OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

OCTOBER 1, 2019–DECEMBER 31, 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 active 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, or 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): M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles provide support to CJTF-OIR in eastern Syria (U.S. Army Reserve photo); 40mm grenades are unloaded to be destroyed by Explosive Ordnance Disposal soldiers at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq (U.S. Army photo); Protesters gather outside the Baghdad Embassy Compound (U.S. Marine Corps photo); A Peshmerga solider stands guard in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (U.S. Army photo). (Bottom row): A U.S. Army Soldier mans an observation post at Forward Operating Base Union III, Baghdad, Iraq, Dec. 31, 2019 (U.S. Army photo).

FOREWORD

We are pleased to submit our 20th Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report on Operation Inherent Resolve, which generally covers the period from October 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019. 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 Iraq in early January 2020, after the end of the quarter, the Lead IG agencies considered it essential to report on these developments and their potential impact on the OIR mission. This report therefore discusses the events set in motion by the December 27 killing of a U.S. contractor at an Iraqi military base near Kirkuk, and the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps–Qods Force.

In response to our additional questions about the impact of these events, the Lead IG agencies received additional information as available from the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (DoS), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). That information is also presented in this report and in the classified appendix. As of the time of completion of this report at the end of January, however, these events continued to unfold, and questions remained about how the fight against ISIS in Iraq will proceed and be affected. Therefore, the next Lead IG report will follow up on those questions and continuing developments and provide more detailed information about these dynamic events and their impact on OIR.

During the quarter, the Lead IG agencies and our oversight partners issued six audit, evaluation, and inspection reports related to OIR. These reports examined various activities related to OIR including security assistance and training for Iraq's security forces, diplomatic security programs supporting the United States' Middle East partners in the fight against ISIS, and financial accountability in humanitarian assistance programs. The Lead IG agencies also continued significant investigations relating to OIR.

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

Glenn A. Fine
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Performing the Duties
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MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL

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

A series of significant events took place in January 2020, after the end of the reporting quarter, which affected OIR, led to a pause in OIR activities in Iraq, and created uncertainty regarding the future of OIR operations. The Lead IG agencies therefore sought additional information on the implications of the January developments on the OIR mission.

The DoD responded that in some cases it was too soon to be able to assess the effects of the developments in Iraq, and also that, due to operational priorities, it was unable to answer other questions. Therefore, while the Iraq section of this report discusses the events of the quarter and early January, it is unclear at this time how these events will affect the OIR mission and efforts by ISIS to resurge.

Glenn A. Fine

Specifically, as discussed in this report, after Iran-aligned militia violence in Iraq escalated this quarter, on January 2, a U.S. drone strike in Iraq killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps–Qods Force. After the strike, U.S. forces in Iraq paused counter-ISIS operations to focus on force protection. The Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) also halted support to the Iraqi Security Forces, who rely on U.S. and Coalition intelligence and air support to conduct operations against ISIS.

In addition, it is unclear whether U.S. forces will be able to remain in Iraq or the scope of their operations. After the strike on Soleimani, the Iraqi parliament passed a non-binding resolution calling for U.S. forces to leave Iraq. The U.S. Government stated it has no intention of pulling troops out of Iraq. The Iraqi government has yet to agree on a new prime minister, and Iranian-aligned militias and some demonstrators continued to call for the U.S. to leave. Then, just as this report was about to be published, the Iraq government announced the resumption of counter-ISIS operations with U.S. forces. However, the announcement did not address the question of the continued presence of U.S. forces in Iraq.

As discussed in our report, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)'s analysis for the DoD OIG indicates that without a U.S. troop presence in Iraq, ISIS would likely resurge in Iraq. This quarter, ISIS continued to carry out attacks and operations in both Iraq and Syria, although the number of ISIS-claimed attacks in Iraq decreased this quarter. ISIS has continued to disseminate its propaganda on Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram, and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) reported that this propaganda revolved around two main themes: ISIS's persistence in the face of adversity, and retaliation through a global insurgency.

Following a demonstration and attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on December 31, USAID and DoS staff responsible for overseeing stabilization and humanitarian assistance in Baghdad were evacuated to Erbil and other locations. As of the end of January, it also remained unclear where and how USAID would operate and provide oversight for its more than $1 billion stabilization and humanitarian assistance portfolio in Iraq.

This report also discusses widespread protests in Iraq this quarter, and the Iraqi government's response to those protests. For example, the DIA reported to the DoD OIG that since early October 2019, thousands of protesters have been injured and hundreds killed in the ongoing demonstrations in Baghdad and the predominantly Shia provinces of southern Iraq.

In Syria, this quarter the DoD completed a withdrawal, redistribution, and deployment of forces in response to a Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria. The net change was that the U.S. force size dropped from roughly 1,000 to 500 personnel in northeastern Syria. Russian, Turkish, and Syrian regime forces moved into areas previously occupied by the United States and its partner force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This quarter, the DoD also deployed some troops to help the SDF secure oil fields and to prevent ISIS from exploiting oil resources.

The DoD OIG received differing assessments of the impact of these events in Syria on ISIS's ability to carry out attacks in Syria. USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that it saw no "compelling evidence" that the Turkish incursion and U.S. troop redeployment resulted in significant changes to ISIS capabilities. However, the DIA reported that, in its assessment, ISIS views the post-Turkish incursion security environment in northeastern Syria as more conducive to its operations, and the DIA said that ISIS probably increased its attacks in northeast Syria by at least 20 percent.

According to the DoD, ISIS remains active in SDF-controlled internally displaced persons camps in Syria. The DIA reported that SDF guards have struggled to maintain security at the Al Hol camp, where ISIS members have attacked the guards. The DIA also reported that ISIS members have stepped up efforts at Al Hol to intimidate residents and enforce ISIS ideology.

We will report on these significant events in more detail in our next quarterly report, and we will continue to seek further responses from the DoD and other Lead IG agencies on these issues.

Finally, my colleagues and I thank the dedicated employees of each Lead IG agency who conduct their 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

Protesters set fire to an entry control point at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, December 31, 2019. (U.S. Army photo)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVENTS IN IRAQ

U.S. FORCES PAUSE OPERATIONS AGAINST ISIS TO FOCUS ON FORCE PROTECTION FOLLOWING THE KILLING OF IRANIAN GENERAL

From early October to the end of December, Iranian-aligned militias in Iraq launched a series of attacks on Coalition forces stationed at Iraqi bases.[1] The violence escalated when a Kata'ib Hezbollah strike killed a U.S. contractor on December 27.[2] In response, on December 29, U.S. military aircraft struck five Kata'ib Hezbollah sites, killing at least 24 members of the militia, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and multiple media reports.[3]

According to the Department of State (DoS), in response to those attacks, thousands of supporters of Kata'ib Hezbollah and other Iranian-aligned militias, including several well-known militia leaders, demonstrated outside the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on December 31, breaching the security gates and setting fires inside the compound.[4] The DIA reported that a spokesman for Kata'ib Hezbollah said that the group intended to remain in tents outside of the embassy until the U.S. withdrew its military and diplomatic presence from Iraq.[5] According to media reports, the protesters dispersed the next day.[6]

Just after the quarter ended, on January 2, 2020, the United States conducted a drone strike in Baghdad that killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps–Qods Force.[7] The strike also killed the former deputy leader of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Jamal Jafaar Ibrahimi, better known as Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, and several other individuals.[8] After the strike, the Department of Defense (DoD) issued a statement saying that by killing of Soleimani, the U.S. military had taken "decisive defensive action to protect U.S. personnel abroad" at the direction of President Trump.[9]

Following Soleimani's death, U.S. officials said they expected Iran to retaliate, and on January 8, Iran launched more than a dozen ballistic missiles at two Iraqi military bases housing U.S. troops.[10] According to the DoD, at least 50 U.S. service members were injured in the attacks.[11] Additionally, the embassy in Baghdad received some rocket and mortar fire in January.[12]

Following the strike against Soleimani, U.S. forces announced a pause in operations against ISIS in Iraq to focus on force protection due to increased threats after Soleimani's death.[13] As of the time of publication of this report, it was unclear the extent to which the pause would either allow ISIS to regroup and resurge in Iraq or disrupt operations against ISIS conducted by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) stated to the DoD OIG that it was too soon to be able to assess the effects of the pause in operations and that due to operational priorities it declined to answer questions from the DoD Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) about the late-breaking developments in January 2020.

A U.S. Army Soldier mans an observation post at Forward Operating Base Union III, Baghdad, Iraq, December 31, 2019. (U.S. Army photo)

However, CJTF-OIR did report to the DoD OIG in December that the ISF had conducted many operations against ISIS independently this quarter.[14] It said that some ISF operations were "minimally enabled" by Coalition Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), strike aircraft or air weapons team support. CJTF-OIR also said that Coalition forces in conjunction with the ISF conducted largescale operations.[15]

On January 7, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper also said that the events in Iraq did not affect U.S. operations against ISIS in Syria.[16] The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy/International Security Agency (OUSD(P)/ISA) reported that operations against ISIS continued in Syria.[17]

Yet according to news reports, within days of Soleimani's killing, on January 5, NATO forces and at least four Coalition partners announced plans to move some troops out of Iraq, possibly temporarily, or into Iraq's Kurdish region.[18] Iraq's parliament passed a non-binding resolution to expel U.S. forces from Iraq.[19] As of the time of publication of this report, Iraq had not initiated a formal process to remove U.S. troops, and the U.S. Government stated it had no current plans to remove all troops from Iraq.[20]

IMPACT OF DEATH OF ISIS LEADER UNCLEAR

On October 26, U.S. forces conducted a raid on a compound in Syria's Idlib province during which ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi was killed. According to news reports, ISIS moved quickly to name a successor known by the nom de guerre Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al Qurayshi.[21] CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG in December that despite al Baghdadi's death, ISIS in Iraq continued low-level attacks, mainly in Diyala and Kirkuk provinces, and did not appear either to grow stronger or to lose its freedom of movement or ability to hide and transport fighters and supplies in Iraq's desert and mountainous terrain.[22]

CJTF-OIR said that ISIS in Iraq retains enough manpower and planning capabilities to conduct regular small-scale attacks against the ISF, the PMF, or local civilians, and occasionally infiltrates urban centers, but has not tried to hold territory.[23]

According to CJTF-OIR, the number of ISIS-claimed attacks in Iraq decreased by roughly half during the first two months of the quarter compared to the first two months of the previous quarter, dropping to 67 from 138, and most were opportunistic attacks.[24] However, the DIA reported that the low number might not reflect all ISIS attacks because the Iraqi government shut down internet access during the quarter, which the DIA said "drastically" affected ISIS's ability to publicize attacks.[25]

CJTF-OIR reported that in terms of popular support, while ISIS in Iraq retains some support due to ideology or tribal ties, the vast majority of Iraqis, including those in Sunni areas, remain hostile to it, which has limited its ability to recruit new members.[26] Despite this lack of popularity, however, ISIS maintained a robust propaganda operation, mainly online through Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram, an encrypted messaging application. The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) said ISIS propaganda presents ISIS as resilient and that its long-term triumph is inevitable.[27]

DEMONSTRATIONS TARGET THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT AND IRAN'S INTERFERENCE IN IRAQ'S POLITICS

Protests erupted in Iraq on October 1 when thousands of people demonstrated in Baghdad against widespread political and economic corruption, high unemployment, and a lack of basic services. As the protests continued, demonstrators also directed their anger at Iran's continuing influence in Iraqi political and military affairs, and in particular Iranian-aligned militias operating in Iraq.[28] The DoD told the DoD OIG that Iraqi government security forces and, separately, some Iranian-aligned militias violently suppressed the protests, with more than 500 demonstrators killed, including some who were targeted for assassination by the militias.[29]

The violence precipitated the resignation of Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abd al Mahdi on November 29.[30] Although he resigned, Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi continued to fill the role of prime minister in a caretaker capacity.[31]

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that in response to the protests, the Iraqi government reshuffled cabinet ministers, fired governors and military commanders in southern

The DoD told the DOD OIG that Iraqi government security forces and, separately, some Iranian-aligned militias violently suppressed the protests, with more than 500 demonstrators killed, including some who were targeted for assassination by the militias.

provides, and established a Federal Public Service Council to address public corruption.[32] Iraq's Parliament passed a law requiring seven judges to sit on the Independent High Electoral Committee, the body that oversees national elections. However, according to a DoS assessment, the Iraqi government must do much more to combat corruption.[33]

According to media reports, several Iraqi political parties opposed the new law, in part because it granted Kurds in autonomous Kurdish areas the right to nominate two judges. Kurds were initially unhappy with the law because it did not include a Kurdish quota for judges.[34] The Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq expressed concern that judges should only be "looking into appeals and complaints," not participating in executive actions.[35]

According to the DoS, the Iraqi Parliament also approved an election reform bill that revamped the rules by which lawmakers are elected.[36] According to media reports, some Iraqi political leaders, including Muqtada al Sadr, leader of a nationalist political party, tweeted support for the new law, but legal experts cautioned that the changes to the law might not lead to significantly different electoral outcomes.[37]

As of the time of publication, no new prime minister had been designated to form a new government.

PRO-IRAN POLITICAL PARTY PUSHES NOMINEES FOR PRIME MINISTER

According to the DoS, in the wake of Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi's resignation, the Iranian-aligned al Bina Coalition, which is the largest bloc in Parliament, first nominated Higher Education Minister Qusay al Suhail and then Basrah Governor Asaad al Eidani as Iraq's new prime minister. However, President Barham Salih refused to name either of them due to opposition from other Shia political parties and protesters across Iraq who demanded an "independent" nominee.[38]

As of the time of publication, no new prime minister had been designated to form a new government.[39] According to media reports, members of some Iranian-aligned militias accused President Salih of refusing to accept al Bina's nominee at the behest of the United States.[40]

IRAQ'S UNREST LIMITS HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS AND ACCESS

According to the United Nations, the protests and the Iraqi government's response hindered humanitarian operations by forcing humanitarian organizations to close offices in Baghdad and move staff to more secure locations such as Erbil in Iraq's northern Kurdish region.[41] The United Nations reported that since November 2019, aid deliveries throughout Iraq have slowed considerably due to the discontinuation of previously agreed-upon access authorization procedures, and the absence of viable alternative mechanisms. In January, the United Nations stated that unless partner organizations are allowed to immediately resume full, unimpeded movement of their personnel and supplies, humanitarian operations in Iraq may come to a complete halt within a matter of weeks. According to the United Nations, hundreds of thousands of people across the most conflict-affected areas face going without sufficient food, medicine, and winterization materials during the coldest months of the year.[42]

More information on the events in Iraq in late December and early January is discussed in the classified appendix to this report.

EVENTS IN SYRIA

COALITION TEMPORARILY PAUSES COUNTER-ISIS OPERATIONS FOLLOWING TURKISH INCURSION INTO NORTHEASTERN SYRIA

Nine days into the quarter, Turkey launched an incursion into northeastern Syria, and the United States withdrew its forces away from Syria's border with Turkey. U.S. troops moved to Syria's far northeastern tip and south to Dayr az Zawr province to safeguard the oil fields.[43] The DoD said that remaining U.S. forces would prevent ISIS from regaining access to critical petroleum infrastructure and its revenues, "that could allow [it] to gain strength." The incursion resulted in a pause in counter-ISIS operations as Kurdish fighters in the Syrian Defense Forces (SDF) responded to the Turkish incursion.[44] CJTF-OIR also temporarily suspended SDF training while the SDF focused on the Turkish incursion.

Figure 1.

Status of Forces Following Turkey's October 9 Incursion into Northeastern Syria
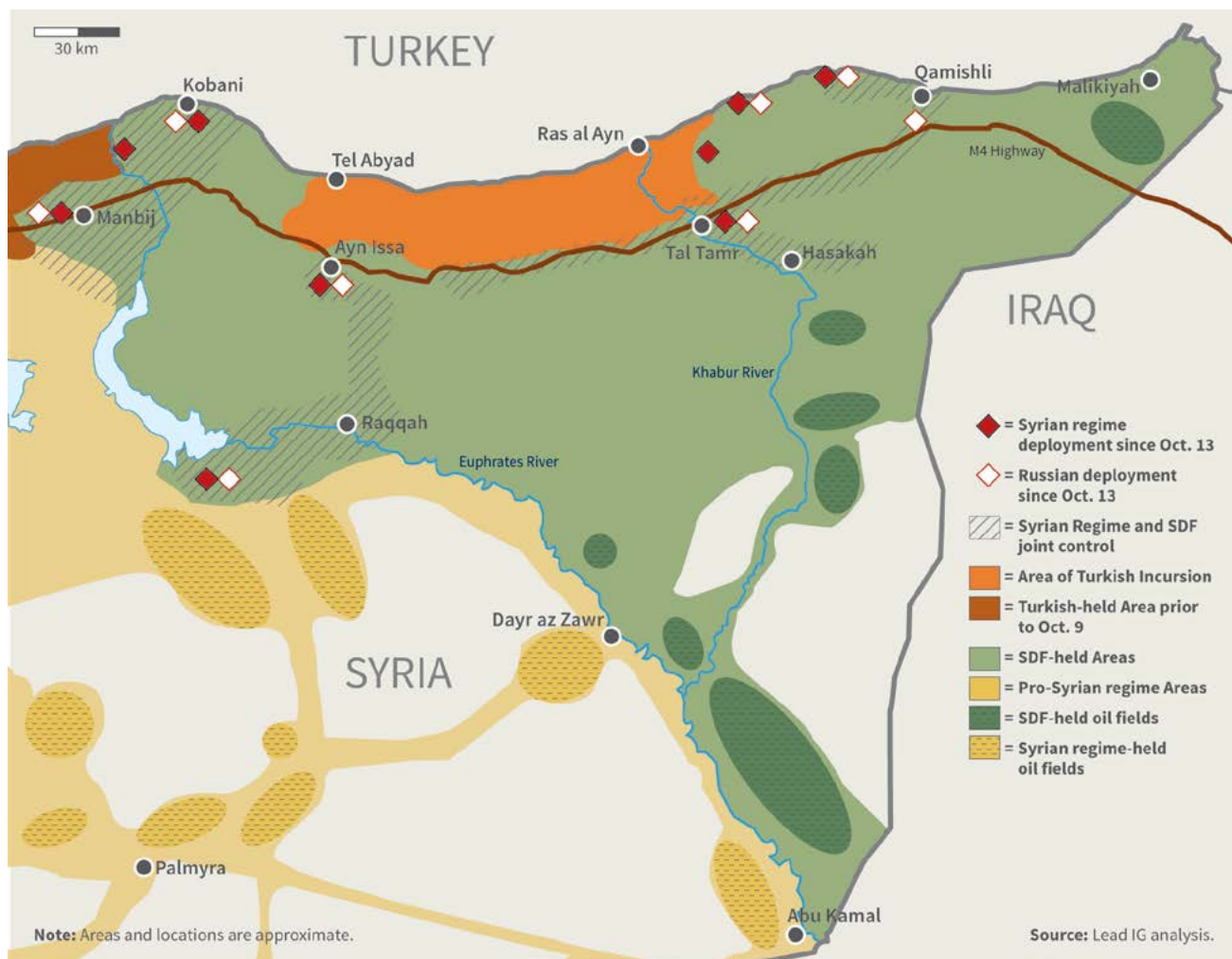
CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that the Turkish incursion did not result in a significant increase in ISIS capabilities or operations in northeastern Syria.

Large-scale operations against ISIS and training of SDF forces resumed in the second half of November, after the redistribution of forces was complete and Turkey's advance halted.[45]

The DIA reported that Turkish forces occupied an area of northern Syria approximately 20 miles deep between the towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al Ayn.[46] On October 17, Turkey agreed to a U.S.-negotiated pause in its advance in exchange for the withdrawal of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the main fighting force of the SDF, from the newly occupied zone.[47] On October 22, Turkey and Russia reached an agreement under which Russia is responsible for ensuring that the YPG withdraw from areas in northeastern Syria outside of Turkey's control.[48]

In mid-October, YPG leaders reached an understanding with Russia, which partners with the Syrian regime, allowing pro-regime forces to move in to areas where U.S. forces departed in order to contain the Turkish advance.[49] The DIA reported that these forces were conducting operations against ISIS to varying degrees.[50]

IMPACT ON ISIS OF TURKEY'S INCURSION INTO NORTHEASTERN SYRIA UNCLEAR

CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that the Turkish incursion did not result in a significant increase in ISIS capabilities or operations in northeastern Syria.[51] CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS's prospects for resurgence remained limited because other armed actors moved in to fill the vacuum left by departing U.S. troops, and that all forces agreed on the necessity of preventing an ISIS resurgence.[52] USCENTCOM also reported that it did not see "compelling evidence" to indicate that the redeployment of U.S. forces in northeastern Syria has resulted in significant changes to ISIS' operational capabilities.[53]

In contrast, the DIA said that "judging from [ISIS's] online claims," ISIS probably increased its attacks in northeast Syria by at least 20 percent, rising from an average of 55 ISIS-claimed attacks to an average of 66 attacks per month following the incursion. The DIA stated, "This suggests ISIS continues to view the security environment in northeast Syria as more conducive to its operations."[54] However, CJTF-OIR stated that ISIS-claimed attacks are "most likely propaganda," and that CJTF-OIR's determination that the Turkish incursion did not result in any significant ISIS resurgence is based on "known facts."[55] However, as noted above, CJTF-OIR cited the number of ISIS-claimed attacks as a data point it measures in Iraq.

ISIS REMAINS COHESIVE AFTER DEATH OF ITS LEADER

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that following the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the group's capabilities in Syria remained the same. USCENTCOM said that ISIS remained cohesive, with an intact command and control structure, urban clandestine networks, and an insurgent presence in much of rural Syria. USCENTCOM and the DIA both assessed that the October death of al Baghdadi did not result in any immediate degradation to ISIS's capabilities.[56]

USCENTCOM reported in December that ISIS maintained the pace, scope, and complexity of its operations in SDF-controlled areas, but did not significantly advance its insurgency.

It said that although ISIS has generally struggled to attack U.S. or Coalition forces, it has had more success against regime forces, Kurdish-supported civil governance elements, other violent extremist organizations, and civilians. ISIS appeared to have recovered some ability to coordinate small-scale complex operations in areas controlled by the Syrian regime, though these attacks did not result in lost terrain or significant regime casualties.[57]

In addition, the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS continues to generate revenue by extorting oil smuggling networks in northeastern Syria, though in its assessment, these revenues are relatively small. Most ISIS revenue continues to come from kidnapping for ransom, extortion, looting, and the use of front companies. The Treasury said that ISIS continues to have access to financial reserves in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and that it continued to rebuild fundraising networks.[58]

U.S. BRADLEY FIGHTING VEHICLES WITHDRAW FROM SYRIAN OIL FIELDS

In October, as the DoD moved forces out of areas of northeastern Syria, it deployed new units into eastern Syria to assist with force protection and prevent ISIS from accessing Syrian oil fields. The U.S. units that deployed to secure the oil fields in northeastern Syria included mechanized M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles from the National Guard's 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team.[59] OUSD(P)/ISA said that these armored fighting vehicles enhance the protection of U.S. forces while they work with the SDF to deny ISIS access to the oil fields.[60]

During the preparation of this report, the DoD OIG was seeking additional information from the DoD about the deployment of mechanized units into eastern Syria. Then, on January 27, 2020, a U.S. Army spokesperson was quoted in the media saying that Bradley Fighting Vehicles and all other elements of the 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team had withdrawn from Syria by the end of November, 2019 and returned to their post in Kuwait.[61]

This raised a number of questions, including: why the Bradleys were withdrawn from Syria so quickly; what conditions on the ground changed or were met that made them no longer necessary; what they were used for while in Syria; what mechanized units and equipment remain in Syria; and in particular, what the cost was of deploying them in October and then removing them in November.

Due to the timing of this development, the DoD OIG was unable to pose these questions to the DoD prior to the publication of this report. The DoD OIG will seek answers to these questions and report on the withdrawal of the Bradley Fighting Vehicles in the next quarterly report on OIR.

ISIS DETAINEES POSE ESCAPE RISK

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that it remains concerned about the long-term security of SDF-run facilities holding approximately 10,000 ISIS fighters, including some 2,000 foreign ISIS fighters.[62] While OUSD(P)/ISA said it has not seen indications of significant changes in these facilities after the Turkish incursion, it said that the longer ISIS prisoners are held in SDF prisons, the greater the potential for them to organize breakouts.[63] CJTF-OIR also reported that the new ISIS leader renewed a call made by al Baghdadi in September for supporters to help imprisoned ISIS members break out of jail.[64]

According to the DIA, following the Turkish incursion, the SDF temporarily reduced the number of personnel at SDF-controlled internally displaced persons camps in northeastern Syria that hold many ISIS-affiliated families, including roughly 13,500 foreign women and children, in order to defend against Turkish forces.

ISIS ACTIVE IN IDP CAMPS AS SDF RESPONDS TO TURKISH INCURSION

According to the DIA, following the Turkish incursion, the SDF temporarily reduced the number of personnel at SDF-controlled internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in northeastern Syria that hold many ISIS-affiliated families, including roughly 13,500 foreign women and children, in order to defend against Turkish forces. The DIA cited news reports that said that ISIS members (which can include fighters or supporters) within the camps conducted attacks against the diminished security forces and guard posts.[65]

According to the DoS, the Asayish, a Kurdish internal security force, continues to provide perimeter security at the IDP camps in northeastern Syria.[66] However, the DIA said that ISIS remains able to move people and resources in and out of camps by relying on smugglers.[67]

The DIA said that security is tenuous in some areas of the Al Hol camp, where approximately 400 guards have struggled to secure the camp. It said that security personnel fear patrolling some areas of the camp due to previous attacks against guards and the limited number of security personnel.[68]

The DIA said that ISIS members have stepped up efforts at Al Hol to intimidate and enforce ISIS ideology through self-appointed morality police and Islamic Sharia law courts, and by imposing religious classes on women.[69]

TURKISH INCURSION DISPLACES CIVILIANS

According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Turkish incursion displaced up to 215,000 individuals in parts of northeastern Syria's Aleppo, Hasakah, and Raqqah provinces.[70] As of December 6, more than 117,000 people had returned to their home regions, while approximately 75,000 remained displaced.[71]

USAID reported that while USAID partner operations were disrupted, humanitarian organizations were able to coordinate and address increased IDP needs of those who fled hostilities.[72] As of the end of the quarter, USAID said that humanitarian implementers remained unable to access Turkish-controlled areas.[73] However, the DoS reported that by mid-November, most staff had returned to northeastern Syria, and DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) programming, which had been disrupted, resumed.[74]

STABILIZATION PERSONNEL LEAVE SYRIA

The DoS and USAID withdrew the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team–Forward personnel from Syria following the incursion. The DoS and USAID said that U.S. Government staff oversaw stabilization and humanitarian assistance programs from posts in the United States, Turkey, and Jordan.[75]

This quarter, human rights groups also reported abuses against civilians and aid workers by Turkish-supported opposition (TSO) forces in northeastern Syria. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported that Turkish military forces and their supported opposition groups conducted summary killings during the Turkish incursion, and the TSO failed to account for missing aid workers, looted and unlawfully appropriated property, and blocked people from returning to their homes.[76]

VIOLENCE TARGETS CIVILIANS IN IDLIB

In Idlib province of northwestern Syria, an ongoing offensive by Syrian government and pro-regime forces on the last opposition-held stronghold displaced nearly 284,000 people in December alone, bringing the total IDPs from that area to almost 700,000.[77] The offensive prompted Turkey, which is already hosting some 3.6 million Syrian refugees, to threaten to close its border.[78]

The DoS also reported on a growing oil shortage in Idlib province and northern Aleppo, with contacts warning of an "impending humanitarian nightmare," if people remain without heat in their homes in temperatures that can drop to mid-30s in winter.[79]

SERVICES TO AL HOL RESIDENTS DECREASE DUE TO TURKISH INCURSION

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that the Turkish incursion in October led to a substantial, but temporary, decrease in services in the Al Hol IDP camp. In particular, it said Doctors without Borders closed down the only hospital in the annex, leaving a major gap in health care. While some humanitarian implementers have returned to Al Hol, the Doctors Without Borders hospital remains closed.[80]

The DoS reported that the incursion was at least partly the cause of an acceleration of returns of Syrian IDPs from Al Hol this quarter as Kurdish forces responsible for security at the camp seek long-term solutions.[81] The DoS said that as of December 11, roughly 880 Syrians returned to Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah provinces in 3 batches. There is no evidence that those moved were ISIS supporters. Repatriation of third-country nationals slowed during the Turkish incursion due to the decreased capacity of the SDF and U.S. military to assist in returns.[82]

LEAD IG OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

The Lead IG and partner agencies continued to conduct oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; investigations; and hotline activities.

AUDITS, INSPECTIONS, AND EVALUATIONS

The Lead IG and partner agencies completed six audit, evaluation, and management assistance reports related to OIR from October 1 to December 31, 2019. These reports examined various activities that support OIR, including: the DoD's oversight of contractor-provided equipment and training to support Jordan's security along its border with Syria and Iraq; diplomatic security programs supporting the United States' Middle East partners in the fight against ISIS; DoD and DoS security assistance and training for Iraq's security forces; and financial accountability in humanitarian assistance programs.

Table 1 lists the released reports by agency.

During this quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their oversight partners had 41 ongoing and 22 planned oversight projects for OIR.

In Idlib province of northwestern Syria, an ongoing offensive by Syrian government and pro-regime forces on the last opposition-held stronghold displaced nearly 284,000 people in December alone, bringing the total IDPs from that area to almost 700,000.

INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

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, Lead IG investigations resulted in one arrest, five criminal charges, and one personnel action, all related to fraud, extortion and bribery concerning contracts supporting the OIR mission.

Investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 5 investigations, initiated 7 new investigations, and coordinated on 116 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the DoD OIG investigator referred 55 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations.

Table 1.

Oversight Reports Issued this Quarter

Report	Release Date
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL	
Audit of Jordan Border Program DODIG-2020-043	December 20, 2019
DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL	
Management Assistance Report: Continued Health and Welfare Concerns for Antiterrorism Assistance Explosive Detection Canines ESP-20-02	December 19, 2019
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL	
Single Audit of Blumont, Inc. and Affiliates for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2017 3-000-20-005-T	December 11, 2019
Audit of Polska Akcja Humanitarna Under Multiple USAID Agreements for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2017 (3-000-20-002-R) 3-000-20-002-R	November 22, 2019
Single Audit of the Catholic Relief Services-United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Affiliates for the Fiscal Year Ended September 30, 2018 3-000-20-001-T	October 21, 2019
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE	
Iraq: Characteristics of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq and How It Compares to Other DoD Security Cooperation Organizations GAO-20-196R	November 21, 2019

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

EVENTS IN IRAQ

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

U.S. Forces Pause Operations against ISIS in Iraq

The DoS reported that from early October to the end of December, Iraqi militias aligned with Iran carried out multiple attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, including a December 27 attack on an Iraqi military base housing U.S. forces near Kirkuk that killed a U.S. contractor. The United States responded on December 29 by conducting airstrikes on five facilities in Iraq and Syria belonging to the Kata'ib Hezbollah, the Iranian-aligned militia blamed for the December 27 attack, killing 24 militia members.[1] Iraqi government officials and political party leaders condemned the U.S. strikes, calling them a violation of Iraqi sovereignty.[2]

The DoS reported that on December 31, an estimated 6,000 supporters of Kata'ib Hezbollah and hundreds of other Iranian-aligned militia members and supporters demonstrated outside the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad.[3] The protesters demanded the removal of U.S. forces from Iraq. According to DoS cables, Kata'ib Hezbollah supporters threw flammable items into the compound, causing damage to the Embassy.[4]

On January 3, a U.S. drone strike at Baghdad International Airport killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force, and Jamal Jaafar Ibrahimi, the former deputy leader of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), better known as Abu Mahdi al Muhandis.[5]

On January 5, the Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) issued a press release stating that U.S. forces had "paused" U.S. operations to defeat ISIS in Iraq.[6] In the press statement, CJTF-OIR said that the need to protect U.S. troops housed at Iraqi military bases had limited its capacity to support Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) operations against ISIS and train Iraqi troops.[7]

As of the time of publication of this report, it was unclear the extent to which the U.S. pause in operations against ISIS could affect ISIS's ability to resurge in Iraq or the ISF's ability to conduct operations against it. Prior to the announcement of the pause in operations, CJTF-OIR reported to the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) that while the vast majority of ISF operations against ISIS this quarter were executed independent of Coalition support, some ground operations continued to be "minimally enabled" by Coalition intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), strike aircraft, or air weapons teams.[8]

Protesters gather outside the Baghdad Embassy Compound, Jan. 1, 2020. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

On January 7, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said that the pause against ISIS in Iraq had not had a "material impact" on U.S. forces' ability to fight ISIS in Syria.[9]

Media outlets reported that at least four Coalition partners and NATO had announced that they plan to shift troops out of Iraq, some temporarily, or redeploy them to Iraqi Kurdistan.[10]

In response to Soleimani's death, Iraq's Parliament passed a non-binding resolution to expel U.S. forces from Iraq.[11] Following the parliamentary vote, President Trump stated that the United States would not withdraw the roughly 5,000 troops stationed in Iraq, and Secretary Esper stated that the United States was "not leaving Iraq."[12] Speaking to reporters on January 7, Secretary Esper said that the United States had begun repositioning some U.S. troops in Iraq as a force protection measure, but he reiterated that the troop movements did not signal a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.[13]

Soleimani Mobilized Militias Opposed to the United States and ISIS

According to open source reporting, as commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force, Major General Qassem Soleimani mobilized Shia militias across the Middle East to further Iran's regional interests, helping to reshape the political landscape in Iran's favor from Tehran to the Mediterranean Sea. The Qods Force is often described as an expeditionary force roughly akin to the CIA and U.S. Special Forces combined. Soleimani used his role as its commander to build a constellation of militias aligned with Iran, including several that opposed the United States, but also fought against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.[14]

As a confidant of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Soleimani earned a reputation for carrying out Iran's regional ambitions, which include support for militias operating in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, propping up Syria's regime, and influencing Iraq's political and military affairs. He is also accused of sponsoring terrorist attacks, training militias to blow up U.S. soldiers in Iraq, and involvement in the 2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.[15]

U.S. officials said that Soleimani and his Qods Force train and direct militias—including the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iraqi Kata'ib Hezbollah—that were responsible for killing or wounding thousands of U.S. soldiers in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Kata'ib Hezbollah, in particular, remains violently opposed to U.S. troops in Iraq.[16] Several smaller Iraqi militias established or trained by Soleimani also violently oppose the U.S. military presence.[17]

The Qods Force was designated as a terrorist organization in 2007 by the Department of the Treasury for providing material support to U.S.-designated terrorist organizations. In 2007, the United Nations passed a resolution barring Soleimani from travelling outside Iran. However, he was often photographed visiting government officials and militia leaders in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.[18]

In 2011, the United States designated Soleimani as a terrorist for his role as commander of the Qods Force, for human rights abuses in Syria, and for his involvement in a plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States.[19] At the time, Soleimani was heavily involved in training and directing the militant Shia

On January 8, Iran launched more than a dozen ballistic missiles at two Iraqi military bases housing U.S. troops in retaliation for Soleimani's killing.[33] The missile strikes injured at least 50 U.S. service personnel.[34] According to media reports, Iran's Foreign Minister said after the missile strikes that "Iran took and concluded proportionate measures in self-defense."[35]

General Kenneth McKenzie, commander of USCENTCOM, said that the drone strike had weakened Iran and Iranian-aligned militias. According to news reports, General McKenzie said that the drone strike had left the PMF essentially leaderless, casting uncertainty over the future of the organization. However, a PMF spokesman said in January that the PMF would continue to operate in Iraq.[36] Although it remained unclear at the time of publication who was responsible, media reported that rocket attacks on Baghdad's Green Zone continued during January, including a January 26 attack in which three rockets struck the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, reportedly causing at least one injury and minor damage.[37]

Additional information on the pause in U.S. military operations against ISIS in Iraq and repercussions from the killing of Soleimani is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

organizations that he helped to create after the United States-led coalition occupied Iraq in 2003.[20] He also was instrumental in brokering political agreements that produced successive Iraqi governments.[21]

In Syria's civil war, Soleimani established Shia brigades in support of the Syrian regime. In Iraq, he supported and advised Shia militias that operated under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and were instrumental in the initial fight against ISIS following the collapse of Iraq's army.[22] According to open-source analysts, Iran seeks to not only preserve the Syrian regime and secure a "land bridge" from Iran to Lebanon, but also views ISIS, a Sunni organization, as an existential threat to Iran, which is majority Shia.[23]

Shia militias belonging to the PMF participated in battles against ISIS across northern and western Iraq, but were also widely accused of violence against Sunni inhabitants.[24] CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG previously that it does not maintain relations with the PMF but that ISF units regularly partner with the PMF in operations against ISIS.[25]

With ISIS territorially defeated, the PMF have become an entrenched part of Iraq's security apparatus.[26] CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG this quarter that the ISF continued to partner with PMF units in ongoing operations.[27] In June 2019, the DIA reported that, despite concerns about Iran's influence over Iranian-aligned militias, the PMF's actions in Iraq were a "net positive" because they targeted ISIS.[28]

After Soleimani's death, Ayatollah Khamenei named Soleimani's deputy, Brigadier General Esmail Ghani as the new Qods Force commander.[29] In an official statement released by Khamenei, the Iranian leader said that the role of the Qods Force under Ghani would continue as it was under Soleimani.[30] In early January, Ghani vowed to carry on Soleimani's mission, including by meeting with the heads of Iraqi militias aligned with Iran.[31]

In 2012, Treasury designated Ghani as a terrorist for his work funding Qods Force operations, including in Lebanon and The Gambia. According to a Treasury press release, Ghani was responsible for Qods Force financial disbursements to the Lebanese Hezbollah and had financial oversight of Qods Force weapons shipments intended for The Gambia.[32]

More information on the role of Soleimani in Iraqi affairs and across the region, and the role of Iraqi Shia militias aligned with Iran is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

STATUS OF ISIS IN IRAQ

ISIS Retains Freedom of Movement, Continues Low-level Attacks

This quarter, ISIS continued to reconstitute in the wake of the death of its leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who was killed in a U.S. raid in Syria on October 26, 2019. On October 31, ISIS announced a new leader, known as Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al Qurayshi.[38] As previously reported by the DoD OIG, the DIA assessed in November that al Baghdadi's death would have little effect on ISIS's ability to "maintain continuity of operations, global cohesion, and at least its current trajectory."[39]

In December, CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS in Iraq continued with a pattern of low-level attacks concentrated in the provinces north and west of Baghdad, but did not appear either to grow stronger or to lose its footholds in Iraq's deserts and mountainous areas.[40] CJTF-OIR also reported that the number of ISIS attacks was down this quarter. It said that ISIS publicly claimed 67 attacks in Iraq in the first 2 months of this quarter—roughly half as many as

the 138 attacks that the group claimed in the first 2 months of the previous quarter.[41] The DIA reported that the number of ISIS-claimed attacks may be lower than the actual number of attacks due to Iraqi government actions to limit access to the Internet during widespread street protests.[42]

CJTF-OIR said that most ISIS-claimed attacks were opportunistic attacks on the ISF and PMF.[43] USCENTCOM reported that attacks were largely limited to majority Sunni or mixed ethno-religious areas.[44]
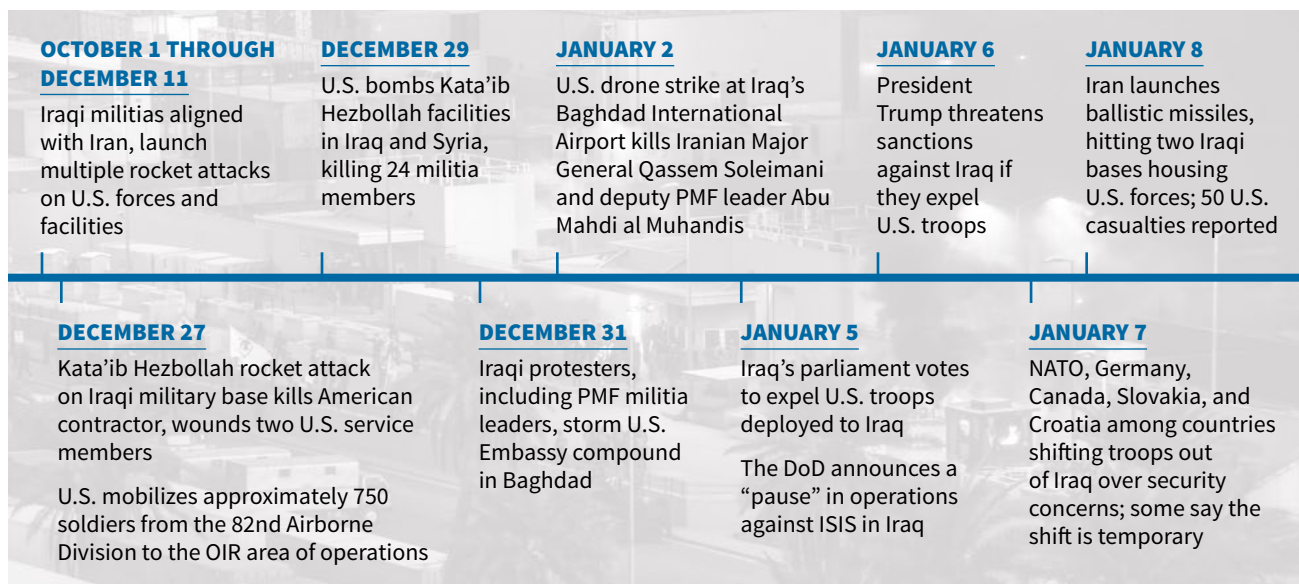
CJTF-OIR also reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS maintained both freedom of movement and the ability to hide and transport fighters and materiel in rural areas where ISF presence is less intense and ISIS can more easily avoid detection and capture.[45]

CJTF-OIR had previously reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS exploited "buffer zones" in mountainous areas in northern Iraq where neither the ISF nor Kurdish Peshmerga forces are in control.[46] This quarter, OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that these zones, or "seams," are a product of an ongoing dispute over the location of the boundary that divides areas of northern Iraq under control of the Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil, from the rest of Iraq, which is governed by Iraq's central government in Baghdad.[47] OUSD(P)/ISA said that the dispute has created a vacuum in which neither government wants to conduct operations against ISIS in areas of the seam, either due to a lack of political will or due to a fear that doing so could instigate conflict between the two governments.[48]

This quarter, CJTF-OIR did not explicitly mention "seams," but said that ISIS was active in areas of Diyala and Kirkuk provinces, which include areas of this seam.[49] According to news reports, Kurdish leaders warned this quarter that hundreds of ISIS fighters occupy the seam and exploit the lack of security presence there.[50]

Figure 2.

Key Events Related to Iran

OCTOBER 1 THROUGH DECEMBER 11
Iraqi militias aligned with Iran, launch multiple rocket attacks on U.S. forces and facilities

DECEMBER 29
U.S. bombs Kata'ib Hezbollah facilities in Iraq and Syria, killing 24 militia members

JANUARY 2
U.S. drone strike at Iraq's Baghdad International Airport kills Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani and deputy PMF leader Abu Mahdi al Muhandis

JANUARY 6
President Trump threatens sanctions against Iraq if they expel U.S. troops

JANUARY 8
Iran launches ballistic missiles, hitting two Iraqi bases housing U.S. forces; 50 U.S. casualties reported

DECEMBER 27
Kata'ib Hezbollah rocket attack on Iraqi military base kills American contractor, wounds two U.S. service members

U.S. mobilizes approximately 750 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division to the OIR area of operations

DECEMBER 31
Iraqi protesters, including PMF militia leaders, storm U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad

JANUARY 5
Iraq's parliament votes to expel U.S. troops deployed to Iraq

The DoD announces a "pause" in operations against ISIS in Iraq

JANUARY 7
NATO, Germany, Canada, Slovakia, and Croatia among countries shifting troops out of Iraq over security concerns; some say the shift is temporary

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that ISIS retains enough manpower and planning capabilities to conduct regular small-scale attacks or ambushes against the ISF, the PMF, or local civilians accused of aiding the ISF or informing on ISIS activities.[51] Media reports described ISIS operatives moving at night in marshy areas of Diyala near the Iranian border, where they employ snipers or ambush ISF or PMF checkpoints.[52] USCENTCOM reported that ISIS's most effective operation this quarter occurred in Diyala, when ISIS attacked PMF forces, killing or wounding 23 people.[53]

ISIS also occasionally infiltrates urban centers to conduct attacks, but has not tried to hold territory or succeeded in attacking strategic targets or damaging critical infrastructure, CJTF-OIR said.[54] ISIS also has been unable to conduct major attacks in Baghdad, which USCENTCOM characterized as a "difficult operating environment for ISIS."[55]

CJTF-OIR reported that in terms of popular support, ISIS may receive passive support due to ideological or tribal ties, but that the vast majority of the Iraqi population, including in Sunni areas, remains hostile to ISIS.[56] In some instances, intimidation by ISIS members had become so intense in Diyala that village residents temporarily left their homes this quarter.[57] CJTF-OIR said Sunni hostility toward ISIS also likely limited ISIS's ability to conduct large-scale recruiting.[58]

More information on ISIS's capabilities is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

ACTIONS CONDUCTED AGAINST ISIS IN IRAQ

Iraqi Street Protests Cause ISF to Postpone Operations against ISIS

CJTF-OIR reported that in October and November the ISF temporarily postponed some operations against ISIS due to ongoing street protests against the Iraqi government.[59] CJTF-OIR said operations were postponed because the protests, concentrated in Baghdad but occurring in many other areas of Iraq, forced ISF senior leadership to focus attention on the protests, which reduced the ability of senior leaders to focus on counter-ISIS operations.[60]

The ISF Conducts Multiple Operations against ISIS with no Coalition Support or with "Minimal" Coalition Support

CJTF-OIR reported that during the quarter, the ISF had conducted numerous operations against ISIS across all partnered operational commands independently or with "minimal" Coalition support in the form of ISR, strike aircraft, or air weapons teams support.[61]

For instance, the Iraqi Air Enterprise flew 474 ISR sorties independently, relying only occasionally on ISR "points of interest" that the Coalition provided to Iraqi intelligence.[62] CJTF-OIR stated that Iraqi "operational objectives were met" during these flights, but did not provide details of what the objectives were.[63] CJTF-OIR also said that most Iraqi Air Enterprise activity against ISIS took place in Anbar, Salah ad Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala provinces.[64]

CJTF-OIR reported that this quarter the "vast majority" of ISF ground operations including security patrols, controlled detonations, and clearance operations against ISIS, were also

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted many operations without Coalition support or with very little Coalition support.

conducted independent of Coalition support or were "minimally enabled" by Coalition ISR, strike aircraft, or air weapons team support.[65] CJTF-OIR reported that the operations destroyed 198 ISIS tunnels, caves, and bed down locations and disposed of 4,250 improvised explosive devices (IEDs), among other captured weapons and materiel.[66]

Similarly, CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted air operations against ISIS independently of Coalition support, destroying 34 ISIS bed down locations, 8 vehicles, 4 tunnels, and 4 pieces of heavy equipment. The ISF conducted independent helicopter strikes, and prepared and executed independent F-16 strikes that relied only on Coalition produced "target packages." CJTF-OIR said that an Iraqi F-16 strike against ISIS on October 10 was the first one since April 2018, and that Iraqis had exhibited a "renewed" willingness to conduct more F-16 operations against ISIS.[67]

More information on actions conducted against ISIS this quarter is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

ISF Continues to Lack Ability to Process Intelligence and Hold Cleared Terrain

According to CJTF-OIR, the ISF continues to rely heavily on Coalition ISR products, rather than its own, and lacks an efficient process for utilizing the intelligence that is gathered. CJTF-OIR said that the reasons for this continued reliance on the Coalition for ISR products include problems with Iraqi collection of intelligence data and the dissemination and utilization of that data."[68]

CJTF-OIR said that the Iraqi process for analyzing and acting upon intelligence "is slow and does not guarantee product dissemination to the appropriate end-users."[69] Moreover, the ISF also fails to prioritize the points of interest to be collected during ISR missions, which reduces its ability to use limited resources efficiently. As a result, Iraqi military units did not value ISR generated by the Iraqi Air Enterprise, and preferred to rely instead on Coalition ISR.[70]

Additionally, CJTF-OIR said the ISF's "ability and desire" to hold terrain cleared of ISIS did not improve this quarter.[71] Rather than holding vast desert terrain where ISIS is present, the ISF instead maintains a presence near population centers and conducts clearance operations into the harsh terrain from there.[72] However, CJTF-OIR reported that while the ISF is able to synchronize clearing operations against ISIS conducted by multiple operations commands, the ISF remains unable to conduct sustained dismounted operations into difficult terrain with a sufficient number of forces.[73] CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF remains hesitant to conduct operations in restrictive terrain without Coalition aviation assets deployed in support of those operations.[74]

CJTF-OIR reported that the Iraqi Army began more aggressive helicopter patrols and clearing operations in the southern Anbar Desert this quarter.[75] In Ninewa, an Iraqi Army division moved its command headquarters closer to Sinjar, and allocated it a portion of the Syrian border to more effectively conduct border operations against ISIS, which CJTF-OIR said has become one of the ISF's top operational priorities.[76] The DIA reported that it had not observed increased border security in Ninewa province because of the transfer of headquarters.[77]

CJTF-OIR reported that the ISF conducted air operations against ISIS independently of Coalition support, destroying 34 ISIS bed down locations, 8 vehicles, 4 tunnels, and 4 heavy equipment.

ISIS Online Propaganda Seeks to Keep the Group Relevant amid Setbacks

Despite a reduction in attacks this quarter, ISIS remained active online, disseminating propaganda on Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram that USCENTCOM said revolved around two main themes: persistence in the face of adversity and retaliation via a global insurgency.[78]

According to USCENTCOM, ISIS's online messages downplayed or ignored ISIS' setbacks and losses. Instead, ISIS propaganda touted ISIS attacks and endurance in the face of hardship. Its messaging also sought to convey the inevitability of a long-term ISIS triumph.[79]

According to USCENTCOM, Twitter remained the primary conduit, in terms of volume, for ISIS propaganda into the Arabic online environment. ISIS also used Facebook to share propaganda messages and recruit new ISIS members. Telegram, a messaging app, was the preferred online vehicle for communication among ISIS leaders, its media team, and hardline supporters, who used the encrypted online discussion platform to coordinate messages and planning for information operations.[80]

In November 2019, the owners of Telegram and the European Police Agency (EUROPOL) cooperated to seek to disrupt ISIS's media operations, deleting hundreds of Telegram accounts in the process. USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that it is too early to determine the long-term results of this action, but that disrupting ISIS's ability to access Telegram could induce ISIS to seek more secure, but possibly less visible platforms.[81]

In addition to these online platforms, the DIA reported that ISIS's flagship media outlets include the al-Naba newsletter, al Himmah library, which is ISIS's official publishing house, al Bayan radio stations, Ajnad Media Foundation, A'maq News Agency, al Furqan Foundation, and al Hayat Media.[82] The DIA said that during the last 6 months, only al Naba, al Bayan, Ajnad, A'maq, and al Furqan have released media products.[83] The DIA said that numerous groups of pro-ISIS supporters continued this quarter to release propaganda reinforcing the group's overall narrative and goals.[84]

USCENTCOM said that the audience for ISIS's online propaganda in Arabic is concentrated mainly in the Arabian Gulf, Iraq, Egypt, and diaspora Arab communities around the globe. USCENTCOM said that it bases this assessment on its monitoring of the geographic origins of the hashtags posted by users of these online platforms.[85] ISIS also targeted sympathizers and supporters active on known pro-ISIS Facebook pages or belonging to pro-ISIS Telegram groups.[86]

The DIA reported that ISIS in Iraq attempts to influence several audiences, including "the Sunni population it claims to defend, the Government of Iraq it aspires to supplant, and the international community it wants to convince of its resiliency."[87] The DIA assessed that ISIS remains largely unpopular in Iraq, including among the Sunni population. However, the DIA said that political grievances among the Sunni population persist and that ISIS likely will attempt to exploit them.[88]

USCENTCOM reported that its online Military Information Support Operations (MISO) team, known as WebOps, regularly assesses the effectiveness of ISIS online propaganda in the Arabic social media information environment through its "target audience analysis" process. This process identifies target audiences by ideology, geolocation, and other demographic factors in

ISIS Online Propaganda Seeks to Keep the Group Relevant amid Setbacks *(continued from previous page)*

order to focus the reach of WebOps messaging to foreign groups or individuals who demonstrate an ability to be influenced, and thus achieve MISO objectives. Web Ops surveys trending topics on social media, conducts interactive engagements on social media, and weighs anecdotal evidence to gauge both the prevailing sentiment in the online information environment and the overall effectiveness of ISIS propaganda by target audience. USCENTCOM WebOps also employs subject matter expertise, open-source information, and finished intelligence reports to assess ISIS information operations to develop future MISO to counter and defeat ISIS's social media propaganda.[89] Additionally, USCENTCOM reported that it assesses the effectiveness of ISIS propaganda and its ability to project influence through surveys, studies, intelligence reporting and assessment, and collaboration with other U.S. Government entities.[90]

USCENTCOM reported that in its assessment, ISIS's online propaganda in Arabic was "overall less effective this quarter compared with the previous quarter." While propaganda production was relatively consistent via Twitter and Telegram, the amount of coordination and community activity on Telegram declined following the actions against ISIS by Telegram's owners and EUROPOL. However, USCENTCOM reported that despite these declines, ISIS propaganda proved resilient and sporadically resurgent as users "migrated to alternative platforms with less reach but sufficient functionality to sustain low-level [engagement]."[91] The DIA reported that ISIS propaganda appeared to resonate among supporters and to inspire attacks, despite the territorial losses that marked the end of the group's physical so-called "caliphate" in Iraq in December 2017 and in Syria in March 2019.[92]

USCENTCOM said its WebOps Arabic language "defeat-ISIS" teams primarily used Twitter to counter ISIS's online propaganda through what it called "high volume disruption messaging and a campaign to expose propagandists for suspension" from the online platform. Through social media engagements, WebOps was able to invoke support among approved foreign target audiences to report ISIS accounts in violation of the platform's terms of service to Twitter in order to have those accounts suspended. The Web Ops team also used Telegram to subvert ISIS messaging and undermine ISIS's online community of support.[93] USCENTCOM did not provide an unclassified response regarding the effectiveness of these strategies for countering ISIS messaging or the metrics it uses to determine effectiveness. Although WebOps continuously assess ISIS's online presence in key forums and adjusts its activities appropriately, due to multiple factors both in the online information environment and the physical environment, it was unclear the extent to which WebOps' counter-messaging has directly undermined ISIS's online reach or influence.[94]

More information on ISIS's propaganda and U.S. efforts to disrupt it is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

CJTF-OIR reported that it continued efforts to push the ISF to leverage its own operational assets more aggressively.[95] CJTF-OIR said that the Iraqi Federal Police in Kirkuk province were "slightly more aggressive in their dismounted patrolling in more restrictive terrain" and the ISF leadership in Salah ad Din province were "most aggressive in the use of organic Iraqi ISR and strike assets in support of their operations."[96]

CJTF-OIR said that the ISF typically plans sequential rather than combined or simultaneous employment of assets, including ISR and artillery. However, CJTF-OIR noted two instances this quarter when the ISF employed Iraqi drones and F16 fighter jets to locate and destroy targets hours before the Iraqi Federal Police conducted clearance operations.[97] The ISF also

employed fixed-wing aircraft to conduct deliberate, pre-planned airstrikes in support of ground operations.[98] However, the DIA reported that the Iraqi Air Force does not conduct close air support and is often reluctant to employ fixed-wing aircraft deliberately because the air force lacks a large supply of guided munitions, funding to replace the munitions, and is worried about the collateral damage they may be caused without guided munitions.[99]

More information on ISIS capabilities is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

Coalition Forces Continue Operations against ISIS-controlled Island

CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition forces conducted operations this quarter against an ISIS transit hub on Qanus Island, a small island in the Tigris River near Mosul. The operations included indirect fire and persistent ISR.[100] Qanus Island was the site of a major Coalition air campaign against ISIS last quarter.[101]

CJTF-OIR said that it was difficult to assess the outcome of the campaign on ISIS's ability to utilize the island as a transit hub and weapons storage area due to the island's dense vegetation, which CJTF-OIR said was one of the primary reasons that ISIS continued to use the island to transport weapons and fighters.[102]

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN IRAQ

Iranian Activity in Iraq Hinders OIR

This quarter, violence initiated by Iraqi militias aligned with Iran interfered with efforts to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. The violence escalated throughout the quarter as thousands of Iraqi street protesters across Iraq demonstrated against the Iraqi government and Iran's involvement in Iraqi politics. According to open sources, militias tied to Iran sought to divert the protesters' attention away from Iran by escalating attacks on Iraqi military bases where U.S. forces are stationed.

As stated previously in this report, the militia attacks provoked U.S. counter attacks, which ultimately led the United States to pause operations against ISIS and focus on force protection. Open sources reported that street protests continued into January 2020, and that Iran and its proxy militias in Iraq are likely to continue to undermine the OIR mission in an attempt to distract from political unrest that threatens their influence in Iraq.[103]

In previous quarters, CJTF-OIR, USCENTCOM, and the DoS reported that tensions between the U.S. and Iranian-aligned actors in Iraq hindered the OIR mission in several ways, including: the reduction of ISR resources available for counter-ISIS operations in order to support force protection measures; the evacuation of U.S. Embassy staff in response to militia threats; the Iraqi government placing restrictions on Coalition air movement after they suspected Israel had conducted airstrikes against Iraqi militias tied to Iran; and the Iraqi parliamentary vote to evict U.S. forces from the country.[104]

USCENTCOM said in December that the need to dedicate ISR resources to monitor Iranian activity in the Persian Gulf continued to require U.S. forces to accept increased risk in Iraq and Syria.[105] However, USCENTCOM reported this quarter that Iraqi restrictions on Coalition use of Iraqi airspace had eased.[106]

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that Iran funds, arms, trains, and directs Shia militia groups in Iraq to wage a proxy war against the United States.[107]

USCENTCOM reported that the arms that Iran supplies include rockets, rocket launchers, rocket-propelled grenades, explosively formed penetrators, IEDs, and "other arms." USCENTCOM and the DIA reported that Iran's support to Iraqi militias is meant to achieve its main objective: to disrupt and harass U.S. forces to pressure the U.S. to leave Iraq.[108] The DIA also reported that Iran sought to solidify Iranian influence within Iraq's security infrastructure as a way to pressure the U.S. to withdraw.[109] USCENTCOM assessed that as long as the U.S. maintains a military presence in Iraq, Iranian-aligned militias will conduct harassing attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities, such as rocket attacks.[110]

Iran has utilized its network of proxy groups and key figures to exert influence over Iraq's political and security affairs for many years. As illustrated on page 25, the Qods Force provides instruction and material support to surrogates in Iraq not only to extend Iranian influence into Iraq, but also to achieve Iran's broader regional objectives. For instance, Iran deploys members of Iraqi militias into Syria to defend the Syrian regime.[111]

Many Iranian-aligned militias also participated in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. However, the United States has repeatedly sanctioned many of these groups and their leaders for their roles in fueling violence and instability in Iraq and attacking Coalition forces. Open source analysts and human rights groups also warn that Iranian-aligned militias enflame sectarian tensions and engage in extrajudicial killings while backed by Iraq's government, including this quarter violently suppressing popular protests against Iran.[112] Media reports indicate that the persistent violence and lawless conduct by Iranian-aligned militias fosters local resentment in Sunni communities that is reminiscent of the grievances that initially fueled ISIS's emergence between 2012 and 2014.[113]

Iranian-aligned Militias Target Protesters; Response to Violence Causes Prime Minister to Resign

Three months of violent protests began on October 1, when 5,000 to 6,000 people, mostly young men, demonstrated at Baghdad's Tahrir Square against widespread political and economic corruption, high unemployment, and weak provision of basic services. Protests spread quickly, coordinated over social media, to other provinces in Iraq.[114] As the intensity of the demonstrations peaked in late October, protesters' anger focused not only on the desire for a complete overhaul of the Iraqi government, including driving out Iranian influence, but also on the Iranian-aligned Shia militias.[115]

Iraqi government security forces and, separately, Iranian-aligned militias, responded brutally to the daily protests. According to UN and open-source estimates, as of late December, at least 500 protesters had been killed and 19,000 wounded.[116] The DIA reported that as of early December, ISF and Iranian-aligned militias, such as Aasa'ib Ahl al Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and the Badr Organization, have been accused of using extreme measures to quell protesters, including opening fire on demonstrators.[117] Public reaction to the violence led to the resignation of Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi on November 29.[118]

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that Iran funds, arms, trains, and directs Shia militia groups in Iraq to wage a proxy war against the United States.

IRAN'S NETWORK OF INFLUENCE IN IRAQ THROUGH QASSEM SOLEIMANI

Jamal Jaafar Ibrahimi (Deceased)

Deputy Leader of the Popular Mobilization Committee

Ibrahimi, commonly known as Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, was considered the de facto leader of the PMF. A long-time advisor to Soleimani, he served as a key conduit for Qods Force support to pro-Iranian PMF militias. In the 1980s in Iran, he commanded the Badr Corps, which then sought to overthrow Iraq's government. He returned to Iraq in 2005, was elected to Parliament, and advised several prime ministers. In 2009, the United States designated al Muhandis as a terrorist and Kata'ib Hezbollah, a militia in which he was a senior commander, as a terrorist organization. He was killed by U.S. forces while traveling alongside Soleimani on January 3.

Hadi al Ameri

Leader of the Badr Organization, the Badr Corps militia, and the Fatah Alliance

Al Ameri leads the Badr Organization and the Badr Corps, and heads the Fatah Alliance, a pro-Iran political bloc formed in 2018 that holds the second-largest number of seats in Parliament. In the 1980s he was in the Badr Corps in exile in Iran. In 2003, he returned to Iraq and founded the Badr Organization. In 2010, he was appointed as Iraq's Minister of Transportation. In 2014, the Badr Organization won 22 seats in Parliament. During the 2018 parliamentary election, al Ameri unified pro-Iranian parties to form the Fateh Alliance.

Akram al Kabi

Leader of Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba militia

Al Kabi, a former senior figure in Asa'ib Ahl al Haq, a pro-Iran militia known for high-profile attacks against U.S. forces prior to 2011, split from the group in 2012 to form al Nujaba, a small militia created in support of Iran's efforts to prop up the Syrian regime. In 2014, al Nujaba joined the PMF, but continued to focus its efforts in Syria. In 2015, al Kabi stated he would overthrow the Iraqi government if ordered by Iran's Supreme Leader and in 2018 threatened to target U.S. forces in Iraq. The United States designated him as a terrorist in 2018.

Qassem Soleimani (Deceased)

Major General, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Qods Force

Shibl al Zaydi

Leader of Kata'ib al Imam Ali militia and its political wing, and a Qods Force financial coordinator

A former fighter with populist cleric Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army, al Zaydi was imprisoned by U.S. forces prior to 2011. In 2014, with assistance from al Muhandis and the Qods Force, he founded Kata'ib al Imam Ali and in 2018, formed a political wing that joined the Fatah Alliance. In 2018, the United States sanctioned him for providing support to the Qods Force and Lebanese Hezbollah.

Mohammed al Hashemi

Former chief of staff to former Prime Minister Adil Abd al Mahdi

Al Hashemi, better known as Abu Jihad, is a key leader in the pro-Iran al Bina Alliance, a union of the Fatah Alliance, the State of Law Coalition, and smaller parties, and is the largest bloc in Parliament. Abu Jihad makes few public appearances, but has held multiple positions in Iranian-aligned organizations, and was likely instrumental in recommending Abd al Mahdi for prime minister in 2018. He was a key ally of al Muhandis and a conduit for PMF influence in the prime minister's office until he resigned in 2019 at Soleimani's behest.

Qais al Khazali

Leader of Asai'b Ahl al Haq militia and Sadiqoun political party

Al Khazali leads Asai'b Ahl al Haq, a PMF militia whose political wing, the Sadiqoun Bloc, belongs to the Fatah Alliance and holds 15 seats in the Iraqi Parliament. In the 2000s, he served as an aide to populist cleric Muqtada al Sadr. In 2004, al Khazali broke with al Sadr's Mahdi Army. In 2006 he formed Ahl al Haq, which was violently opposed to the 2003-2011 U.S.-led occupation of Iraq. In January 2020, the United States designated al Khazali and his brother Laith as terrorists and Ahl al Haq as a terrorist organization.

Sources: See Endnotes on page 105.

In early December, the Treasury sanctioned three Iranian-aligned militia leaders for their role in violent attacks on protesters, including Ahl al Haq chief Qais al Khazali, his brother Laith, and Husayn Falih Aziz al Lami, a security leader in the PMF.[119] In January, the DoS designated Asa'ib Ahl al Haq as a foreign terrorist organization and applied terrorism sanctions to Qais and Laith al Khazali.[120]

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that Iraqi security sources claim to have evidence of Iraqi Shia militias acting independently of Iran to counter the mass antigovernment protests, probably because the militias are seeking to maintain the status quo in Baghdad to preserve their influence, and by extension Iran's, in the current government. However, the DIA reported that Qods Force Commander Soleimani traveled repeatedly to Baghdad to advise the Iraqi government on a counter-protest response, which probably also allowed him to meet with Shia militia leaders.[121] Analysts reported that as early as October 3, officers from the IRGC, including Soleimani, had formed a crisis cell in Baghdad to coordinate response to the protests among leaders from the PMF and ISF.[122] Additionally, open source information indicated that Soleimani visited Iraq to direct pro-Iran political parties to continue supporting Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi, and to advise the selection of a new Iranian-aligned prime minister after Abd al Mahdi resigned in late November.[123]

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that the protests in Iraq had led to a temporary postponement in operations against ISIS because they diverted the attention of ISF leaders and reduced their capacity to direct operations against ISIS in Iraq. USCENTCOM said that all of Iraq's Operational Commands continued to conduct tactical operations (such as patrolling, static security, and interdiction operations) and that the level of protests at the conclusion of the quarter had not affected these operations.[124]

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

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Baghdad Tackles Corruption and Election Law as Concession to Protesters

In response to the widespread protests in Iraq, the Iraqi government pledged to act on corruption. It established a Federal Public Service Council that was directed to address corruption in government employment. The members of that council were sworn in on October 31. The DoS reported that the government removed some government employees accused of corruption, and the prime minister ordered the firing of directors general at ministries, who were widely considered some of the most corrupt officials. Though it described these actions as a start, the DoS assessed that much more needs to be done to combat corruption. Prior to his resignation, the prime minister pledged further action against corruption; however, most plans to fight corruption remain under development.[125]

According to media reporting, on December 5, in an attempt to appease the protesters demands for a new political system, Iraq's Parliament approved a new law requiring that the Independent High Electoral Committee comprise seven experienced judges.

The new law produced complaints from protesters, political parties, and the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq. Many protesters and political parties opposed granting the KRG judiciary the right to nominate two judges, considering it to be an instance of the quota system, a feature of the political system that they had been protesting. The Kurdish parties initially opposed the selection system because it did not include a quota for Kurdish judges appointed to the electoral commission. The Supreme Judicial Council expressed their concerns about inclusion of judges on the commission due to their participation in executive actions.[126]

The DoS reported that on December 24, the Iraqi Parliament approved a "highly anticipated" election reform bill to fulfill a key demand of protesters.[127] The new law makes sweeping changes in how lawmakers are elected by doing away with voting for lists of candidates grouped by party and replacing them with voting for individuals. Under the new law, Iraq would be divided into districts, with a member of parliament elected from each. Media sources reported that religious leader Muqtada al Sadr tweeted support for the new law, calling it the "first step on the path of reforms." However, legal experts, intellectuals, and the protesters quickly raised issues with the new law. Because the individual representatives must still form parties to select a new prime minister, according to the constitution, the status quo might not change significantly.[128]

Demonstrations at Baghdad's Tahir Square in October. (Human Rights Watch photo)

Prime Minister's Resignation Hinders Iraqi Government Business

Widespread protests and incidents of excessive force used against demonstrators impeded the Iraqi government's capacity to govern. The DoS reported that the Prime Minister's resignation has created a caretaker government and it is uncertain exactly when the 2020 budget will be submitted and approved. The DoS also said that the Iraqi government made some progress in negotiations with the KRG and reportedly reached a preliminary budget agreement on how oil and revenues will be shared; however, that agreement is not final until approved by the Parliament. In the absence of an approved 2020 budget, the Iraqi government will operate under 2019 funding levels, automatically renewed each month until a new budget is passed.[129]

Iran-aligned Political Bloc Nominates Two Prime Ministers; Both Rejected

The DoS reported that when the Prime Minister's office becomes vacant for any reason, the Iraqi Constitution specifies that the Iraqi President occupy the office and designate a new Prime Minister nominee from the largest political bloc to form a new government within 15 days.[130] When President Barham Salih refused to occupy the Prime Minister's office, Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi agreed to serve in a caretaker status until the new government was formed.[131] The leadership of the political blocs agreed to extend the deadline to December 22.[132] However, President Salih missed that deadline.[133]

The DoS reported that the Iran-aligned Bina Coalition, which considers itself the "largest bloc" in Parliament, nominated Higher Education Minister Qusay al-Suhail on December 17 and followed by nominating Basrah Governor Asaad al-Eidani after President Salih refused to designate al-Suhail due to "robust" opposition from protesters across Iraq, other Shia factions, and the southern provinces.[134] Salih refused to designate Asaad al-Eidani in response to broad opposition by antigovernment protesters, who renewed their demand for an "independent" nominee to be the next prime minister.[135]

According to media sources, members of the Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al Haq accused President Salih of refusing to name their preferred prime minister nominee at the behest of the United States.[136]

As of the end of January, a new prime minister had not been designated.

STABILIZATION AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Recent Events Prompt Uncertainty about Program Sustainability

Following the demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, USAID and DoS staff responsible for overseeing stabilization and humanitarian assistance in Baghdad were evacuated to Erbil.[137]

In December, USAID Iraq had reported that with low staffing numbers it had begun considering how to close awards. However, most of the USAID Iraq portfolio consists of grants and cooperative agreements and the Mission would need to review each activity on a case-by-case basis to determine how to wind down ongoing projects responsibly. This would

Widespread protests and incidents of excessive force used against demonstrators impeded the Iraqi government's capacity to govern.

require the Agreement Officer and the Agreement Officer's Representative to work with each implementer to develop a closeout plan, which could be implemented over several months, depending on the specific situation for that activity. While there are a few contracts that the Mission could cancel quickly, this would require extensive negotiations with the partners to reach a cost settlement after the contracts are closed.[138]

As of the end of January, it remained unclear where and how USAID would operate and provide oversight for its more than $1 billion stabilization and humanitarian assistance portfolio in Iraq.

Iraq's Unrest Limits Humanitarian Operations and Access

According to USAID and DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), the mass protests and government response in Iraq hindered humanitarian operations by forcing implementers to work remotely or close offices in Baghdad and move staff to more secure locations such as Erbil in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.[139]

However, periodic internet outages imposed by the Iraqi government have limited the ability of USAID staff to work remotely. According to USAID and PRM implementers, the upheaval due to government protests has led to a change in leadership in the Iraqi Joint Coordination and Monitoring Center. In addition, in December 2019, the responsibility for issuing access letters moved from the Monitoring Center to Iraq's Directorate of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). USAID and PRM implementers, as well as the Directorate of NGOs itself, report that the Directorate of NGOs is under-resourced to handle the new responsibility, and the process for obtaining access letters is again in flux.[140]

According to the DoS and USAID, the lack of access letters has hindered the ability of USAID and PRM implementers to conduct humanitarian activities, move staff and cargo, and prevented implementers from conducting field site visits.[141] USAID said that with support from donors, the Humanitarian Coordinator and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are currently engaging with the Prime Minister's Office to seek an alternative mechanism for NGO access approvals.[142]

According to the United Nations, since November 2019, aid deliveries throughout Iraq have slowed considerably, due to the discontinuation of previously agreed-upon access authorization procedures, and the absence of viable alternative mechanisms. In January, OCHA warned that unless implementers are allowed to immediately resume full, unimpeded movement of their personnel and supplies, humanitarian operations in Iraq may come to a complete halt within a matter of weeks. According to the United Nations, hundreds of thousands of people across the most conflict-affected areas face going without food, medicine, and winterization materials during the coldest months of the year.[143]

Profile: UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization

The Iraq Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) was established in May 2015 in response to a request from the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with strategic direction provided by the Iraqi government and co-chaired by the Stabilization Task Force and the FFS Steering Committee, FFS is intended to assist the Iraqi government in rebuilding liberated areas destroyed by ISIS so that IDPs can return home.

Figure 3.

Images of Mosul Before and After Bombing of West Mosul (MAXAR NextView license)

June 30, 2014
ISIS leader al Baghdadi declares "caliphate"

December 31, 2019
As of End of Quarter

The U.S. Government, through USAID, is the largest contributor to the 28-donor, multilateral platform.[144] As of the end of the quarter, USAID reported that since 2015, it has provided $363.3 million for FFS—of this amount, $69.7 million is for stabilization activities for Mosul following the defeat of ISIS; and $58.9 million is for the Ninewa Plain and western Ninewa province.[145] Mosul is the administrative capital of Ninewa province and the largest Sunni city in Iraq.[146] The USAID Mission in Iraq described Mosul as a critical economic hub for northern Iraq and asserted that its stabilization is essential for supporting the stabilization of surrounding communities.[147] Following the territorial defeat of ISIS, through satellite imagery analysis and field surveys, the United Nations estimated that Mosul had approximately eight million tons of conflict debris.[148] For an aerial view of the destruction of west Mosul, see Figure 3.

According to USAID, UNDP carries out stabilization activities in Iraq under four categories:

- **Public Works and Light Infrastructure Rehabilitation.** Activities including light repairs of key infrastructure including health clinics, water infrastructure and treatment facilities, power grids and generators, schools, other government buildings, and access roads.

- **Livelihoods.** Activities aimed to support the local economy and revenue generating income for local households, particularly families returning to their homes.

- **Capacity Support.** Activities providing technical assistance to local governments to support planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring functions.

- **Community Reconciliation.** Activities that aid local leaders and community groups to promote social cohesion and dialogue.[149]

The FFS supports activities in the areas liberated from ISIS, including Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din provinces, to rehabilitate public infrastructure and restore essential

services damaged by conflict.[150] Under the FFS, UNDP will not build new structures but rather will rehabilitate or fully rehabilitate an existing structure which the Iraqi government had fully operated and maintained before.[151]

To prioritize needs, the FFS Steering Committee approves areas for implementation and then UNDP works with stakeholders to conduct damage assessments and prioritize projects for donor funding.[152] According to USAID, UNDP also uses an on-line "e-tendering" and procurement process, and holds regular trainings for local business partners on the registration and bidding process. According to USAID, as a result, 95 percent of rebuilding awards go to local businesses, and there is an intended secondary economic benefit for the community through hiring locally.[153] In addition, UNDP tries to de-couple projects in order to help smaller businesses to win awards, which, according to USAID, is particularly important for those businesses trying to reestablish themselves in the wake of ISIS.[154] For example, to rehabilitate a school, one business may be awarded a contract to provide furniture while another is awarded a contract to perform structural rehabilitation.[155]

According to UNDP, as of December 2019, 2,196 UNDP-funded construction projects had been undertaken resulting in the completion of 1,936 infrastructure projects. In addition, contractors rehabilitated 19,898 houses.[156]

According to UNDP, these reconstruction projects also created cash-generating job opportunities for 30,261 Iraqis, including 4,322 women and 13,099 youth; provided 3,481 small business grants; and provided 5,218 small grants to Iraqi households.[157] According to USAID, "returns intention surveys" conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have indicated that returns frequently follow FFS investment. FFS projects have followed ISIS' path of destruction according to USAID, and there is a strong correlation between FFS projects and returns. In addition, USAID reported the completion of over 1,200 third-party monitoring reports since 2016, which have also indicated that FFS projects influence IDPs decisions to return home.[158]

According to USAID Iraq, without UNDP's stabilization work, further development efforts would not be possible—for example, UNDP's efforts to repair electrical and water infrastructure along with rehabilitation of public buildings allows for other implementers and organizations to host community reconciliation and economic development programs in those locations.[159]

Data Suggest UNDP Stabilization Projects Promote Returns

As of December, more than 4.3 million IDPs have returned to their places of origin across eight provinces in Iraq, according to the IOM.[160] PRM funds IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, which tracks IDPs and returnees, and USAID funds IOM's Returns Index, which is a tool designed to measure the severity of living conditions in the locations to which Iraqis are returning and to reflect the displacement context in Iraq.[161] According to USAID, this data allows USAID and PRM implementers working in Iraq to better strategize for interventions and resource allocation in vulnerable areas. Residential destruction, employment access, and water sufficiency are the top three ranked priorities amongst those remaining displaced.[162]

UNDP Funding Delays Prompt Additional Oversight and Monitoring

While the UNDP FFS was established in summer 2015, a USAID OIG investigative referral in October 2017 that raised concerns about the risk of corruption and fraud within UNDP projects in Mosul led to the suspension of funding. Activities resumed after 6 months.[163]

In response to these concerns, USAID Iraq requested that UNDP increase its capacity to manage risk and monitor the implementation of FFS, which the U.S. Government sees as an important tool to advance the U.S. and Coalition objective of defeating ISIS. According to USAID, the review and subsequent delay allowed USAID to further develop the portfolio and to coordinate partnerships and conduct relationship building. These activities ultimately improved the award once implementation began and reorienting the assistance enhanced overall stability efforts.[164]

At the time of the referral, USAID traditionally maintained a hands-off approach to oversight of awards to organizations like UNDP.[165] According to USAID, following the pause in USAID support for the award, USAID representatives reported having substantial involvement and maintaining direction over related activities.[166] USAID's involvement includes approving every project prior to funding.[167] To enable USAID to closely monitor and oversee projects, FFS provides substantial reporting.

According to USAID, in 2019, USAID received more than 400 monitoring reports from third-party Iraqi field monitors contracted by USAID. According to USAID, field monitors are scheduled to visit projects four times: at the start of the project before implementation, in the middle, at the end of implementation, and a year after the project has concluded. In addition to USAID monitoring, UNDP applies several layers of monitoring of its own to project activities, including quality assessment and control; municipal stabilization advisors who liaise with communities on projects random sampling of beneficiaries after projects; videotaping of cash transfers; and international staff monitoring of projects.[168]

Despite its reported successes, USAID OIG remains concerned regarding the continued ability of the USAID Mission in Iraq to provide oversight and management of such large and complex awards with so few staff. Due to the size and complexity of the religious and ethnic minority portfolio coupled with the uncertainty surrounding USAID staffing in Iraq, USAID OIG will continue to profile awards each quarter.

PRM Provides Funds for IDP Returns

According to the DoS, PRM's Community Revitalization Project completed infrastructure rehabilitation projects across 15 provinces including Anbar, Basra, Baghdad, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din. According to PRM, the projects improve community access to essential services including electricity, water and irrigation, health services, and education. PRM reported that one electricity project in Tel Kaif, Ninewa province, restored electricity and improved the water supply in a village that was severely damaged during fighting against ISIS. In Diyala province, a project to rehabilitate the Jalawla central water station and to extend its water pipe network into the al Wahdah community benefitted nearly 55,000 returnees, according to PRM.[169]

In Sinjar, a project repaired the main water network, which was heavily damaged during the operations against ISIS, and had resulted in severe water shortages in the district center. According to PRM, the project was expected initially to provide access to clean drinking water for 445 households, most of whom were Yazidi returnees. During the quarter, the project facilitated "go-and-see" visits home for IDPs living in camps so they could determine if their areas of origin were safe enough to allow them to return. PRM reported that nearly 99 percent of these families have decided to return, with PRM assistance. At the end of the quarter, 6 families had already returned, and more than 100 families were awaiting return, pending additional funding approval.[170]

Thousands of Iraqis Remain in Syria

Al Hol Refugee Camp, Hasakah. (WFP photo)

According to the DoS, many Iraqi asylum seekers remain in Syria, including more than 30,000 in the Al Hol camp, most of whom are women and children. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad told the DoS OIG that the Iraqi government considers most of these families to be affiliated with ISIS. As of November 2019, the Iraqi government planned to repatriate this population to an IDP camp in Tal Afar, Ninewa province, despite the humanitarian community's concerns that such a camp would be a de facto detention facility and potentially contribute to residents' future radicalization.[171]

EVENTS IN SYRIA

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

On October 9, Turkey launched an incursion into northeastern Syria and the United States withdrew its forces away from Syria's border with Turkey. The incursion and U.S. troop withdrawal created tension between U.S. forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the United States' main Syrian partner in the fight against ISIS, and also resulted in a pause in counter-ISIS operations that lasted several weeks.[172]

The DIA reported that Turkish forces occupied an area approximately 20 miles deep between the Syrian towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al Ayn.[173] On October 17, Turkey agreed to pause its advance in exchange for the withdrawal of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the main fighting force of the SDF, from the newly occupied zone.[174] On October 22, Turkey and Russia announced an agreement under which Russia is responsible for ensuring that the YPG are not positioned along parts of the Turkish border outside Turkey's zone of control.[175]

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

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that U.S. forces resumed large-scale operations against ISIS in partnership with the SDF later in the quarter, after withdrawing from the area of the Turkish incursion, reducing the number of forces in Syria, and redistributing others at the far northeastern corner of Syria near Qamishli in Hasakah province and to the oil fields in Dayr az Zawr.[176] CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF resumed participation in U.S.-led counterterrorism raids against ISIS in mid-November.[177]

OUSD(P)/ISA said that the purpose of U.S. forces in northeastern Syria was to continue to fight ISIS and prevent it from accessing critical petroleum infrastructure "that could allow [ISIS] to gain strength."[178] OUSD(P)/ISA said that ISIS previously controlled oil fields in northeastern Syria and used the revenue to fund operations, and that the U.S. military "will not allow this to happen again."[179] OUSD(P)/ISA said that the SDF produces oil from these fields and collects and uses the revenue.[180]

In response to questions about how these developments affect the fight against ISIS and ISIS's capability to carry out attacks, the DoD OIG received differing assessments.

According to CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM, these developments did not result in any significant ISIS resurgence or increase in its capabilities in northeastern Syria.[181] CJTF-OIR reported that ISIS's ability to capitalize on the U.S. troop redeployment and the pause in fighting was limited by the influx of other forces and actors, including Turkey and its Syrian opposition fighters and the Syrian regime and its partner Russian forces, all of whom agree on the necessity of preventing an ISIS resurgence.[182]

In contrast, the DIA said that "judging from [ISIS's] online claims," ISIS probably increased its attacks in northeast Syria by at least 20 percent, rising from an average of 55 ISIS-claimed attacks to an average of 66 attacks per month following the incursion. The DIA stated, "This suggests ISIS continues to view the security environment in northeast Syria as more conducive to its operations.[183] However, CJTF-OIR stated that ISIS-claimed attacks are "most likely propaganda," and that CJTF-OIR's determination that the Turkish incursion did not result in any significant ISIS resurgence is based on "known facts."[184] However, CJTF-OIR cited the number of ISIS-claimed attacks as a data point it measures in Iraq.[185]

As in past quarters, the DIA again said that a reduction in counter-terrorism pressure would provide ISIS room to expand its ability to conduct transnational attacks targeting the West. It said ISIS would probably use any security vacuum created in northern Syria to devote additional resources and attention to conducting attacks against targets beyond Iraq and Syria.[186] More information on other actors fighting ISIS in northeastern Syria is contained on page 44 of this report.

During the Turkish incursion, the Kurdish-led SDF halted counterterrorism operations as Kurdish fighters focused on combatting the Turkish advance, according to the DIA.[187] Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated repeatedly that his government sought the removal of the Kurdish elements of the SDF, known as the Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG), from its border.[188] The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that Turkey considers the incursion largely a success.[189]

CJTF-OIR reported that the incursion and U.S. troop movements made it necessary to pull U.S. ISR assets from counterterrorism operations in order to address its priority task: the force protection of U.S. bases and convoys. Because of these developments, U.S. forces placed counter-ISIS operations on hold.[190]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the one exception to the pause in counter-ISIS operations was in the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV), where, even during the Turkish advance, Coalition forces continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations. CJTF-OIR said that dozens of U.S. military convoys conducted joint patrols with Syrian partner forces to maintain security for Coalition forces.[191] In addition, CJTF-OIR said that while joint counter-ISIS missions decreased immensely due to the Turkish incursion, the SDF continued to share information with CJTF-OIR about cross-border fire incidents from Turkey.[192]

SYRIA: SELECTED KEY EVENTS, 10/1/2019-12/31/2019

OCTOBER 9
Turkish Forces advance into northeastern Syria; U.S. forces withdraw from the border and deploy forces to guard oil fields to prevent ISIS access; U.S. temporarily pauses operations against ISIS

OCTOBER 17
U.S. brokers temporary pause in Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria

OCTOBER 26
ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi killed in Idlib during U.S. operation

OCT
NOV

OCTOBER 13
SDF reaches security arrangement with the Syrian regime and Russia regarding status of forces in areas of Syria along the Turkish border

OCTOBER 22
Russia and Turkey reach agreement on creating a security zone on either side of Turkey's zone of control; the goal is to remove YPG from areas of northeastern Syria near Turkey

CJTF-OIR reported however, that with the reduction of its footprint, its reach has decreased, along with the number of combined counter-ISIS missions. CJTF-OIR stated that while Coalition forces are operating in a smaller area, the SDF is still conducting operations outside that area. CJTF-OIR also said that the missions did decrease but are picking back up following the realignment of SDF forces after the Turkish incursion.[193]

According to CJTF-OIR and defense officials, the October withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria's northeastern border reduced the number of U.S. forces stationed in northeastern Syria from approximately 1,000 to 500. In addition, approximately another hundred U.S. forces remain in southeastern Syria at the At Tanf Garrison, a desert outpost near the Jordanian border, along a transit route from Iran and where the U.S. has been training a tribal force called the Mughawir al Thawra.[194]

The DIA reported that in mid-October, YPG leaders reached an understanding with Russia, which partners with the Syrian regime. The agreement allowed pro-regime forces to move into areas left by departing U.S. forces in order to contain the Turkish advance.[195] The DIA said that as of December, between 4,000 and 10,000 Syrian regime forces had deployed to northeastern Syria.[196]

However, the DIA said that the understanding between the SDF and Russia and regime entities was military in nature and did not address long-standing Kurdish political demands for autonomy over governance and security structures developed through the SDF and its political wing, the Syrian Democratic Council. The DIA said that the Syrian regime rejects these demands, noting that Syrian President Bashar al Assad has stated that the goal of the deployments was to restore state control over northeastern Syria, not to help the Kurds.[197]

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that the United States made clear to the SDF that the U.S. military's ability to partner with the SDF would be limited in areas where the SDF is working with the Syrian regime or Russia. OUSD(P)/ISA stated that the United States had also conveyed to the SDF that it was free to decide whether and how to engage with the Syrian regime.[198]

> **According to CJTF-OIR and defense officials, the October withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria's northeastern border reduced the number of U.S. forces stationed in northeastern Syria from approximately 1,000 to 500.**

MID-NOVEMBER
Following pause in operations against ISIS, SDF renews participation in U.S.-led counter-terrorism raids against ISIS

DECEMBER 2
SDF announces agreement with Russia to deploy Russian forces into additional areas of northeastern Syria; SDF forces redeploy to areas of Hasakah and Dayr az Zawr

DECEMBER 16
SDF commander accuses Turkey of ethnic cleansing in northeastern Syria and calls on President Trump to take action

DEC

NOVEMBER 1
Russia and Turkey begin joint patrols in northeastern Syria along the Syria-Turkey border

NOVEMBER 17
Days after U.S. forces withdraw, Russian troops move into Kobani airfield, a former U.S. logistical hub in northeastern Syria

DECEMBER 9
Russian forces move into Raqqah following an expanded agreement with the SDF

More information about control of the oil fields and revenue is contained on pages 41 and 42 of this report.

Coalition Members Reaffirm Commitment to Fighting ISIS

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that the events of October in Syria, including the Turkish incursion and U.S. troop withdrawal, raised concerns among Coalition partners about possible destabilization in Syria; the effect that the Turkish incursion might have on the counter-ISIS mission; reactions from Iranian and Russian forces in Syria; the security of the prisons holding ISIS fighters and camps holding ISIS-affiliated families; the actions of Turkish-supported opposition forces and possible war crimes; and the continued ability to provide humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands in Syria.[199] According to OUSD(P)/ISA and the DoS, both the DoD and the DoS remain in dialogue with Coalition members on the best way forward to ensure their continued support.[200]

STATUS OF ISIS IN SYRIA

USCENTCOM and DIA Provide Differing Assessments of ISIS's Insurgent Capabilities

CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that the change in the level of ISIS's resurgence in Syria since last quarter has been marginal.[201] Despite the disruption in counter-ISIS efforts after the Turkish incursion, CJTF-OIR said that ISIS capabilities remained basically the same and that attacks had decreased this quarter.[202]

USCENTCOM also assessed that ISIS capabilities were roughly unchanged both within and outside areas of U.S. or SDF control, and said it did not see "compelling evidence" to indicate that the redeployment of U.S. forces in northeastern Syria has resulted in any significant changes to ISIS' operational capabilities.[203] USCENTCOM further said that ISIS capabilities appeared unchanged in areas where U.S. forces had departed. As noted on page 35 of this report, CJTF-OIR assessed that ISIS's inability to exploit these developments is likely due to other forces with an interest in preventing an ISIS resurgence now operating in those areas.[204]

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that ISIS remained cohesive, with an intact command and control structure, clandestine networks in a number of Syrian cities, and an insurgent presence in much of rural Syria. ISIS maintained the pace, scope, and complexity of its operations in SDF-controlled areas, but did not significantly advance its insurgency, USCENTCOM said.[205]

In contrast, as previously stated in this report, the DIA reported that ISIS claimed attacks indicate an increase since the Turkish incursion, and its activities suggest that ISIS continues to view the security environment in northeast Syria as conducive to its operations. The DIA said that ISIS claimed about 20 percent more attacks each month following the incursion this quarter.[206]

According to open source analysis, underlying factors that enabled ISIS to rise in 2014— including local grievances, weak governance, and insurgent access to funds or resources— remain intact in Syria. For example, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a

Despite the disruption in counter-ISIS efforts after the Turkish incursion, CJTF-OIR said that ISIS capabilities remained basically the same and that attacks had decreased this quarter.

An M1 Abrams battle tank is driven out of a C-17 Globemaster III at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, Nov. 1, 2019. (U.S. Air Force photo)

Washington, D.C.-based think tank, reported that with the Syrian civil war nearing its ninth year, the country is carved into various controlling factions and there is weak governance, political instability, and corruption. It also found that while ISIS lost oil revenue in Syria, it has access to an estimated $50 million to $300 million to continue operations.[207]

USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS appears to have sufficient weapons, explosives, operatives, and funding to carry out its present level of operations, but assessed that it likely faces significant constraints in expanding beyond that for the next 12 to 18 months.[208] USCENTCOM did not clarify what constraints might go away or change in 12 to 18 months.

CJTF-OIR also told the DoD OIG that the ISIS kinetic threat against Coalition forces in Syria has remained low—primarily small arms fire and IEDs.[209] USCENTCOM said that although ISIS has generally struggled to attack U.S. or Coalition forces, ISIS has had more success against regime forces, Kurdish-supported civil governance elements, other violent extremist organizations, and civilians.[210]

However, the DIA said that while ISIS capabilities remain relatively low tech, the threat remains a concern. The DIA characterized the threat as moderate.[211]

ISIS Continues to Conduct Operations Against SDF and Regime Forces

USCENTCOM said that ISIS continued to carry out operations in Raqqah, Hasakah, and Dayr az Zawr Provinces as it did before the U.S. departure.[212] USCENTCOM reported that, in Homs and Dayr az Zawr provinces, ISIS attacked regime forces in the desert areas with varying degrees of success.[213] In addition, ISIS attacked "soft" targets, such as the murder of two Christian priests in Dayr az Zawr Province in November.[214]

USCENTCOM also said that ISIS continued to conduct small-scale attacks on SDF forces and their civilian affiliates in the MERV and Hasakah Province.[215] USCENTCOM said ISIS claimed numerous attacks in the MERV and demonstrated its capability to conduct ambushes, assassinations, and IED attacks similar in size, frequency, and complexity to those ISIS has carried out since it lost its last controlled territory in March 2019.[216]

USCENTCOM said that in Manbij, ISIS continues to maintain a small, clandestine presence, which enables it to carry out small-scale but potentially high-impact operations. However, USCENTCOM said that ISIS did not appear to have increased the number of operatives since the U.S. withdrew from Manbij.[217]

USCENTCOM said that ISIS did appear to have recovered some ability to coordinate complex operations in areas controlled by the Syrian regime. It said that ISIS demonstrated the ability to carry out near-simultaneous small-scale attacks against multiple targets, though these attacks have not resulted in lost terrain or significant regime casualties.[218] USCENTCOM said it is unaware of any ISIS attacks on Russian, Iranian, or Turkish forces in Syria during the past quarter.[219]

USCENTCOM said that after several months of relative quiet in southern Syria, ISIS fighters struck in Dara'a Province in early November, killing a regime intelligence official. ISIS claimed another attack, which killed two regime intelligence officials in the area in early December. USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that these two attacks suggest ISIS is becoming more active in southern Syria, possibly due to regime focus on Idlib Province and the area of Turkish operations in northern Syria, and a breakdown of reconciliation between the regime and the opposition in the south.[220]

More information about ISIS's capabilities is contained in the classified appendix.

ISIS Operations Unaffected by ISIS Leader's Death

USCENTCOM and the DIA both assessed that the October death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in a U.S. operation in Syria has not resulted in any immediate degradation to ISIS' capabilities.[221] USCENTCOM said ISIS likely implemented an existing succession plan upon Baghdadi's death, and continued to operate without interruption.[222]

Open source analysts reached similar assessments.[223] A Center for Strategic and International Studies analysis said that al Baghdadi had long been preparing his followers to continue operations after his death and he encouraged the delegation of authority to ISIS wilayats, or provinces, abroad.[224]

USCENTCOM told the DoD OIG that ISIS likely followed a similar succession plan to replace spokesman Abu Hasan al Muhajir—who was killed in a separate attack a day later—with current spokesman Abu Hamza al Qurayshi.[225]

The DIA reported that ISIS's global branches and networks pledged allegiance to al Baghdadi at the height of the "caliphate" in 2014-2015 and again during ISIS's re-pledging campaign after his death. As of November 29, 2019, ISIS fighters from Sinai, Khorasan, Bangladesh,

USCENTCOM said that in Manbij, ISIS continues to maintain a small, clandestine presence, which enables it to carry out small-scale but potentially high-impact operations.

Pakistan, Somalia, East Asia, Central Africa, West Africa, Tunisia, Yemen, and Azerbaijan have each pledged allegiance to the new caliph.[226]

Additional information about ISIS leadership changes is contained in the classified appendix.

ISIS Recruiting Limited by Sunni Resentment of ISIS Brutality

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS maintains the capability to recruit and radicalize within Syrian IDP camps.[227] Of the approximately 68,000 residents at the Al Hol camp, an unknown number of women retain allegiance to ISIS, according to the DoS.[228] CJTF-OIR and DoS reported that some ISIS-affiliated women in the camp are seeking to radicalize young children and have created *hisbah*, or enforcement, units to assert influence over other camp occupants.[229]

Both CJTF-OIR and USCENTCOM reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS seeks support from the Sunni population for its resurgence in Syria, but the effort would likely meet with only limited success. CJTF-OIR said that while most of the Sunni population remains opposed to ISIS rule, fear and distrust of the Syrian regime in northeastern Syria might provide recruitment possibilities for ISIS.[230]

In its assessment, USCENTCOM said that the Syrian Sunni population still resents ISIS's previous excesses, with public opinion polls consistently showing a low level of residual support for ISIS among Sunnis in both Syria and Iraq. USCENTCOM said that ISIS mostly relies on intimidation to gain backing, and while this often compels short-term cooperation, it does not engender long-term loyalty to ISIS from people who are not predisposed to follow its ideology.[231]

ISIS Generates Revenue Even After Loss of Territory

The Treasury reported to the DoD OIG that in its assessment, ISIS's revenues in Syria remain at historic lows due to its lack of territorial control over populations it can extort and lack of recurrent access to natural resources.

The Treasury reported to the DoD OIG that in its assessment, ISIS's revenues in Syria remain at historic lows due to its lack of territorial control over populations it can extort and lack of recurrent access to natural resources. However, the Treasury reported that ISIS continues to adapt its financial model to respond to its fundraising challenges.[232] The DoD Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counternarcotics and Global Threats previously reported to the DoD OIG that with the loss of its territorial control in March 2019, ISIS is able to operate an insurgency on significantly less revenue.[233]

The Treasury also reported that ISIS continues to generate revenue by extorting oil smuggling networks in northeastern Syria, though it assesses these revenues are small compared with the group's other main sources of income: kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and looting and the use of front companies. The Treasury said that ISIS continues to have access to financial reserves in the hundreds of millions of dollars even as it works to rebuild its significantly reduced fundraising networks. ISIS primarily uses cash couriers, called *hawaladars*, and money services businesses to move funds within and out of Syria and Iraq.[234]

Finally, the Treasury reported to the DoD OIG that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from areas of northeastern Syria diminished its insight into ISIS's fundraising and cash storage activities as well as its ability to assess trends in ISIS financing in Syria.[235]

SDF Denying ISIS Access to Oil Revenue

For years, oil and gas revenue served as a key source of ISIS's income, with the group running a sophisticated, large-scale oil business that produced an estimated 45,000 barrels per day at its peak. OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that in 2015, when ISIS still controlled substantial territory, the group's oil enterprise brought in an average of $1.5 million a day and an estimated $500 million that year. At one point, nearly three-fourths of ISIS's Syrian oil revenues came from Dayr az Zawr Province.[236]

In 2017, according to open source reporting, Coalition forces disabled or destroyed thousands of ISIS tanker trucks as well as its ability to refine oil, thereby reducing the revenue it received from oil to less than $4 million per month by late 2017.[237] After that, ISIS typically sold crude oil to independent operators who refined it and sold it locally or smuggled it to Turkey or to areas of Iraq and Syria outside of ISIS's control.[238]

With the territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria in March 2019, all of the oil fields once held by ISIS came under the control of the SDF, according to media reports. The SDF also controls oilfields in northeastern Syria that the Syrian regime abandoned when it withdrew its forces from the area at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011.[239] Prior to the civil war, oil produced in northeastern Syria accounted for about 75 percent of Syria's total oil production of 385,000 barrels per day.[240]

As previously mentioned in this report, the DoD has stated that U.S. forces deployed to the oil fields after the Turkish incursion in October to prevent ISIS from accessing critical petroleum infrastructure "that could allow [ISIS] to gain strength."[241] U.S. administration officials and the DoS have also stated that maintaining U.S. soldiers in northeastern Syria to protect the oil fields is intended as well to ensure that oil proceeds do not go to Iran or the Syrian regime.[242] Furthermore, the United States said that the SDF needs the oil revenue in order to fund its counter-ISIS operations and provide governance in SDF-controlled areas.[243]

The Syrian Democratic Council President told the press that it had sold oil to the Syrian regime through the Qatirji Group, a Syrian-based company sanctioned by the United States for facilitating oil and weapons sales between the Syrian regime and ISIS.[244] According to media reports, a U.S. government official stated in a speech that the SDF also uses some of the oil locally and sells it to Turkey and to Iraqi Kurds.[245]

ACTIONS AGAINST ISIS IN SYRIA

SDF Resumes Counter-ISIS Operations after Turkish Incursion

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that following its pause in operations against ISIS after the Turkish incursion, the SDF resumed joint counter-ISIS efforts in mid-November, disrupting ISIS activity, and ISIS's ability to operate at night was "significantly degraded."[246] CJTF-OIR said that this resumption of pressure on ISIS networks had led to "increasingly effective targeting."[247]

Specifically, CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that its forces conducted 13 partnered or U.S.-enabled counter-ISIS operations in Syria this quarter, resulting in the capture of 85 ISIS detainees.[248]

However, CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the Turkish incursion pulled the focus of the SDF's internal and provincial security forces, (InSF and PRISF) away from D-ISIS

operations and that the InSF and PRISF had suffered an unknown number of casualties. CJTF-OIR said it did not know the disposition and composition of InSF and PRISF forces involved in countering the Turkish military incursion so it could not identify their losses.[249]

In December, CJTF-OIR said that the InSF and PRISF had renewed their collection of human intelligence in support of the counter-ISIS mission, while also rebuilding their forces. CJTF-OIR said that InSF and PRISF conducted multiple operations over a 10-day period in December, reinvigorating the D-ISIS fight.[250]

In September 2019, CJTF-OIR told the DoD OIG that the SDF had been recruiting additional personnel—particularly new recruits for the Arab component of the Kurdish-led SDF, the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC)—to conduct security and information gathering operations among the local Arab population as part of its efforts to fight ISIS.[251] In prior quarters, CJTF-OIR had reported to the DoD OIG that the SAC was probably unable to conduct counter ISIS operations without support of the SDF's main component YPG.[252] Subsequent to the incursion, CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the SDF reorganized after the Turkish incursion, absorbing portions of the SAC and the InSF along with the YPG. It said the PRISF maintained the prison security role.[253]

The DIA reported that the SAC is a patchwork of Arab tribal militias, military councils, and former opposition groups recruited by the YPG initially as a "symbolic" move to help attract western support and training. It said the SAC never existed as a separate entity and the groups were subordinate to the YPG, but the level at which they took operational instruction from the YPG varied.[254] The DIA reported that this year, the YPG took additional steps to dissolve what remains of the independent command and control of its allied Arab militias, but several of the groups remain intact.[255]

The DIA further stated that SAC forces largely withheld support to the YPG-led defensive operations against advancing Turkish forces, though some non-Kurdish military council elements did participate. CJTF-OIR said that in particular, the SDF-aligned Syria Military Council helped defend Syriac Christian areas of northern Raqqah province from the Turkish incursion.[256]

U.S. Bradley Fighting Vehicles Withdraw from Syrian Oil Fields

In October, as the DoD moved forces out of areas of northeastern Syria, it deployed new units into eastern Syria to assist with force protection and prevent ISIS from accessing Syrian oil fields. OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that U.S. and Coalition forces are not involved in the production and distribution of oil and revenue.[257] It stated that those forces maintain the inherent right to self-defense against any threat, included while securing the oil fields.[258]

The U.S. units that deployed to secure the oil fields in northeastern Syria included mechanized M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles from the National Guard's 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team.[259] OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG on December 17, 2019, that in light of the dynamic situation in Syria, USCENTCOM determined that the deployment of some mechanized units was a prudent force protection measure for U.S. and partner forces in northeastern Syria. OUSD(P)/ISA said that these armored fighting vehicles enhance the protection of U.S. forces while they work with the SDF to deny ISIS access to the oil fields.[260]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the Turkish incursion pulled the focus of the SDF's internal and provincial security forces, (InSF and PRISF) away from D-ISIS operations and that the InSF and PRISF had suffered an unknown number of casualties.

U.S. Soldiers provide M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle capabilities for CJTF-OIR in eastern Syria. (U.S. Army Reserve photo)

USCENTCOM reported to DoD OIG on December 23 that there are inherent logistical challenges associated with operating mechanized vehicles in austere environments such as Syria. Restricted supply lines, finite resources, and reduced lines of communication present challenges that affect CJTF-OIR's ability to operate in this area of operations. USCENTCOM added that its partnership working by, with, and through the SDF helps bridge these gaps.[261]

During the preparation of this report, the DoD OIG was seeking additional information from USCENTCOM about how the SDF was bridging the logistical gaps of operating mechanized units in eastern Syria. Then, on January 27, 2020, a U.S. Army spokesperson was quoted in the media saying that Bradley Fighting Vehicles and all other elements of the 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team had withdrawn from Syria by the end of November, 2019 and returned to their post in Kuwait.[262]

This raised a number of questions, including: why the Bradleys were withdrawn from Syria so quickly; what conditions on the ground changed or were met that made them no longer necessary; what they were used for while in Syria; what mechanized units and equipment remain in Syria; and in particular, what the cost was of deploying them in October and then removing them in November.

Due to the timing of this development, the DoD OIG was unable to pose these questions to the DoD prior to the publication of this report. The DoD OIG will seek answers to these questions and report on the withdrawal of the Bradley Fighting Vehicles in the next quarterly report on OIR.

Other Actors Conduct Limited Counter-ISIS Operations

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that other groups now operating in northeastern Syria after the Turkish incursion, including Turkey and its affiliates, Syrian regime, and Russian forces, conducted operations against ISIS to varying degrees.[263]

The DIA said that Turkey considers fighting ISIS a high priority and conducts counter-ISIS operations in areas of Syria under its control. The DIA said that as of mid-November, Turkey had conducted two high-profile operations against ISIS, resulting in the capture of bomb-maker Ebu Cihad al Din al Nasir Ubeyde and the sister and brother-in-law of now deceased

ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.[264] The Turkish-supported opposition, also known as the Syrian National Army, routinely arrests ISIS members operating in its territory using its police elements, but likely places a higher priority on force protection, the DIA reported.[265] However, CJTF-OIR questioned the impact that Turkey and its supported opposition forces are having on the counter-ISIS fight.[266]

The DIA reported that Syrian regime forces will fight ISIS, but the regime's priority is re-establishing territorial control, particularly in western Idlib province.[267] USCENTCOM reported that while regime forces will conduct short and limited operations against ISIS in response to ISIS attacks, the regime forces will then return to their previous positions, allowing ISIS to return.[268]

Syria's partners, Russia and Iran, are the regime's primary counter-ISIS partners, according to the DIA. It said that Russia ranks fighting ISIS second in priority to restoring the Syrian regime's control over Syrian territory, and Russia has provided air support and advisory assistance to Syrian units fighting ISIS in eastern Syria. According to the DIA, Iran has more pressing goals in Syria but also views ISIS as a regional and national security threat and has contributed manpower, including Iranian advisers and Shia militias, as well as financial support, to Syria's counter-ISIS operations.[269]

The DIA reported that Syrian opposition groups also combat ISIS. The al Qaeda-affiliated Hay'at Tahir al Sham (HTS) ranks countering ISIS among its top priorities because ISIS elements in Idlib Province routinely attack HTS positions and leaders. In the last year, HTS publicly took credit for targeting ISIS leaders in the province.[270]

ISIS Detainees Pose Ongoing Challenge with Increasing Risk

The SDF has been holding approximately 2,000 foreign ISIS fighters among approximately 10,000 ISIS detainees in facilities across northeastern Syria since the fall of the ISIS territorial "caliphate" in March 2019. OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that after the Turkish incursion, it has not seen indications of significant changes in these numbers or in the disposition of these detention facilities.[271]

However, OUSD(P)/ISA said that it remains concerned about the long-term security of these facilities.[272] As it did last quarter, OUSD(P)/ISA stated that the SDF continues to bear the burden of maintaining and securing detention facilities and IDP camps that pose significant humanitarian and security challenges in northeastern Syria. It said that the longer ISIS prisoners are held in SDF prisons, the greater the potential for them to organize breakouts.[273]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that following the death of al Baghdadi, the new ISIS spokesman echoed al Baghdadi's public statement in September calling on supporters to breakout imprisoned ISIS members.[274]

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that the United States continues to call on countries to repatriate their citizens captured fighting for ISIS, but the repatriations varied depending on the country of origin.[275] However, many countries have been reluctant to repatriate their citizens suspected of fighting for ISIS, due to concerns about their inability to prosecute or police them, according to open source reports.[276]

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In a report issued in November, the International Crisis Group reported that Russia, Malaysia, Uzbekistan and Kosovo made concerted efforts to begin repatriations of their nationals being held in SDF detention, although hundreds remain, while North African countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, as well as Western governments—particularly EU member states, Canada, and Australia—have lagged in this effort. As of October 2019, Western governments had brought home only roughly 180 (110 of these by Kosovo), the International Crisis Group reported.[277]

The Department of Justice (DoJ) reported to the DoD OIG that it, along with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, conducts investigations and prosecutes foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists when appropriate, and will continue with those efforts "regardless of any U.S. withdrawal from Syria."[278]

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that repatriations of third country nationals slowed during the Turkish incursion due to the decreased capacity of the SDF and the U.S. military to support repatriations.[279] OUSD(P)/ISA reported that the SDF halted repatriations during the incursion.[280]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that likely fewer than 200 ISIS prisoners had escaped from SDF prisons since the incursion.[281] This quarter, CJTF-OIR said that there have been limited reports of ISIS detainees escaping from SDF facilities and these escapes had not affected the OIR mission.[282] CJTF-OIR said that the SDF has taken action to recapture detainees, but it did not provide details of those actions or the results for this report.[283]

The International Crisis Group stated in its report that the events of October 2019 demonstrated the precariousness of security in the region where the detainees are housed. It warned that new Turkish attacks could draw more SDF fighters away from guarding the prisons and camps, while the uncertainty of control in the region also raised the specter that the Syrian regime, which is "widely and credibly alleged to have committed atrocities against prisoners in its custody," might assert authority over detainees currently held under SDF control.[284]

The DIA told the DoD OIG that the SDF continues to maintain prisons that hold high value ISIS detainees. The DIA said that should the SDF lose additional territory, forcing the SDF to transfer its detainees, its preference would be handing them to U.S. forces, and, as a last resort, to pro-regime forces. The DIA said that SDF leaders believe that Turkish forces would release the detainees and use them as proxies to attack the SDF. The DIA said it had not observed the SDF transfer custody of ISIS detainees to the Syrian regime.[285]

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that as of late November, Turkey maintained custody of 265 ISIS members whom Ankara claims were released by the SDF during the incursion.[286] The DIA said that as of early December, Turkey deported or planned to deport approximately 35 foreign terrorists, a dozen of whom went to Morocco, 11 to France, 9 to Germany, 2 to the Netherlands, and 1 to Ireland.[287]

ISIS Active in IDP Camps as SDF Focuses on Turkey

The DIA reported that SDF leaders told local news organizations that the SDF temporarily reduced manning and security personnel at IDP camps in northeastern Syria following the Turkish incursion to focus on defending against the Turkish advance. The DIA noted that

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that likely fewer than 200 ISIS prisoners had escaped from SDF prisons since the incursion.

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that in the aftermath of the incursion, the Asayish, a Kurdish internal security force, continues to provide security at IDP camps in northeastern Syria.

these camps hold many ISIS-affiliated families and cited news reports that said that ISIS members within the camps conducted attacks against the diminished security forces and guard posts.[288] However, USAID reported that implementers have not reported any incidents of residents attacking guard posts at camps.[289]

The DIA said that it is unable to determine the number of ISIS members that reside in SDF-controlled IDP camps, defining an ISIS member as an individual who professes allegiance and provides or enables military, paramilitary, operational, administrative, ideological, or logistic support to the group.[290]

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that in the aftermath of the incursion, the Asayish, a Kurdish internal security force, continues to provide security at IDP camps in northeastern Syria.[291] The DIA said that ISIS still maintains the ability to move some people and resources in and out of IDP camps, relying on smugglers who charge thousands of dollars to facilitate the movement. Additionally, residents of the camps have received financial support from external ISIS supporters outside of Syria, the DIA stated.[292]

USAID reported that during the Turkish incursion in October, all 13,000 residents of the Ayn Issa camp near the Turkey border fled as hostilities drew near.[293] The DIA, citing media reports, said that more than 800 people were being held in the foreign nationals section of the camp.[294] Citing open source reporting, the DIA further said that the SDF claims it was able to recapture most of the detainees who escaped Ayn Issa.[295] Additionally, it said that according to a senior camp official, ISIS sleeper cells launched attacks inside the camp in the first several days after the incursion began.[296] However, USAID reported to USAID OIG that it had not seen similar reporting.[297]

GUARDS STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN SECURITY AT AL HOL IDP CAMP

The DIA reported that at the Al Hol camp in Hasakah province, where tens of thousands of displaced persons—including many ISIS family members—arrived after the defeat of the ISIS caliphate in March 2019, bringing the total population to about 70,000. Kurdish forces maintained approximately 400 guards but have struggled to provide adequate security for the camp. According to the DIA, security personnel fear patrolling some areas of the camp due to previous attacks against guards and the limited number of security personnel.[298]

The DoS told the DoS OIG that the SDF reported a reduction in violence in Al Hol during the incursion. The DoS said these elements may have been awaiting potential liberation, which never came to fruition.[299]

The DIA reported at the end of the quarter that more than 10,000 residents of the Al Hol camp were held by the SDF in a separate annex, where they are kept away from other members of the camp on suspicion of affiliation with ISIS.[300] The International Crisis Group report said that of 13,500 foreign women and children held in northeastern Syria IDP camps, 11,000 are in the Al Hol annex.[301] According to the United Nations, 94 percent of the current 66,100 residents in Al Hol are women and children.[302]

The DoS reported that while a majority of the population at Al Hol are young children, some adult women may pose a higher risk of continued allegiance to ISIS given they traveled from other countries to join the ISIS "caliphate" before it was defeated in March

2019. The DoS added that some of the women are survivors who traveled involuntarily and were victims of coercion or abuse.[303]

The DIA and the International Crisis Group report described women in the foreign annex as detainees, held in separate areas of Al Hol and other camps along with their children.[304] USAID, the DoS, and the OUSD(P)/ISA stated that women and their children in the foreign annex of Al Hol are not detained, and should not be referred to as "detainees."[305] However, open source reporting indicates that the residents of the annex are under guard.[306] USAID reported last quarter that residents of the annex must be escorted when going to the market in the camp.[307]

The DIA said it lacks information to determine what percentage of this population provides support to ISIS and is responsible for various ISIS-related activity in the camp, including riots, smuggling, IED construction, attacks against camp guards, and assaults on other camp residents.[308] Citing media reporting, the DIA said that ISIS members residing in the camp have stepped up efforts at Al Hol to intimidate and enforce ISIS ideology through self-appointed morality police and Islamic Sharia law courts, and by imposing religious classes on women.[309]

USAID reported to the USAID OIG that there are more than 30,000 Iraqis in the Al Hol camp, most of whom are women and children. The Iraqi government considers some of these families as affiliated with ISIS. USAID said that the humanitarian community continues to engage the Iraqi government to repatriate this population, but remains concerned about plans by the Iraqi government to confine them in a camp in Tal Afar, where they would face limited freedom of movement and potentially experience stigma from local populations due to perceived association with ISIS.[310]

The DIA said that it lacks detailed information on other camps to assess the ISIS membership within those populations.[311]

ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN SYRIA

Turkey Takes Northern Syria Territory in Incursion

U.S. European Command reported to the DoD OIG that the timing of the Turkish incursion in Syria in October 2019 was likely due to a building frustration on the part of the Turkish government, which had already been dissatisfied with the pace of removing YPG forces from Manbij under an agreement with U.S. forces called the Manbij Roadmap. Furthermore, Turkey was frustrated with the pace of implementation of a joint Turkish-U.S. security mechanism in which Turkey sought the removal of YPG forces in the region where incursion took place.[312] The DoS told the DoS OIG that Turkey's frustration stemmed from the U.S. support for the SDF.[313]

The DIA said that as part of the agreement Turkey and Russia reached on October 22, joint Russia-Turkey patrols to a depth of 10 kilometers (7 miles) from the border began on November 1, 2019. As of mid-December, Turkish forces and Russian military police had conducted over a dozen combined patrols, the DIA said.[314]

USAID reported to the USAID OIG that there are more than 30,000 Iraqis in the Al Hol camp, most of whom are women and children.

However, the DIA said that Turkey has been vocal about its dissatisfaction with the lack of YPG withdrawal from border areas. The DIA said there have been several roadside bomb attacks within the Turkish zone of control as well as sporadic clashes with YPG forces. The DIA assessed that the Turkish military will likely remain engaged in security and stabilization efforts in the zone for "the foreseeable future."[315]

Turkish-supported Opposition Provides Substantial Support to Turkish Military

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that the Turkish-supported Syria opposition forces provide substantial manpower to Turkey's military efforts in northern Syria.[316] These forces serve as the military wing of the Turkish-appointed and supported opposition government in the border areas Turkey now controls, the DIA reported.[317]

The DIA reported that the Turkish-supported opposition likely consists of between 22,000 and 50,000 fighters from more than 30 different groups, which range from hardline Islamist to more moderate nationalist groups. Turkey likely only mobilized about 6,000 of these forces for the incursion into northeastern Syria because it is also addressing other security objectives in the northwestern Syria provinces of Idlib and Halab.[318]

Human rights groups, along with U.S. Government contacts and humanitarian providers, reported this quarter that these opposition groups committed abuses against civilians and aid workers in areas Turkey now controls.[319]

More information on the actions of the Turkish-supported opposition in northeastern Syria, including allegations of war crimes, is contained on page 53 of this report.

Coalition Forces Use Pre-Existing Channels to De-conflict with other Forces

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that with multiple state and non-state actors operating in close proximity while attempting to achieve their individual missions, the environment in northeastern Syria is complex, and characterized by friction, uncertainty, and the inherent danger associated with counter-ISIS operations. CJTF-OIR said this presents unique force protection challenges that must be assessed and managed on a daily basis by all levels of command.[320]

CJTF-OIR also reported to the DoD OIG that it actively negotiates de-confliction measures with Turkey and Russia to ensure the Coalition and SDF can continue to conduct counter-ISIS operations in Syria.[321]

OUSD(P)/ISA told the DoD OIG that the Coalition continues to use pre-existing channels to de-conflict military operations with other forces in the area, particularly Russian and Turkish forces. It said that the Office of Defense Cooperation Turkey and a senior U.S. defense official or attaché coordinates daily with Turkey regarding its incursion into northeast Syria. OUSD(P)/ISA said that de-confliction operations with Russia are conducted daily through the CJTF-OIR de-confliction cell. Both channels help to ensure that there are no miscalculations or escalation in the region, according to OUSD(P)/ISA.[322]

CJTF-OIR reported that although established de-confliction procedures exist, both Russia and the United States have limited options for enforcement if a party violates protocols, which could lead to increased risk to force protection and the potential for unintended escalation or miscalculation.[323]

More information on deconfliction efforts is contained in the classified appendix to this report.

SDF Reaches Military Agreements with Syrian Regime, Russia

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that under agreements with the SDF, at least 300 Russian military police are deployed in northeastern Syria, occupying the towns of Kobani, Raqqah, Tal Tamr, Amuda and Ayn Issa – areas previously occupied by U.S. forces.[324]

The Russian military police are also conducting joint patrols with Turkish military in areas east of Qamishli, east of Kobani and north of Tal Tamr, along the M4 highway, the DIA reported. In addition, Russia, working with the Syrian regime, deployed forces to the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates River in Raqqah province and reinforced its position in Qamishli with helicopters, personnel, and vehicles.[325]

The DIA said that the Syrian regime has deployed forces along the M4 Highway, stretching from Manbij to Tal Tamr to prevent a further Turkish incursion. The DIA said forces from Syria's 17th Infantry Division and the V Corps deployed following an October 13, 2019 agreement between the SDF and regime forces.[326] The DIA also said that numerous skirmishes have occurred on the new front line between regime and Turkish forces.[327]

CJTF-OIR reported to the DoD OIG that the presence of Russian and pro-regime forces in northeastern Syria cannot be "statistically verified" as having a direct impact on the counter-ISIS mission. CJTF-OIR said that according to open source intelligence reporting, the SDF and Russian military are in talks to transition into a "phase two" border security agreement. This agreement would have Syrian regime border guard units deployed along the Turkish border as far east as the Iraq border, and occupying former CJTF-OIR positions. The result of this agreement will allow the SDF to withdraw forces from the border and reallocate resources to the Counter-ISIS mission.[328]

CAPACITY BUILDING IN SYRIA

OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that due to the Turkish incursion, CJTF-OIR temporarily suspended training in October after the SDF shifted its focus to react to this new threat. Once the situation in northeast Syria began to stabilize in late November, CJTF-OIR resumed training of partner forces to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS.[329]

More information about training of the SDF or any other Coalition-aligned Syrian Forces conducted this quarter can be found in the classified appendix.

Asked what actions have been taken to prevent the YPG from using U.S.-provided weapons against Turkey, OUSD(P)/ISA reported to the DoD OIG that training and equipping for the SDF is provided in direct support of counter-ISIS operations in Syria, and in accordance with the guidance laid out in Federal law to train and equip in Syria. OUSD(P)/ISA added

Once the situation in northeast Syria began to stabilize in late November, CJTF-OIR resumed training of partner forces to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS.

that all vetted groups are required to make credible commitments to respect the laws of armed conflict, the rule of law, and human rights when conducting operations with U.S. assistance.[330]

Local Kurdish and Turkish press reported in late November that Turkish President Erdogan claimed that his troops found and seized truckloads of U.S.-supplied SDF weapons after chasing the SDF from their positions. The United States had supplied the SDF with light weapons and training since 2014.[331]

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

U.S. Policy Goals Unchanged in the Immediate Aftermath of the Incursion

The DoS said U.S. policy priorities in Syria were unchanged this quarter, despite the Turkish incursion into Syria, and remain the enduring defeat of ISIS and al Qaeda; support for an inclusive political solution that aligns with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254; and the removal of all Iranian-led forces and proxies in Syria.[332] OUSD(P)/ISA said that the United States would continue to evaluate its posture and adjust as necessary.[333]

Turkey and D-ISIS Coalition Agree on Common Goals in Northeast Syria

The DoS stated that while the Turkish incursion did not change the overall U.S. policy for Syria, the U.S. response to the incursion included negotiating agreements to hold Turkey to the "terms and spirit" of the October 17 Turkish-U.S. Government Joint Statement, to improving bilateral cooperation on counterterrorism, and supporting resolution of the broader Syrian conflict. Meetings with Turkish officials and the November 14 Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ministerial defined "mutual commitments central to this process," the DoS reported. According to the DoS, as a result of these meetings, Turkey agreed to continue efforts to defeat ISIS; to ensure Turkish forces "abide by the laws of armed conflict…and to credibly and transparently" investigate any reports of human rights abuses. Turkey also agreed to prevent forced demographic change, to ensure that persons displaced by the incursion can return home safely, and conduct refugee returns under the oversight of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.[334]

UNSCR 2254 Sees Minor Gains, But No Major Progress

By December 2019, progress on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 was limited, according to the DoS.[335] After almost two years of stalled negotiations, the UN-facilitated Syria Constitutional Committee convened two rounds of meetings with UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, on the U.N.-led political process, primarily to agree on representation for the proposed constitutional committee. The DoS said that progress stalled when the first set of meetings on November 25 resulted in "plenty of minor setbacks and no major breakthroughs." Pedersen adjourned the second session on November 29, unable to convene the group. The DoS said the regime delegation "reportedly had strict instructions not to discuss" the constitution during this session, and the opposition "refused

U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo along with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale and Special Representative for Syria Engagement Ambassador James Jeffrey, meet with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu in Ankara, Turkey. (DoS photo)

to meet except to discuss the constitution." At the end of quarter, a follow-on meeting date had not been set, according to the DoS.[336]

Countries Reluctant to Repatriate Foreign Fighters

This quarter, the DoS reported that the Syrian regime sought to reintegrate former opposition fighters into regime ranks in areas retaken by regime forces, but the methods and conditions of reconciliation efforts varied by location and situation. However, the DoS expressed concern "over the safety and security of these individuals," but said it lacked insight into these reconciliation efforts.[337]

The DoS said that repatriation for foreign terrorist fighters varied depending on the fighters' country of origin, and that the plan to deal with detained foreign fighters in northeast Syria was unchanged—"countries must take responsibility for their own citizens...and not look to others to solve the problem."[338]

The DoS reported that the United States wants all "detainees [to] be held accountable for their crimes" and generally does not currently support their reintegration into local communities.[339] In December, the U.S. Embassy in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, convened speakers from the United States and the United Kingdom to help representatives from the government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Muslim community develop a "coordinated, data-driven plan for returnees from Syria and Iraq." According to the DoS, there are about 10,000 detainees, of which 2,000 are FTF, 8,000 are Iraqi and Syrians.[340]

More information on reconciliation, reintegration and repatriation efforts is contained in the classified appendix.

Turkish Incursion Reduces Coalition Social Media in Syria

In October, a representative of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS reported that the Coalition's social media channels reduced their output due to Turkish military action in northeastern Syria. During October, Global Coalition officials monitored events in

northeastern Syria; however, planned events such as media tours were postponed. In November, the Coalition Communications Cell began a campaign to highlight counter-finance efforts, including efforts to stop cultural goods trafficking and the exploitation of the financial system. According to the DoS, D-ISIS Coalition social media channels also issued and amplified messaging about the Turkish and Syrian regime military action in northeast Syria and the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.[341]

The DoS reported that the Global Engagement Center's direct messaging platforms released 66 messages in October 2019 reaching 1.2 million readers; viewers watched their videos for more than 2,300 hours. The total engagement rate was 14.3.[342]

Turkish-supported Opposition Groups Accused of Abusing IDPs in Northeast Syria

This quarter, human rights groups released reports of abuses against civilians and aid workers by Turkish-supported opposition (TSO) forces in northeast Syria. In mid-October, Amnesty International reported that Turkish military forces and TSO groups violated laws of conflict by conducting "summary killings and unlawful attacks" during the Turkish incursion.[343]

In September 2019, Turkish President Erdogan stated that Turkey intended to resettle up to 3 million Syrian refugees from Turkey into a future Turkish-controlled safe zone in northeast Syria.[344] As of January 2020, the Turkish armed forces and TSO forces had seized control of an area of terrain bounded by the Turkish border, Tel Abyad, the M4 Highway, and Ras al Ayn, which the Turkish government has referred to a "safe zone" for Syrian refugee returns.[345]

In late November, Human Rights Watch reported that the Syrian National Army—the umbrella group for TSOs deployed by Turkey during its incursion—had "executed civilians and failed to account for aid workers" who went missing while working in the incursion area.

In late November, Human Rights Watch reported that the Syrian National Army—the umbrella group for TSO forces deployed by Turkey during its incursion—had "executed civilians and failed to account for aid workers" who went missing while working in the incursion area. The report stated TSO forces blocked Kurdish families displaced by the Turkish incursion from returning to their homes and "looted and unlawfully appropriated" their property.[346]

Multiple U.S. Government sources throughout northeast Syria, including individuals displaced by the incursion, provided first- and second-hand accounts of TSO forces preventing Kurdish populations from returning to their homes in the incursion zone. NGO reporting also indicated that Syrian Kurdish authorities had prevented some Syrian Kurds from crossing into Iraq out of fear of Turkish attempts to reengineer northeast Syria demographics, thereby reducing the traditional Kurdish footprint in favor of a Sunni majority, though more than 16,000 Syrians fleeing the Turkish incursion successfully crossed into the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.[347]

According to the DoS, after Turkey and the TSO groups established control over the "safe zone" in northeast Syria in October 2019, some TSO groups continued to target minorities, particularly the Kurdish community.[348] NGO and U.S. Government sources report that some TSO forces have seized, looted, and resettled their families in private properties belonging to local Kurdish and Christian residents who fled the Turkish invasion. Photos published in Syrian media showed private properties marked as "reserved" for specific TSO groups and their fighters.[349]

U.S. Government contacts in opposition-held Syria reported that TSO fighters were permitted to move their families from elsewhere in Syria into empty homes in the incursion zone, regardless of their origin within Syria. One U.S. Government contact who tried to return to her home in the incursion zone reported Syrians from elsewhere in the country were now inhabiting TSO-seized properties. In October, one U.S. Government-supported NGO reported "an epidemic of organized crime, including systematic theft of houses" in the TSO-controlled incursion zone.[350] Videos published by TSO forces on social media and reports from U.S. Government contacts indicated some of the Sunni Islamist TSO groups have used religious rhetoric "to justify attacks on 'infidel' Kurds and other religious and ethnic minorities" and to justify looting.[351]

The DoS stated that TSO misconduct in areas occupied by Turkey in northern Syria presents "significant challenges" to the safe and voluntary return of refugees. According to the United Nations, as of December 18, 70,590 people remain displaced because of the incursion while an estimated 129,041 individuals have returned home. Of the 129,041 returnees, an estimated 50,000 (39 percent) have returned to areas occupied by Turkey. U.S. Government contacts have reported consistently that while some Arab IDPs have returned to the Turkish-controlled zone, Kurdish IDPs have not. One international organization reported in October that Kurdish IDPs are likely to remain displaced.[352]

STABILIZATION AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Violence Targets Civilians and Hospitals in Idlib

This quarter, humanitarian aid providers reported that in northwest Syria, attacks on civilian sites and infrastructure had increased, inflicting a particularly heavy toll on health activities. The United Nations recorded at least 83 attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel in 2019; of these, 50 attacks took place in Idlib province. Cumulatively, the attacks have killed at least 54 people, injured more than 100 people, and affected at least 59 health care facilities, 5 of which were attacked twice.[353]

Relief organizations reported increased airstrikes in Idlib province since mid-October, including strikes on a surgical hospital in Kafr Nobol town, a maternal and pediatric hospital in Ariha sub-district, a primary health care center, and an ambulance center in Jisr al Shughur. The Kafr Nobol hospital's administrators shared the facility's coordinates with OCHA and the United Nations verified the facility's humanitarian status. The UN's deconfliction mechanism shared the exact location of the facility and its status with parties to the conflict. Nevertheless, it was attacked multiple times after its coordinates were shared.[354]

According to USAID, the attacks targeted civilian and humanitarian infrastructure and resulted in multiple deaths and injuries in October and November. The DoS reported that locations such as the deconflicted site of Kafr Nobol surgical hospital were part of sequenced attacks on multiple health care facilities in the same geographical locations, indicating the targeting of not only those individual facilities, but of local health networks and referral systems.[355]

The United Nations recorded at least 83 attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel in 2019; of these, 50 attacks took place in Idlib province.

SYRIA: QUARTERLY FOCUS ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

HASAKAH AND RAQQAH

USAID implementer the UN World Food Program (WFP) reached more than 308,200 people, including displaced individuals and host community members, with food assistance between October 9 and 28. USAID implementers provided bread, ready-to-eat meals and monthly food rations, medical services, water trucking, multipurpose cash transfers, shelter materials, and other relief items to IDPs, including those in collective centers in Hasakah and Raqqah cities.

AL HOL

Asayish was providing perimeter security around all the camps and continues to do so. The exodus of international and local staff because of the October incursion led to a substantial but temporary decrease in services in Al Hol camp, with the exception of the winterization items provided by PRM's implementers. In particular, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) closed down the only hospital in the annex, leaving a major gap in health care. While a number of humanitarian implementers have returned to Al Hol, the MSF hospital remains closed.
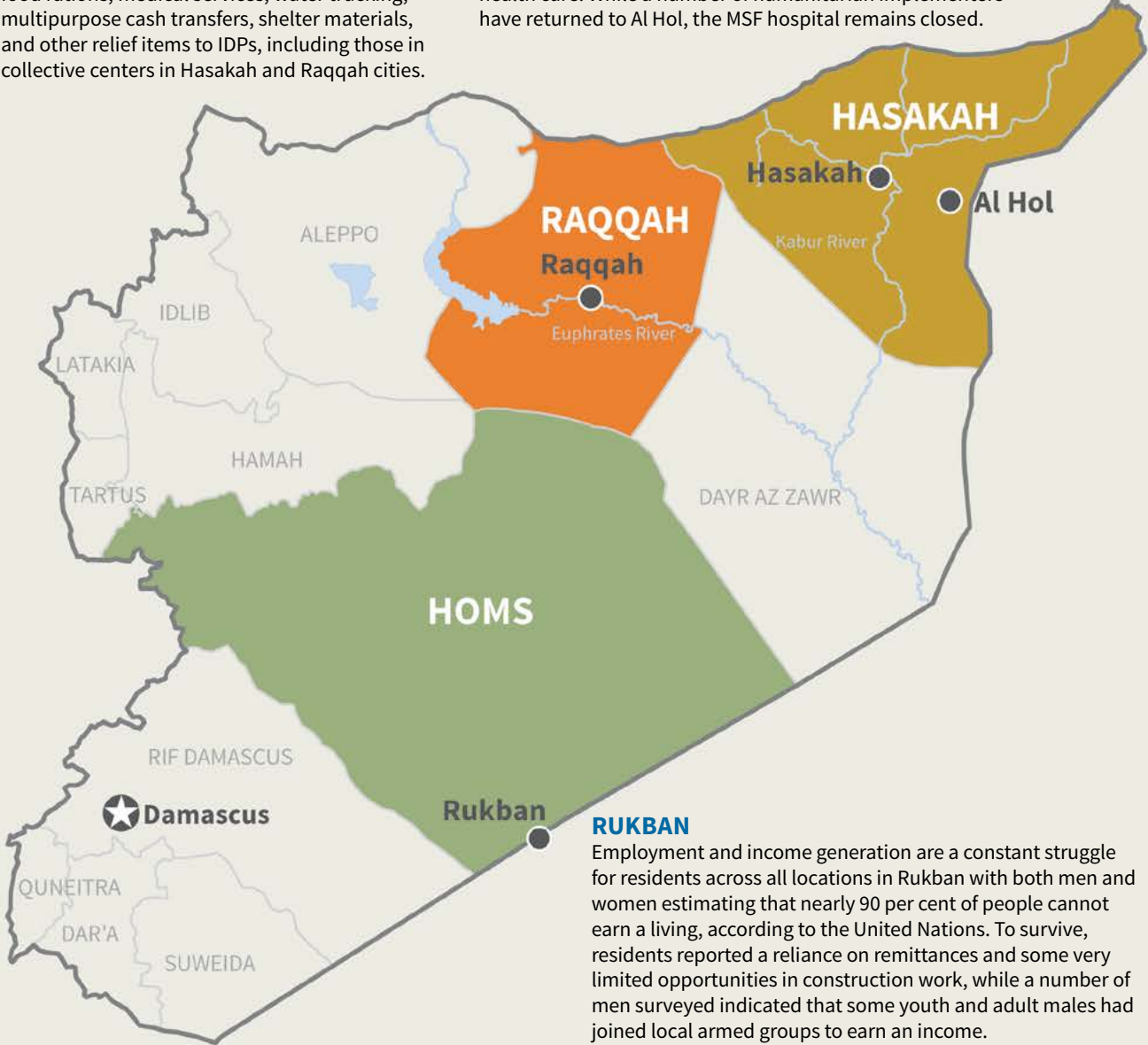
RUKBAN

Employment and income generation are a constant struggle for residents across all locations in Rukban with both men and women estimating that nearly 90 per cent of people cannot earn a living, according to the United Nations. To survive, residents reported a reliance on remittances and some very limited opportunities in construction work, while a number of men surveyed indicated that some youth and adult males had joined local armed groups to earn an income.

HOMS

The United Nations postponed another movement of Rukban residents to shelters in Homs, which had been tentatively set for mid-January. The United Nations visited temporary shelters in Homs for residents who have recently returned from Rukban camp and will continue to review conditions of returnees from Rukban in preparation for the next humanitarian convoy.

According to the DoS, USAID implementers reported that on November 20, the Qah IDP camp and a USAID-supported maternity hospital in northern Idlib were struck by cluster munitions from a Syrian government-held area, killing at least 12 people and injuring 50 people, including 4 medical staff.[356] Relief organizations providing health services reported that the Qah maternity hospital had been established in recent months to fill a gap left after a Syrian government airstrike destroyed southern Idlib's Tamala Maternity Hospital in May.[357]

Article 14, first paragraph, of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV provides for the establishment of "hospital and safety zones and localities so organized as to protect from the effects of war, wounded, sick and aged persons, children under fifteen, expectant mothers and mothers of children under seven."[358] According to DoS reporting, OCHA had shared the coordinates of both hospitals with all parties to the conflict, including Syrian and Russian government military points of contact, as part of a no-strike list under the established humanitarian deconfliction mechanism.[359] The New York Times compiled a list of 182 no-strike sites in northwest Syria and found that of those facilities, 27 hospitals or clinics had been damaged by Russian or Syrian attacks since April.[360]

According to the DoS, in December alone, nearly 284,000 people were displaced by Syrian government attacks in Idlib, bringing the total number of IDPs from that area to almost 700,000.[361] The prospect of the hundreds of thousands of refugees stranded at the border fleeing into Turkey has caused the President of Turkey to threaten abandoning the EU-Turkey pact that helps to fund Syrian refugees in Turkey.[362] As the UN Commission of Inquiry has documented and survivors have testified to the UN Security Council, the civilians of Idlib have also survived chemical weapon attacks, assaults, rapes, detention, torture, and prolonged starvation. At a UN Security Council meeting on Idlib, U.S. representatives reiterated calls to Syria and Russia to stop the offensive in Idlib immediately and commit to "a real ceasefire that spares civilian lives and does not feature attacks on hospitals, schools, bakeries, or other critical civilian infrastructure."[363]

According to the DoS, Idlib province and northern Aleppo are suffering a growing oil shortage. Several Syria Transition Assistance Response Team (START) contacts reported to DoS that a majority of people in northwest Syria currently lack heating, and have warned of an "impending humanitarian nightmare" if the current shortage continues.[364] Average winter low temperatures in Idlib are in the mid-30s.[365] The shortage began after the trade crossing between SDF-held areas and Syrian National Army-held areas of northeastern Aleppo was closed.[366]

5.76 million
Syrian refugees and 6.2 million Syrians are internally displaced. Syria accounts for the world's largest number of forcibly displaced people.

3.75 million
Syrian refugees live in Turkey. Most Syrians have sought refuge in five neighboring countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt.

90 percent
of Syrian refugees live in urban areas in neighboring countries, often in informal settlements and dangerous locations.

Source: USA for UNHCR, "Syria Refugee Crisis," Accessed 1/14/2020.

NDAA Penalizes Syrian Government For Committing Civilian Atrocities

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which was signed into law on December 20, 2019, contains a provision, the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019 (Title LXXIV), which authorizes sanctions against the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian backers for committing atrocities against the Syrian people.[367] The act also allows the Secretary of State to provide support to entities conducting criminal investigations, supporting prosecutions, or collecting evidence against those who have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity in Syria.[368]

The provision is named after an individual known as Caesar, who was employed as a crime scene investigator by the Syrian government's military police.[369] For three years, Caesar documented torture against civilians by the Syrian government. The more than 55,000 photographs were taken in Syria between May 2011 and August 2013 and document deceased men, women, and children who were tortured and died in Syrian government detention facilities. The FBI has since confirmed as authentic evidence the torture, starvation, and murder of more than 11,000 civilians in Syrian government custody.[370] Human Rights Watch conducted its own investigation and produced a report titled, "If the Dead Could Speak," which also verified the authenticity of the photographs.[371]

The Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019 requires the President to produce various strategies, assessments, and briefings related to the provision of humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians, which includes:

- Strategy relating to areas of Syria in which civilians are subject to forced displacement;
- Briefing on monitoring and evaluating of ongoing assistance programs in Syria;
- Assistance to support entities taking actions relating to gathering evidence for investigations into war crimes or crimes against humanity in Syria since March 2011; and
- Briefing on strategy to facilitate humanitarian assistance.[372]

Turkish Incursion Increases Humanitarian Need

According to USAID, military operations by Turkish Armed Forces and Turkish-supported opposition groups that began on October 9 resulted in increased humanitarian needs over the quarter. The operations displaced up to 215,000 individuals in parts of northeast Syria's Aleppo, Hasakah, and Raqqah provinces, according to the United Nations.[373]

According to media reporting, the Tal Tarir hospital staff reported the hospital had seen 644 wounded and 170 dead since the Turkish incursion began on October 9.[374] Critical civilian infrastructure was damaged or destroyed during the incursion, notably including the Aluk Water station, which was damaged by shelling and bombardments twice in late 2019, cutting off water access to approximately 400,000 people in Hasakah province.[375]

Large-scale Turkish military operations subsided in mid- and late October following various political agreements, prompting some displaced individuals to return to areas of origin; however, as of the end of the quarter, hostilities continued to damage civilian infrastructure and exacerbate humanitarian needs, according to relief organizations.[376]

As of December 6, more than 117,000 people had returned to their areas of origin, while approximately 75,000 people remained displaced as a result of the Turkish incursion. According to the DoS, as of January 8, more than 19,200 additional Syrian refugees have arrived in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region through informal crossings at Sahela and al Waleed. The refugees are being hosted in two refugee camps, Bardarash and Gawilan. Refugees who pass security screening and who have relatives living in Iraqi Kurdistan can live outside the camp. DoS implementing partners, including the United Nations and NGOs, have managed the response to the new refugee influx, which has brought the total number of Syrian refugees in Iraq to more than 245,000 since 2011.[377]

USAID and DoS reported that in northeast Syria, the incursion disrupted U.S. Government partner operations in areas around the front lines. Increased needs caused by conflict-related displacement stressed their ability to cope with demand for services. However, USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and PRM reported that in response to some of the new displacements, humanitarian organizations were able to coordinate and address the needs of IDPs who relocated from camps near the Turkish border due to nearby hostilities, as well as to facilitate the extension and respond to the increased need in two camps as additional households fled to the sites.[378]

According to the DoS, since the Turkish operations in mid-October, humanitarian organizations have reported increased movement restrictions and access limitations around Turkish-controlled areas. International NGOs report the widespread displacement of Syrian staff, as well as concerns about the risk of conscription by the Syrian regime. As of the end of the quarter, USAID said that humanitarian implementers remained unable to access Turkish-controlled areas due to insecurity, lack of permission, and incidents that restrict movement, including IED attacks that put civilian lives at risk.[379] Initially, PRM local staff were also displaced and traumatized by the experience, the DoS said. The DoS reported that by mid-November, most implementing partners had returned to northeast Syria, and all PRM programming resumed.[380]

According to the DoS and USAID OFDA, humanitarian agencies were closely monitoring the role of the Syrian government in northeast Syria following the mid-October deal between the regime and the SDF. At the end of the quarter, implementers are still able to operate in all areas of the northeast except Turkish-controlled areas but should the regime begin to exert administrative control, cross-border NGOs may become more limited in their movements due to concerns around staff security.[381]

Turkish Incursion Hinders Stabilization Efforts

USAID reported that following the launch of the Turkish incursion, USAID suspended some stabilization programs because of the rapidly deteriorating security environment, mainly in the corridor between Tel Abyad and Ras al Ayn down to the M4 highway. Stabilization programming continues in Dayr az Zawr, and elsewhere in the northeast where the environment on the ground permits. According to USAID, stabilization programming will continue until the security, policy, or funding environment no longer permits USAID programming in Syria.[382] USAID said that it paused some programming in Raqqah province for policy clarification, and that USAID stabilization activities inside Turkish-controlled areas will remain suspended.[383]

As of December 6, more than 117,000 people had returned to their areas of origin, while approximately 75,000 people remained displaced as a result of the Turkish incursion.

The DoS reported that most Near Eastern Affairs governance and stabilization programs in northeastern Syria remained active. However, the demining program was halted due to the incursion and had not restarted, in part because following the incursion, pro-regime forces moved into areas where the demining program had operated.[384]

Due to the security situation in northeast Syria and the "changing footprint of U.S. forces on the ground," the DoS and USAID withdrew all Syria Transition Assistance Response Team–Forward (START-Forward) personnel from Syria. Following the drawdown of START-Forward this quarter, the DoS said U.S. Government staff including START and the Jordan-based Southern Syria Assistance Platform oversaw stabilization and humanitarian assistance programs from permanent posts in the United States and the region. Programming scale and scope depended on the security situation and the availability of local implementers.[385]

USAID reported that all USAID Syria programming is remotely operated via interagency platforms at START (different from START-Forward) in Turkey and the Syria Stabilization Assistance Platform in Amman, Jordan. USAID relies on a number of sources for reporting to triangulate information, from technology to field-based monitors, both through implementers and third-party monitors to confirm activities are ongoing, and goods and services are delivered.[386]

Uncertainty Continues Over Stabilization Funding

According to USAID, implementers have reported concern about the uncertainty of future programming due to funding running out. With donor funds nearly expended, and the March 2018 Presidential funding freeze of $200 million in funds for recovery efforts in Syria still in place for stabilization, programming has diminished pending additional resources.[387]

One exception to the funding freeze was the October 12 announcement from the President of $50 million to provide assistance in Syria. According to the White House, the money "will provide emergency financial assistance to Syrian human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and reconciliation efforts directly supporting ethnic and religious minority victims of the conflict."[388]

According to the DoS, this funding will provide emergency financial assistance to Syrian human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and reconciliation efforts directly supporting ethnic and religious minority victims of the conflict. The DoS said the funding would also go toward increased accountability, removal of explosive remnants of war, community security for stabilization assistance, documentation of human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations, and support for survivors of gender-based violence and torture.[389]

To meet the White House's stated objectives for this funding, the DoS reported reviewing what programming will remain feasible over time in the current security environment and is working on an implementation plan for the President's funding announcement that will address both the immediate needs of religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and long-term goals to advance human rights and accountability.[390]

A section of Al Hol Refugee Camp, Hasakah province, Syria. (WFP photo)

According to USAID, the other funding exception to the freeze for USAID was the $4.5 million released for the Syrian Civil Defense also known as the White Helmets.[391]

Some Residents Leave the Al Hol Camp

According to the DoS, returns of Syrian IDPs from the Al Hol camp accelerated this quarter, likely in part due to the Kurdish authorities' increased motivation to empty the camps and find a long-term solution for residents after the Turkish incursion. According to the DoS, as of December 11, roughly 880 Syrians have returned to Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah province in three batches. There is no evidence that those moved were ISIS supporters. Repatriation of third-country nationals slowed during the Turkish incursion due to the decreased capacity of the SDF and U.S. military to assist in returns.[392]

According to PRM implementers, as of January 1, the population of Al Hol was 67,631 people (or 18,743 households).[393] The population breakdown remained similar to previous counts: 45 percent Iraqis, 40 percent Syrians, and 15 percent third country nationals. According to DoS and USAID, in December, around 220 people have arrived in the camp, including 41 households relocated from Mahmoudli on October 24 and 6 households previously hosted in Ayn Issa camp transferred from Raqqah city on October 27.[394]

According to the United Nations, since the beginning of June almost 2,990 residents have departed from the camp, including more than 1,440 Syrians and 1,450 third country national women and children. On November 21, the United Kingdom announced that arrangements had been made to facilitate the repatriation of several British orphaned children. In addition, this quarter, two Austrian children, one Albanian child, and one Danish child were repatriated to their home countries, according to the United Nations.[395]

According to the DoS, PRM partner UNHCR completed distributions of core and winterization items this quarter that reached more than 200,000 individuals, and PRM increased contributions to an NGO partner to carry out a distribution of kerosene and heaters for residents of Al Hol.[396]

SUPPORT TO MISSION

FY 2020 Appropriations Provide Modest Increase for DoD OCO Funding

On December 20, 2019, two appropriation bills funded the federal government through FY 2020. The legislation provides the DoD with a total of $713.2 billion in FY 2020, which includes $634 billion in base funding, $71.3 billion in OCO funding, and $8 billion in emergency hurricane relief funding.[397] This represents an increase of approximately 4 percent from FY 2019's total DoD appropriation of $685.6 billion and a 3.6 percent increase in the OCO budget from the FY 2019 appropriation of $68.8 billion.[398]

The DoD's OCO appropriation for FY 2020 includes $1.2 billion in funding for the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund, a slight decrease from the $1.3 billion appropriated for this fund in FY 2019. This funding provides assistance including training, equipment, logistics support, stipends, and infrastructure to regular and irregular foreign forces engaged in the fight against ISIS, both in Iraq and Syria, as well as neighboring states, including Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia.[399]

The FY 2020 appropriation for the DoS, USAID, and related agencies is $54.7 billion, which includes $8 billion in OCO funding.[400] This represents an increase of approximately 1 percent from the FY 2019 appropriation of $54.2 billion, which included no OCO funding.[401]

This quarter, the DoD Comptroller released the DoD's congressionally mandated Cost of War report, which details the DoD's spending on overseas contingency operations in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan through September 30, 2019. According to this report, the DoD has spent $1.57 trillion in support of contingency operations since September 11, 2001. The total cost of operations in Iraq over that time (including operations in Syria) was $771.1 billion, of which $40.5 billion has been obligated in support of OIR since that operation began in 2014.[402]
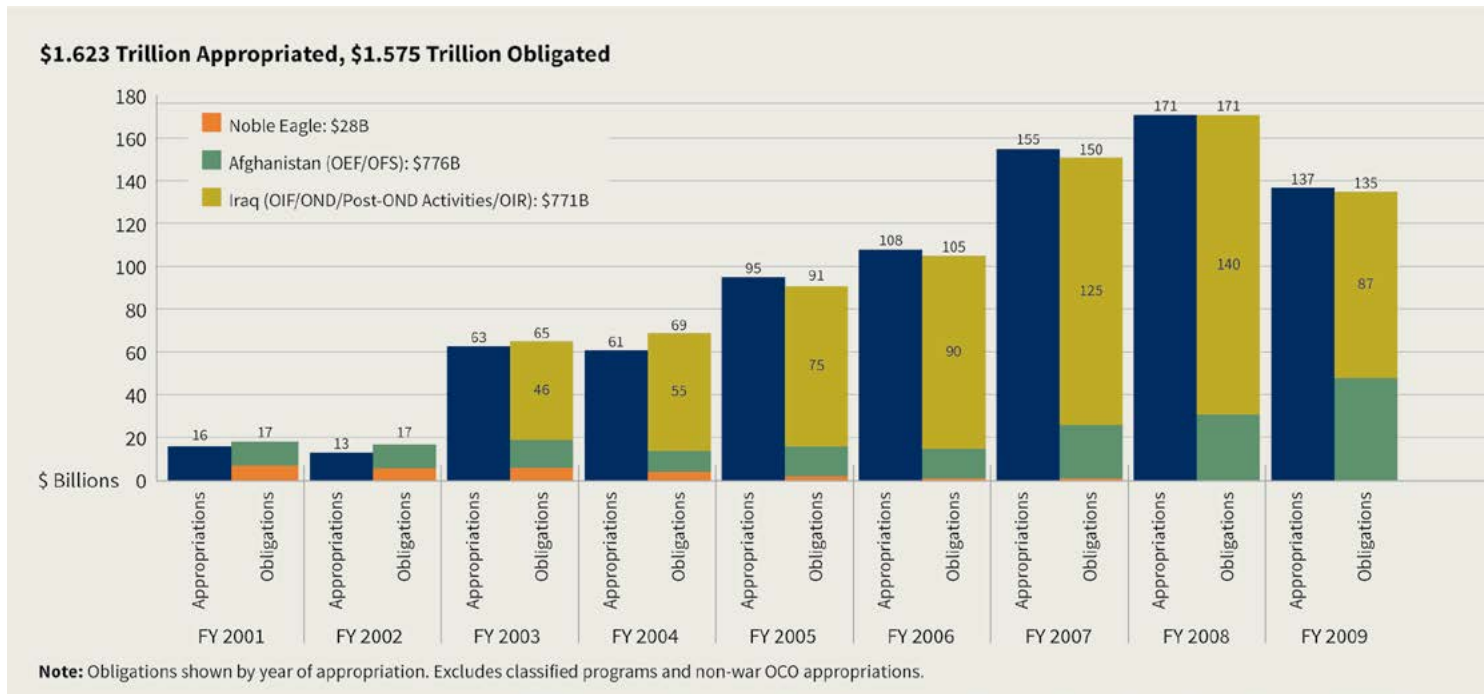
The DoD Comptroller reported that the DoD obligated $11.8 billion for OIR during FY 2019, which was 44 percent more than the $8.2 billion spent on OIR in FY 2018. Average monthly spending on all OCOs in FY 2019 was reported at $4.2 billion, of which $1 billion was in support of OIR. According to the DoD Comptroller, these obligations cover all expenses related to the conflicts, including war-related operational costs, support for deployed troops, and transportation of personnel and equipment.[403]

COST OF WITHDRAWAL ESTIMATED AT $123 MILLION

CJTF-OIR reported that the cost of the drawdown and withdrawal from Syria was estimated at $123 million. During the drawdown and redeployment, cost estimates were captured under the following categories: Retrograde Costs and Destroyed/Abandoned Base Camp Costs. The Retrograde Costs of $113 million consists of air and ground movements carrying personnel, equipment, and ammunition from Syria into Iraq and Kuwait. The Destroyed/Abandoned Base Camp Costs of $10 million consists of personal property and real property across seven locations and is specific to CJTF-OIR and direct subordinate assets.[404]

Figure 4.

Total DoD War-Related Appropriations and Obligations from September 11, 2001 through September 30, 2019

$1.623 Trillion Appropriated, $1.575 Trillion Obligated

Legend:
- Noble Eagle: $28B
- Afghanistan (OEF/OFS): $776B
- Iraq (OIF/OND/Post-OND Activities/OIR): $771B

Note: Obligations shown by year of appropriation. Excludes classified programs and non-war OCO appropriations.

CJTF-OIR said that throughout the duration of the drawdown, CJTF-OIR forces retrograded approximately 175 vehicles and 200 twenty-foot equivalent units of materiel by ground transport. From the forward logistics nodes, approximately 882 pallet position equivalents (2342 short tons) were retrograded from the Kobani Landing Zone and the Northern Landing Zone. According to CJTF-OIR, the changes made to the deployment/withdrawal orders during the month of October resulted in greater abandonment of property and the inability to execute all the planned foreign excess personal and real property divestments.[405]

DoS and USAID Funding Remains Stable

The FY 2020 State Department, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill provides $54.7 billion to fund the DoS, USAID, and related agencies and includes $8 billion in OCO funding.[406] This bill represents an increase of approximately 1 percent from the FY 2019 appropriation of $54.2 billion, which also includes $8 billion in OCO funding.[407]

The Congress allocated FY 2020 OCO funds for specific budget line items. For example, $2.6 billion is allocated for Worldwide Security Protection under Diplomatic Programs, and $424 million for Worldwide Security Upgrades. Other programs receiving significant allocations include International Peacekeeping Activities ($989 million), International
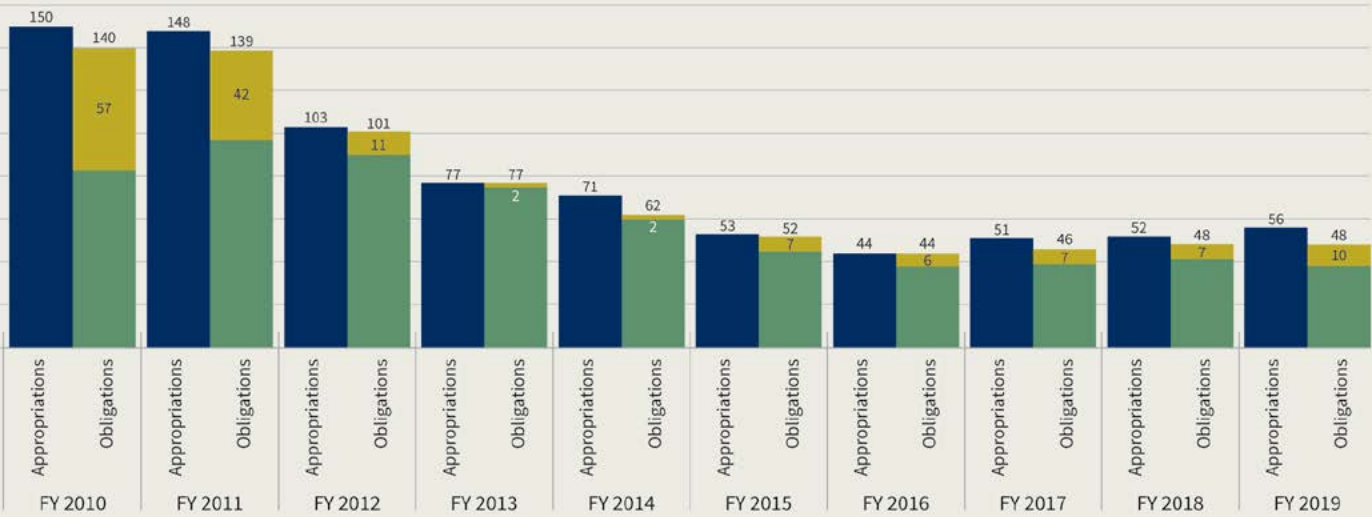
Source: DoD Comptroller.

Disaster Assistance ($1.7 billion), Migration and Refugee Assistance ($1.5 billion), and Foreign Military Financing ($512 million).[408]

Impact of U.S. Embassy in Iraq Staffing Level Reductions

On November 5, the DoS terminated the Ordered Departure (evacuation of nonemergency personnel) that had been in place for nearly 6 months due to credible security threats. The evacuation included the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, and the U.S. Consulate Erbil. During the Ordered Departure, the DoS reviewed staffing to identify the minimal staff needed to advance strategic objectives and provide adequate oversight of programs while minimizing personnel at risk in a high-threat, high-risk environment. In early December, the DoS announced plans to decrease staffing levels by 137 positions to 349 positions by May 1, 2020.[409]

As of December 15, the DoS reported personnel in Iraq included 349 under the reduced staffing plan, 514 locally employed staff, and 2,937 contractors (1,497 U.S. and 1,440 third-country nationals) for an overall total 3,924.[410]

The DoS OIG is currently auditing the DoS staffing review and planned reductions. Table 2 in Appendix E contains the audit description. The DoS OIG is conducting fieldwork and anticipates publishing the audit report in June 2020.

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

The most recent meeting of the Joint Planning Group in November 2019 featured DoS Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Joey Hood. Mr. Hood shared experiences on his career working throughout the Middle East, including as Deputy Chief of Mission in Iraq and Kuwait, as well as duty in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Qatar.

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.

FY 2020 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations

Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Military Operations and Security Cooperation focuses on determining the degree to which the contingency operation is accomplishing 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

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 six reports related to OIR. These reports examined various activities that support OIR, including the DoD's oversight of contractor-provided equipment and training to support Jordan's security along its border with Syria and Iraq; diplomatic security programs supporting the United States' Middle East partners in the fight against ISIS; DoD and DoS security assistance and training for Iraq's security forces; and financial accountability in humanitarian assistance programs. As of December 31, 2019, 41 projects were ongoing and 22 projects were planned.

Final Reports by Lead IG Agencies

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Jordan Border Program
DODIG-2020-043; December 20, 2019

The DoD OIG conducted an audit to determine whether the Defense Threat Reduction Agency is ensuring the contractor provided equipment, training, and sustainment to meet the Jordan Border Security Program requirements.

Jordan is a U.S. ally in countering ISIS and shares its border with Syria and Iraq, where Syrian regime forces and insurgency groups have used weapons of mass destruction. The Jordan Border Security Program, overseen by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, is intended to assist the Jordanian government to deter, detect, and interdict weapons of mass destruction and related materials crossing its border. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency is responsible for ensuring that the contractor provides maintenance, supply acquisition and management support, technical documentation, and training to the Jordanian Armed Forces to sustainably manage the program, which includes a security system consisting of infrared cameras, surveillance radars, fencing sensors, and intrusion detection devices.

The DoD OIG determined that Defense Threat Reduction Agency personnel ensured the contractor provided training in the operation, administration, and maintenance of the Jordan border security system, as well as performed required maintenance on program-related equipment. However, Defense Threat Reduction Agency personnel did not comply with internal guidance when providing oversight over the contractor performing inspection and inventory of the equipment transferred to Jordanian Armed Forces.

This occurred because the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's quality assurance surveillance plan lacked specific methods for contracting officer's representatives to provide effective surveillance over the transfer of equipment. Further, the DoD OIG determined that the agency did not request the Jordanian Armed Forces to conduct annual inventories, stating that it was unreasonable to ask them to undertake this effort due to the difficulty of accessing equipment integrated into the system and limited manpower.

As a result, Defense Threat Reduction Agency officials did not have an accurate record of the exact type, quantity, or condition of $37 million of the $39.5 million in equipment that the DoD provided through the contractor to the Jordanian Armed Forces between 2014 and 2019. Furthermore, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency risks not being able to accurately determine whether the Jordanian Armed Forces have sufficient equipment to maintain the border security system.

The DoD OIG recommended that the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Cooperative Threat Reduction Contracting Officer update the existing quality assurance surveillance plan with oversight plans for specific methods for the inspection, acceptance, and accountability of the property transferred to the Jordanian Armed Forces. The DoD OIG also recommend that the Cooperative Threat Reduction Director request the Jordanian Armed Forces to perform a full annual inventory of equipment received to support the Jordan border security system.

The Cooperative Threat Reduction Director agreed with the recommendation to conduct a physical inventory of property previously transferred to the Jordanian Armed Forces. The Director partially agreed with the recommendation to update the quality assurance surveillance plan, which remains unresolved.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Management Assistance Report: Continued Health and Welfare Concerns for Antiterrorism Assistance Explosive Detection Canines
ESP-20-02; December 19, 2019

In September 2019, the DoS OIG issued an evaluation report identifying a range of problems with the DoS Explosive Detection Canine Program, including the deaths of canines that were provided to partner countries. Following the report's publication, the DoS OIG received notice of additional canine deaths in the program.

After receiving this information, the DoS OIG conducted additional work related to the Explosive Detection Canine Program and found that various canines provided by the DoS had died of non-natural causes in multiple countries, including Jordan and Egypt. Dogs from the program have played a critical role protecting Middle East partners in the fight against ISIS.

The DoS OIG recommended that the DoS cease providing additional canines to Jordan and Egypt until there are plans in place to ensure the health and welfare of any additional canines and to provide continuous monitoring of their care.

The DoS concurred with the recommendation, and the recommendation can be closed when the DoS provides documentation detailing the plans for health and welfare monitoring in Jordan and Egypt.

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

Single Audit of Blumont, Inc. and Affiliates for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2017

3-000-20-005-T; December 11, 2019

Blumont, Inc. and Affiliates (Blumont) contracted with an independent certified public accounting firm in compliance with United States Code of Federal Regulations to obtain an opinion on whether Blumont's financial statements as of December 31, 2017, were presented fairly in all material respects. In Syria, Blumont has provided humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected populations through awards from USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace.

The contracted certified public accounting firm performed an audit that covered USAID expenditures of $74,334,661 provided to Blumont for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2017. The contracted firm expressed an unmodified opinion on the financial statements except for two material weaknesses in internal control over financial reporting. The accounting firm identified no questioned costs. Upon receiving the contracted accounting firm's audit report, USAID OIG recommended that USAID's Office of Acquisition and Assistance, Cost, Audit and Support Division, verify that Blumont, Inc. and Affiliates corrected the two material weaknesses identified.

Audit of Polska Akcja Humanitarna Under Multiple USAID Agreements for the Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2017 (3-000-20-002-R)

3-000-20-002-R; November 22, 2019

Polish Humanitarian Action (or PAH, for its Polish acronym) contracted with an independent accounting firm in compliance with United States Code of Federal Regulations to obtain an opinion on whether PAH's fund accountability statement for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2017, was presented fairly, in all material respects, to evaluate internal controls, and to determine whether PAH complied with award requirements and applicable laws and regulations. PAH expenditures of U.S. Government financial assistance included sub-grant agreements through two USAID awards for emergency food assistance to support conflict-affected people in Syria.

The contracted accounting firm performed an audit that covered USAID expenditures of $1,773,510 for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2017. The accounting firm found that the fund accountability statement presented fairly, in all material respects, the program revenues, and costs incurred and reimbursed, for the period then ended. The accounting firm did not identify any deficiencies that were considered material weaknesses in internal control or instances of noncompliance. Upon receiving the contracted accounting firm's report, USAID OIG made no recommendations to USAID.

Single Audit of the Catholic Relief Services-United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Affiliates for the Fiscal Year Ended September 30, 2018
3-000-20-001-T; October 21, 2019

Catholic Relief Services-United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (CRS) contracted with an independent accounting firm in compliance with United States Code of Federal Regulations, to obtain an opinion on whether CRS's financial statements as the fiscal year ended September 30, 2018, were presented fairly in all material respects. CRS receives USAID funding to provide in Syria and Iraq emergency multi-sector assistance such as logistics support; relief commodities; water, sanitation and hygiene; shelter and settlements; agriculture and food security.

The independent accounting firm performed an audit that covered USAID expenditures of $443,519,747 for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2018, which included awards in Iraq and Syria. The independent accounting firm expressed an unmodified opinion on CRS's financial statements and determined that the schedule of expenditures of federal awards and the indirect rate calculation were fairly stated in all material respects. The independent accounting firm identified one significant deficiency in internal control related to limited systems to monitor sub recipients and one material weakness related to a material loss of commodities. In addition, the independent accounting firm identified one material weakness and a significant deficiency in internal control over compliance and an instance of noncompliance that was required to be reported under Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards.

Upon receiving the independent accounting firm's report, USAID OIG made two recommendations to USAID's Office of Acquisition and Assistance, Cost, Audit and Support Division: to verify that CRS corrects the material weakness and to verify that CRS corrects the material instance of noncompliance.

Final Reports by Partner IG Agencies

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Iraq: Characteristics of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq and How It Compares to Other DoD Security Cooperation Organizations
GAO-20-196R; November 21, 2019

The GAO conducted this evaluation to provide relevant Congressional committees with an analysis of the DoD and DoS plan to transition the activities conducted by the DoD-funded Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) to another entity, or to transition the funding of such activities to another source, as required by the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.

OSC-I manages the provision of over $15 billion in security assistance and training for Iraq's security forces. Based at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, OSC-I supports the U.S. Mission in Iraq and USCENTCOM by conducting security assistance activities, defense institution building, and regional engagements. These activities are intended to enhance the capabilities of Iraq's security forces and ensure an enduring strategic partnership between

the U.S. military and Iraq's security forces. OSC-I coordinates its efforts with CJTF-OIR, which provides training, equipment, advice, and assistance to Iraq's security forces with the goal of defeating ISIS in Iraq and Syria. However, during the ordered departure from May to November 2019 and a reduced personnel presence at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, OSC-I, has been operating at reduced staffing levels.

Security cooperation organizations are DoD elements located in foreign countries that are responsible for carrying out security cooperation and security assistance management functions under U.S. law. Two Senate reports accompanying the FY 2018 and FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Acts included provisions requesting that the GAO review OSC-I's operations and how those operations compare to those of other security cooperation organizations.

The GAO report contains information on OSC-I's operational funding, structure, activities and size, use of its authorized authorities, and personnel and operational funding in comparison to other security cooperation organizations. Among the GAO's key findings were that: the DoD obligated $36.8 million in operational funding for OSC-I in FY 2018; OSC-I had five directorates that engaged in a variety of activities related to defense institution building, security assistance and building partner capacity, and regional engagement; OSC-I worked with multiple elements of Iraq's security forces, using additional authorities granted to OSC-I by Congress; and OSC-I was the largest of the security cooperation organizations managed by USCENTCOM, in terms of number of personnel and the amount of funding it received for its operations.

The GAO provided a draft of this report to the DoD and DoS for review and comment. The DoD had no comments. The DoS provided technical comments which were incorporated into the final report.

Ongoing Oversight Activities

As of December 31, 2019, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 41 ongoing projects related to OIR. Figure 5 describes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 2 and 3, contained in Appendix E, list the title and objective for each of these projects. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

- The **DoD OIG** is 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 U.S. Central Command's civilian casualty evaluation and reporting procedures to determine if there are accurate accounts of potential civilian casualties resulting from OIR airstrikes.
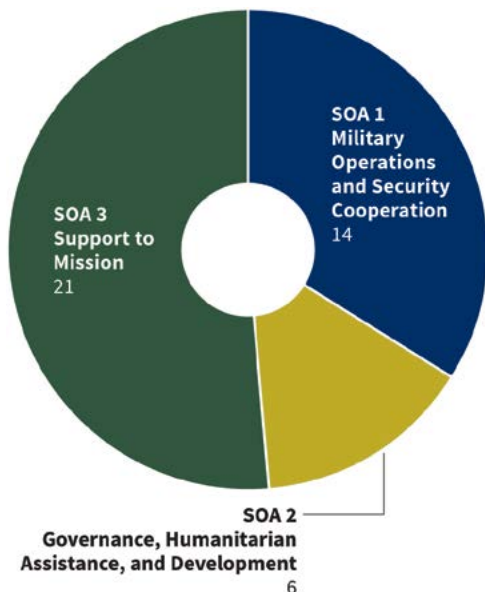
- The **DoJ OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the Bureau of Prisons' policies, procedures, and practices for monitoring inmates with known or suspected ties to domestic and foreign terrorism as well as its efforts to prevent further radicalization among its inmate population.

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

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

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

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

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

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

Figure 5.

Ongoing Projects by Strategic Oversight Area

SOA 3 Support to Mission 21

SOA 1 Military Operations and Security Cooperation 14

SOA 2 Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development 6

SUPPORT TO MISSION

- 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 the U.S. 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.
- 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 December 31, 2019, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 22 planned projects related to OIR. Figure 6 describes the planned projects by strategic oversight area.

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

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

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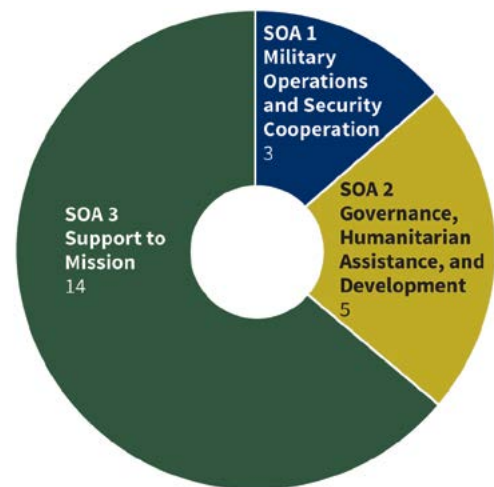
GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoS Office of Global Women's Issues has tailored its programs to meet its goals of helping women be more prepared for, and able to participate in, decision-making processes related to conflict and crisis.
- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoS is effectively identifying, assessing, and managing risks before awarding funds to international organizations, and whether DoS is ensuring that funds are managed and spent to further U.S. goals and objectives.

SUPPORT TO MISSION

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

Figure 6.

Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area

SOA 1 Military Operations and Security Cooperation 3

SOA 2 Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development 5

SOA 3 Support to Mission 14

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether the DoD is implementing effective oversight, controls, and processes to mitigate cybersecurity risks to unmanned systems
- The **DoS OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether DoS and U.S. Mission Iraq personnel properly accounted for property.
- The **Army Audit Agency** intends to evaluate whether base operations support in Kuwait and Qatar meets mission needs.

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, Lead IG investigations resulted in one arrest, five criminal charges, and one personnel action. Those actions are discussed below.

Investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 5 investigations, initiated 7 new investigations, and coordinated on 116 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations.

The Lead IG agencies and partners continue to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS, the DoD OIG's investigative and criminal division), the DoS OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command (CID), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. This quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 49 fraud awareness briefings for 597 participants.

The Dashboard on the next page depicts activities of this Working Group.
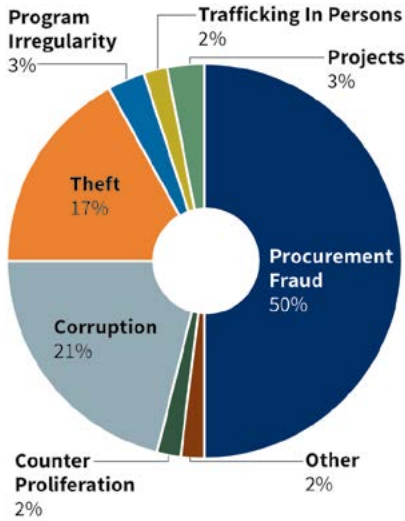
U.S. Army Contracting Officer Indicted and Extradited from the Philippines for Bribery

A former civilian employee of the U.S. Department of the Army was charged in an indictment December 12 for his role in a scheme to steer Army contracts for work to be performed at Camp Arifjan, a U.S. Army base in Kuwait.
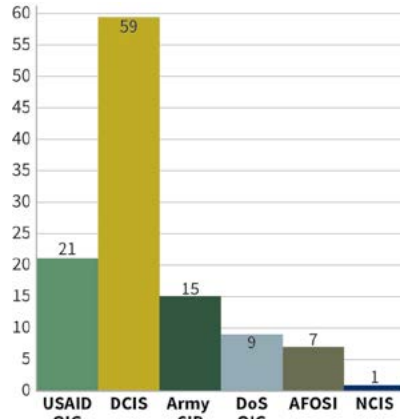
DCIS and CID initiated an investigation in 2016 regarding Ephraim Garcia, who was a program manager for the Army's Department of Public Works (DPW) Directorate at Camp Arifjan. As part of his duties, Garcia was involved in the solicitation, award, and management of Government contracts at Camp Arifjan. Garcia allegedly initiated and

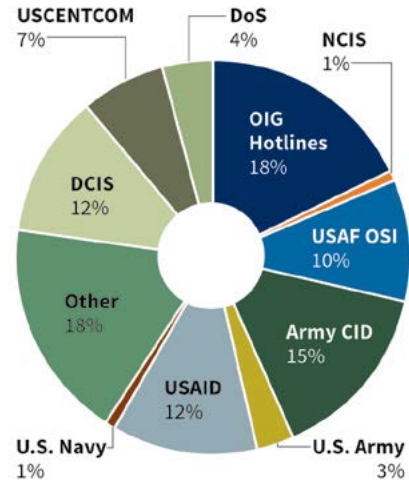# ACTIVITY BY FRAUD AND CORRUPTION INVESTIGATIVE WORKING GROUP

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE
As of December 31, 2019

Offense type donut chart:
- Program Irregularity 3%
- Trafficking In Persons 2%
- Projects 3%
- Theft 17%
- Procurement Fraud 50%
- Corruption 21%
- Counter Proliferation 2%
- Other 2%

OPEN INVESTIGATIONS*
116

Q1 FY 2020 RESULTS

Arrests	1
Criminal Charges	5
Criminal Convictions	—
Fines/Recoveries	—
Suspensions/Debarments	—
Contract Terminations	—
Personnel Actions	1
Administrative Actions	—

Q1 FY 2020 BRIEFINGS

Briefings Held	49
Briefings Attendees	597

OPEN INVESTIGATIONS BY WORKING GROUP MEMBER*

Member	Count
USAID OIG	21
DCIS	59
Army CID	15
DoS OIG	9
AFOSI	7
NCIS	1

SOURCES OF ALLEGATIONS

- USCENTCOM 7%
- DoS 4%
- NCIS 1%
- OIG Hotlines 18%
- USAF OSI 10%
- Army CID 15%
- U.S. Army 3%
- USAID 12%
- U.S. Navy 1%
- Other 18%
- DCIS 12%

PRIMARY OFFENSE LOCATIONS

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

Offense locations bar chart (= Procurement Fraud, = Bribery, = Program Fraud, = Trafficking in Persons, = Theft, = Other):
- BAHRAIN
- IRAN
- IRAQ
- JORDAN
- KUWAIT
- LEBANON
- QATAR
- SAUDI ARABIA
- SYRIA
- TURKEY
- UAE
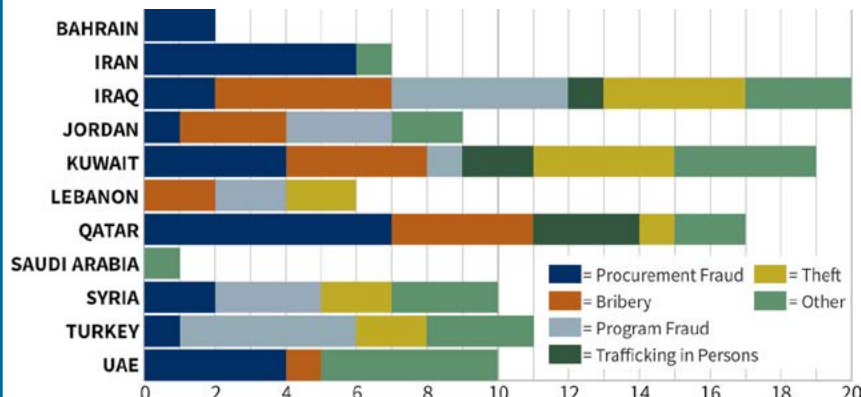
*Some investigations are joint with more than one agency and some not joint with any other agency. Therefore, the total number of Joint Open Cases may not equal the total number of Open Cases. Open Cases as of 12/31/2019.

participated in a scheme in which he paid a prime contractor employee to steer sub-contracts to the Kuwaiti subcontractor Gulf Link. Gulf Link allegedly agreed to artificially inflate the cost of bids on contracts. Garcia, Gulf Link, and the prime contractor employee allegedly split the proceeds from the inflated bids.

In February 2018, Garcia and others were indicted for bribery charges. DCIS, working with the DoS OIG, and the U.S. Marshals Service, coordinated with the Philippine government Bureau of Immigration, Fugitive Search Unit, who arrested Garcia without incident on December 10. Garcia was immediately deported from the Philippines to the United States.

In the indictment, Garcia was charged with one count of offering a bribe, one count of receiving illegal gratuities and one count of offering kickbacks.

Two Charged in Scheme to Impersonate U.S. Government Officials and Defraud Iraqis

On November 20, two U.S. citizens residing in Iraq were charged in two separate indictments for their alleged participation in schemes to defraud Iraqi companies out of millions of dollars by impersonating U.S. Government officials.

The two U.S. citizens were charged with one count each of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, six counts of wire fraud, one count of false impersonation of U.S. Government officials, and one count of wrongful use of U.S. Government seals. The indictments alleged that the two U.S. citizens, along with their co-conspirators, induced companies doing business in Iraq to enter into fraudulent contracts, under which the victim companies were to provide materials worth millions of dollars to the U.S. Government and receive payment in return. However, the purported contracts were fraudulent, and the victim companies that provided materials or made payments to obtain the contracts were never paid.

The two U.S. citizens and their co-conspirators allegedly e-mailed the companies forged contracts that contained falsified U.S. Government seals and impersonated U.S. Government officials during in-person meetings with the victim companies. The defendants were allegedly responsible for defrauding the victim companies out of items worth millions of dollars. This is an ongoing investigation with DCIS and CID.

Contract Translator Terminated and Prohibited from Base

In 2019, DCIS initiated an investigation based on allegations that an Iraqi translator employed by a DoD contractor extorted multiple Iraqi businessmen, allowing them access to the K1 Airbase in Iraq, in exchange for items of value. Upon presentation of the allegations, the Department of Justice declined to prosecute the translator, and recommended DCIS pursue alternatives to federal criminal prosecution, such as administrative debarment through the appropriate authorities. Based on the investigation, on December 8 the Air Force prohibited the translator's access to K1 Air Base and all facilities in the CJTF-OIR area of operations. The contractor was also terminated by his employer.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO LEGACY CASES

DCIS, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations have 22 ongoing "legacy" investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the designation of OIR.

Hotline

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the DoD OIG investigator referred 55 cases to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations.

As noted in Figure 7, the majority of the cases opened during the reporting period were related to personal misconduct, reprisal, criminal allegations, and personnel matters.

Figure 7.

Hotline Activities

Other 1.0%
Safety and Security 1.0%
Procurement/ Contract Administration 5.5%
Trafficking in Persons 1.0%
Personnel Matters 16.0%
Personal Misconduct/ Ethics Violations 32.7%
Criminal Allegations 16.8%
Reprisal 26.0%

40mm grenades are unloaded to be destroyed by Explosive Ordnance Disposal soldiers by controlled detonation at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

APPENDICES

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 October 1 through December 31, 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.

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 170 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS. Over the same time period, the DoJ has obtained more than 135 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.

The following examples include details on indictments, convictions, or sentences related to foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists related to ISIS activity from October 1 through December 31, 2019:

- **On November 26, 2019, in the Southern District of Indiana, Samantha Marie Elhassani** pleaded guilty to a one-count information charging her with concealment of terrorism financing. In November 2014, Elhassani's husband informed her that he and his brother wanted to travel to Syria to join ISIS, which she knew was a terrorist organization that engaged in terrorist activities. Between November 2014 and April 2015, Elhassani helped her husband and brother-in-law join ISIS by making multiple trips to Hong Kong and transporting more than $30,000 in cash and gold out of the United States and depositing it in a safe deposit box in Hong Kong. Elhassani melted down the gold to look like jewelry and did not disclose the cash and gold on customs declaration forms. At the time Elhassani transported the money and gold, she knew that her husband and brother-in-law intended to use these resources to support ISIS. Elhassani eventually traveled with her husband and brother-in-law to Syria, where the two men became ISIS fighters. In July 2018, Elhassani was transferred from the custody of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to U.S. law enforcement custody.

- **On December 6, 2019, in the Southern District of New York, Sajmir Alimehmeti** was sentenced to 22 years in prison and 5 years of supervised release. On February 21, 2018, Alimehmeti pleaded guilty to attempting to provide material support to ISIS, and committing passport fraud in order to facilitate an act of international terrorism. In May 2016, Alimehmeti attempted to assist an individual who was purportedly traveling from New York to Syria to train and fight with ISIS, but who was actually an undercover law enforcement employee. Alimehmeti helped the undercover law enforcement employee's supposed travel to Syria to

join ISIS by arranging for false documents for the trip. In addition, in October 2015, Alimehmeti had applied for a United States passport, claiming his previous passport had been lost. However, Alimehmeti later told an undercover employee that his prior passport had not been lost, and instead, that he was applying for a new passport because he believed rejections stamps on his old passport, including from attempted entries into the United Kingdom, would make it difficult to travel.

- **On December 13, 2019, in the District of Montana, Fabjan Alameti** was sentenced to 57 months in prison and 3 years of supervised release. On August 28, 2019, Alameti pleaded guilty to two counts of making false statements in a matter involving international terrorism. According to court records, Alameti traveled to Bozeman, Montana, 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.

- In addition, one person had been transferred to the United States from Iraq to face federal criminal charges since 2014. Seven people have been transferred to the United States from Syria to face federal criminal charges related to terrorism since 2014.

During the quarter, the DoJ conducted 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.

During the ordered departure of U.S. Government employees from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad between May and November 2019, and since that time because of the reduced staffing and travel restrictions that have continued to apply to the U.S. Government presence in Iraq, the DoJ's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) operations for Iraq have been managed from Washington, D.C. Despite not having personnel in country, DoJ has continued to manage a program intended to develop strong and sustainable law enforcement capacity in the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI). During the quarter, ICITAP coordinated with interagency partners to conduct the following law enforcement courses:

- **Basic Cyber Crimes Course, and Advanced Cyber Crime Crimes Course** conducted by the FBI in Leesburg, Virginia. During the course, 18 Iraqi MoI personnel learned about information technology hardware, digital forensics, legal challenges, ransomware, internet fraud, social media, and the "dark web."

- **Modern Surveillance Course** conducted by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and members of the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force in Los Angeles. During this course, 16 Iraqi MoI personnel learned about surveillance planning and techniques, including use of aircraft and electronic devices, undercover operations, and use of force.

- **Crime Scene Investigation First Responders Train-the-Trainer** course conducted at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. During this course, 18 Iraqi MoI personnel learned about crime scene processing, fingerprints, trace evidence, shoe and tire impressions, crime scene photography, DNA, and ballistics. They then demonstrated their new skills to train their peers through "teach back" presentations on a forensics-related topic.

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY DESIGNATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

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

This quarter, the Secretary of the Treasury made the following notable designations:

- **Sahloul Money Exchange Company (Sahloul):** Sahloul held deposits from ISIS-linked individuals seeking transportation out of Syria to Turkey. In late 2016, Sahloul facilitated the transfer of foreign donations to ISIS's then-headquarters in Mosul, Iraq, and transferred thousands of dollars to ISIS operatives in Turkey.
- **Al Sultan Money Transfer Company (Al Sultan):** Al Sultan was involved in transferring ISIS money. An ISIS associate identified Al Sultan as an exchange that could be used to avoid scrutiny when transferring funds.
- **Tawasul Company (Tawasul):** A Syria-based ISIS financial facilitator transferred funds via Tawasul's office in Harim, Syria.
- **ACL Ithalat Ihracat:** ACL Ithalat Ihracat is owned, controlled, or directed by Ismail Bayaltun, who is listed below.
- **Ismail Bayaltun:** Ismail Bayaltun and his brother Ahmet Bayaltun (listed below) provided material support to ISIS through ACL Ithalat Ihracat, which supplied ISIS with equipment.
- **Ahmet Bayaltun:** Turkey-based Ahmet Bayaltun was identified as an ISIS procurement agent.
- **Nejaat Social Welfare Organization (Nejaat):** Nejaat was used as a cover company to support the activities of ISIS- Khorasan (ISIS-K) in Afghanistan, such as recruiting fighters and transferring funds.
- **Sayed Habib Ahmad Khan:** Sayed Habib Ahmad Khan was identified as the director of Nejaat, and identified as an ISIS-K facilitator.
- **Rohullah Wakil:** Rohullah Wakil, an executive member of Nejaat, co-led a Nejaat Salafi solidary meeting which served as a cover for ISIS-K planning.
- No individuals or organizations sanctioned for providing support to ISIS were removed from the sanctions list during this reporting period.

In addition to the above designations, the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) leverages its participation and influence to develop a shared understanding of the threat posed by ISIS, as well as to encourage countries to take action within their jurisdictions and in coordination with others to

disrupt ISIS financing and facilitation. During the quarter, Treasury met with Coalition partners on several occasions:

- **On November 19 and 20**, the Counter ISIS Finance Group (CIFG) conducted its 12th meeting, in Luxembourg City. Co-chaired by the United States, Saudi Arabia and Italy, the 56-member state working group focuses on countering ISIS finances and is part of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. The CIFG discussed progress made in the effort to disrupt ISIS's finances and how the Coalition can most effectively adapt to the new methods ISIS is using to raise and transfer funds. Panels focused on ISIS's regional ambitions in Europe, Southeast Asia, and Africa; ISIS's use of front companies; and efforts to undermine Iraqi reconstruction.

- **In October and November 2019**, Treasury hosted multiple delegations of Iraqi counterparts, including from the Kurdistan Regional Government, to reinforce the importance of continuing cooperation on identifying and disrupting ISIS fundraising and financial networks, front companies, and financial reserves.

- **In September 2019**, Treasury's Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing traveled to Baghdad and Erbil to discuss joint Iraqi-U.S. efforts to target ISIS's financial reserves and to investigate ISIS's financial networks operating across Iraq.

- Treasury continues to work with interagency and Iraqi partners to prioritize identifying ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders, disrupting its financial facilitation networks in Iraq, and designating ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and elsewhere.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE DESIGNATIONS

In addition, during the quarter, the Secretary of State designated Amadou Kouffa as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). According to the Department of State's announcement of this designation, Kouffa is a senior member in Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), an al Qaeda affiliate active in the Sahel region of Africa, including Mali and Burkina Faso. The Secretary of State designated JNIM as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and as an SDGT in September 2018.

APPENDIX E
Ongoing Oversight Projects

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

Table 2.

Ongoing Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Agency, as of December 31, 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.

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

Audit of U.S. Military Equipment Retrograded from Syria
To determine whether the DoD has secured and accounted for the U.S. military equipment retrograded 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 Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve's Military Information Support Operations
To determine whether Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve 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 the Cybersecurity of DoD Additive Manufacturing Systems
To determine whether DoD Components are securing additive manufacturing systems and data to prevent unauthorized changes and ensure integrity of design data.

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of 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 Federal assistance awards provided by the DoS Global Engagement Center align with its statutory mandate and authority and whether the Global Engagement Center has monitored those awards in accordance with Federal requirements, DoS policies and guidance, and the terms and conditions of each award.

Inspection of United States Mission to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva
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 Approach Used to Adjust the Size and Composition of Missions Afghanistan and Iraq
To determine whether the DoS used established procedures, guidance, and best practices in its approach to adjust the size and composition of Missions Afghanistan and Iraq and has aligned resources invested at these missions with established U.S. Government foreign policy 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.

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

Table 3.

Ongoing Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of December 31, 2019

AIR FORCE AUDIT AGENCY

Air Force Office of Special Investigations Emergency and Extraordinary Expense Funds
To determine whether Air Force Office of Special Investigations officials effectively managed and accounted for emergency and extraordinary funds at deployed locations.

Contract Management, 39th Air Base Wing, Turkey
To determine whether personnel managed contracts in accordance with guidance.

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

Industrial Control Systems Access Controls (Jordan)
To determine whether Air Force personnel protect industrial control systems from unauthorized access.

Ground Fuels (Jordan)
To determine if U.S. Air Forces Central Command personnel account for ground fuel charges, payments and reimbursements; establish physical controls over fuel pumps; and record fuel disbursements.

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

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

Industrial Control Systems Access Controls (Qatar)
To determine whether Air Force personnel protect industrial control systems from unauthorized access.

Ground Fuels (Qatar)
To determine if U.S. Air Forces Central Command personnel account for ground fuel charges, payments and reimbursements; establish physical controls over fuel pumps; and record fuel disbursements.

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

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

Industrial Control Systems Access Controls (Kuwait)
To determine whether Air Force personnel protect industrial control systems from unauthorized access.

Ground Fuels (Kuwait)
To determine if U.S. Air Forces Central Command personnel account for ground fuel charges, payments and reimbursements; establish physical controls over fuel pumps; and record fuel disbursements.

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

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

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

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

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Monitoring Efforts to Prevent Radicalization
To review the Bureau of Prisons' policies, procedures, and practices for monitoring inmates with known or suspected ties to domestic and foreign terrorism; and efforts to prevent further radicalization among its inmate population.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

U.S. Assistance to Iraq's Ministry of Interior
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 4 through 5 list the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects.

Table 4.

Planned Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of December 31, 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 U.S. Special Operations Command Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center
To determine whether U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center provides U.S. combatant commanders the increased capability to conduct Internet-based information operations globally.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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

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

Audit of DoS Management of Awards to International Organizations
To determine whether DoS efforts to identify, assess, and manage risks before awarding funds to international organizations are effective; and assess whether 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.

Audit of the Special Immigrant Visa Program (Iraq)
To determine whether the DoS administered the Special Immigrant Visa program in Iraq and Afghanistan in accordance with Federal law.

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.

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

Table 5.

Planned Oversight Projects related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of December 31, 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
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
DoS	Department of State
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FFS	Funding Facility for Stabilization
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al Sham
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
InSF	Internal Security Forces
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	Refers to DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG
MERV	Middle Euphrates River Valley
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
O&M	Operations and Maintenance

Acronym	
OCHA	U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OCO	Overseas Contingency Operation
OFDA	U.S. Aid for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OUSD(P)/ISA	Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PRISF	Provincial Internal Security Forces
PRM	Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SAC	Syrian Arab Coalition
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
START	Syrian Transition Assistance Response Team
Treasury	U.S. Department of the Treasury
TSO	Turkish Supported Opposition
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U. S. Central Command
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units
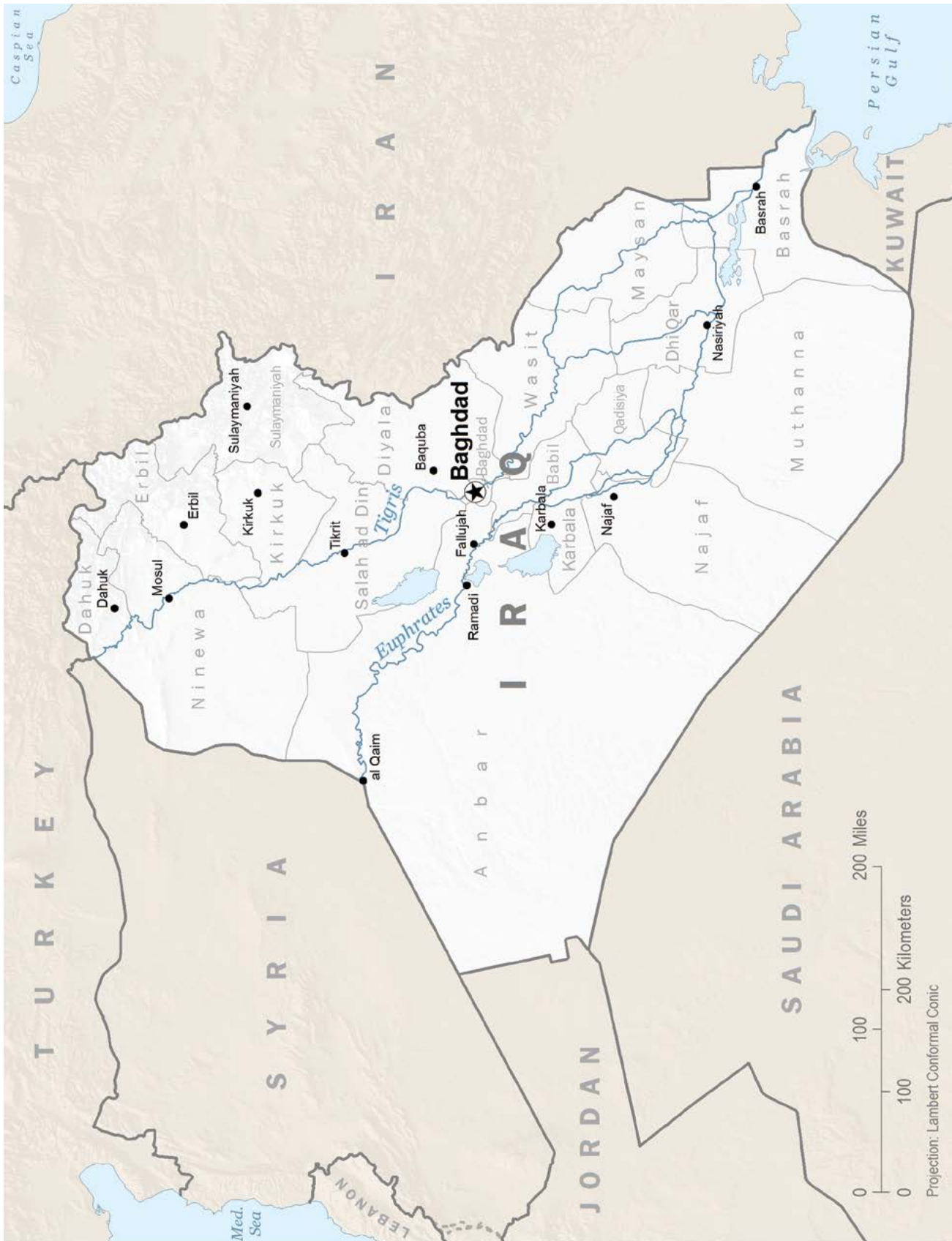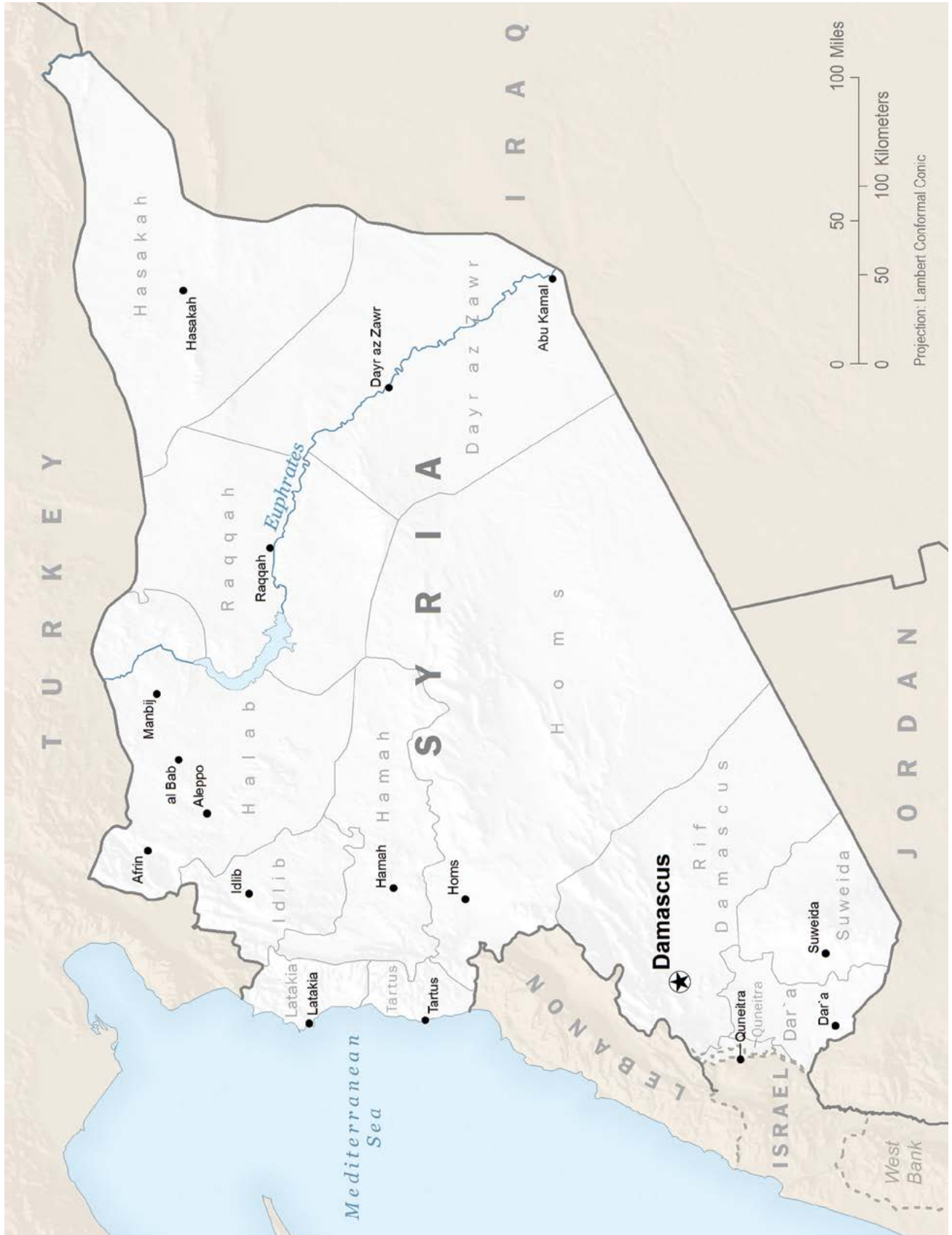
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