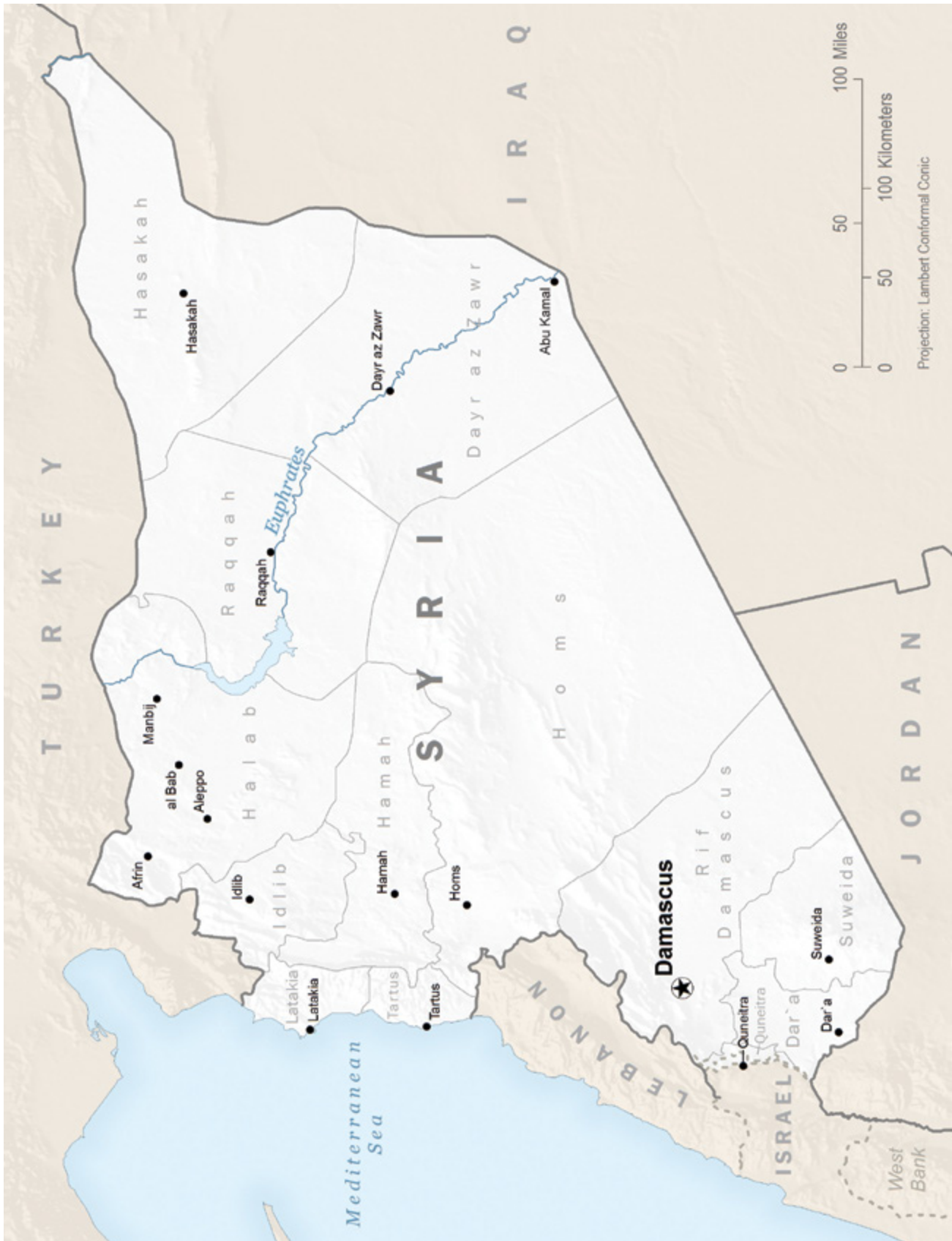


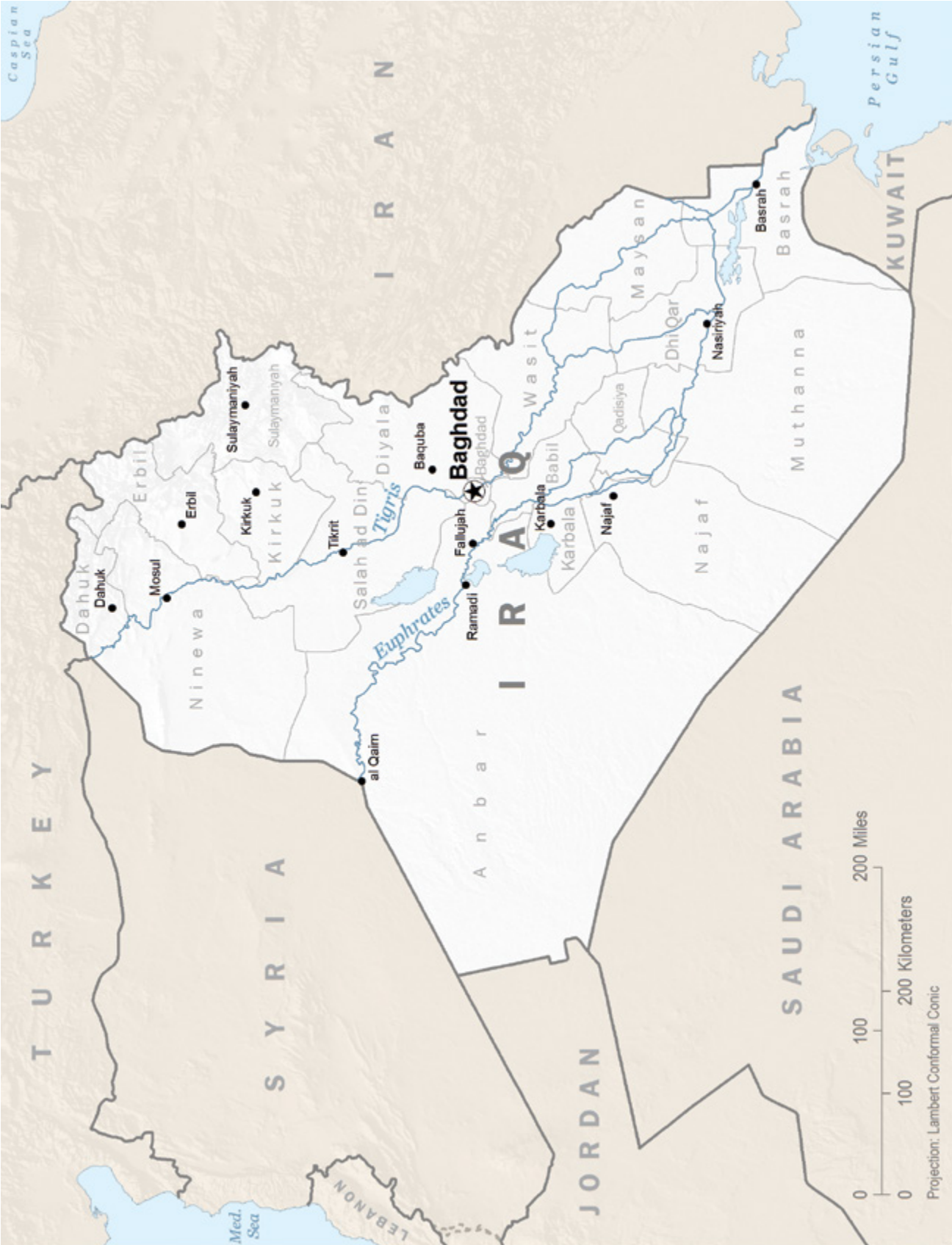
## Acronyms

Acronym	
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force-OIR
CTC	West Point's Combatting Terrorism Center
D-ISIS	Defeat-ISIS
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD OIG	Department of Defense Office of Inspector General
DoS	Department of State
FFP	U.S. Agency for International Development, Office for Food for Peace
FY	fiscal year
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised explosive device
IRGC-QF	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (Iran)
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	Refers to DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG
MaT	Mughawir al Thawra
NGO	Non-governmental organization

Acronym	
OCHA	U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	U.S. Aid for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OUSDP(P)/ISA	Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Turkish)
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRM	Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SAC	Syrian Arab Coalition
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
START	Syrian Transition Assistance Response Team
Treasury	U.S. Department of the Treasury
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
WHO	United Nations World Health Organization
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units







## ENDNOTES

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**U.S. Soldiers deliver M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles for support to CJTF-OIR in eastern Syria. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)**



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