OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO

IRAQ & SYRIA

JANUARY 1, 2024–MARCH 31, 2024

We are pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This report discharges our quarterly reporting responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. 419).

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

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OIR as well as the work of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to further the U.S. Government's policy goals in Iraq and Syria during the period of January 1 through March 31, 2024. This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies—the DoD, State, and USAID OIGs—and our partner oversight agencies.

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Members of the Syria Civil Defense remove unexploded ordnance from the Syrian countryside as part of the USAID-funded Strengthening Community Resilience program. (USAID photo)

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U.S. Army Soldiers conduct sling load operations at Fort Bliss, Texas, as part of their preparation for deployment in support of CJTF-OIR. (U.S. Army National Guard photo)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Iran-aligned militias paused attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces following an attack on a U.S.-manned installation in Jordan that killed three U.S. Service members. The militias paused attacks to avoid U.S. counter strikes on senior commanders and key infrastructure and to avoid direct retaliation against Iran.[3] Prior to the pause in attacks, Iran-aligned militias carried out more than 50 attacks on the Coalition during the quarter, including rockets launched at an Iraqi air base in January. The militias have linked their attacks against the Coalition to U.S. support for Israel in its ongoing conflict with Hamas.[4]

ISIS continued to pose a threat during the quarter.[5] In January, ISIS launched a 10-day campaign in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict.[6] Attacks surged during this period, especially in Syria.[7] More than 9,000 ISIS detainees remained in Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) detention, and ISIS followers continued to indoctrinate and intimidate residents in the al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps.[8] Repatriations of displaced persons continued slowly, including the repatriation of 157 households from al-Hol to the Jeddah 1 camp in Iraq.[9]

The United States and Iraq held the first meeting of the Higher Military Commission. The commission will provide information to determine how the Coalition's military mission in Iraq will transition to a bilateral security partnership based on a timeline that considers three mutually agreed factors: the threat from ISIS; the operational and environmental requirements; and the Iraqi Security Forces' (ISF) capability.[10] The ISF conducted five independent airstrikes during the quarter, though it continued to rely on the Coalition for strike development.[11] The Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) also made incremental progress in warfighting functions and

took significant steps toward reform goals, including achieving two fully operationally capable KSF divisions under the command of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs.[12]

The SDF continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations during the quarter. However, regular attacks by Iran-aligned militia groups, ongoing airstrikes by Türkiye, and tensions between SDF and local Arab tribes in Dayr az Zawr governorate posed challenges to the SDF's ability to secure its area in northeastern Syria.[13] Coalition forces continued to train guard forces for SDF detention facilities, where a general lack of professionalism remained a concern.[14] In January, the SDF launched a 10-day security operation in al-Hol.[15] Coalition forces continued to train security forces for al-Hol, with training resuming following a temporary pause during the quarter due to SDF clashes with Arab tribes and Turkish military activity.[16]

The Iraqi economy improved slightly, while humanitarian need in Syria reached a historic high. During the quarter, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected continued economic growth and fiscal expansion in Iraq, with increased medium-term vulnerabilities caused by oil price volatility.[17] Unprecedented rainfall during the quarter eased the effects of years of drought, while Syria continued to face a water crisis.[18] In Syria, more than 70 percent of the population is projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2024.[19] Northeastern Syria continued to experience high commodity price fluctuations, the devaluation of the Syrian pound, and reduced agriculture yields as the result of drought conditions.[20]

In Syria, more than 70 percent of the population is projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2024.

Emerging Events

Several events occurred after the quarter ended that could have an impact on the OIR mission and U.S. policy goals in Iraq and Syria:

On April 13-14, Iran launched more than 300 attack drones and missiles at Israel, raising concerns for expanded regional conflict. The attack followed a reported Israeli attack in Syria that killed senior Iranian military officials. Israel, along with the United States and a coalition of partners, destroyed the vast majority of the weapons before they struck.[21] In response, Israel fired an airstrike on April 19 near a major Iranian air base and nuclear site inside Iran, causing minor damage.[22] U.S. and European leaders urged Israel and Iran to de-escalate tensions, warning of severe destabilization in the Middle East.[23]

Iraqi president Mohammed Shia al-Sudani met with President Biden on April 15 to discuss the future of the Coalition in Iraq and U.S.-Iraqi bilateral relations. According to a joint statement released after the meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the enduring strategic partnership between Iraq and the United States and discussed ongoing bilateral cooperation under the 2008 U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement.[24] In addition, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed Tamim co-chaired the U.S. Iraq Higher Coordinating Committee, reaffirming the importance of the bilateral partnership and Iraq's critical role in regional security and prosperity.[25]

An Iran-aligned militia targeted U.S. forces in Syria on April 21. However, Kata'ib Hizbullah denied that it was resuming its attacks on U.S. bases.[26]

A U.S. Army Soldier and an Iraqi service member participate in an artillery live fire exercise at al-Asad Air Base, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

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

MISSION UPDATE

The Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) mission is to advise, assist, and enable partner forces until they can independently maintain the enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq and designated areas of Syria, in order to set conditions for long-term security cooperation frameworks.[27]

The Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which comprises troops from 25 countries, executes the OIR campaign.[28] CJTF-OIR is part of the 87-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, led by the United States.[29]

U.S. Soldiers train on a mobile unmanned aircraft integrated defeat system during pre-deployment training at McGregor Range Complex, New Mexico. (DoD photo)

The OIR campaign is organized around four lines of effort.[30] (See Figure 1.) In June 2023, CJTF-OIR issued an amendment to its campaign plan that outlines decisive conditions and conditions-based milestones, which it will use to measure the progress of the mission. Specifically, this assessment framework contains milestones set against an estimated timeline of 2 to 4 years to transition OIR activities to a long-term security framework.[31]

FUNDING

CTEF: CJTF-OIR uses the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) as the primary vehicle for providing materiel and other support to partner forces in Iraq and Syria. Of the $398.0 million CTEF appropriation for FY 2024, $242.0 million was designated to support partner forces in Iraq, of which $66.6 million had been expended as of the end of February. Of the $156.0 million designated for Syrian partner forces, $15 million had been expended as of the end of February.[32] (See page 8.)

FMF: Congress approved $1.25 billion for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Iraq ($250 million annually) for FY 2019 through FY 2023. For FY 2024, State requested a reduced amount ($75.5 million) for FMF because substantial funds appropriated in previous years for FMF remained available for immediate expenditure against cases developed with the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).[33] As of mid-March, $838.0 million (67 percent) of available FMF funds had been spent.[34] On March 22, Congress approved the FY 2024 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, which included $175.0 million for FMF for FY 2024.[35]

Figure 1.

OIR Lines of Effort

OIR is currently in Phase IV, Normalize, during which CJTF-OIR provides security, planning, and support to the Iraqi government and appropriate authorities in Syria.

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

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

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

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

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

DOD FUNDING FOR OIR

DoD Enacted Funding for OIR FY 2019-FY 2024, in $ Millions

Various State and USAID programs receive funding that support U.S. Government political, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance objectives in Iraq and Syria. Funding information for stabilization and humanitarian assistance programs managed by the State Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) is available on page 57. State and Mission Iraq require separate funding for personnel, operations, facilities, and security that support U.S. Government activities and programs in Iraq and Syria.

*FY 2024 displays requested amount.

CTEF-funded Support to Iraq and Syria During the Quarter
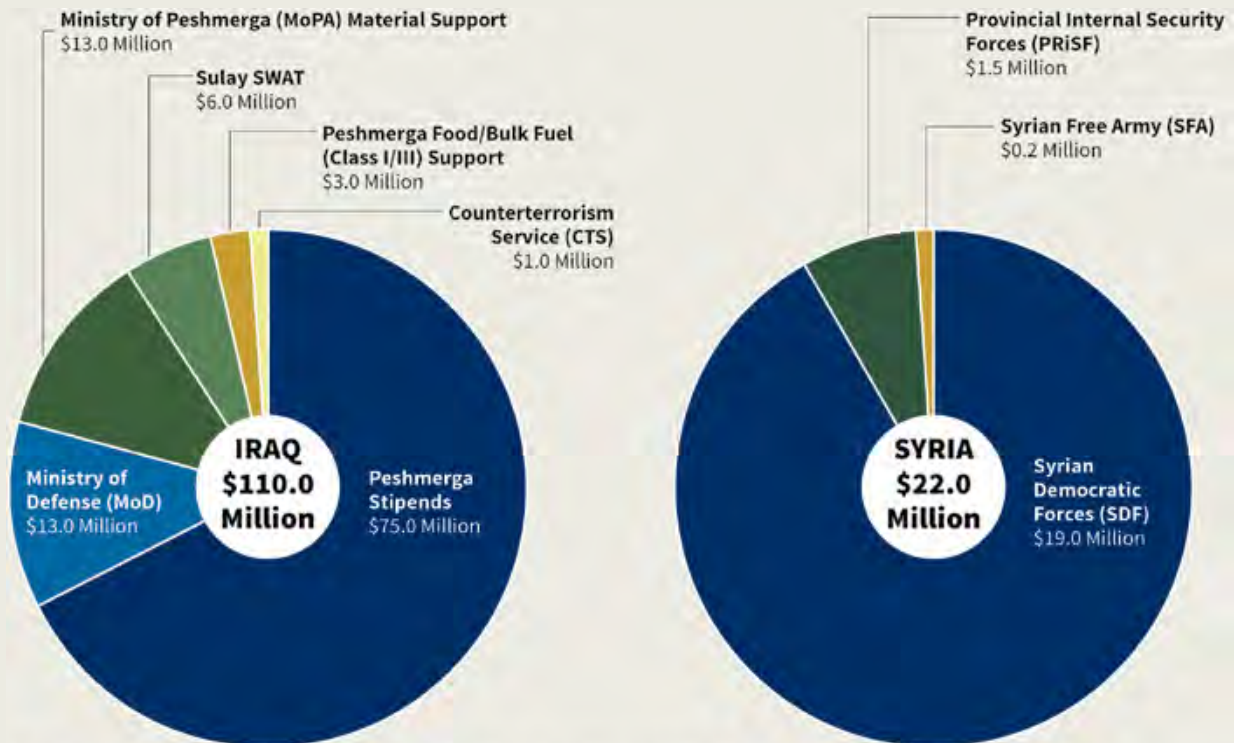
Notes: Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. Syria funding numbers available for October and November 2023 only.

Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.2 OIR FOL016, 4/2/2024.

U.S. Soldiers prepare to load into a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter during air assault training in Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

STATUS OF ISIS

March 23 marked the fifth anniversary of the military defeat of ISIS, when the SDF, supported by Coalition partners, captured the terrorist group's last territorial stronghold of Baghuz in eastern Syria. However, ISIS continues to pose a threat, the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) said, with more than 9,000 ISIS detainees remaining in SDF detention, and ISIS followers continuing to indoctrinate and intimidate residents in the al-Hol and Roj displaced persons camps.[36]

According to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, ISIS was one of the primary terrorist threats within Iraq in 2023. Despite its inability to control populated territory, ISIS was able to conduct periodic attacks in Iraq.[37] In a late March interview with an international news organization, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski said that the ISIS threat is "much, much diminished, but nevertheless our work is essentially not done."[38]

The USCENTCOM commander, General Michael "Erik" Kurilla, told Congress in March that ISIS's enduring defeat is dependent on continued Coalition pressure and support to partner forces fighting the group.[39] If there were a premature departure of Coalition forces from Iraq and Syria, "ISIS would reconstitute the ability to seize territory within 2 years," General Kurilla said.[40]

The Global Coalition's Communications Working Group met on February 22-23 in London, United Kingdom, to advance efforts to counter ISIS propaganda, messaging, and recruitment. The group discussed the use of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence in countering terrorist propaganda. On March 5, the Global Coalition Foreign Terrorist Fighters Working Group convened in The Hague, the Netherlands. The meeting addressed the need for continued repatriations of displaced persons and detained fighters in northeastern Syria, the threat posed by ISIS affiliates in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the movement of foreign terrorist fighters in Africa.[41]

ISIS ACTIVITY AND CAPABILITY

In January, ISIS launched a 10-day campaign in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict.[42] During this period, attacks surged, especially in Syria.[43] The USCENTCOM commander noted that Coalition counter-ISIS efforts during this time were reduced because of Iran-aligned militia attacks.[44]

While the increased attacks demonstrated that ISIS is determined to grow, the group still did not control territory and had limited fighters.[45] ISIS's decline in capability may have levelled off in some areas of Syria, but the group remained territorially defeated and incapable of mounting large, complex attacks inside Syria or from Syria, even as Coalition forces prioritized force protection due to Iran-aligned militia attacks.[46]

Attack Trends This Quarter

IRAQ
ISIS remained in **survival mode**, with a brief increase in operations during the January attack campaign.[47] ISIS fighters remained confined to remote areas with challenging terrain.[48]

ISIS attacks consisted of improvised explosive devices (IED) and small-scale raids on remote security force outposts, showing **no change in sophistication**.[49] The group emphasized targeting local security forces and civilians to drive its insurgency.[50]

ISIS conducted no attacks in the **Iraqi Kurdistan Region**.[51]

SYRIA
ISIS attacks in Syria spiked in January during the 10-day campaign.[52] The SDF commander told journalists in February that ISIS was exploiting the Coalition's increased focus on Iran-aligned militia attacks to conduct its own operations.[53] However, while attacks increased, ISIS continued to operate at a **reduced capacity** overall.[54]

ISIS remained concentrated in the Syrian desert**, unable to re-establish significant influence** in Sunni Arab population centers, and highly unpopular in SDF-operating areas of eastern Syria.[55]

ISIS fighters operated in small, clandestine cells in deserts and mountains, employing small arms, IEDs, indirect fire, ambushes, and unmanned aircraft systems.[56] Attacks targeted **isolated checkpoints and convoys**, with no overall change in operational stance.[57] ISIS also conducted a few larger scale attacks.[58]

ISIS also **exploited security gaps** resulting from tensions between the SDF and tribal forces in Dayr az Zawr governorate, conducting hit-and run small arms attacks against the SDF, assassinations of local officials, and civilian intimidation.[59]

Location of ISIS-claimed Attacks During the Quarter

Source: ACLED, data for events in Iraq and Syria attributed to the Islamic State, 1/1/2024-3/31/2024.
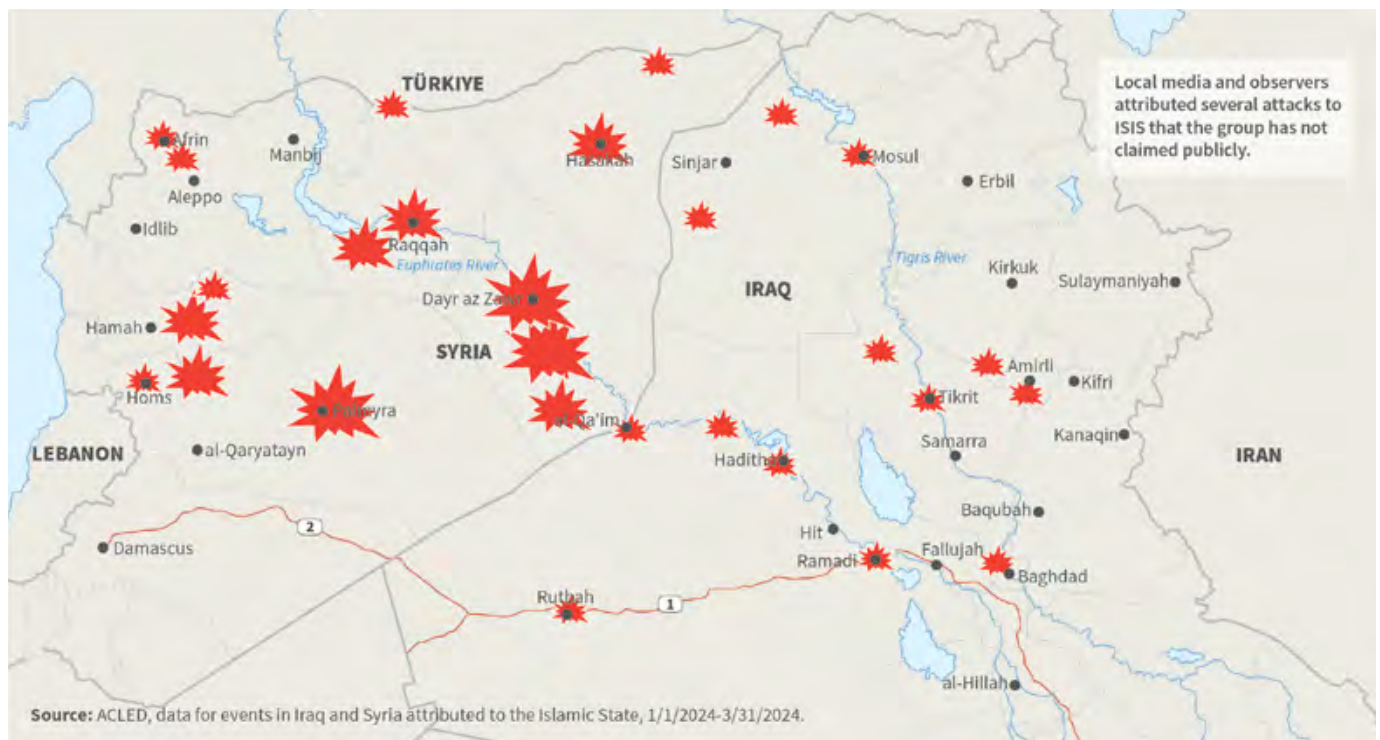
ISIS Attacks by Month, January 2022–March 2024

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.2 OIR FOL018A, 4/2/2024; ACLED, data for battles, explosions, and violence against civilians, 1/1/2022-3/31/2024.

Note: About this data: Claimed attacks: CJTF-OIR tracks ISIS claims of its attacks in Iraq and Syria in its al-Naba publication. CJTF-OIR said that it has "moderate confidence" of this data to demonstrate attack trends over time because ISIS does not claim all of its attacks. ACLED: This data includes ISIS-claimed attacks and other attacks attributed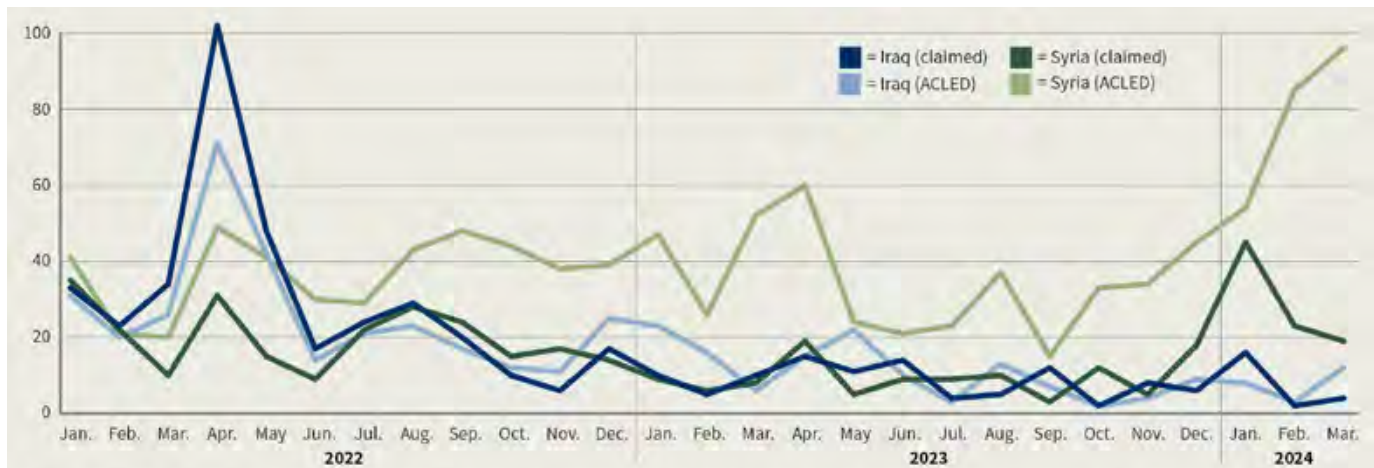 to ISIS by media and local officials. ExTrac: (data not shown) CJTF-OIR also tracks data from this source, which uses AI and proprietary methods to track attacks and attribute them to ISIS. Attack numbers reported by ExTrac are often much higher than claimed or ACLED-identified attacks. CJTF-OIR said "we expect the truth to be somewhere in the middle."

ISIS CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

LEADERSHIP: There was no significant change to the group's leadership or organization in Iraq or Syria during the quarter and no top-level leadership losses were reported.[60] Since mid-2023, joint U.S. operations with partner forces in Iraq and Syria have resulted in the **killing or capture of ISIS commanders**, fighters, and facilitators and **degraded the group's capacity to plan, support, and carry out terrorist attacks.**[61] Despite suffering leadership losses, ISIS leaders maintain organizational cohesion and access to significant funds.[62]

STRATEGY AND CAPABILITY: Despite ISIS's historical rejection of Hamas, which is associated with Shia Iran, ISIS leaders sought to **exploit developments in Gaza** to promote their narrative of a divinely ordained conflict between Islam and its "enemies."[63] However, developments in Gaza likely have not substantially impacted the group's insurgent capabilities in Iraq or Syria, including freedom of movement, recruitment, or capacity to raise funds.[64] ISIS continued **misinformation campaigns** on social media, though its messaging remained heavily degraded.[65] ISIS also continued its strategy to break out its members from detention facilities. On March 29, 10 ISIS detainees escaped from a Turkish military-run detention facility in Syria after reportedly bribing their guards.[66]

EXTERNAL OPERATIONS: ISIS senior leaders in Iraq and Syria almost certainly remained committed to enabling operations outside the region.[67] Although the ISIS threat in Syria and Iraq was much reduced from previous years, ISIS continued to **pose a significant terrorist threat** to U.S. interests in Syria and a collateral threat to U.S. forces in Iraq. The group probably continued to **lack the capability** to target the U.S. homeland.[68]

ISIS branches worldwide continued to **attack regional targets** during the quarter. ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), based in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility for a January 3 attack in Kerman, Iran, that killed more than 80 people and a March 22 attack on a concert hall in Moscow that killed at least 130 people.[69] In late January, ISIS affiliated gunmen, possibly linked to ISIS-K, opened fire in a church in Istanbul, Türkiye, killing one person.[70] CJTF-OIR said these successful operations serve to **embolden global ISIS** and support financing and recruiting.[71]

FINANCES: Coalition and law enforcement actions continued to target ISIS financial reserves and financial leaders, disrupting ISIS financial facilitation networks in the Middle East.[72] As a result, ISIS has **struggled to meet its financial obligations**.[73] ISIS leadership has an estimated $10 million to $20 million in operational funds, indicating an ongoing decline in revenue. ISIS funds are mostly held in cash and other liquid assets.[74]

ISIS continued to **extort local populations** in its effort to exert influence in parts of Iraq and Syria.[75] ISIS continued to use informal cash transfer networks, known as **hawalas, virtual currencies, and online platforms** to distribute funds, including to individuals in the al-Hol displaced persons camp.[76] ISIS supporters have transferred funds—up to $20,000 per month—to individuals at al-Hol through intermediaries in Türkiye via the hawala system.[77] ISIS members also continued to receive contributions through hawalas to secure the release of ISIS terrorists from detention, particularly in northeastern Syria[78]

MILITIA ATTACKS

Iran-aligned Militias Pause Attacks Following Deadly Strike on U.S. Forces in Jordan

Iran-aligned militia groups continued to attack U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq and Syria in January and early February. CJTF-OIR reported that the groups used a mix of one-way attack unmanned aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, and rockets in at least 50 separate incidents against U.S. and Coalition targets.[79] (See Figure 2.)

The attacks were carried out by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI), an umbrella group of Iran-aligned militias that have launched at least 170 attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq and Syria since the conflict between Israel and Hamas began on October 7.[80]

On January 20, rockets hit al-Asad Air Base in Anbar province in one of the largest attacks on U.S. personnel, according to USCENTCOM.[81] According to media reports, the IRI claimed credit for the attack.[82]

Figure 2.

U.S. Interests Targeted by Iran-aligned Militias During the Quarter
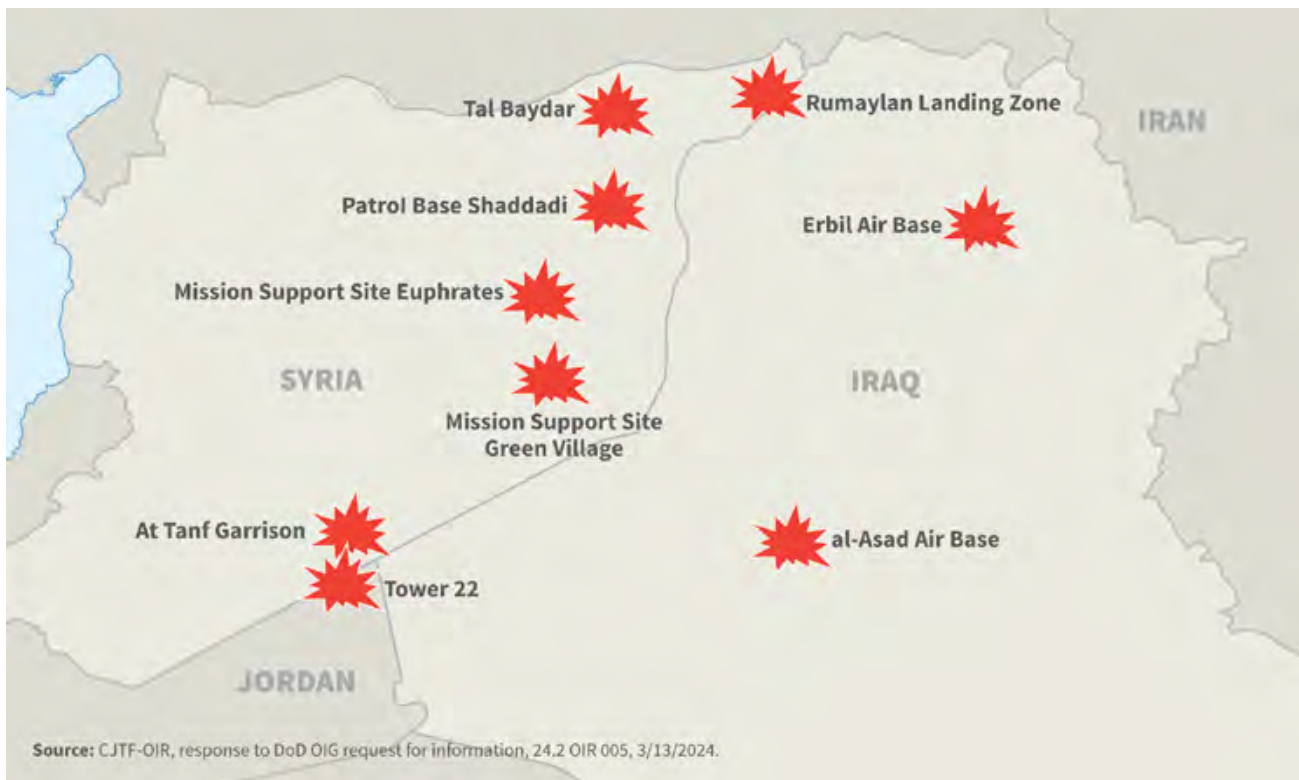
Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.2 OIR 005, 3/13/2024.

On January 28, a drone attack on a U.S.-manned installation in Jordan known as Tower 22 resulted in the deaths of three U.S. Service members.

On January 28, a drone attack on a U.S.-manned installation in Jordan known as Tower 22 resulted in the deaths of three U.S. Service members.[83] The IRI claimed credit for the attack, as well as a February 4 strike on the al-Omar oil fields in Syria, near a U.S. base, that killed six members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).[84] CJTF-OIR reported that there were no further attacks on Coalition forces after this attack during the quarter.[85]

Citing media sources, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), Esmail Qaani, met with militia leaders in Baghdad on January 29 and instructed them to pause attacks and take other measures to avoid U.S. strikes on senior commanders and key infrastructure, and to deter direct retaliation against Iran.[86] The DIA reported that Iraqi militia officials said Qaani's direct involvement was critical in getting the militias to halt the attacks.[87]

CJTF-OIR said that the militias cited Western actions in support of Israel to justify attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces and increase their own recruitment efforts, particularly among Iraqi tribal minorities.[88] Militia groups have surged volunteers from Iraq and moved drones and anti-tank missiles to southwestern Syria from Lebanon in support of the Lebanese Hezbollah in case of a wider conflict with Israel.[89]

U.S. Forces Respond with Strikes on Militia Targets

U.S. forces responded to the Iran-aligned militia attacks with strikes targeting facilities used by the IRGC-QF and affiliated militia groups in Syria and Iraq.[90] The USCENTCOM reported that the U.S. strikes sought to "reset deterrence against [militia] aggression in the region," and that overall, the strikes achieved the desired effect.[91]

On February 2, U.S. forces conducted a series of strikes in Iraq and Syria in direct response to the Tower 22 attack. The strikes included more than 85 targets at 7 facilities (3 in Iraq, 4 in Syria) used by IRGC-QF and the affiliated groups they sponsor.[92] U.S. forces deployed several aircraft, including long-range bombers flown from the United States, and dropped more than 125 precision munitions.[93]

The DoD said the targets included command and control operations centers, intelligence centers, rockets, missiles, unmanned aerial vehicle storage, and logistics and munition supply chain facilities used by militia groups and their IRGC-QF sponsors to attack U.S. and Coalition forces.[94]

U.S. President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., said in a statement that the strikes sent a message that the United States is not seeking conflict, but it will respond when harmed.[95]   He said the strikes marked the beginning of the U.S. response to the attack in Jordan, which would "continue at times and places of our choosing."[96]

On February 7, U.S. forces fired a Hellfire missile in Baghdad that killed Abu Baqir al-Saadi, a senior Kata'ib Hizbullah commander.[97] USCENTCOM reported that al-Saadi was directly responsible for planning and participating in attacks on U.S. forces in the region.[98]

Earlier in the quarter, U.S. forces killed Mushtaq Jawad Kazim al-Jawari (also known as Abu Taqwa) a leader of the Harakat al-Nujaba, an Iran-backed U.S.-designated terrorist group, which is also among Iraq's state-affiliated Popular Mobilization Forces.[99] The DoD said al-Jawari was actively involved in planning and carrying out attacks against U.S. personnel.[100] U.S. forces also conducted strikes on January 24, targeting three facilities used by the Kata'ib Hizbullah militia and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq, in response to a January 20 Kata'ib Hizbullah attack on the al-Asad airbase and other attacks.[101]

Coalition Prioritizes Force Protection Amid Heightened Threat, While OIR Mission Continues

CJTF-OIR said that due to the militia attacks, it has been forced to prioritize force protection.[102] The threat level to Coalition forces remained high during the quarter, necessitating continued security measures, including restriction of freedom of movement.[103] CJTF-OIR further reinforced its force protection posture following the deadly January 28 attack on Tower 22 in Jordan.[104]

CJTF-OIR said that the combined effects of the Israel-Hamas conflict and the increase of attacks by Iran-aligned militias have resulted in a "more challenging" operational environment for the OIR campaign, necessitating adjustments in the Coalition's focus and emphasizing the need to address regional security and force protection.[105] These adjustments include the reallocation of resources and assets to meet force protection requirements, CJTF-OIR said.[106] Despite the risks and increased threats affecting Coalition forces in Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, and Jordan, CJTF-OIR's mission to conduct operations to defeat ISIS and advise, assist, and enable partner forces continued without significant change and its commitment to the mission remained undeterred.[107]

Key leader engagements with local partners returned to normal frequency during the quarter, following delays in the previous quarter.[108] Local partners in both countries continued to provide increased patrols and presence in the vicinity of Coalition bases to aid in force protection.[109]

CJTF-OIR noted that the militia attacks have challenged its relationships with its partner forces.[110] In addition, CJTF-OIR said that the reallocation of assets and equipment throughout the combined joint operating area to support force protection has impacted and delayed logistical support for some partners.[111] The resources and capacity that would typically be devoted to providing necessary equipment, supplies, and advisory support to these partners have been diverted toward addressing immediate threats.[112]

State reported that it acknowledged the demand for international attention toward the Israel-Hamas conflict during bilateral and multilateral engagements with Coalition partners. However, State said that it continues to emphasize the need for sustained commitment to the counter-ISIS mission in both Iraq and Syria as a critical element of regional stability.[113]

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IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

The Coalition's Military Advisory Group continued to advise, enable, and assist the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)—including the Iraqi Air Enterprise—and Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) at bases in Baghdad and Erbil. The Special Operations Advisory Group advised, enabled, and assisted the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) from bases in Anbar province.[114] (See page 16.)

New Commission Launched to Discuss Transition of the Counter-ISIS Mission in Iraq

U.S. Army Major General Joel Vowell, Commander of CJTF-OIR, exchanges a handshake with Iraqi Lieutenant-General Abdul Kareem after the Higher Military Commission meeting on March 24, 2024, Baghdad, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

In late January, the United States and Iraq launched the Higher Military Commission (HMC), initiating a process that the two sides committed to during the U.S.-Iraq Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue in Washington, D.C., in August 2023. The HMC will provide information to determine how and when the Coalition's military mission in Iraq will transition to an enduring bilateral security relationship based on a timeline which considers three mutually agreed factors: the threat from ISIS; the operation environment; and the ISF's capability.[115]

Expert working groups of military and defense professionals were created to conduct assessments in each of the three areas, in close consultation with Coalition partners.[116] The

COALITION ADVISING IN IRAQ

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

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

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

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

Map legend:
- = Coalition Presence
- = ISF Provincial Operations Command (OC)
- = Iraqi Kurdistan Region
- = Internal Area Claimed by the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and Federal Iraq

Map locations:
- Kurdistan Coordination Line
- Mosul • Ninewa OC • Ninewa West OC
- Erbil • Erbil Air Base • Kurdistan Coordination Center
- Kirkuk • JOC-I Forward Command Kirkuk
- Tuz Khurmatu • Tuz Khurmatu OC
- Tikrit • Salah ad Din OC
- Haditha • Jazeera OC
- Samarra • Samarra OC
- Al-Asad Air Base
- Ramadi • Anbar OC
- Baqubah • Diyala OC
- Baghdad • Union III • BDSC • U.S. Embassy • Baghdad OC
- Karbala • Karbala OC
- Amarah • Maysan OC
- Nasiriyah • Sumer OC
- Basrah • Basrah OC

Provinces labeled: DAHUK, ERBIL, NINEWA, SULAYMANIYAH, SALAH AD DIN, KIRKUK, DIYALA, ANBAR, BAGHDAD, WASIT, KARBALA, BABIL, QADISIYA, NAJAF, MAYSAN, DHI QAR, MUTHANNA, BASRAH, IRAQ

Rivers: Euphrates River, Tigris River

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

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

The DoD and State reported that the HMC will enable the transition to an enduring bilateral security partnership between the United States and Iraq while minimizing risks to Iraq's security and sovereignty.

working groups met regularly throughout the quarter, except during a brief pause following the Tower 22 attack in January.[117] CJTF-OIR reported that the HMC remained the preferred route to an "orderly transition" for the "drawdown" of OIR.[118]

The HMC builds upon previous bilateral strategic discussions, including the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue, the U.S.-Iraq Military Technical Talks, the U.S.-Iraq Higher Coordinating Committee, and the U.S.-Iraq Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue.[119] The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) reported that during the Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue, senior DoD officials and Iraqi Ministry of Defense officials affirmed their commitment to developing Iraq's security and defense capabilities.[120]

The DoD and State reported that the HMC will enable the transition to an enduring bilateral security partnership between the United States and Iraq.[121] The transition will be informed by the assessments of the working groups, which will determine the most effective evolution of the defeat-ISIS Coalition mission to ensure that ISIS never resurges.[122]

CJTF-OIR reported that the HMC discussions had affected partner force relations and noted concern over members attempting to understand and predict potential impacts or courses of action associated with the transition of Coalition advisors' roles as forces draw down.[123]

U.S. Airstrikes against Iran-aligned Militias Prompt Calls to Expel Coalition Forces from Iraq

According to media reports and Iraq experts, the U.S. strikes against Iran-aligned militia targets exacerbated divisions within the Iraqi government and elicited protest from some elements of the Iraqi government.[124]   State reported that it encouraged the Iraqi government to take stronger action against the Iran-aligned militias to prevent further escalation.[125]

While Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani criticized the U.S. strikes as violations of Iraqi sovereignty, he also characterized militia attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces as acts "hostile" to Iraq, signaling his need to remain engaged with both the United States and Iran, Iraq experts said.[126]

The ruling Coordination Framework bloc, a coalition of mainly Shia and Iran-aligned parties that brought Prime Minister al-Sudani to power, intensified efforts to end the presence of the Coalition in Iraq following U.S. airstrikes in February that killed a commander of Kata'ib Hezbollah.[127] Militia leaders and political affiliates also demanded the immediate termination of the Coalition mission, while Iraq's military spokesman called the killing of the commander an "assassination" that "compels the Iraqi government more than ever to terminate the mission of this coalition."[128]

However, according to media reports, on February 10, members of parliament backing an end to the Coalition presence in Iraq failed to mobilize a quorum to hold a non-binding resolution calling for the expulsion of foreign forces.[129]

Iraqi politicians continued to push for a Coalition withdrawal. According to a media report, the parliament met following the failed resolution to draft a law mandating the withdrawal of Coalition troops.[130]

U.S. Strikes Against Iran-aligned Militias Impact Coalition-ISF Relations and KSF Activity Against ISIS

CJTF-OIR reported that the persistent threat that Iran-aligned militias pose to the Coalition and the U.S. "unilateral self-defense response" to those threats had impacted the relationship between the ISF and Coalition advisors and "complicated engagements" with Iraqi partner forces.[131]

In particular, Coalition relations with the Joint Operations Command-Iraq (JOC-I) Strike Cell were strained, CJTF-OIR said.[132] Additionally, no progress was made regarding the security cooperation framework in Iraq due to the Coalition's focus on force protection as a result of the militia attacks.[133]

Otherwise, CJTF-OIR reported "little to no impact" on the OIR campaign plan due to militia attacks: there were no significant changes to Coalition advisors' efforts to advise and assist the JOC-I in Baghdad; battle rhythm, briefings, and advising remained unchanged; and partner forces continued to remain focused on counter-ISIS operations.[134]

Similarly, CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advising efforts in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) remained unaffected by militia activity.[135] Coalition advisors observed a temporary shift in KSF counter-ISIS operations at the height of the militia attacks, as the KSF focused on the movement of the militias across disputed territories in northern Iraq.[136] Additionally, advisors halted contracted maintenance training for the regional logistic hubs for several weeks, which delayed the start of training packages for the KSF.[137] CJTF-OIR said that the training resumed by the end of the quarter.[138]

Coalition Forces Continue to Advise ISF Leadership

The primary venue for Coalition advising of the ISF is the JOC-I, a cross-functional organization that reports to the Prime Minister but does not necessarily maintain direct command and control over ongoing military operations in Iraq. From their seat at the JOC-I, Coalition advisors have only high-level, and sometimes inconsistent, visibility on ISF operations, most of which are overseen by the Iraqi operational commands.

Operations: The JOC-I's role in planning and executing operations is often limited. CJTF-OIR said that the JOC-I was involved in a series of operations across four operational commands during the quarter. However, Coalition advisors were not included in the planning portion of the operations.[139] Coalition advisors were only included while the operations were being executed due to involvement of Popular Mobilization Forces, with which the Coalition does not partner, in operational planning.[140]

Airstrikes: The JOC-I strike cell continued to rely heavily on the Coalition's strike cell. While the JOC-I has improved its ability to coordinate intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and joint fires, the strike cell possesses limited tasking authority and does not track ISR assets with sufficient detail to support the targeting process, which limits the JOC-I to conducting only dynamic targeting. The Coalition's strike cell advises the JOC-I strike cell on intelligence, targeting, and current operations management.[141] Coalition advisors plan to reduce enabling of Iraqi Terminal Air Controllers to motivate the JOC-I to execute targeting independently.[142]

CJTF-OIR reported an increase in ISF counter-ISIS air strikes during the quarter, including five strikes that were conducted without Coalition support.[143] (See Figure 3.)

Information Operations: CJTF-OIR said that Joint Information Operations Center personnel maintain an advanced level of situational awareness of all threats in the information environment, including threats from ISIS. They monitor the information environment continuously and produces five daily reports for the prime minister's office and the JOC-I leadership. The Center's personnel are actively participating on social media platforms and are developing an Iraqi Information Operations doctrine.[144]

COUNTERTERRORISM FORCES

The CTS is responsible for most counter-ISIS operations in Iraq and is the focus of Coalition advising efforts. CJTF-OIR reported that the CTS is capable of executing operations and maintaining counterterrorism pressure on ISIS relatively independently.[145] During the quarter, the CTS conducted 37 partnered operations against ISIS, according to CJTF-OIR.[146] However, CTS units exhibited varying levels of success across Iraq related to the level of Coalition partnership with the unit involved, the threat environment in each province, the capabilities of leaders manning the Iraqi Special Operations Forces headquarters, and the warfighting skills of each battalion.[147]

Last quarter, Major General Karim Aboud al-Tamimi assumed leadership of the CTS and has since made sweeping changes to the command and staff.[148] CJTF-OIR said that al-Tamimi has been "less overtly political" than his predecessor, and "more focused on the operational

Figure 3.

Counter-ISIS Airstrikes by Iraqi Aircraft, January 2022-March 2024

Sources: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.2 OIR 032, 3/13/2024; CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.2 OIR FOL032, 4/2/2024.
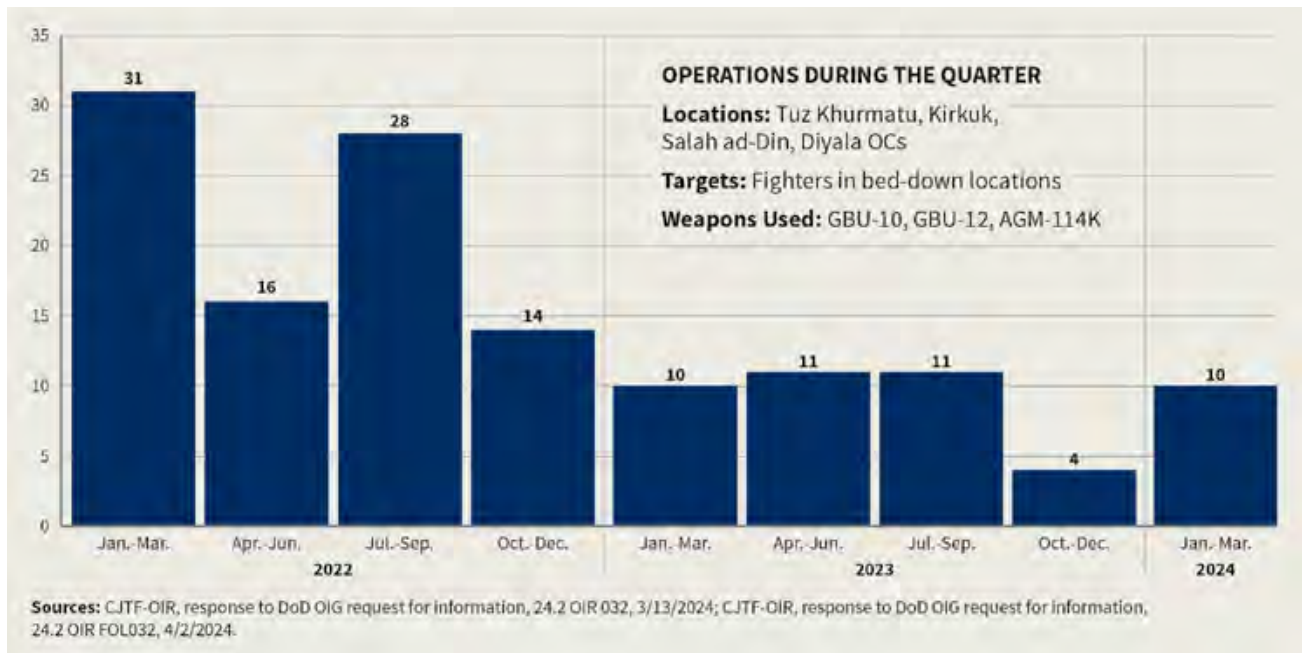
capability of the CTS."[149] CJTF-OIR said that al-Tamimi has created a CTS 2030 Vision and reinvigorated the CTS operational headquarters.[150] CJTF-OIR described the CTS's ability to absorb significant leadership changes without hindering counter-ISIS operations or relations with the Coalition as a mark of "institutional strength."[151]

No Progress Toward Training CTS Trainers

Force generation remained a key focus for Coalition advisors and the CTS.[152] Iraq's 2023 budget authorized the CTS to recruit 3,000 soldiers in federal Iraq and 500 soldiers from the IKR but CJTF-OIR reported last quarter that there was no movement toward generating these new forces.[153]

CJTF-OIR reported that Coalition advisors would be heavily involved in advising regarding CTS force generation as new recruits are selected and sent for training.[154] Coalition advisors worked with the CTS leadership to assign 200 high-quality CTS non-commissioned officers and other officers to the Academia, a CTS training center, to offset training bottlenecks that may occur due to the expected high number of new recruits.[155] However, CJTF-OIR reported no progress during the quarter on readying CTS trainers to instruct personnel entering or reentering the CTS.[156]

End-use Monitoring and Leahy Vetting

Articles provided to Iraq under the Arms Export Control Act are subject to end-use monitoring (EUM). Iraq is considered a "hostile environment" by the DoD, with movement and security restrictions that prevent U.S. personnel from conducting the mandated regular observations of the articles' status. Therefore, DoD EUM reports are provided by the Iraqi government in lieu of direct observations by U.S. personnel. The DoD and State said this approach best ensures that inventory tracking remains up to date despite operational challenges.[157]

Approximately 90 percent of EUM is executed by the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior. In addition, third parties are used in locations that are inaccessible to U.S. personnel. Though bar codes are used for EUM, they are not on every item (including the most numerous item, night vision devices) resulting in most EUM items not having a bar code. In the absence of bar codes, monitors check serial numbers, which appear on most defense articles.[158]

State reported that it was not aware of any instances during the quarter where assistance was provided by the United States to ISF or KSF in violation of the Leahy law. The Leahy law refers to two statutory provisions prohibiting the United States from providing certain assistance to a unit of a foreign security force if the U.S. Government has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. State vets proposed recipients of such assistance to determine if there is credible information that they have committed a gross violation of human rights.[159]

Effect of a Pause in Funding for CTS Forensics and Investigations

The United States has provided funding and advising to the CTS to strengthen its ability to exploit enemy material collected during operations to support future operations and prosecutions of ISIS fighters.

The United States has provided funding and advising to the CTS to strengthen its ability to exploit enemy material collected during operations to support future operations and prosecutions of ISIS fighters. Last quarter, CJTF-OIR reported that U.S. funding for the laboratory had stopped, leaving a "critical capability gap" in the CTS's ability to collect evidence for prosecutions against ISIS members in court.[160] CJTF-OIR reported this quarter that there was no degradation of operations due to the pause in funding for the CTS Special Forensics and Investigations Laboratory.[161]

CJTF-OIR said that the CTS possesses a "sound foundation" of evidence collection that enables it to exploit sensitive sites. Forensics and investigations technicians are trained on fingerprinting, bio-enrollment, photography, cell phone exploitation, and data analysis.[162]

However, CJTF-OIR said that on many occasions, the Special Forensic Investigative Laboratory receives evidence that has been cross contaminated by operators on site.[163] It said this problem could be fixed by holding the operations officer in charge accountable for cross contamination mistakes and by increasing the number of sensitive site exploitation classes taught at the Academia.[164]

Additionally, CJTF-OIR noted that there is no working relationship between the laboratory and the Ministry of Interior, which it said harms the laboratory's credibility and prevents it from accessing the ministry's extensive fingerprint database.[165] Chain of custody forms for collected evidence are not properly completed.[166]

CJTF-OIR said that plans to address these shortcomings. These plans include: conducting scenario-based sensitive site exploitation training to provide hands-on experience with the actual collection of evidence and the proper methods to bag the evidence to avoid the loss of any DNA or fingerprints; working with Coalition advisors to facilitate a working relationship between the laboratory and the Ministry of Interior and enable access to the fingerprint database; and creating a "cheat sheet" that sensitive site exploitation operators can use to ensure proper handling of material.[167]

KURDISH SECURITY FORCES

In September 2022, the United States revised and renewed a memorandum of understanding with the KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) to support reform measures that seek to create a unified, nonpartisan military that operates under MoPA command.[168] The non-binding memorandum of understanding has served as an organizing framework for DoD counter-ISIS support to the MoPA since 2016 and encourages continued MoPA reform. The MoU will remain in effect until the end of September 2026, subject to the availability of funds.[169]

A key element of the reform plan is the transfer to the MoPA of forces belonging to the two biggest political parties—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Specifically, the MoU calls for the transfer of the PUK's 70s Units and the KDP's 80s Units.[170]

In line with the reform plan, thousands of personnel have transferred from these politically affiliated forces to the MoPA, where they have been organized into units known as Regional Guard Brigades, ultimately to be assigned to one of the MoPA divisions.[171]

CJTF-OIR reported incremental progress in the MoPA's ability to establish an operations center capable of planning and executing operations against ISIS.[172] (See Table 1.)

Table 1.

Status of MoPA Warfighting Functions During the Quarter

Function	Capability
Mission Planning	**KSF operations continue to be planned and executed at the Sector Commander level.** Coalition advisers worked with the Kurdish Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs Operations Center (MoPOC) to develop the capability to plan operations against ISIS within the IKR. The MoPA is in the process of finalizing the Peshmerga Forces Operating Concept, which will clarify the role of the MoPOC and outline the transition of command from the Sector Commands to the MoPA. Coalition advisers helped the MoPOC develop its mission planning capability and provided advice to the two MoPA division headquarters.
KSF Ground Operations	**MoPA units are effective in executing counterinsurgency operations in their areas of responsibility.** Coalition advisers helped develop MoPA structures and ministry headquarters to enable it to execute counter-ISIS ground operations.
Intelligence	**Intelligence collection in the IKR is "efficient" but relies almost solely on human intelligence sources.** Coalition advisers continue to advise the Directorate of Intelligence and other relevant stakeholders at the MoPA.
Command and Control	**The MoPOC is developing but is not yet able to effectively exercise command and control of operations.** The MoPA's two divisions conducted a training exercise in February that demonstrated the capabilities of the divisions to oversee command and control the Regional Guard Brigades. The KSF has requested additional similar training to improve the MoPA's command and control of forces.
Fire Support	**MoPA artillery units have not executed combined arms operations since 2017.** Artillery regiments are distributed under the 1st and 2nd Support Force Commands, but their command and communication structure is unpracticed and their capabilities have not been verified. The regiments exercise twice a year with live ammunition, but only in battery-size units and without supported infantry units. Coalition advisers continued to help the MoPA understand how best to employ artillery in support of counter-ISIS operations. The MoPA has been receptive to Coalition efforts and the Support Forces Commanders appear willing to support the development of artillery capabilities.
Logistics and Sustainment	**The MoPA made steady progress in improving the logistics and sustainment of the force.** CJTF-OIR assessed that the two regional logistic hubs have sufficient facilities, manpower, and equipment to achieve initial operating capability. Coalition advisers helped the MoPA start basic operations at the two recently established Regional Logistic Hubs, which recently achieved initial operating status and should become fully operational during 2024.
Information Operations	**KSF information operations publish information and pictures showing counter-ISIS operations conducted by MoPA units and joint operations with the ISF.** The information is published on social media sites, which have thousands of followers. However, the posts are "reactive," coming after operations are conducted, rather than before or during an ongoing operation. Most posts highlight KSF cooperation with Coalition forces and KSF training, not counter-ISIS operations. Integrating information operations into KSF military doctrine is "likely to take some time to fully implement." Coalition advisers work with the MoPA to enable them to link information operations into operations planning and coordinate information operations at headquarters with media cells embedded with Regional Guard Brigades.

Source: CJTF-OIR, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.2 OIR 033, and 24.2 OIR 034, 3/13/2024.

U.S. Soldiers conduct a Command Post Exercise with the 1st Infantry Division of the KSF Army, February 18, 2024. (U.S. Army photo)

The MoPA Takes Significant Steps Toward Reform

In January, U.S. and Kurdish officials held an inaugural meeting of the Peshmerga Executive Steering Committee in Erbil, during which they assessed that the MoPA had made significant progress toward financial and force structure reform, according to a DoD press release.[173]

CJTF-OIR reported that the KSF's 1st and 2nd Divisions achieved fully operational capability in March, which CJTF-OIR described as an "important milestone" in the OIR campaign plan as well as the MoU and related terms of reference.[174] The DIA reported that both divisions had completed a command post exercise in February that signaled that they had achieved full operating capability.[175]

CJTF-OIR reported that the 2nd Division Headquarters was manned at 70 percent as of the end of the quarter, and the MoPA had biometrically enrolled 100 percent of its personnel into an electronic funds transfer system to pay salaries, a key financial reform.[176]

Coalition advisers continued weekly engagements with key MoPA leaders in support of the Coalition's Partner Force Development Plan, which is partly based on the MoU and related terms of reference, CJTF-OIR said.[177] Advisers also regularly advised, assisted, and enabled KSF divisions, MoPA logistics facilities, and MoPA training centers.[178]

However, CJTF-OIR reported that despite the progress made on reform efforts, political challenges remained, including what CJTF-OIR described as "perceptions of inequality" between forces previously attached to the KDP or PUK.[179] CJTF-OIR said that Coalition advisers met routinely with MoPA leadership to encourage continued dialogue and compromise to reduce these perceptions and build trust.[180]

CJTF-OIR previously reported that efforts at MoPA reform were "slowed" by an ongoing political divide between the KDP and the PUK.[181] Last quarter, MoPA Minister Shoresh Ismail returned to his post after more than a year out of office due to a dispute with PUK leaders.[182] CJTF-OIR said that this quarter, while party politics continued to hamper reform, the minister's reinstatement was having "a significant impact" on reform progress.[183] According to local media reports, the minister said that the partisan 70s and 80s Units will be united under MoPA control by September 2026.[184]

> **CJTF-OIR said that this quarter, while party politics continued to hamper reform, the minister's reinstatement was having "a significant impact" on reform progress.**

Progress toward Formation of Joint ISF-KSF Brigades

The ISF and KSF have been working toward creating joint brigades to patrol disputed areas in northern Iraq that are claimed by both the Iraqi government in Baghdad and the KRG in Erbil.[185] The brigades would help to close security gaps in these areas that are often exploited by ISIS, according to the DIA.[186]

CJTF-OIR reported that the Joint Brigades did not conduct operations during the quarter.[187] However, there was progress toward training new recruits. CJTF-OIR said that more than 1,000 KSF soldiers, mostly new recruits, had completed 6 weeks of ISF-led basic training to support the creation of two Joint Brigades.[188]

Additionally, the MoPA reflagged the 20th Regional Guard Brigade to be the 2nd Joint Brigade, which will operate under the ISF chain of command.[189] CJTF-OIR reported that the first two Joint Brigades are being equipped using CTEF funds and that four more Joint Brigades are planned.[190]

SYRIAN PARTNER FORCES

To achieve its mission, CJTF-OIR works with vetted local partner forces in Syria, including the SDF in northeastern Syria and the Syrian Free Army (SFA), further south along Syria's southeastern border.[191]

The SDF operates in Hasakah governorate, in areas of the Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah governorates east of the Euphrates River, and in portions of the Aleppo governorate.[192] The SFA mans outposts in and secures a deconfliction zone within a 55-kilometer radius around the At Tanf Garrison, near the confluence of Syria's border with Jordan and Iraq. (See page 25.) The SFA provides force protection against ISIS and Iran-aligned militia group positions surrounding the deconfliction zone.[193]

Coalition forces operate and support the SDF in the Eastern Syria Security Area (ESSA), which includes Hasakah governorate and parts of Dayr az Zawr east of the Euphrates.[194] Coalition forces also support SDF operations in Raqqah governorate.[195]

SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

SDF, Facing Multiple Threats, Struggles to Maintain Security in the ESSA

Coalition forces continued to partner with the SDF during the quarter on counter-ISIS operations and training.[196] However, CJTF-OIR reported that regular attacks by Iran-aligned militia groups, ongoing airstrikes by Türkiye, and tensions between SDF and local Arab tribes in Dayr az Zawr governorate posed challenges to the SDF's ability to secure its area in northeastern Syria.[197]

CJTF-OIR reported that strikes and attacks against the SDF, particularly the Turkish aerial bombardments, caused multiple SDF personnel losses and stretched the SDF's capability to maintain its pace of operations against ISIS. While counter-ISIS operations have not yet decreased significantly, the SDF struggled to maintain security in the ESSA.[198]

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THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT IN SYRIA

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

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

BASES/TROOP PRESENCE
- Iran-aligned
- Russian Troops
- Türkiye
- United States

AREAS OF INFLUENCE
- ISIS Support Zones
- Pro-Regime
- SDF
- Türkiye-supported Opposition
- Syria Free Army

BORDER PRESENCE
- Russia
- Syrian Army
- SDF
- Iran-aligned Militia
- Türkiye and Türkiye-supported Opposition
- United States and Coalition
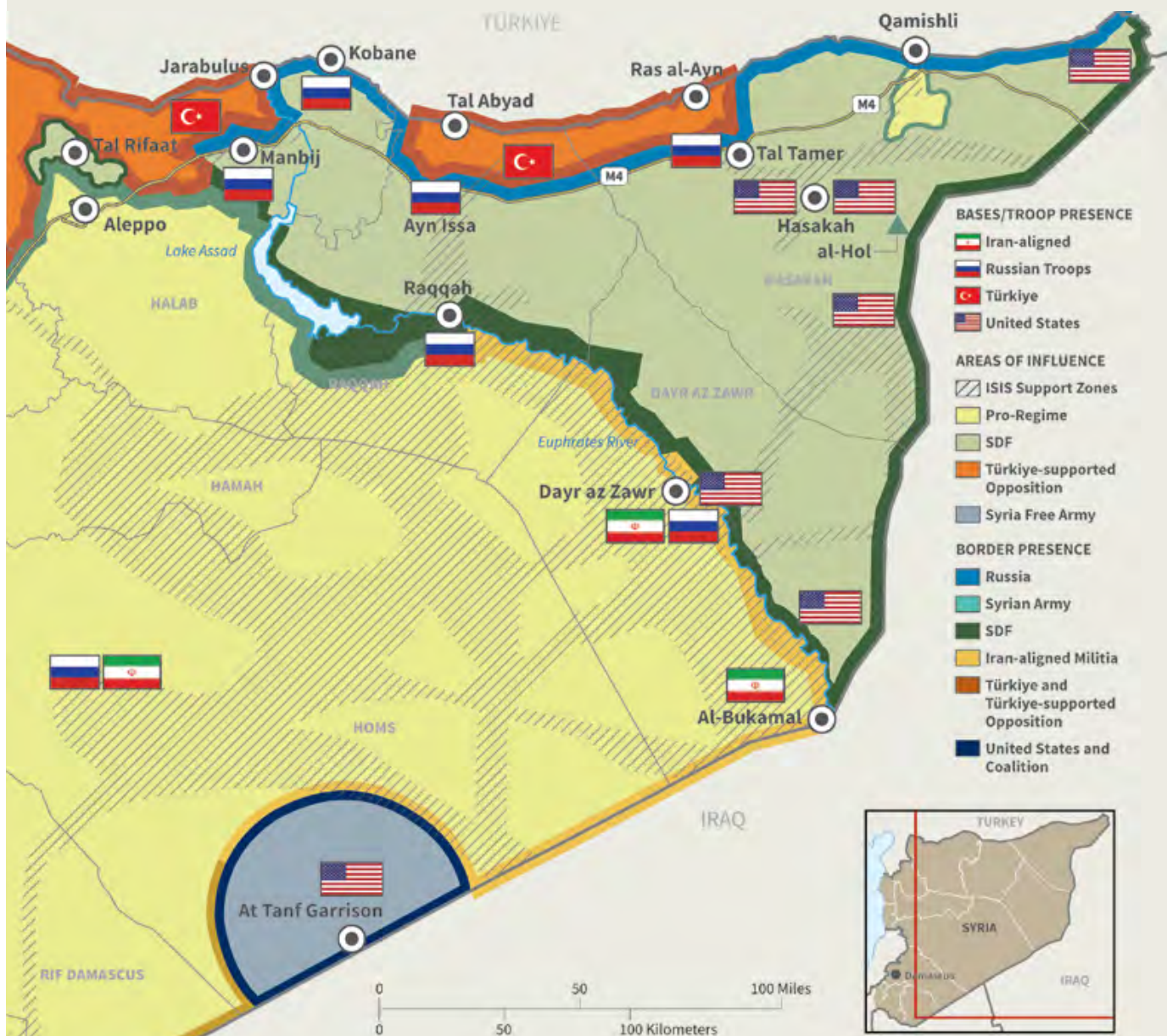
Note: This map does not depict precisely or comprehensively bases or operational locations in Syria.

Source: CJTF-OIR, vetting comments, 4/16/2024 and 4/29/2024.

At the same time, the situation has led to challenges in the SDF's relationship with the Coalition.[199] According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF leadership has complained that the Coalition is not applying pressure on Türkiye to stop its attacks and has requested more U.S. support. The SDF has also complained that force protection taken by the Coalition against Iran-aligned militia attacks, including consolidation of U.S. forces on fewer sites in Syria, are reducing what the SDF perceives as a deterrent effect that the Coalition presence has on Türkiye in Syria.[200]

Meanwhile, according to media reporting, Turkish military bombardments in January in northern Hasakah and Raqqah governorates degraded civilian infrastructure, reducing the capacity of the SDF-affiliated governing body, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), to provide electricity, fuel, water, and even food to populations in territory it controls.[201] CJTF-OIR said that the SDF and the DAANES are under both political and financial strain, with some media reports speculating that the DAANES has only a few months of funding reserves left to pay soldiers.[202]

Arab Tribal Insurgents Attack SDF Positions

The conflict between the SDF and the Arab tribal insurgency continued during the quarter, with clashes erupting periodically in the Dayr az Zawr governorate.[203] Arab tribes allege the cash-strapped DAANES has to provide essential services to secure basic rights.[204] CJTF-OIR reported that the conflict did not escalate to the levels reached in late September when tribal forces attempted to expel the SDF from the Middle Euphrates River Valley.[205]

The insurgents continued to attack SDF positions on the eastern side of the Euphrates River, often at night, according to media reporting.[206] These attacks were often accompanied by supporting artillery fire from the regime-controlled western bank of the river.[207] The clashes have forced the SDF to retain reinforced units and fighters in defensive positions on the eastern bank of the river.[208]

The number of fighters involved in the Arab tribal insurgency is unclear.[209] According to media reporting, the insurgency does not have support of a large portion of the Arab population, with numbers estimated in the low thousands rather than tens or hundreds of thousands.[210] CJTF-OIR said that the Syrian regime and its Iranian partners appear to be continuing to fund and arm the insurgency, while the insurgency's leader, Ibrahim al-Hifl, is reported to be located in Syrian regime-controlled territory, either in Damascus or in Dayr az Zawr city.[211]

The DIA reported that the Syrian regime continued to encourage local tribal affiliates to oppose SDF and U.S. forces in Dayr az Zawr. The regime has promised economic support to influential tribal leaders, while its outreach and propaganda exploited Arab-Kurdish tensions and questioned United States commitment to the SDF and the region.[212] The DIA said that Iran also provided support to tribal groups opposing the SDF.[213]

Meanwhile, SDF engagements with local Arab and tribal leaders continued, according to media reports. CJTF-OIR said that there was little reporting about the success of ongoing reconciliation efforts, but the lack of detrimental news suggested some success in efforts to provide some local autonomy to Arab tribes.[214] The DIA said that in late December, the DAANES published a new "social contract" outlining measures for restructuring local

The conflict between the SDF and the Arab tribal insurgency continued during the quarter, with clashes erupting periodically in the Dayr az Zawr governorate.

governance to involve more tribal leadership. However, the DIA had no update whether this document has been implemented or any other measures taken.[215]

CJTF-OIR said that tensions persisted between the SDF and the non-insurgent local Arab population.[216] According to U.S.-sponsored public surveys, Arab clans and tribes in northeastern Syria that continue to support the SDF, do so mainly because they see the SDF as a better option than the regime and their Iranian allies.[217] These populations are still critical of the policies of the SDF and the DAANES.[218]

CJTF-OIR reported that the ongoing tribal tension in SDF-held areas exposed security gaps in the area, and if the tensions continue, ISIS would be able to exploit the security environment further and degrade the SDF's ability to maintain security in eastern Syria.[219]

Coalition Continues to Partner with SDF on Counter-ISIS Train, Advise and Assist Mission

On January 27, the SDF said that it launched a large-scale clearance operation of the al-Hol displaced persons camp with support of Coalition forces, based on information that ISIS was planning an attack.[220] CJTF-OIR reported that the operation was largely successful and gained significant attention in the information environment.[221]

In a separate operation on February 22, the SDF targeted what it described as a group of ISIS cells in Hasakah City. The SDF said that its forces apprehended 16 ISIS operatives and facilitators who were either involved in conducting attacks against the SDF or who supported ISIS cells in executing terrorist acts, and seized multiple weapons, ammunition and equipment.[222]

In late January, the SDF conducted a large-scale operation in Raqqa where the SDF said that ISIS and militia forces loyal to the Syrian regime had exploited unrest stemming from a conflict between two clans. The SDF said that it arrested individuals linked to ISIS terrorist cells and the Syrian regime.[223]

USCENTCOM reported that the SDF conducted 28 partnered operations with Coalition forces during the quarter, a decrease compared to the previous quarter.[224] During those operations, 7 ISIS operatives were killed and 27 detained.[225]

CJTF-OIR reported that the SDF is capable of executing operations up to the battalion level and maintaining counterterrorism pressure on ISIS relatively independently.[226] The SDF has the ability to successfully execute unilateral operations but continued to rely on Coalition forces for some capabilities. CJTF-OIR said that there was no change to SDF capabilities during the quarter.[227]

CJTF-OIR also continued to train the SDF, though it reported pauses to some training due to SDF availability, particularly related to training for detention facility guards and displaced persons camp security forces.[228] (See pages 28 and 32.) CJTF-OIR said that train-the-trainer courses were a significant feature of training during the quarter, with five instructors graduating from the instructor training course for the displaced persons camp security force. CJTF-OIR also said that the newly graduated instructors have since started to teach a course to train the next generation of instructors. In addition, recently trained SDF instructors have also run their own long-range marksmanship course during this quarter.[229]

SDF Detention Facilities Remain at Physical Risk, Guard Force Training Temporarily on Hold

The SDF operates detention facilities holding an estimated 9,050 ISIS detainees, as of an August assessment.[230] CJTF-OIR said that while all the detention facilities require some form of improvements to physical security, some require more attention than others, as they are at risk of attack and/or breakout attempts by ISIS detainees.[231] Plans to provide at-risk facilities with CTEF-funded barrier material to enhance security concerns have not yet been implemented.[232] Planned site assessments are a critical first step to understand what needs to be done, CJTF-OIR said.[233]

Conditions inside the detention facilities also vary.[234] CJTF-OIR said that while guard force training for detention facilities includes training on humane treatment, not all of the detention facilities have medical facilities, and in general, facilities do not have proper healthcare nor do they provide inmates sufficient calories or three meals a day.[235]

The Combined Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant (CSOJTF-L), which runs guard force training and divestments for the facilities, reported that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is expected to complete site visits in June to assess conditions.[236] The visits should give CSOJTF-L a better understanding of the situation at each facility.[237]

Classes for detention facility guards have been on hold since the start of the year, with no indication when they will restart, and therefore none were trained during the quarter.[238] CJTF-OIR reported that the training continues to face intermittent pauses due to Turkish military bombardments, which it said are destabilizing the region.[239] The ongoing pause is due to the current threat environment to the SDF and the reshuffling of priorities, CJTF-OIR said.[240]

CSOJTF-L has limited information on the guard forces once they complete training. The task force is currently working to better track and understand the number and training level of guards at the facilities.[241] CJTF-OIR said that the assumption is that the detention facilities have a sufficient number of guards, but there is no clarity on whether or not they are trained. When asked, the SDF responds that all of the guards are trained, CJTF-OIR said. Moving forward, CSOJTF-L said that it is working on issuing certification or competencies when training is completed.[242]

CJTF-OIR noted that there is a general lack of professionalism in the detention facility guard force, but that assessment is based on a Western standard.[243] It also said that the SDF guard forces share information when it benefits them, and the relationship with the guard force is "very transactional."[244]

In mid-January, a rocket attack struck the recently reinforced Ghuwayran Detention Facility, causing a number of injuries.[245] While the SDF initially attributed the attack to ISIS, CJTF-OIR said that there were no ISIS attacks or internal uprisings at SDF-run detention facilities during the quarter.[246] The strike came amid a barrage of Turkish airstrikes in northeastern Syria, according to a news report.[247] The facility, which holds thousands of ISIS fighters, was the scene of a major ISIS attack and attempted breakout in January 2022.[248]

> **CJTF-OIR said that while all the detention facilities require some form of improvements to physical security, some require more attention than others, as they are at risk of attack and/or breakout attempts by ISIS detainees.**

SYRIAN FREE ARMY

SFA Making Progress Through Coalition Training

Coalition forces also continued to train the SFA in defensive tasks while promoting stability within the deconfliction zone surrounding the At Tanf Garrison.[249] During the quarter, the SFA, along with Coalition forces, conducted 44 partnered training operations to build proficiency in defensive operations. The SFA also regularly patrols the deconfliction zone to curb smuggling into the nearby Rukban displaced persons camp.[250]

The SFA participated in one kinetic operation during the quarter. CJTF-OIR said that on January 20, the SFA reported a low-flying unmanned aircraft near At Tanf, which allowed Coalition forces to track the drone, identify it as hostile, and shoot it down.[251]

CJTF-OIR said that it continued to instruct the SFA on how to plan and execute defensive military operations and sustainment operations for both themselves and the Rukban camp.[252] CJTF-OIR said that the aim is to build independence within the SFA and teach it how to train and think like a proficient fighting force.[253] To encourage greater SFA independence from the Coalition forces, the Coalition has continued to take a more hands-off approach in training.[254]

CJTF-OIR said that the SFA has been a stabilizing influence within the deconfliction zone and Rukban camp.[255] The SFA has developed its own tactics, techniques, procedures, and best practices for security operations and has demonstrated initiative in maintaining the integrity of the deconfliction zone by stifling smuggling and the influence of malign actors.[256]

During the quarter, the SFA announced that it replaced its commander of 16 months with a new leader, Lieutenant Colonel Salim Turki al-Antari. The SFA did not disclose a reason for the change of command.[257] According to a war monitor, al-Antari defected from the Syrian regime shortly after the start of the civil war and worked with several rebel factions before joining the SFA in 2018, when the group went by the name Mughawir al Thawra.[258] The SFA said that the change of leadership was in support of its mission to stabilize the region and defeat ISIS.[259]

SFA training with the Coalition takes places at both the staff and fighting unit levels.[260] During the quarter, Coalition forces conducted extensive levels of training with the SFA to give it the capabilities to conduct its own internal training for new and current members.[261] The SFA made measured progress toward marksmanship, maneuver, and indirect fires proficiency and continued to demonstrate growth and development as a professional fighting force.[262] The SFA also continued to build task proficiency in maneuver (mounted and dismounted) while incorporating mortars, using communications equipment, medical tasks, planning defensive operations, and messaging in the information environment, as well as individual weapon training. [263]

Coalition forces also conducted a live-fire exercise, maneuver, and indirect fires training with the SFA.[264] CJTF-OIR said that the focus was to build familiarity and proficiency with numerous weapon systems, including ones made available to them by the Coalition and also weapons that the SFA has acquired independently.[265]

A legal aid assistant provides consultation to a local woman who recently arrived from the al-Hol camp for displaced persons. (USAID photo)

DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS

The United States continued to urge the international community to repatriate, reintegrate and rehabilitate their nationals currently held in SDF detention facilities and residing in displaced persons camps in Syria, particularly those residing in the al-Hol and Roj camps, which contain thousands of foreign nationals who came to the country and joined ISIS, and where ISIS operatives remain active.[266] U.S. military and diplomatic officials continued to emphasize that the rapid reduction of the populations of the camps is critical to resolving security and humanitarian challenges in the camps and reducing the risk of an ISIS resurgence.[267]

General Kurilla, the USCENTCOM Commander, said in early March that the international community had repatriated 6,396 displaced persons from Syria, and reduced the population at al-Hol, the largest of the camps, by 18 percent.[268] An estimated 43,000 residents remain in the camp.[269] (See Figure 4.)

Humanitarian conditions in the al-Hol camp remained dire. An NGO reported in January that residents of the camp faced numerous challenges, including limited access to water, inadequate sanitation facilities, and a healthcare system inhibited by restrictive security practices. The only barrier between inhabitants and the elements is makeshift tents.[270] USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) reported that it continued to provide monthly food assistance and daily bread, mental health and psychosocial support, nutrition, and access to clean water and sanitation facilities to the residents of al-Hol.[271]

ISIS Continues Violence, Intimidation, and Radicalization Activities in al-Hol

CJTF-OIR reported that al-Hol remained a "hotbed for ISIS radicalization" during the quarter.[272] ISIS loyalists used fear and intimidation to effectively control sections of the camp, punishing residents who violate ISIS's extremist interpretation of Islamic Sharia law.[273]

CJTF-OIR reported that porous infrastructure at al-Hol continued to present a security challenge in the camp, particularly in the Foreigner's Annex of the camp where many families of ISIS fighters have been housed since the territorial defeat of ISIS in 2019.[274] ISIS is able to smuggle contraband in and out of the camp with relative ease.[275] CJTF-OIR said the security

Figure 4.

Demographics of al-Hol and Roj Displaced Persons Camps

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

al-Hol: 43,000 People

Men 7%
Children (Under 5) 8%
Women 32%
Children (5 and Over) 54%

Third-country Nationals 15%
Iraqi 46%
Syrian 39%

Roj: 2,600 People

Men 3%
Children (Under 5) 3%
Women 33%
Children (5 and Over) 60%

Iraqi 12%
Syrian 3%
Third-country Nationals 85%

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 4/1/2024.

gaps allow for a greater exertion of influence by ISIS throughout the camp.[276] Fear of ISIS reprisals against residents opting to repatriate was also reported, CJTF-OIR said.[277]

The SDF reported during the quarter that ISIS had increased activity in the camp, taking advantage of the SDF's preoccupation with confronting ongoing Turkish and Syrian regime-sponsored attacks.[278] The SDF said that ISIS activity included intimidation, killings, exerting pressure on residents, burning humanitarian aid and obstructing the delivery of medical supplies and other aid.[279] In addition to ongoing efforts to indoctrinate children, ISIS was involved in creating chaos within the camp to hinder the ability of security forces to control the situation, the SDF said.[280]

SDF Conducts Large Counter-ISIS Operation in Al-Hol

CJTF-OIR reported that SDF operations to remove ISIS operatives from al-Hol have reduced ISIS's influence in the camp.[281] On January 27, the SDF launched what it described as the third phase of operations against ISIS inside al-Hol, to crack down on ISIS activity and prevent an ISIS plan to launch a coordinated attack by fighters outside the camp and operatives within the camp.[282]

The SDF said in a press release that during the 10-day operation, led by its Women's Protection Units (YPJ) and assisted by Coalition forces, the SDF apprehended dozens of suspected ISIS operatives, uncovered tunnels and seized a large number of weapons, ammunition, explosive belts, and handmade explosives, the magnitude of which demonstrated the group's preparations for a large-scale attack.[283]

The SDF said that it killed a senior ISIS operative Abu Sufian al-Lahibi, who was responsible for orchestrating ISIS attacks inside and outside the camp, and captured individuals directly involved in efforts to spread and enforce ISIS ideology and indoctrinate children.[284] The YPJ also freed a Yazidi woman who had had been abducted by ISIS from Iraqi Kurdistan in 2014 and was being held hostage in the camp.[285]

Security Force Training for Al-Hol Resumes, Security Infrastructure Missing

While guard force training for SDF detention facilities remained on pause, CJTF-OIR reported that training of security forces for displaced persons camps resumed midway through the quarter.[286] CSOJTF-L, which provides the training, continued to offer courses. By the end of the quarter, 70 internal security forces (Asayish) were trained for al-Hol and other camps, and 3 partner force instructors were trained, bringing the total number of trained security personnel for the camps to 1,936.[287]

Similar to detention facility guard forces training, pauses in the security forces training for displaced persons camps are due to SDF priorities and security concerns related to Turkish military activity and tribal clashes. SDF forces are often relocated to where they are needed most due to the threat environment at a given time, CJTF-OIR reported.[288]

CJTF-OIR said that it was awaiting the completion of an assessment in June by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to have a better understanding of how many trained security forces are being used to address security needs in the camp, and whether the number is sufficient.[289] CJTF-OIR said that no site visit was conducted during the quarter. However, CJTF-OIR noted that there was a discrepancy between the 50 to 100 security officers it had most recently observed in al-Hol and the 500 officers reported by the SDF.[290]

Additionally, CJTF-OIR reported that CTEF-funded items provided by the Coalition to the SDF for al-Hol security or humanitarian efforts are not being used for their intended purposes to improve conditions in the camp.[291] These items included Bearcats intended to refrigerate medical supplies, and guard towers that have gone missing.[292] CJTF-OIR said that in the future, it must identify ways in which it can ensure more appropriate application of U.S.-provided equipment.[293]

Repatriations Continue; One Convoy to Iraq

In the past year, the international community stepped up its efforts to repatriate and reintegrate displaced individuals in Syria.[294] Ian McCary, the U.S. Deputy Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS said in March that although the international community is "making progress" on repatriations, more needs to be done and "repatriations are our single most important tool for preventing an ISIS resurgence."[295]

During the quarter, General Kurilla, the USCENTCOM Commander, visited the al-Hol and Roj camps, where he met with administrators and residents to discuss the repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of camp residents.[296] Days later, General Kurilla testified to Congress that Coalition forces, along with their partners, continue to identify and detain ISIS facilitators operating in the camps. He said that the longer residents remain in the camps, the

By the end of the quarter, 70 internal security forces (Asayish) were trained for al-Hol and other camps, and 3 partner force instructors were trained, bringing the total number of trained security personnel for the camps to 1,936.

more susceptible they are to ISIS ideology, which makes their reintegration into their home communities more difficult.[297]

State continues to use bilateral and multilateral engagements to encourage the voluntary repatriation of displaced persons to their communities and countries of origin. State said that these efforts have resulted in an increased willingness among many partners to repatriate their nationals from Syria.[298]

Repatriations to Iraq slowed during the quarter. On March 9 and 10, the Iraqi government repatriated 157 households (625 individuals) from al-Hol to the Jeddah 1 camp in Iraq. This repatriation convoy was the 14th convoy since repatriations began in May 2021; the last convoy occurred in late December.[299] The March repatriations included 13 persons with physical disabilities (of whom 2 were children), 19 unaccompanied and separated children, and 4 pregnant women.[300] A total of 8,183 Iraqis (2,070 households) have been repatriated since May 2021.[301]

During the quarter, the Kyrgyz Republic repatriated 99 women and children from the Roj and al-Hol camps. State said that the SDF, with support from Kuwait, facilitated the operation.[302] Sweden announced in March that it would not repatriate Swedes who joined ISIS and are currently in camps in northeastern Syria because of the threat they could pose to security.[303]

In addition to the repatriation of displaced persons from Syria, the United States has been urging countries to repatriate and prosecute or reintegrate those being held in SDF detention for ISIS-related activities. CJTF-OIR said that on March 16, the SDF transferred 50 Iraqi detainees from various SDF detention centers to Iraq, while it later transferred 3 female Iraqi detainees with 13 children.[304] CJTF-OIR reported that one foreign terrorist fighter was repatriated during the quarter from Syria to the United Arab Emirates.[305]

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

This quarter's attacks by Iran-aligned militias in Iraq and Syria complicated an already complex operating environment for Coalition forces by increasing force protection needs, influencing and distracting partner forces and partner relationships, and escalating the risk of further conflict.[306]

Actions by other third parties—including Türkiye, the Syrian regime, and Russia—also affected the operating environment for CJTF-OIR and its partner forces.[307]

Regime, Russia, Iran, Türkiye Conduct Counter-ISIS Operations

The Syrian regime and third parties conducted counter-ISIS operations in Syria during the quarter, particularly as ISIS became more active. The DIA reported that intensified ISIS attacks on regime positions in central Syria prompted the regime in January to reinforce its military positions in the area with better armed conventional forces, supplemented by Iran-aligned militias and Russian air support.[308]

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Syrian regime forces conducted broad clearing operations that eliminated some ISIS fighters, though poor weather and the harsh terrain inhibited the effectiveness of those activities, the DIA said. Russian forces continued to conduct airstrikes against ISIS militants in central Syria.[309]

On 15 January, Iran launched four Kheibar Sheikan medium-range ballistic missiles toward ISIS targets in Syria. The DIA, citing a press report, said that the strike was the farthest ranging operational missile launch that Iran has conducted to date—approximately 1,230 kilometers from Iran. Iran claimed the attack was in retaliation for the January 3 ISIS-Khorasan attack in Iran.[310]

During the quarter, Turkish forces conducted intensified counter-ISIS operations inside Türkiye following an ISIS attack targeting a Turkish church in January, and the March ISIS-K attack in Moscow, Russia. In late March, Türkiye's Interior Minister announced that Turkish forces conducted simultaneous overnight raids in 30 provinces and detained 147 people with suspected links to ISIS.[311] The mass raids followed two days of counter-ISIS operations, in which 40 arrests were made in raids of eight cities on the first day, and another 24 in another eight locations the next day. Media reports said in total, Turkish forces arrested 211 ISIS suspects over a 4-day period following the Moscow attack.[312]

RUSSIA

Russian aircraft have routinely violated deconfliction and safety protocols, presenting a risk to Coalition forces and equipment and the potential for unintended escalations, according to CJTF-OIR.[313] CJTF-OIR said that during quarter, there were no instances of unsafe or unprofessional behavior towards Coalition aircraft or Coalition ground forces during the covered period, although CJTF-OIR did not provide unclassified information regarding whether the activity violated the protocols.[314] CJTF-OIR said that there has been no kinetic threat from Russian forces, and no perceived interference with the OIR campaign. CJTF-OIR noted that Coalition commanders may take additional force protection measures when Russian aircraft overfly their areas of operations.[315]

According to CJTF-OIR, At Tanf Garrison is the point of greatest tension over the safety arrangements, because while the protocols loosely cover the Coalition base, they are not enshrined there the way they are at other deconfliction zones.[316] CJTF-OIR said that the Russian military takes advantage of the more dubious nature of the protocols at At Tanf. Additionally, Russia uses Coalition flights in northern Syria that are not in the area covered by deconfliction protocols as grounds for its "unsafe and unprofessional" actions, CJTF-OIR said.[317]

CJTF-OIR said that Russian forces violate the protocols for several reasons, including in response to actual or perceived Coalition violations of protocols, as show of force, or for intelligence collection.[318] Russia routinely portrays Coalition forces as being solely responsible for all violations and regularly accuses Coalition air activity of being unsafe. CJTF-OIR said that the Russian military conducts overflight violations as "posturing," and that the Russian military routinely portrays itself as the "sole guarantor of peace and stability in Syria," seeking to protect Syrian sovereignty.[319]

Russian aircraft have routinely violated deconfliction and safety protocols, presenting a risk to Coalition forces and equipment and the potential for unintended escalations, according to CJTF-OIR.

Jordan Targets Captagon Smugglers

During the quarter, Jordan launched several airstrikes in Syria targeting suspected hideouts and warehouses of drug smugglers.[320] Media reporting, citing Jordanian and regional officials, said the Jordanian army stepped up its campaign against drug dealers after protracted clashes in December with dozens of infiltrators from Syria. Those arrested were linked to Iran-aligned militias and carried large caches of weapons and explosives.[321]

The Jordanian Foreign Ministry issued a statement in February declaring that Jordan intended to completely halt the trafficking of drugs into and through the country, including a Syrian formulation of the amephetamine fenethyline, which they sell under the name captagon.[322]

A January 18 airstrike in Syria reportedly killed 10 people, including women and children. While Jordan did not deny or confirm its involvement in the strike, an international human rights group called on the Jordanian government in March to ensure accountability for its counter-drug trafficking airstrikes in southern Syria, and to compensate the victims and their families.[323]

The United States and the United Kingdom have linked to and sanctioned members of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's family and close associates for the manufacture of captagon, and Hezbollah associates enabling the trafficking of the highly addictive drug.[324] During the quarter, the United States designated an additional 11 individuals and entities that it said were "supporting the Assad regime in Syria by facilitating illicit financial transfers and trafficking of illegal drugs."[325]

State said in a statement that Syria had become "the leading producer and exporter of captagon," which is being trafficked throughout the Middle East and Europe. State noted that the Assad regime is utilizing millions from the illicit drug trade, along with other illicit trade from the mining sector, undermining stability, security and public health in Syria and the wider region.[326]

TÜRKIYE

Türkiye continued to conduct strikes in northern Iraq and northern Syria during the quarter, targeting those it said were suspected members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization that has waged a violent Kurdish separatist campaign against Türkiye.[327] In Syria, strikes focused on SDF-controlled and Kurdish majority areas along Syria's northern border with Türkiye; in Iraq, Turkish operations focused on perceived PKK elements in the IKR.[328]

In Iraq, Türkiye launched large-scale operations against PKK positions in January and March, according to media reports. In January, Türkiye attacked 29 locations in Iraq and Syria in response to an attack on a Turkish military base that killed 9 Turkish soldiers. Targets in Iraq included Metina, Hakurk, Gara, and Qandil in the mountainous northern Iraqi Kurdistan Region.[329] In March, Türkiye said that it killed 12 PKK members in northern Iraq.[330]

Türkiye established a permanent military presence in northern Iraq in 2018, and according to Iraq experts has since erected 40 military bases and more than 100 military outposts in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.[331] Türkiye has also periodically conducted airstrikes against PKK bases in northern Iraq, where the PKK has maintained a headquarters since the 1980s.[332]

According to media reports, in March, Türkiye proposed setting up a "joint operations center" with Iraq to fight the PKK.[333] Those reports said that the Iraqi government had responded "positively" to the idea and had banned the PKK in Iraq.[334] In March, officials from both countries held talks in Baghdad to discuss security issues, including potential measures against the PKK.[335]

In Syria, Türkiye does not differentiate between the PKK and the SDF. Rather, Türkiye sees the SDF as an extension of the PKK and targets it accordingly.[336] CJTF-OIR said that the SDF is a coalition of diverse militias and rebel organizations formed in 2015 in response to the Syrian civil war and is not PKK.[337]

During the quarter, the Turkish military continued its strike campaign against the SDF, focusing on military, infrastructure, and high-value targets, the DIA said, citing press reporting.[338] According to a media report, Türkiye struck dozens of targets in northeastern Syria in response to PKK attacks on Turkish forces in northern Iraq.[339]

CJTF-OIR said the Turkish strikes in Syria increased significantly during the quarter. In one 72-hour period, the Turkish military conducted as many as 74 airstrikes.[340] Dozens of SDF members and civilians were killed, while SDF counterstrikes killed Turkish soldiers and aligned militia members.[341] The strikes targeted critical national infrastructure including oil refineries and electrical power plants, and destroyed the as-Suwaydiyah power plant, which generated much of the region's electricity. (See page 59.) CJTF-OIR said the strikes resulted in power outages and increased fuel prices that impacted SDF military funding and have undermined SDF operations during the quarter.[342] In addition, strikes on infrastructure had a significant impact on civilian populations and threatened the fragile stability in northeastern Syria.[343]

Last quarter, the SDF reported that Turkish forces killed two different SDF leaders in separate operations.[344] One was a senior commander, Farhad Derik. The other, SDF General Roni Walat, was killed in an IED attack in Syria's Middle Euphrates River Valley.[345] CJTF-OIR reported that General Roni's alleged assassination degraded SDF morale and motivation for the short term. However, once he was replaced, operational tempo returned to normal levels.[346]

Turkish Strikes Strain U.S.-SDF and U.S.-Turkish Relationships

According to CJTF-OIR, the SDF is the only active combat-capable armed force in Syria willing and capable of defending the population against ISIS.[347] The ongoing Turkish bombardments threaten the safety of U.S. personnel working in Syria with SDF partners, CJTF-OIR reported.[348]

During the quarter, SDF leadership called on the United States to do more to rein in its NATO ally Türkiye.[349] CJTF-OIR reported that SDF perceive that Coalition forces are not applying pressure on Türkiye to stop their attacks.[350] Despite the tense situation, CJTF-OIR said that relations between SDF and Coalition forces remain positive. Coalition forces conduct key leader engagements with most levels of the SDF chain of command

CJTF-OIR said the Turkish strikes in Syria increased significantly during the quarter.

CJTF-OIR reported that the Turkish military and intelligence forces continued to operate in the vicinity of Coalition forces in northern Syria.

with positive effect. Relations are unlikely to significantly deteriorate in the immediate to medium term, CJTF-OIR reported.[351]

CJTF-OIR reported that the Turkish military and intelligence forces continued to operate in the vicinity of Coalition forces in northern Syria.[352] CJTF-OIR said that Turkish forces have not hindered Coalition operations in Syria or Iraq during the quarter and communications lines remain open.[353] However, Coalition forces are not likely to discourage Türkiye from reducing its air activity in Iraq and Syria, CJTF-OIR said.[354]

The OUSD(P) reported that during U.S.-Türkiye strategic meetings led by State in early March 2024, the two governments' senior representatives agreed to convene a U.S.-Turkish Syria working group to engage more deeply on issues where progress can be made between the two governments.[355] Future engagement topics will include confidence-building measures that the United States can take to assuage Turkish concerns regarding the U.S. relationship with authorities in northeastern Syria, and U.S. concerns regarding Türkiye's air campaign targeting northeastern Syria civilian infrastructure.[356] The DoD intends to leverage these future engagements to mitigate the likelihood of future damage to civilian infrastructure and civilian casualties.[357]

While U.S. Government officials continue emphasizing to their Turkish counterparts that targeted strikes against SDF leaders and operational sites in Iraq and Syria undermine the DoD's counter-ISIS mission in these countries, Turkish officials have not adjusted their government's official stance that strikes against SDF targets constitute necessary and justified counterterrorism operations against PKK-aligned forces to protect Turkish people and interests.[358]

A Syrian woman works at a tailoring and textile workshop in Hasakah as part of the USAID Syria Livelihoods Program. (USAID photo)

BROADER U.S. POLICY GOALS

BROADER U.S. POLICY GOALS

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Government pursues several policy goals in Iraq and Syria that, while not directly a part of the OIR mission, are integral to the success of the campaign. (See Table 2.) The U.S. Government, primarily through State and USAID, remains the largest donor for stabilization and humanitarian programming in Iraq and Syria.[359] Other U.S. Government agencies, including the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Justice, also contribute to the counter-ISIS mission through sanctions, prosecutions, and technical assistance programs.

The United States seeks a stable, sovereign, and secure Iraq as well as a prosperous Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) within federal Iraq. State said that Iraq is integral to regional security and prosperity. Although ongoing militia attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces in the region have recently affected U.S.-Iraq relations, Iraq has significant potential: an upper middle-income country with the fifth-largest oil reserves in the world, a young population (half of whom are under 20 years old), and relative political stability.[360]

U.S. policy in Iraq aligns with President Biden's October 2022 National Security Strategy, which seeks to empower our allies and partners to advance regional peace and prosperity through a series of inter-connected U.S. goals in the Middle East that focus on regional

Table 2.

U.S. Policy Goals in Iraq and Syria

Iraq	Syria
Promote inclusive, economic reform	A unified, stable Syria that is governed through a Syrian-led political solution, with accountability and justice for the Syrian people, while contributing to regional stability
Support an Iraqi democracy that delivers for all citizens	Support efforts to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS and al Qaeda
Support a resilient Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR)	Reduce violence, including through the observance of ceasefires across the country
Bolster Iraqi independence and advance regional integration	Reduce suffering by improving humanitarian access throughout Syria
	Promote accountability for atrocities and the protection of and respect for human rights
	Advance an inclusive, Syrian-led political solution to the Syrian conflict in line with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254

Source: State, "Integrated Country Strategy-Iraq," 5/30/2023; State, response to State OIG request for information, 3/18/2024.

The strategy notes that the future of the Middle East will be defined as much by climate, technological, and demographic changes as by traditional security matters.

security; advancing peace in the Middle East; strengthening inclusive economic growth; advancing accountable, responsive governance and human rights; and accelerating cross-sectional actions to address climate change.[361] The strategy notes that the future of the Middle East will be defined as much by climate, technological, and demographic changes as by traditional security matters. Nonetheless, State said that the enduring defeat of ISIS remains a significant policy priority. This is what is meant by the "360-degree" partnership between the United States and Iraq: one that encompasses more than security, with a renewed focus on economic linkages, energy, climate change, water, and improving respect for human rights. This relationship, a partnership rooted in equality and mutual respect, was outlined in the 2008 U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement, which is the foundation of the U.S. relationship with Iraq. State said that this relationship is deep and multifaceted and has paid major dividends in the fight against ISIS. Further, the Strategic Framework Agreement is a document that Iraqi interlocutors often highlight as the basis for future cooperation.[362]

State said that U.S priorities in Syria are important steps on the road to advancing a broader political settlement to the Syrian conflict consistent with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.[363] The U.S. Government has not and will not express any support for efforts to "normalize or rehabilitate the brutal dictator Bashar al-Assad," lift sanctions on Syria, or change U.S. opposition to reconstruction in Syria until there is irreversible progress toward a political solution, according to State.[364]

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Through diplomacy and stabilization programs, State and USAID seek to help Iraq expand its inclusive private sector growth, create opportunities for U.S. investment through comprehensive economic reform, implement anti-corruption measures, and diversify Iraq's economy.[365] In Syria, the U.S. Government promotes economic stabilization programs to counter recruitment into ISIS and al-Qaeda and humanitarian assistance to reduce human suffering.

IRAQ

IMF Projects Economic Growth in Iraq

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission met with Iraqi authorities in Amman, Jordan, in late February to collect economic and financial information and hold bilateral discussions on Iraq's economic developments and policies. At the conclusion of the annual visit, the IMF mission projected a continuation of Iraq's economic growth and fiscal expansion, while projecting increased medium-term vulnerabilities caused by oil price volatility.[366]

The IMF mission noted that Iraq's non-oil sector growth stalled in 2022 but rebounded strongly in 2023, growing 6 percent, while at the same time inflation receded. The IMF cited increased public expenditures and solid agricultural output as factors contributing to the rebounding economy. Headline inflation, which includes food and energy, declined from a high of 7.5 percent in January 2023 to 4 percent by the end of 2023, which the IMF attributed to lower international food and energy prices.[367]

Looking to the future, the IMF mission said that the Iraqi government needed to reduce its dependence on oil revenues and ensure fiscal sustainability while controlling spending on the public workforce and increasing non-oil tax revenues. Further, Iraq will need higher economic growth to absorb the expanding labor force, increased non-oil exports, and a broader tax base. The IMF mission encouraged the Iraqi government to promote private sector development, to include labor market reforms, financial sector modernization, restructuring state-owned banks, pension and electricity sector reforms, improved government operations, and reduced corruption.[368]

Iraq's Central Bank Acts to Adopt International Best Banking Practices

During the quarter, the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) moved to bring Iraq's banking system closer in alignment with international best practices and increase transparency across the financial system over the medium and long terms. The CBI issued circulars intended to "dinar-ize" the Iraqi economy and transition away from reliance on the U.S. dollar. The CBI also encouraged Iraqi banks to form relationships with reputable correspondent banks abroad.[369] The CBI issued a circular in mid-January that would wind down access to the CBI's U.S. dollar wire auction during 2024 for those banks that do not develop banking relationships with reputable correspondent banks. Likewise, the CBI began implementing instructions issued in December 2023 to require the disbursement of U.S. dollar wire transfers from abroad in local currency with some exceptions, such as the salary payments to employees of legally registered NGOs and community-based organizations as well as employees of diplomatic missions.[370]

State said that these actions were taken in consultation with the Treasury Attaché and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and mark a positive step toward greater Iraqi control over monetary policy. Treasury Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson visited Iraq in January to discuss countering illicit finance and promote continued banking reforms in Iraq.[371] After the visit, Treasury identified Al-Huda Bank as a "bank that serves as a conduit for terrorist financing, as a foreign financial institution of primary money laundering concern."[372] In response, the CBI removed Al-Huda Bank and seven other local commercial banks from access to the U.S. dollar wire auctions.[373]

Iraq to Reduce Oil Exports in Line with OPEC Quota

On March 18, Iraq's Ministry of Oil announced its commitment to reduce production of oil to comply with the OPEC+ quota of 4 million barrels per day (bpd). According to media reports, Iraq plans to reduce crude oil exports to 3.3 million bpd, which is 130,000 bpd fewer than were exported in February, to compensate for exceeding the OPEC limits in January and February. The ministry said that Iraq exported 3.43 million bpd in February and 3.42 million bpd in March, according to a media report.[374] (See Figure 5.)

The decision to reduce oil exports followed a visit to Iraq by Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman. During the visit, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said it was important for Iraq to act in concert with Saudi Arabia to maintain stability in the oil market, according to the news article. At the time of the oil ministry's announcement, crude oil was trading above $86 per barrel, the highest since November 2023.[375]

Looking to the future, the IMF mission said that the Iraqi government needed to reduce its dependence on oil revenues and ensure fiscal sustainability while controlling spending on the public workforce and increasing non-oil tax revenues.

Figure 5.

Actual vs. Projected Daily Oil Revenue, in $ Millions, January 2023–March 2024

Sources: Ministry of Oil, Republic of Iraq, 3/28/2024; Iraq Oil Report, 3/4/2024, 4/4/2024.

Note: The Ministry of Oil has not released its oil revenues for February and March. The monthly average price per barrel of oil for these months were calculated based on estimates provided by an industry source.

Iraq-Türkiye Oil Pipeline Still Closed After 12 Months; Negotiations to Reopen Stalled

In March 2023, Türkiye shut down the Iraq-Türkiye Oil Pipeline pending Iraqi government approval to restart oil exports to Türkiye from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). The move followed an international arbitral tribunal's ruling that Türkiye owes Iraq roughly $1.5 billion in damages for importing oil from the IKR without the consent of Iraq's federal government. During the quarter, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the Iraqi government, and international oil companies (IOC) doing business in the IKR held periodic tripartite discussions to try to reach agreement on the various issues, including an amendment to the federal budget law, determining the entity most appropriate to undertake IOC contracts going forward, the appropriate mechanism for transferring payments to the IOCs, how to handle outstanding KRG debt, and pricing that accounts for the IOCs' higher costs for producing oil in the IKR.[376]

The Association of the Petroleum Industry of Kurdistan, which represents the IOCs in the IKR, has been meeting with members of President Biden's administration and Congress to seek support for reopening the pipeline and assurances that the IOCs will receive fair compensation when the pipeline reopens. According to a media report, the association took these meetings in anticipation of Prime Minister al-Sudani meeting with President Biden in mid-April.[377]

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In Iraq, the U.S. Government encourages the development of an inclusive and responsive democracy that is transparent, accountable, and committed to international norms.[378] In Syria, the U.S. Government seeks a political resolution to the ongoing conflict through the UN-facilitated, Syrian-led process laid out in UNSCR 2254.[379]

IRAQ

Iraq Taking Steps to Meet Summer Electricity Demands

According to media reports, Iraq took actions during the quarter to meet its citizens' likely demands for electricity this summer. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Electricity said that Iraq is currently producing between 19,000 and 20,000 megawatts of electricity per day and expects to produce 27,000 megawatts per day by May 1. Halting delivery of Iranian gas to southern and central Iraq has complicated these efforts.[380]

On March 27, Iraq's Ministry of Electricity and the National Iranian Gas Company finalized a 5-year contract for Iran to export 50 million cubic meters of natural gas per day to Iraqi power stations in exchange for oil and gasoline, according to a media report. Iraq relies heavily on imported Iranian gas to help meet the country's electricity needs. In 2023, Iraq imported approximately 9 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Iran, which breaks down to about 25 million cubic meters per day. The new contract calls for Iran to provide up to 50 million cubic meters to meet Iraqi demand. According to the press report, Iran's Oil Ministry claims to have been delivering 50 million cubic meters of gas per day in recent months since Iraq was able to settle a portion of its debt to Iran.[381]

Jordan's National Electricity Power Company spokesperson said on March 28 that the electricity grid interconnection between Jordan and Iraq was ready to start, and Iraq's Ministry of Electricity confirmed that the transmission line works, according to a press report. The interconnection went into operation on March 30 and is providing 40 megawatts of electricity to a power station at Rutbah in western Anbar province. In February, Iraq and Jordan signed an agreement for Jordan to supply Iraq with 40 megawatts of electricity per day, which is the first phase of a plan to establish a joint Arab energy market.[382]

Prime Minister al-Sudani Active on International Stage

During the quarter, Prime Minister al-Sudani continued international outreach. The Israel-Hamas conflict and the situation in Gaza was a common topic of conversation.[383]

In February, Prime Minister al-Sudani attended the Munich Security Conference, where he met with Jordan's King Abdullah II, Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, and members of Congress. He also met with UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, as well as other world leaders and heads of NGOs and private companies.[384]

In February, Prime Minister al-Sudani attended the Munich Security Conference, where he met with Jordan's King Abdullah II, Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati, U.S. Vice President Harris, and members of Congress.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, Prime Minister al-Sudani met with U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, French President Emmanuel Macron, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, and representatives from the IMF, World Bank, European Union, and others.

Prime Minister al-Sudani canceled meetings with Iran's foreign minister that were scheduled to take place at Davos after Iran struck the northern Iraqi city of Erbil with ballistic missiles, killing at least four people, according to news reports. The Iraqi government condemned the attack and sent a letter of complaint to the UN Security Council. Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Iranian Consul General and recalled its Ambassador from Tehran. The Arab League condemned the attack.[385]

Iraqi Kurdistan Region in Political Turmoil

According to Iraq experts, over the last two decades, the IKR has forged an independent political and economic path, electing a regional parliament, developing relationships with foreign governments, and signing contracts with international oil companies. That independence has been challenged since 2017, when the KRG held a non-binding referendum in which voters overwhelmingly supported the Kurdish region's independence from federal Iraq. Iraq responded by driving Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) from Kirkuk and replacing them with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). In recent years, Iraq has experienced a more stable security and political environment and has used its power to reduce the IKR's autonomy.[386]

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the dominant political parties in the IKR, have been at loggerheads for several years. According

Secretary Antony J. Blinken meets with Kurdish Prime Minister Masrour Barzani at the Department of State in Washington, D.C., February 26, 2024. (State photo)

to a news report, the two parties are divided by personal, financial, and security disputes. Their inability to join forces has harmed the IKR's interests in dealings with the federal government, and efforts to mediate their disputes have been mostly unsuccessful.[387]

Long-delayed parliamentary elections in the IKR (as a result of the KDP-PUK impasse) are scheduled for June 10. However, on February 21, the Federal Supreme Court canceled 11 parliamentary seats reserved for minority groups, reducing to 100 the number of regional parliamentary seats. The ruling was the result of a lawsuit by the PUK seeking to gain influence over the KDP and led to intensified tensions between the political parties.[388]

On March 18, the KDP announced it would boycott the June parliamentary elections. U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski posted on social media that she discussed with IKR President Nechirvan Barzani, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, and KDP President Masoud Barzani, the importance of the parliamentary elections, and encouraged the KDP to work with other Kurdish parties and Baghdad to ensure credible, transparent elections.[389] According to media reports, the KDP failed to submit a list of candidates to the Independent High Election Commission by the March 31 deadline. Other KRG political parties, including the PUK, submitted their lists of candidates before the deadline.[390]

A second Federal Supreme Court ruling on February 21 further weakened the IKR's autonomy by directing Iraq's federal government to pay KRG employees and ordering the KRG to send all oil and non-oil revenues to Baghdad.[391]

The IKR has been the subject of additional Federal Supreme Court rulings that have weakened the ability of the region to govern itself. According to a media report, the court is close to the ruling Coordination Framework, a bloc of Iran-aligned political parties that helped bring al-Sudani to power. Since 2021, the Federal Supreme Court issued rulings holding unconstitutional the IKR's oil and gas law, removing the Speaker of the Iraqi parliament, and paving the way for the Coordination Framework's choice for prime minister to form Iraq's government.[392]

SYRIA

Regime Refuses to Participate in Ninth Round of the Syrian Constitutional Committee Scheduled for April 2024

In February, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, issued invitations to hold the ninth session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva in April, according to a media report.[393] The ninth round of talks, previously scheduled for July 2022, had been postponed after Russia said that it no longer considered Switzerland to be neutral.[394]

The special envoy expressed deep concern about developments on the ground in Syria, noting that the repercussions of regional conflicts can be clearly seen in the country, according to a UN press statement.[395] He called upon the international stakeholders to support the actions of the United Nations as facilitator and to refrain from interfering with the venue of the committee.[396]

The Syrian Constitutional Committee, a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned process facilitated by the United Nations, has not met since July 2022, according to State.[397] Russia has blocked the convening of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, which is the first step toward brokering

The KDP-PUK impasse has harmed the IKR's interests in dealings with the federal government, and efforts to mediate their disputes have been mostly unsuccessful.

a political settlement in Syria in line with UNSCR 2254, according to State.[398] The predominant view among most European countries, the United States, and other likeminded nations is that the Assad regime remains the main obstacle to achieving progress towards a political solution to the conflict and that it should cooperate with the political process and empower its delegates to negotiate in good faith for the Syrian people as outlined in UNSCR 2254.[399] A Syrian-led political solution that represents the will of all Syrians as outlined in UNSCR 2254 remains the only viable solution to the conflict, according to State.[400]

The United States continues to support the efforts of the special envoy to advance a political resolution to the crisis.[401] The United States supports the UNSCR 2254 process additionally through State-managed programming that provides technical expertise and capacity building for select Constitutional Committee members.[402] The United States continues to urge all parties to engage fully in this process and to support UN Envoy Pedersen's efforts, while clearly identifying the regime as the problem to progress.[403]

The U.S. Government and Arab Partners Share Goals to Reach a Solution to the Syrian Crisis

State reported that the United States generally shares many of the same goals as Arab partners with respect to Syria, including reaching a solution to the Syrian crisis consistent with UNSCR 2254, expanding humanitarian access to all Syrians in need, building security and stability to ensure ISIS cannot resurge, creating safe conditions for the eventual return of refugees to their countries of origin, clarifying the fate of those unjustly detained and the missing, reducing Iranian influence, and countering captagon drug trafficking from Syria.[404] While the United States does not believe Syria merited the lifting of its suspension from the Arab League, Arab League members have indicated they intend to use Syria's readmission to push for and demand progress in these areas over the months ahead. Despite skepticism of the efficacy of this approach, the United States is aligned with its Arab partners on the ultimate objectives.[405]

During the quarter, State continued to coordinate closely with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom on shaping the Arab countries' engagements with the regime to push for progress on the UN-facilitated political process.[406] State said that the United States has been clear that it will stand by U.S. sanctions imposed on Syria.[407] The United States consulted with its partners about their plans while making clear that the United States will not normalize relations with the Assad regime and that U.S. sanctions remain in full effect.[408] The United States remains committed to a political solution as outlined in UNSCR 2254 is the only viable solution to the conflict and is working with allies, likeminded partners, and the United Nations to implement UNSCR 2254.[409]

On March 7, the Syrian Negotiation Commission held its regular meeting in Istanbul, Türkiye, in the presence of representatives of the countries concerned with implementation of UNSCR 2254, according to a media report.[410] The U.S. Syria Regional Platform joined the meeting to reaffirm U.S. support for the Syrian opposition and its critical role in promoting an inclusive, Syrian-led, U.N.-facilitated process as outlined in UNSCR 2254.[411] Additionally, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met with Türkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on March 8.[412] They discussed all aspects of the Syrian crisis and the commitment of the United States and Türkiye to UNSCR 2254.[413]

DAANES Closes Offices of Unlicensed Political Parties

In early March, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) Parties Affairs Committee stated that unlicensed political parties must submit a license application to the committee, and DAANES said that it will take legal measures against parties that do not comply, according to a media report.[414] Since 2019, the committee has allowed unlicensed parties, such as the Kurdish National Council (KNC), to open offices, which facilitated Kurdish-Kurdish dialogue, according to a media report.[415] The KNC accused the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) of directing the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to close the headquarters of parties not affiliated with DAANES, such as the KNC.[416]

Hours before the DAANES announcement, the second headquarters of the KNC burned down, according to a media report[417] The Internal Security Forces announced on its website that it had launched an investigation into the incident, according to a media report.[418]

The U.S. Syria Regional Platform stated that it was "troubled by continuing reports of attacks on KNC offices in northern Syria and urgently called for these attacks to stop" and called on all parties "to engage in a peaceful and purposeful discourse to achieve the aspirations of the Syrian people without violence."[419]

Syria Remains in Noncompliance with the Chemical Weapons Program

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team reported in February that there were "reasonable grounds" to believe ISIS deployed sulfur mustard gas during attacks aimed at capturing the town of Marea in September 2015.[420] Adedeji Ebo, director and deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said that the report was the first to identify the use of chemical weapons by a non-state actor in Syria.[421] The finding raises concern about dual-use chemical substances falling into the hands of non-state actors, the United Nations said.[422]

Additionally, Slovenia's delegate to the UN Security Council stated that other international investigative bodies have confirmed the use of chemical weapons by Syrian forces in nine instances since Syria became a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, according to a UN press release.[423]

The United States has made clear that Syria remains in noncompliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and continues to hide the scope of its chemical weapons program activities instead of declaring them in line with its obligations.[424] State said that Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention was intended to lead to the complete and verifiable elimination of its chemical weapons program.[425] However, the regime continues to hide the scope of its chemical weapons activities instead of declaring them in line with its obligations, according to State.[426] The regime has failed to cooperate with the OPCW, which is the implementing body established by the Chemical Weapons Convention, and has not explained gaps, discrepancies, and omissions in its declarations that the OPCW has identified, according to State.[427] In response, Syria said that it had fulfilled its obligations and destroyed its entire chemical stockpile, and it looked forward to cooperating with OPCW to close all outstanding issues.[428]

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USAID funded 11 awards related to stabilization activities during the quarter. The total amount of the awards was approximately $622 million.

Mr. Ebo stated that the absence of accountability for the use of chemical weapons continues to be a threat to international peace and security, according to the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs.[429] The regime's use of chemical weapons, its failure to declare and destroy its chemical weapons and facilities, its refusals to cooperate with the OPCW, and its chemical weapons capability remain a continuing threat to the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the safety of all, according to State.[430] The representative of the United States said in the Security Council meeting that the regime continues to complicate and impede the OPCW's work and its various technical teams, heightening concerns that Damascus continues a residual chemical weapons capability, according to a UN press release.[431]

The United States continues to urge Syria to give up its chemical weapons capabilities and come into compliance.[432] In addition, the United Kingdom cautioned that regional instability heightens the risk of chemical weapons proliferation to non-state actors, warning that the possibility of further use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime or non-state actors cannot be excluded.[433]

STABILIZATION

According to State, U.S. Government stabilization assistance plays a critical role in the counter-ISIS mission by addressing the economic and social grievances that ISIS and other violent extremist groups seek to exploit, including by improving local service provider capacity, and supporting civil society to advocate for critical needs that Syrians and Iraqis have identified.[434]

IRAQ

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Alleged Corruption at UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization

In a January media report, whistleblowers alleged that large sums of funding in the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Funding Facility for Stabilization are being lost to corruption in Iraq as donors fail to track spending on post-war reconstruction.[436] Allegations included UNDP staff demanding bribes of up to 15 percent of the contract value to help navigate the bidding system and pass the vetting process.[437] The UNDP issued a statement in January stating that it was looking into these allegations.[438]

USAID is the largest contributor to the 29 donor multilateral Funding Facility for Stabilization, with a $457 million award for July 2015 to December 2025.[439] The UNDP committed to providing frequent briefings to USAID about the inspection processes, according to USAID.[440] In March, the UNDP released its Management Assessment and Review Mission Report on the allegations to 1) review whether appropriate management and oversight systems are in place; 2) review whether the systems are being implemented effectively; and 3) identify possible challenges and recommendations for corrective measures.[441] The UNDP noted that it did not receive any additional information or details from the journalist in regard to the allegations.[442] The review team, according to the UNDP,

did not have an investigations or audit mandate, and investigating allegations of fraud and corruption by staff, including the solicitation of bribes and in-person meetings, was not within the mandate of the review team.[443]

The review team recommended a follow-on analysis to ensure appropriate personnel and oversight capacity are in place, noting that UNDP Iraq had previously downsized personnel in early 2023 and again in early 2024, with 67 staff either separated or departed from the Funding Facility for Stabilization during this period.[444] The latest organizational change may have resulted in progressive reductions of staff capacities, particularly in areas like procurement, according to the UNDP.[445] The review team also recommended that all open audit recommendations related to financial management be reviewed and closed as a priority.[446] High-risk construction interventions would also benefit from an additional layer of risk assessment at the project identification stage to identify additional risk areas and establish mitigation measures, according to the review team.[447] The report also noted that UNDP audits and evaluations continued to highlight weaknesses in the UNDP Iraq monitoring system.[448]

USAID reported that in response to the allegations, it increased its monitoring through additional site visits to USAID-funded projects to verify the delivery of services.[449] USAID's Supervisory Contracting Officer, through USAID OIG, engaged directly with UNDP's Office of Audits and Investigations to understand their approach and timeline of investigations.[450]

Illiquidity Challenges Iraqi Businesses

The private banks in Iraq have limited liquidity and technical capacity to lend to small businesses.[451] Weak trust in the banking sector and banks' limited capacity to assess the creditworthiness of businesses contribute to excessive collateral requirements, insufficient risk-sharing, and higher cost of finance for businesses.[452]

USAID supported the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) to promote financial inclusion and increase private bank financing for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises.[453] USAID also supported the CBI to leverage private banks' capital and improve commercial lending conditions to address micro and small businesses' financing gaps.[454] USAID recently launched a program to enhance the capacity of private financial institutions to adopt innovative funding approaches and develop their lending portfolio.[455] This does not impact USAID implementers to a large extent.[456] USAID continued to build the capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises to plan and budget effectively to mitigate the impact of high prices of raw materials on production costs.[457]

Years-Long Drought Eases After Unprecedented Rainfall

During the quarter, Iraq experienced heavy downpours, unprecedented in recent years. According to a media report, the heaviest rainfall was more than 11 inches in March in the northern Dohuk province, and 3.6 inches in Baghdad. According to Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, rain and flooding varied between "moderate to extremely heavy," and boosted Iraq's strategic water reserves by 10 percent.[458] The ministry projected that water reserves would grow further during April and May as snow melts in the upper basins of the

According to Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, rain and flooding varied between "moderate to extremely heavy," and boosted Iraq's strategic water reserves by 10 percent.

Tigris and Euphrates rivers; however, both rivers originate from Türkiye, which can restrict water flow to Iraq.[459]

The heavy rains have had a positive impact on Iraq's marshes, which are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, according to the media report. Years of drought had caused the marshes to shrink from 4,000 square kilometers in 2005 to fewer than 500 before the current rains. Some areas of the marshes have grown by 50 percent as the result of this winter's rainfall. The Ministry of Water Resources is looking for a prosperous winter wheat season and an agricultural revival in central and southern Iraq.[460]

Prior to this quarter's rainfall, Iraq was facing a water crisis that threatened its social, political, and economic stability. According to State, resolution of the crisis cannot rely on international partners alone but must include substantive structural and legislative initiatives by the Iraqi government. Needed reforms include repairing and investing in water infrastructure and market reforms such as developing and implementing new tariff structures. These reforms will require sustained engagement by the prime minister's office and the Iraqi parliament. State said that it is unlikely the Iraqi government will be able to implement the reforms and investments in a timely manner and has urged the government to look to the private sector for help.[461]

USAID Programs Promote Climate Resiliency

During the quarter, USAID continued its support to the Iraqi government to finalize and adopt its environmental strategies.[462] The strategies seek to address climatic shocks in Iraqi, which have displaced nearly 131,000 people in Iraq's central and southern regions as of mid-September 2023, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).[463]

USAID and the Al-Jabaish Eco-Tourism Organization mobilized 1,400 youth volunteers on climate action through a 26-day campaign that removed 60 tons of waste from marshes. (USAID photo)

USAID's recently launched a governance activity (Ma'an) to support local governments to improve public service delivery and become more responsive to citizen demands.[464] It will focus on residential water delivery, solid waste management, and sanitation, for example through increased fee collection and service utilization.[465] USAID continued to promote climate friendly techniques in the agriculture sector to conserve water and energy resources.[466]

USAID also supported innovative climate adaptation solutions through its Water and Energy for Food activity.[467] Through its partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, USAID supported water directorates to adopt new technologies to assure better water security and resilience to climate change.[468] In partnership with the UNDP, USAID promoted water preservation technologies among farmers in southern Iraq and equips youth with technical skills to promote energy saving systems.[469]

USAID anticipates awarding two new programs in FY 2024 that support climate adaptation.[470] Through those activities, USAID will develop local meteorological and climate data centers across Iraq to disseminate real time information on water scarcity.[471] This data will inform the government's decisions on measures to combat the impact of drought and farmers' internal displacements.[472] USAID will also support Iraqi water directorates to adopt modern technologies that enhance the water quality and increase vulnerable communities' access to water.[473] USAID will work with local authorities to pilot projects to use recycled water for irrigation and enhance water fee collection.[474]

SYRIA

Stabilization Efforts in Syria Face Ongoing Challenges

State said that one of the key U.S. counter-ISIS efforts in Syria remains supporting essential services in areas liberated from ISIS to stabilize the area, including enabling the return of displaced persons.[475]

During this quarter, the economic situation in northeastern Syria faced ongoing challenges, including high commodity price fluctuations, the continued devaluation of the Syrian pound, and reduced agriculture yields as the result of drought conditions, according to State. These conditions and the economic challenges have increased the overall need for stabilization and humanitarian assistance funding in Syria during the last 2 years, according to State.[476]

State said that ongoing State stabilization programs in non-regime areas of Syria include work with local governance entities, civil society, and Syrian communities to support education, community security, independent media, civil society, reintegration, reconciliation, removal of explosive remnants of war, restoration of essential services, and a political resolution to the Syrian conflict in line with UNSCR 2254. This stabilization assistance, as well as the U.S. Government's broader stabilization efforts, is vital to helping to accelerate inclusive economic recovery in areas liberated from ISIS.[477] There were no significant ISIS attacks impacting State stabilization projects during this quarter.[478]

USAID funded 56 active awards, worth approximately $132 million, related to stabilization activities in Syria during the quarter.[479]

A USAID-funded vaccination program leads to improvements in the livestock industry in northeastern Syria. (USAID photo)

Subsidies in the Agriculture Sector Are Unsustainable

The heavily subsidized agricultural sector in northeastern Syria is extremely unsustainable, according to USAID, with the DAANES experiencing increased deficits, not only due to the destruction of energy and oil production infrastructure, but also because of poorly planned and managed subsidies that limit the amount of budget resources available for capital investment in agriculture infrastructure and other critical areas such as health and education.[480] The water crisis and dilapidated infrastructure, such as electricity services and irrigation pumps, has resulted in decreased crop production in northeastern Syria.[481]

USAID reported supporting agriculture during the quarter through its Essential Services, Good Governance, and Economic Recovery program by strengthening the poultry value chain in Hasakah province, including the establishment of a table egg production farm, fertilized egg production farm, and pasta factory.[482] These activities enhanced irrigation services to improve local crop production and supported poultry value chains to increase availability and reduce market prices of locally produced table eggs and chicken meat, according to USAID.[483]

USAID's Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria program, also intended to support agriculture in Syria, is still in the start-up phase and is in the process of conducting several assessments to inform the program's implementation in future years.[484] Leadership changes in the Dayr az Zawr Civic Council and a lack of leadership appointments, in addition to security concerns and instability in Dayr az Zawr, affected the ability of the Essential Services program to assess potential activities that may further support agriculture or anticipated returnees in Dayr az Zawr, according to USAID.[485]

USAID also reported that its supplemental funding last year directly supported agriculture projects this quarter through the Syria Recovery Trust Fund.[486] The Syria Recovery Trust Fund concluded its support of 1,000 potato farmers in northern Aleppo during the quarter, including the training of 22 personnel on the use of climate smart production techniques to train future potato farmers.[487] USAID funds were also used to provide loans from the Syria Recovery Trust Fund-supported revolving credit fund to farmers and others in the agriculture value chain in northeastern Syria. The trust fund provided loans to 334 farmers.[488]

REINTEGRATION OF DISPLACED PERSONS

Return of Syrians to Home Communities Delayed, Support for Reintegration Programs Continues

Both State and USAID continued to support the safe, voluntary return and reintegration of Syrians from the al-Hol displacement camp.[489] State and USAID worked with al-Hol camp administration and local councils in areas of northeastern Syria to ensure that Syrians leaving al-Hol will have the support of their local communities and access to services and basic needs upon their return to communities of origin.[490]

The planned release of Syrian families to their home communities remained delayed during the quarter due to clashes between the SDF and local Arab tribes. USAID reported that 136 Syrian families (approximately 542 individuals) were scheduled to be released from al-Hol to communities in Dayr az Zawr in December, but their departure has been delayed until April.[491] USAID plans to have its implementers work closely with these populations once they depart the camp.[492]

USAID's Essential Services, Good Governance, and Economic Recovery program continued to operate a Case Management System in Raqqa to track sheltered individuals, returnees, and the services they receive. This included coordination with service providers, communication with 76 returnee families, and making referrals.[493] During the quarter, the program made 475 new referrals and closed 468. From October 2023 through the end of this quarter, the program made a total of 1,350 referrals, of which 919 cases have since been closed.[494]

USAID reported that a grant to rehabilitate transitional shelters in Raqqa for al-Hol returnees was completed in February, including basic rehabilitation of nine homes used to host returnees. The program also provided 23 transitional shelters for 33 returnee families, along with post-shelter strategy planning.[495]

USAID also awarded new grants in January. A grant to conduct phase II of enhancing the provision of electricity in Raqqa was expected to be completed by the end of the quarter.[496] Another to secure housing for al-Hol returnees in Day az Zawr is ongoing with completion dependent on the pace of returns.[497]

Repatriated Iraqis Continue to Face Challenges

On March 9 and 10, the Iraqi government repatriated 157 households to the Jeddah 1 camp in Iraq.[498] This brings the total number of repatriated Iraqis to 8,183 individuals (2,070 households) since May 2021. Of this population 1,423 households, or 5,495 individuals,

USAID reported that 136 Syrian families (approximately 542 individuals) were scheduled to be released from al- Hol to communities in Dayr az Zawr in December, but their departure has been delayed until April.

Iraqis repatriating from al-Hol camp face several challenges, including a lengthy security review and vetting process by the Iraqi government, a lack of space at Jeddah 1, and high barriers to returning to their areas of origin in Iraq.

have departed Jeddah 1 to other areas of Iraq.[499] Vulnerable populations that returned to their areas of origin from Jeddah 1 continue to face ongoing security risks, USAID said, including secondary displacement, lack of civil documentation, impediments to freedom of movement, and discrimination and stigmatization in their new communities.[500]

State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) continued to support camp management, protection, health care, and education in the Jeddah 1 camp.[501] USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) continued to deliver protection; mental health and psychosocial support; and food assistance to Iraqis returning to the Jeddah 1 camp.[502] Through this support, a UN partner implementer provided consultations by psychologists, individual and group and case management, and family and community support services, such as recreational activities.[503] Additionally, the same UN partner is conducting awareness-raising activities and capacity building for local actors in the camp and supporting the provision of direct specialized protection interventions.[504] USAID BHA supported efforts to understand the camp protection environment better.[505] Starting in February, a USAID BHA-supported partner began providing approximately 2,900 internally displaced persons (IDP) with e-vouchers to cover 80 percent of the daily calorie intake of IDPs and supplement the Iraqi government's monthly food distribution.[506]

Iraqis repatriating from al-Hol camp face several challenges, including a lengthy security review and vetting process by the Iraqi government, a lack of space at Jeddah 1, and high barriers to returning to their areas of origin in Iraq.[507] A large portion of the Iraqis that remain in al-Hol arrived to the camp following the last battle to dislodge ISIS from Syria, which took place in the town of Baghuz. The association with Baghuz has created the perception that they have strong ties to ISIS, which complicates and delays the Iraqi government's security screening process prior to their arrival to Jeddah 1.[508]

Iraqi returnees from al-Hol who have departed Jeddah 1 for other places in Iraq also face additional challenges, such as lack of housing, civil documentation, livelihoods, and access to basic services, as well as concerns about safety and security.[509] Female-headed households and children may face significantly higher barriers for reintegration, particularly those who are unable to find a sponsor to help approve their returns to communities of origin.[510]

USAID and State PRM supported Iraqi nationals who have been cleared by authorities to sustainably reintegrate into communities.[511] Reintegration interventions aim to support community members to live freely and peacefully and engage in the community's social and economic life.[512] The activities focus on creating an enabling environment for sustainable return and reintegration through improving the capacity of existing and new local peace structures and by supporting local authorities to enhance community readiness and acceptance of returnees.[513] Interventions provide socio-economic reintegration support, build the capacity of local peace structures that include mental health and psychosocial services, and foster "case management" which includes both a system and dedicated staff trained to identify the needs of returnees and to monitor progress towards safe and effective reintegration.[514] USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives supports host communities in areas of origin and/or alternative areas of return to increase community acceptance of returnees and support their reintegration.[515]

Iraqi Ministry Announces Closure of Remaining 23 Internally Displaced Persons Camps

More than 1.1 million Iraqis remained internally displaced as of December 2023, according to figures from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix.[516] The highest number of IDPs resided in Ninewa province, followed by Duhok, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala, and Anbar provinces.[517] Approximately 90 percent of IDPs are in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) in northern Iraq.[518]

The Iraqi government announced on January 2 that it planned to close all 23 remaining formal IDP camps in Iraq during 2024. According to State, the Minister of Migration and Displacement, Evan Jabro, convened Iraqi government and UN stakeholders on January 16 to devise plans to close the camps, arguing that their continued presence prevents Iraq from moving past the ISIS crisis and exposes residents to fire hazards. These IDP camps are separate from the Jeddah 1 transit camp, which is not considered an IDP camp. All of Iraq's remaining IDP camps are in the IKR.[519]

The Iraqi Council of Ministers passed a resolution on January 23 revising the target date for camp closures to July 30, 2024, offering various incentives, including $3,054 per in-camp IDP family "to encourage voluntary return to their areas of origin or any chosen area," and establishing an interagency high committee to implement the decision.[520]

According to USAID BHA, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which administers the 23 camps, was not consulted and was surprised by the announcement and skeptical that the Iraqi government would adequately incentivize IDPs to voluntarily return to their areas of origin.[521] Furthermore, re-integrating locally is a more viable option for many IDPs as opposed to returning to their home of origin.[522]

Mission Iraq said that it is engaged with the Iraqi government, KRG, and UN agencies on the IDP camp closure proposal. State said the PRM will continue to stress the importance of making sure that the decision to return is voluntary, the need to avoid forced camp closures and prevent secondary displacement, and including the KRG and humanitarian actors in process planning.[523]

The United Nations reported that Caritas Czech Republic and the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs signed a Memorandum of Understanding on February 28 for the Piloting Job Search Club Methodology in Duhok Governorate project.[524] The project aims to support IDPs and host community members to find decent job opportunities and is implemented in partnership with International Labor Organization as part of its PROSPECTS program.[525]

USAID reported that the Ministry of Education has taken responsibility for a World Food Program initiative that will reach 770,000 children across 25 districts.[526] The program is budgeted for 3 years, and the World Food Program (WFP) will continue to offer technical and capacity strengthening support.[527]

USAID reported that humanitarian assistance needs have not changed since the previous quarter.[528] IDPs across Iraq continue to face urgent humanitarian needs, lack of access to basic services, and poor conditions in camps.[529] Meanwhile, IDPs who return to their

More than 1.1 million Iraqis remained internally displaced as of December 2023, according to figures from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix.

areas of origin continue to face barriers to return and reintegration, including lack of civil documentation, and face limited access to basic public services, such as education, health care, and social security benefits, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.[530]

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Humanitarian Crisis Reaches Historic Level

State said that the economic situation in Syria is at its worst since the Syrian conflict began over a decade ago.[531] Humanitarian needs are the highest they have ever been, compounded by devastating earthquakes, historic levels of drought that have decimated food crops, and the collapse of the Lebanese financial sector.[532] Furthermore, some actors claimed that both the Syrian regime and sanctions hampered needed aid deliveries.[533]

Table 3.

U.S. Humanitarian Assistance Funding for the Iraq Response in FY 2024

USAID BHA	$3,500,000
TOTAL	**$3,500,000**

Note: Year of funding indicates the date of commitment or obligation, not appropriation, of funds. Funding figures reflect publicly announced funding as of January 19, 2024.

Source: USAID, "Iraq–Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #1," 1/22/2024.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), approximately 16.7 million Syrians (over 70 percent) of the population, are projected to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2024.[534] This is an increase from 15.3 million in need in 2023 and the largest number since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011.[535] More than 90 percent of Syrians live in extreme poverty, on less than $1.90 a day, according to State.[536] The governorates with the highest concentration of people in need are Aleppo (3.5 million), Idlib (2.6 million), and Rif Dimashq (2.3 million).[537] More than half of the 7 million IDPs in Syria are located in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.[538] Over 155,000 Syrians returned to the country in 2023.[539]

The WFP estimates that more than 12 million Syrians are now food insecure, an increase of more than 4.5 million since last year, according to State.[540] In addition, a severe shortfall in donor funds has forced the United Nations to suspend regular food aid in Syria, placing millions in the grip of hunger.[541]

Table 4.

U.S. Humanitarian Assistance Funding for the Syria Response in FY 2023

Syria Earthquakes Response		Syria Regional Crisis Response	
USAID BHA	$170,000,000	USAID BHA	$677,048,619
State PRM	$77,000,000	State PRM	$650,880,184
DoD	$4,475,623	**TOTAL**	**$1,327,928,803**
TOTAL	**$251,475,623**		

Note: Funds committed or obligated in FY 2023. These figures reflect publicly announced funding as of September 30, 2023. This funding does not include funding for the 2023 earthquake response, which is reported separately (above).

Source: USAID, "Humanitarian Update #786," 3/15/2024.

In 2024, OCHA expects that women, girls, children, and persons with disabilities will continue to experience protection concerns (being subject to violence, abuse, coercion and deprivation), including vulnerability to incidents of gender-based violence.[542] The economic situation is not anticipated to improve and Syria will suffer food and fuel shortages, rising inflation, and devaluation of the Syrian pound.[543] Severe shortages in water and energy supplies will also lead to a significant decline in agriculture production, according to OCHA.[544] A lack of funding for the agricultural sector and reduced food aid and nutrition programs increase the risk of food insecurity, malnutrition, and related diseases.[545]

According to the OHCHR, Syria is home to the world's largest number of displaced people, with more than 13 million Syrians unable to return to their homes.[546] As of early February, more than 43,000 people remained displaced due to the effects of the 2023 earthquakes that killed at least 6,000 people in Syria and over 50,000 people in Türkiye.[547] These include 40,000 IDPs sheltering in 70 reception centers and 3,000 IDPs residing in displacement camps.[548]

During the quarter, USAID BHA funded 29 active awards (total amount of awards: over $649 million) in Syria.[549] BHA reported receiving notifications of 12 alleged incidents of fraud, abuse, corruption, or diversions during the quarter.[550]

Syria Extends UN Access to Border Crossings for Humanitarian Assistance

In February, the Syrian regime extended for 3 months its consent to use the Bab al-Salam border crossing in northeastern Syria and the al-Rai border crossing in northern Aleppo for UN humanitarian access.[551] These border crossings enable faster, more efficient aid deliveries to communities in need, in addition to the vital crossing at Bab al-Hawa in northwestern Syria, according to State.[552]

This is the fourth extension of the Syrian regime's consent for use of the Bab al-Salam and al-Rai border crossings since the Syrian regime initially consented to the use of these crossing points following the earthquakes in early February 2023.[553] Permission to use the Bab al-Hawa border crossing was extended in January for 6 months until July 10.[554]

Approximately 5,000 trucks carrying UN humanitarian assistance crossed through the three border crossing points from Türkiye to northwestern Syria between February 2023 and February 2024 to support people in need.[555] Of the three crossings, UN agencies most often use the Bab al-Hawa crossing, the only northwestern Syria crossing point previously authorized under UN Security Council resolutions, as it has preferable road infrastructure and is geographically closer to populations in need.[556] In December 2023, for example, more than 90 percent of the nearly 550 total trucks that crossed from Türkiye to Syria transited through the Bab al-Hawa crossing.[557]

The United States welcomed the extension of access but said that reauthorizing these crossings for 90-day increments is not a sustainable approach to addressing the scale of humanitarian needs in Syria.[558] The United States called for continued access that will provide predictability and sustainability to these border crossings for aid deliveries.[559] The guarantee of humanitarian access for as long as the needs persist will benefit all parties in Syria, according to State.[560]

The United States also called for unhindered humanitarian deliveries to the Rukban displaced persons settlement. The Syrian regime and Russia have prevented UN convoys from reaching civilians in need in this area.[561]

Turkish Airstrikes Compound Water Crisis in Northeastern Syria

From early October through mid-January, Türkiye escalated attacks in the northern parts of Hasakah, Raqqa, and Aleppo governorates, according to USAID.[562] These strikes destroyed oil infrastructure and several critical electricity stations. The Swediyeh power station, which is the primary source of electricity across northwestern Syria, and four other power stations were rendered completely inoperable.[563] Swediyeh provided an estimated 920,000 people with electricity and was the only producer of liquified petroleum gas in northeastern Syria.[564] This sharply reduced electricity production and transmission and severely decreased fuel production.[565] USAID reported that this significantly undermined the functioning of water stations, boreholes (used for extraction of water), health facilities, bakeries, silos, mills, and other infrastructure related to providing services in northeastern Syria.[566] Reduced production of fuel also curtailed the availability of fuel for cooking gas and heating for winter, resulting in shortages and higher prices, and has undermined all humanitarian operations in northeastern Syria.[567] As of February 22, DAANES authorities had begun to reconnect the Swediyeh power station and the Tabqa Dam, which partially restored the power station and allowed for the generation of 10 percent of the megawatts required to meet electrical needs in Hasakah governorate.[568]

The water crisis has not only reduced access to water for drinking and domestic use for millions of Syrians, according to USAID, but has also triggered substantial harvest and income loses, an increase in water-borne diseases and malnutrition rates, and additional protection risks, especially for women and girls.[569] Water shortages also forced households to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as changing regular hygiene practices and increasing household debt to afford high water costs.[570]

USAID BHA reported that it supported 13 NGOs, in addition to the International Organization for Migration and the UN Children's Fund, to provide water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance in Syria.[571] USAID implementers distributed essential hygiene items to vulnerable populations and rehabilitated small-scale sanitation and water systems (such as handwashing stations and latrines) in displacement camps and informal settlements.[572] In northern Syria, USAID implementers worked to increase access to safe drinking water through emergency water trucking and the distribution of water storage tanks and water treatment devices, according to USAID.[573]

Approximately 1.4 million people faced limited access to safe drinking water as of January 26, as power outages impeded the operation of water stations and boreholes.[574] The outages compounded existing water shortages resulting from the shutdown of the Alouk water station – one of the region's primary sources of safe drinking water – following a series of Turkish strikes in October that destroyed vital electricity infrastructure needed to power the water station.[575] A landslide at a gold mine in Türkiye in February caused cyanide chemicals to leach into water sources feeding the Euphrates River, further affecting the availability of safe drinking water.[576]

USAID reported that it coordinated closely with State, the DoD, and the National Security Council to document the long-term impact of the Turkish strikes.[577] In response, the U.S. Government urged for an immediate de-escalation of violence, respect for established ceasefire lines, and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.[578]

Russian and Syrian Regime Attacks Heighten Concerns for Civilian Protection and Safety of Aid Workers

USAID reported that between February 29 and March 10, Russian and Syrian forces launched at least 20 airstrikes, 15 rocket or missile strikes, and 100 artillery bombardments targeting Aleppo and Idlib, killing 2 civilians, including 1 child, and 1 member of the Syrian National Army (SNA).[579] In addition, 3 civilians and 4 SNA members were injured, according to a USAID implementer.[580] An unexploded ordnance detonation injured 4 children playing at a destroyed school in Idlib's Jisr-Ash-Shugur subdistrict on March 5.[581] However, no USAID implementers reported any suspension of activities or staff movement as a result of these incidents.[582]

Food Prices Continue to Increase Due to Currency Devaluation, High Fuel Prices, and Regional Conflict

Nearly 13 million people in Syria are in need of food assistance, including more than 2.1 million who live in camps, and a further 2.6 million are at risk of food insecurity, according to OCHA.[583] In 2023, reduction in food assistance due to limited funding and resources undermined the food security of the most vulnerable households with a deterioration in household consumption.[584] Approximately two-thirds of the Syrian population experienced insufficient food consumption and an additional nearly 2 million people reported having inadequate consumption in the past 3 months.[585] Inadequate food consumption is projected to continue to rise in the months ahead.[586]

Almost 45 percent of the Syrian population depends on agriculture as their primary source of income. Before the Syrian conflict began in 2011, Syria was self-sufficient in food and exported it.[587] Agriculture production, especially wheat, is now more than 35 percent below national needs.[588] With Syria a significant net food importer, the devaluation of Syrian currency at the end of 2023 resulted in expensive imported commodities and high domestic food prices.[589] The WFP noted that high fuel prices, exacerbated by shortages and related cuts in fuel subsidies in December and January, also contributed to economic challenges while the regional conflict threatens the food supply chain, further adding to inflationary pressure.[590] The cost of essential food commodities for a family of five had quadrupled in the last 2 years and reached 5 times more than the minimum wage, as of December.[591] For 2024, food prices were expected to continue to trend upwards, according to the WFP.[592]

USAID BHA reported funding the UN Children's Agency, the WFP, and 15 NGOs to provide emergency food and nutrition assistance in Syria and to Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, including cash transfers for emergency nutritional products, food vouchers, and monthly in-kind rations, in addition to distributing wheat flour and yeast to bakeries.[593] According to USAID, the WFP reached approximately 3.5 million people with assistance in December 2023, including the distribution of more than 18,500 metric tons of in-kind food assistance to approximately 3.1 million people and providing $1.7 million in cash-based food assistance to approximately 162,100 individuals.[594] USAID assistance also supported cash transfers for food and food

vouchers for Syrian refugees in the region.[595] As of January, the WFP and USAID implementers, including the WFP and other NGOs, provided food assistance to an estimated 3.2 million people, including approximately 2.4 million people in Syria and approximately 800,000 Syrian refugees across Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye.[596]

PROSECUTIONS AND SANCTIONS OF ISIS ACTIVITY

Several Federal government agencies conduct activities to degrade ISIS capabilities in Iraq and Syria as part of a whole-of-government effort to reduce ISIS manpower and disrupt its financing. Efforts include prosecutions of foreign terrorist fighters and homegrown violent extremists linked to ISIS; disrupting ISIS financing; designations of ISIS-linked individuals and organizations as terrorists; support for efforts to repatriate ISIS-affiliated individuals in displacement camps in Syria; strengthening the ISF's ability to gather evidence in support of warrants and prosecutions; and mitigating threats to the homeland posed by ISIS-linked individuals attempting to enter the United States to conduct attacks.[597]

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Since 2014, the Department of Justice (DoJ) has charged more than 240 individuals with international terrorism-related conduct relating to ISIS and obtained more than 205 convictions. The DoJ reported that the remaining cases are in various stages of litigation.[598] During the quarter, two individuals prosecuted for ISIS-related activity were sentenced to prison.[599] (See Table 5.)

Table 5.

Department of Justice Prosecutions and Activities against Terrorism, January–March 2024

Date and Jurisdiction	Description
February 8 Southern District of Texas	**Warren Clark** was sentenced to 10 years in prison and a lifetime of supervised release for receiving military training from ISIS. Clark admitted he illegally traveled from Turkiye into Syria where he took mandatory religious and military training. He later called himself a citizen of the Islamic State and renounced his U.S. citizenship. Clark was captured in Syria by the SDF and was subsequently transferred to U.S. law enforcement custody.
February 12 Southern District of Ohio	**Shihab Ahmed Shihab** was sentenced to approximately 14 years and 8 months in prison followed by 15 years of supervised release for attempting to provide material support to a terrorist plot to murder former U.S. President George W. Bush. Shihab hoped to smuggle at least four Iraqis associated with ISIS into the United States with the goal of completing the assassination. In the fall of 2021, Shihab believed he successfully smuggled an ISIS member into the United States for a fee of $40,000. In reality, the individual was fictitious, and the interaction was coordinated under the direction of the FBI. In furtherance of the assassination plot, Shihab traveled to Dallas in February 2022 to conduct surveillance of locations associated with the former President. In March 2022, Shihab met with others in a hotel room in Columbus, Ohio, to look at sample firearms and law enforcement uniforms. Shihab was arrested in May 2022 and pled guilty in March 2023 to attempting to provide material support to terrorists.

Source: DoJ OIG, response to DoD OIG request for information, 24.2 WOG DOJ 01B, 4/11/2024.

The DoJ reported that no individuals were transferred to the United States from Iraq or Syria to face terrorism charges during the quarter. A total of three individuals from Iraq and Syria have been transferred to the United States to face terrorism charges since 2014.[600]

The DoJ's National Security Division provides a full-time, in-country attorney to support a range of matters related to facilitating appropriate civilian prosecutorial dispositions for foreign terrorist fighters and other terrorists, including efforts to counter the financing of terrorism.[601]

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Fly Team provided sensitive site exploitation training, crime scene management, interview, and post-blast investigation training to the SDF in conjunction with U.S. military partners.[602] The DoJ also aided in the repatriation process by attempting to obtain biometrics of all individuals prior to them leaving the conflict zone.[603]

The DoJ's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training continued to provide support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia in their efforts to prosecute ISIS suspects repatriated from Syria to their respective countries.[604]

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Treasury reported that it used the full range of its authorities to aggressively target ISIS leaders, operatives, financiers, and associated organizations around the world. Treasury has designated 177 ISIS-associated individuals and entities since 2014.[605]

Treasury reported that during the quarter, it sanctioned two ISIS cybersecurity experts and one ISIS financial facilitator for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, ISIS, pursuant to Executive Order 13224.[606] No sanctioned individuals or organizations were removed from the sanctions list.[607]

Specifically, the following people were sanctioned:

- **Mu'min Al-Mawji Mahmud Salid**, an Egyptian national and the creator and leader of the ISIS-affiliated platform Electronic Horizons Foundation (EHF). EHF provides cybersecurity guidance and training to ISIS supporters seeking to evade law enforcement scrutiny from their online activities. Al-Mawji provided technical support on computer applications to ISIS leadership and shared cryptocurrency expertise and instruction with ISIS supporters, including posting a tutorial on the EHF website that provided specific instructions on how to donate funds to ISIS-affiliated entities. Al-Mawji also established an ISIS-affiliated media outlet to create and distribute ISIS propaganda that calls for violence against the West.[608]

- **Sarah Jamal Muhammad Al-Sayyid**, also an Egyptian national, who helped her partner, Mu'min AlMawji, establish EHF and who collaborated on projects including logistical management and cryptocurrency support. Additionally, she recruited other ISIS members to join EHF and procured web servers to host ISIS platforms on behalf of EHF.[609]

Treasury has designated 177 ISIS-associated individuals and entities since 2014.

- **Faruk Guzel**, a Turkish national who, in 2020, received multiple transfers from a group of ISIS supporters for individuals associated with ISIS in Syria via a money remittance service. In turn, he distributed the money to ISIS-affiliated persons.[610]

Treasury reported that it continues to work with interagency and Global Coalition partners, including the Iraqi government, to identify ISIS's financial reserves and financial leaders and disrupt its financial facilitation networks in the Middle East. In addition, Treasury is working to designate ISIS facilitators, front companies, and fundraisers in various countries. Treasury has a leading role in the Global Coalition, serving as a co-lead of the Counter ISIS Finance Group, along with its counterparts from Italy and Saudi Arabia. In January, Treasury co-led a Counter ISIS Finance Group meeting with over 40 Global Coalition members and observers, including Iraqi partners, to exchange information on ISIS financing activities and efforts to counter them across Asia and Africa.[611]

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) collaborates with other Federal agencies, USCENTCOM, and forward bases to monitor and mitigate threats that ISIS in Iraq and Syria poses to the United States.[612] The Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) office in Amman participates in joint plans and exercises and provides intelligence support to ongoing investigations and oversight of operational and investigative activity in Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon—which is synchronized with the OIR mission to ensure ISIS does not launch attacks against the United States.[613] HSI contributes to interagency partners daily, as part of the joint terrorism task force model, by providing subject matter expertise and operational support as outlined by HSI's unique administrative and criminal authorities to disrupt any threats to the U.S. homeland.[614]

During the quarter, DHS continued to monitor for threats from foreign terrorist organizations and homegrown violent extremists attempting to inspire potential followers to conduct attacks in the United States. DHS noted that foreign terrorists continue to engage with supporters online to solicit funds, create and share media, and encourage attacks while their affiliates in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East prioritize local goals.[615]

U.S. paratroopers conduct a corrosion control inspection on aircraft at an undisclosed location. (U.S. Army photo)

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

Under the Lead IG framework, the DoD OIG, State OIG, USAID OIG, and partner agencies conduct audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations related to Operation Inherent Resolve.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

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

Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OIR*, published on September 26, 2023, as part of the *FY 2024 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*, is organized by three strategic oversight areas: Military Operations and Security Cooperation; Diplomacy, Governance, Stabilization, and Humanitarian Assistance; and Support to Mission.

AUDITS, INSPECTIONS, AND EVALUATIONS

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

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

FY 2024 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations.

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COMPLETED PROJECTS

Between January 1, 2024, and March 31, 2024, the DoD, State, and USAID OIGs issued seven oversight reports related to OIR, which includes one classified report, as detailed below. Completed reports by Lead IG agencies are available on their respective web pages.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Munitions Storage at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait

DODIG-2024-064; March 19, 2024

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

This report is related to the DoD OIG's "Audit of Munitions Storage Facilities at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar" (DODIG-2024-063). The audits are part of a series of four audits reviewing munitions storage within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility. Both facilities support the OIR mission.

The DoD OIG determined that the Army inconsistently adhered to safety and security policies in storing munitions. Issues identified in the report include that Army officials stored munitions without an approved site plan, did not manage munitions storage by approved net explosive weight limits, did not maintain awareness of net explosive weight limits in munitions storage structures, did not ensure risk acceptance requirements were met for waiving lightning protection systems, and did not remove flammable vegetation surrounding munitions storage structures. When officials do not store munitions in accordance with safety policies, that increases the risk of serious injury, loss of life, and damage to property.

The DoD OIG issued multiple recommendations to Army officials to ensure proper adherence to safety and security policies and procedures, and to improve management of munitions storage. During the audit, Army officials took some corrective action and stopped storing munitions without approved site plans. However, the recommendations will remain open until the DoD OIG receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

Audit of Munitions Storage at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar

DODIG-2024-063; March 19, 2024

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoD stores and secures munitions in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility in accordance with applicable safety and security policies.

The DoD OIG determined that while safety and security policies were generally followed, there is room for improvement in managing munitions storage. The report identified that U.S. Air Forces Central officials and contractor personnel did not manage munitions storage by approved net explosive weight limits for some munitions storage structures for over a year. Additionally, U.S. Air Forces Central officials and contractor personnel did not track the net explosive weight totals for munitions stored by two Al Udeid Air Base tenant organizations. The DoD OIG also found that weapons safety managers were unaware of the net explosive weight totals in munitions storage structures.

The DoD OIG issued multiple recommendations to Air Force officials to ensure proper adherence to safety and security policies and to improve management of munitions storage. During the audit, Air Force officials began taking steps to address some of the findings. However, the recommendations will remain open until the DoD OIG receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

Audit of Army Oversight of the DoD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise II Contract

DODIG-2024-042; January 9, 2024

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the Army provided effective oversight of the DoD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise (DLITE) II contract in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility to ensure contractors fulfilled requirements.

In 2017, the Army awarded three task orders under the DLITE II contract for language services throughout the USCENTCOM area of responsibility. The Army Contracting Command–Detroit Arsenal (ACC-DTA) and Contract Linguist and Intelligence Program Support Office (CLIPSO) are responsible for contract oversight. The DoD OIG found that ACC-DTA and CLIPSO provided effective oversight of the DLITE II contractor fill rates for linguists from March 2021 through February 2022 for three contractors. However, ACC-DTA and CLIPSO oversight officials did not document contractor performance in accordance with requirements and in a timely manner.

Furthermore, CLIPSO oversight officials did not timely address and fully document alleged security incidents for three Contractor C linguists. This occurred because CLIPSO did not establish a process to ensure consistent reporting and documenting the resolution of alleged security incidents involving contracted linguists. Without CLIPSO implementing a process to ensure security incidents are resolved, there is risk of endangering U.S. and Coalition personnel, and an increased risk that a linguist could leak classified information.

Because of the actions taken by ACC-DTA officials, the DoD OIG did not make recommendations related to audit findings on documenting contractor performance. The DoD OIG made recommendations related to alleged linguist security incidents. Management agreed with the recommendations, which will remain open until the DoD OIG receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

Audit of Enhanced End-Use Monitoring of Sensitive Equipment Given to the Government of Iraq

DODIG-2023-119; March 13, 2024

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoD conducted enhanced end-use monitoring (EEUM) for sensitive equipment provided to the Iraqi government in accordance with the DoD Security Assistance Management Manual and the transfer agreement terms and conditions.

Since 2014, the U.S. Government has provided the Iraqi government with over $22.5 billion in training and equipment, including sensitive equipment such as F-16 aircraft, Stinger missiles, M1A1 Abrams tanks, and night vision devices to support OIR. To monitor

equipment provided to other countries, the DoD developed the Golden Sentry End-Use Monitoring (EUM) program. The program is designed to verify that foreign recipients use U.S.-provided equipment or services in accordance with the terms and conditions of the transfer agreement or other applicable agreements.

The DoD OIG determined that the DoD did not conduct EEUM in Iraq in accordance with established procedures between 2019 and 2022. For example, for certain sensitive equipment, DoD officials did not meet all applicable EEUM inventory and physical security inspection requirements. The DoD OIG also determined that USCENTCOM did not conduct proper inspections of official records as required.

The DoD's failure to comply with required procedures increased the risk that the DoD would not know whether sensitive U.S. military equipment was missing. This equipment could be misused or acquired by adversaries in the region, such as Iranian-affiliated militias and ISIS, which could use the equipment against U.S. personnel, allies, and partners.

The DoD OIG made several recommendations to improve DoD adherence to EEUM procedures, and to ensure proper management of sensitive equipment. Management agreed with the recommendations. However, the recommendations will remain open until the DoD OIG receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Inspection of Embassy Baghdad and Constituent Post, Iraq

ISP-I-24-06; January 16, 2024

State OIG conducted this inspection to evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate General in Erbil. Specifically, State OIG inspected the executive direction, policy and program implementation, resource management, and information management operations of the embassy and consulate general in Erbil.

State OIG found that the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission led Mission Iraq in a professional and collaborative manner consistent with State leadership and management principles; Mission Iraq's coordination of foreign assistance programs did not systematically include bureau program managers; consular operations did not meet State standards for crisis preparedness and lacked American Liaison Network coverage; the embassy used power generation that was costlier than procuring power locally; the embassy's property management practices did not comply with State standards for expendable property and fuel deliveries; the embassy and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center's safety, health, and environmental management program did not comply with standards; and Mission Iraq did not fully comply with State's guidance for employment of third-country national staff.

State OIG made 37 recommendations, 35 to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, 1 to the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and 1 to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations. The embassy and the relevant State bureaus concurred with 36 recommendations and neither agreed nor disagreed with 1 recommendation. The recommendations will remain open until State OIG receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

State OIG also issued a report on classified findings related to this inspection to evaluate the programs and operations of the embassy and consulate general. The report is classified. Details can be found in the classified annex to this report.

USAID OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

New Partnerships Initiative: USAID Provided Technical Assistance to Support Implementation but Faced Challenges with Data Reliability, Partner Inexperience, and Mission Staff Capacity

9-000-24-003-P; March 25, 2024

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

In FY 2017, more than 80 percent of USAID's $17.2 billion in total obligations was directed to only 75 project implementation partners. While direct funding of local partners has been increasing, in FY 2022, it still accounted for only 10.2 percent, or $1.6 billion, of the Agency's total budget. In 2019, USAID launched the New Partnerships Initiative (NPI), which aimed to diversify USAID's partner base by creating avenues for new and underutilized partners (NUPs)—organizations that have received less than $25 million in awards from USAID over the past 5 years—to work with the Agency through an updated approach to partnering and procurement.

USAID OIG determined with its USAID provided guidance and technical assistance to develop NPI action plans, but the missions reviewed relied on experiences from past initiatives to implement NPI and continued to face long-standing challenges. The missions identified long-standing challenges to working with NUPs, including implementer inexperience and lack of mission capacity (specifically, limited mission staff bandwidth) as constraints to increasing the number of awards to NUPs. Consequently, it was unclear whether NPI changed the way missions work with local partners and approach localization efforts. USAID developed indicators to measure NPI performance, but data may have been flawed, and results were not regularly collected or communicated. NPI action plan guidance required missions to report periodic results on seven key indicators, including one related to subawards, a central component of the initiative. However, this indicator depended on data that USAID did not have control over and that may have been inaccurate, unreliable, or unavailable. Additionally, USAID collected and communicated NPI performance results infrequently and on an ad hoc basis. Missions reported progress toward one of the seven NPI indicators annually, but USAID has not regularly requested other data on NPI performance from missions.

USAID OIG made three recommendations to improve USAID's processes for measuring and reporting NPI performance results. USAID agreed with all three recommendations.
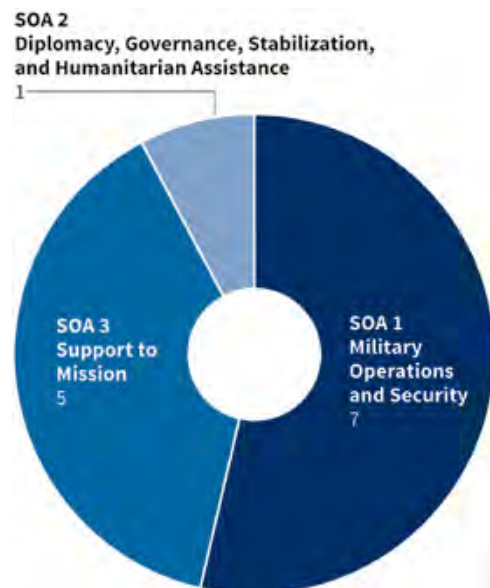
ONGOING AND PLANNED OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of March 31, 2024, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 13 ongoing and planned projects related to OIR, including those summarized below. Tables 6 and 7, contained in Appendixes F and Tables 8 and 9 in Appendix G, lists the titles and objectives for all ongoing and planned projects.

Military Operations and Security Cooperation

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

- The **DoD OIG** intends to conduct a follow up to a previous audit related to accountability of equipment provided to Iraqi security and vetted Syrian opposition forces through the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund.

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an evaluation to determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception planning in support of ongoing OIR operations.

- **State OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether State effectively managed programs to counter Iran-backed groups.

Diplomacy, Governance, Stabilization, and Humanitarian Assistance

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

Support to Mission

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the DoD requested and received reimbursement from Kuwait for services provided by the DoD in accordance with the Defense Cooperation Agreement.

- **State OIG** intends to conduct an audit to determine whether State planned and designed the power plant at the new consulate compound in Erbil, Iraq, in accordance with Federal and State requirements and guidelines.

Figure 6.

Ongoing and Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area

INVESTIGATIONS

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

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 DCIS, State OIG, USAID OIG, the Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 3 investigations and coordinated on 67 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking

Figure 7.

DoD OIG Related Investigation Activities Related to OIR, January 1–March 31, 2024

Note: Some investigations are joint with more than one agency and some not joint with any other agency. Therefore, the total number of Joint Open Cases may not equal the total number of Open Cases. Open Cases as of 3/31/2024.
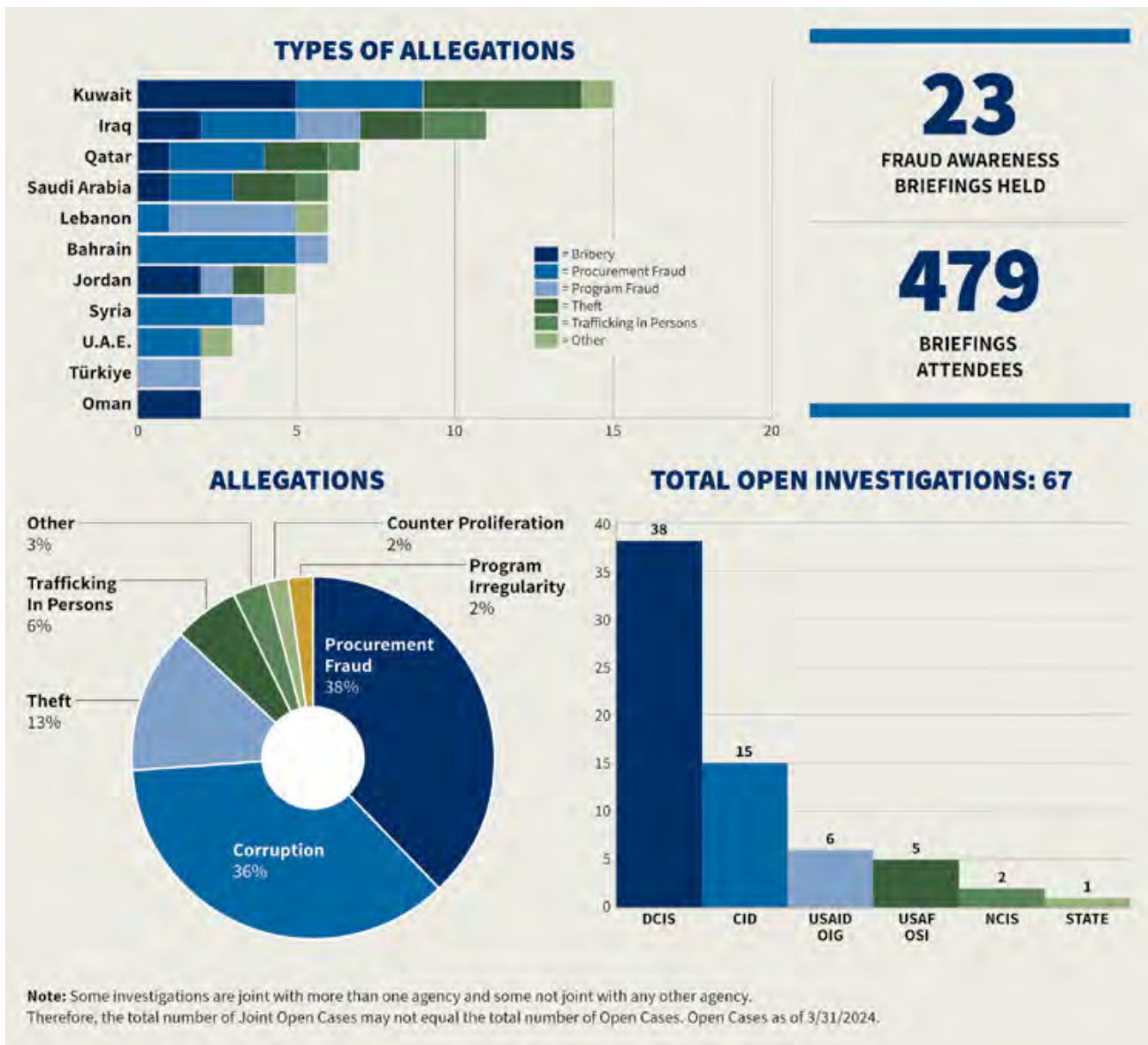
allegations. DCIS has 3 ongoing "legacy" investigations related to crimes involving the OIR area of operations that occurred prior to the formal designation of OIR. The State OIG and USAID OIG are working on 7 investigations.   The Dashboard on page 72 contains a consolidated listing of these investigative agencies.

Figure 7 displays the primary offense locations, allegations, and other data on investigations related to OIR. Lead IG and partner agencies coordinate fraud and public corruption investigation activities related to overseas contingency operations through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group. During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 23 fraud awareness briefings for 479 participants.

HOTLINE ACTIVITY

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

During the quarter, the DoD OIG Hotline investigator received 85 allegations related to OIR and referred 57 cases for further criminal investigation. State OIG received 28 allegations and referred no cases and USAID OIG received 2 allegations. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 8.

Hotline Activities, January 1–March 31, 2024

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding. In some instances, a case may contain multiple subjects and allegations.
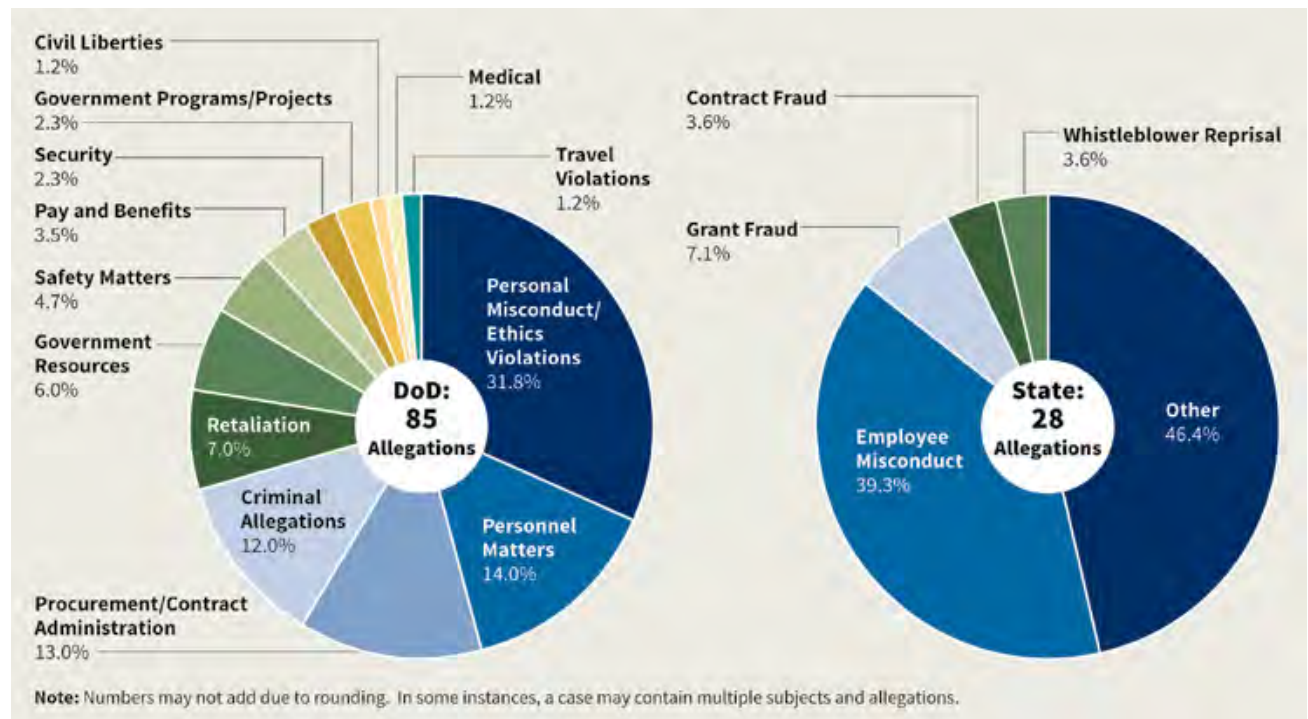
A Combat Aviation Brigade member prepares for a night flight in Iraq. (U.S. Army photo)

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
Classified Appendix to this Report

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

APPENDIX B
About the Lead Inspector General

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

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

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

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

- Submit to Congress on a quarterly basis a report on the contingency operation and to make that report available to the public.
- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.

APPENDIX C
Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

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

This report covers the period from January 1 through March 31, 2024. The three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG—and partner oversight agencies contributed the content of this report.

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

INFORMATION COLLECTION FROM AGENCIES AND OPEN SOURCES

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

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

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

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

REPORT PRODUCTION

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

APPENDIX D
State and USAID Stabilization Programs

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Funding Facility for Stabilization Aims to stabilize areas recently liberated from ISIS by restoring damaged or destroyed essential services and providing the conditions for a dignified, safe, and voluntary return of IDPs to their home. July 2015–December 2025 $457 million award	USAID is the largest contributor to this 29-donor, multilateral program.
Durable Communities and Economic Opportunities Aims to build resilient, adaptive communities and advance economic well-being in target communities in Iraq by addressing underlying drivers of conflict and increasing community leadership of inclusive local development. June 2020–September 2025 (including two option years) $24.5 million award	Engaged selected communities impacted by conflict and their leadership to identify and resolve conflict sustainably and peacefully through inclusive dialogue and practical solutions. Provided training and networking services to Iraqi victims of war to help them gain high-quality and sustainable sources of livelihood.
Shared Future Supports the durable return for IDPs from the Ninewa Plain, focusing on religious and ethnic minority communities. June 2018–September 2025 $29 million award	Worked with youth, community, and religious leaders to increase mutual understanding, tolerance, and trust both within their communities and with other communities. Improved vocational and leadership skills and youth livelihood opportunities through targeted vocational training.
Iraq Response and Resilience Program Supports vulnerable people in areas suffering from limited resources as a result of natural or other disasters, such as acute pollution, to ensure every Iraqi has safe access to water, electricity, health, education, free movement on sealed roads and civil/municipal services, and the opportunity to support their family financially. September 2019–December 2023 $16.3 million award	Rehabilitated nine water treatment units in Basrah that will provide over 640,000 beneficiaries with potable water.
Supporting the Vulnerable Populations in Iraq September 2018–September 2024 $4 million award	Supported the return of displaced populations from ethnic and religious minorities in Ninewa Plain and western Ninewa through activities related to livelihoods, housing, community peacebuilding, education, and psychosocial services.
Transitional Assistance to IDPs in Erbil, Iraq Assists vulnerable IDP families with immediate household needs, such as shelter and food, and ease their return home when possible.September 2019–November 2023 $7.4 million award	Provided cash assistance to support the IDPs from Ninewa province in protracted displacement in Erbil and assisted beneficiaries to prepare for durable solutions for their families through targeted information and planning sessions.

Program	Activity Highlights
Strengthening the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee to Response to Communities in Crisis Supports building the capacity of the committee while responding to the ongoing needs of IDPs in Iraq through institutional capacity-building and organizational development. October 2020–September 2024 $3.5 million award	Strengthened the capacity of the Ankawa Humanitarian Committee and prepared it to fully engage with USAID on future development initiatives through strengthened capacity and commitment. The committee provides cash support to small entrepreneurs to establish/improve their small businesses.
Building Resilience in Children Leverages Ahlan Simsim's unique approach that combines locally driven, crisis-sensitive and age-appropriate interventions to increase resilience capacities among children, families, and communities impacted by conflict and violence. July 2021–June 2024 $11 million award	Engaged families and communities impacted by conflict and violence using a combination of original multimedia, direct services, and youth engagement programming to increase resilience capacities that help to counter malign influences and prevent radicalization to violence and violent extremism.
Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Minority Communities in Iraq Aims to contribute to communal healing, intercommunal understanding, and appreciation of the diversity of Iraq, a fundamental step toward the promotion and actualization of democracy. May 2021–May 2024 $2 million award	Partnered with local Iraqi organizations to describe and document the tangible and intangible heritage of religious and ethnic minority communities in Iraq. Created digitally documented collections as databases, built for portability, interoperability, and accessibility.
Iraq Community Resilience Initiative II ICRI Phase II provides direct assistance to Iraqi partners to empower inclusive civic action with the goal of supporting a prosperous and inclusive Iraq. This is achieved by improving positive perceptions of civic engagement among Iraqis and increasing community mobilization around national causes. September 2021–September 2025 $18 million award	Established partnerships with local government authorities, civil society organizations, media, and community groups in an inclusive manner to quickly implement activities that strengthen community resilience. Encouraged collaborative action across diverse segments of Iraqi society to tackle common issues, such as climate change impacts, lack of essential services, and challenges related to hosting returns of displaced Iraqis, while empowering initiatives and platforms that aid communities in responding to these stressors.
Return with Hope February 2024–February 2026 $5 million award.	Provides individualized case-management for Iraqi returnees from Al-Hol camp to support their re-integration in their areas of origin and/or areas of return. The program will complement the ongoing work of other organizations already active in the targeted geographic locations and focus on how this program will facilitate the durable return of beneficiaries through the direct provision of specific services, the referral to other available service providers, and building the capacity of social workers from local civil society and relevant government entities.

Source: Source: USAID Middle East Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/20/2024.

State-funded Stabilization Programs in Syria During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Essential Services and Local Governance Seeks to build trust in local governance entities, making target communities less susceptible to ISIS influence.	Provided operational and infrastructure assistance to municipal vehicle mechanics, firefighters, and emergency response drivers, to enhance local council effectiveness in providing essential services across multiple sectors. Conducted maintenance of water stations and networks in areas previously impacted by tribal unrest. Conducted capacity building needs assessments of local councils to help determine data driven decisions in the water and firefighting sectors and trained local council personnel on administrative skills to enhance overall governance.
Civil Society Seeks to help civil society organizations restore essential services and livelihoods in areas liberated from ISIS.	Supported Syrian civil society organizations to deliver essential services, improve livelihoods, represent Syrians, and strengthen social cohesion in communities liberated from ISIS and in communities with members of religious minority groups. Supported an information management unit that coordinated with al-Hol camp management and administration to facilitate the return of over 500 individuals from al-Hol camp to communities of return, including a data collection dashboard on individual and family demographic data, needs assessments, and feedback upon return. Other programming rehabilitated drinking water and irrigation infrastructure in Dayr az Zawr to address identified barriers to community reintegration, benefitting more than 73,000 individuals in five communities. Built the capacity of civil councils, education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial literacy and numeracy, technical and vocational training, psychosocial support, teacher training, and rehabilitation/winterization of schools. Worked with families recently returned from displaced persons camps through a social reintegration program focused on building cohesion in the communities.
Education Seeks to build the capacity of local councils, their education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial numeracy, primary education, and psychosocial support for children.	Built the capacity of civil councils, education committees, and community-based organizations to provide remedial literacy and numeracy, technical and vocational training, psychosocial support, teacher training, and rehabilitation/winterization of schools. Rehabilitated and equipped schools in Raqqah. Provided training in computer skills, solar panel repair, carpentry, and other vocations. Worked with families recently returned from displaced persons camps through a social reintegration program focused on building cohesion in the communities.
Support to Independent Media Seeks to promote unbiased, professional and relevant reporting.	Provided capacity building and operational support to independent northern Syrian media outlets that improved access to accurate, unbiased information and countered violent extremism and disinformation perpetuated by Iran-backed militias, Russia, the Assad regime, and other malign actors. Expanded news programs, gender programming, and programming discussing community issues.

Program	Activity Highlights
Community Security Seeks to build the capacity of internal security forces to provide security that supports, and is supported by, the communities they serve.	Supported the InSF and the governance bodies that oversee them to deliver community policing services that serves, and are supported by, the population. Rehabilitated InSF stations; held engagements between InSF officers and local community members; and rehabilitated streetlights in under-served areas to address a primary security concern of local communities. Provided a holistic approach to community security, supporting officer trainings, building the capacity of civilian authorities, promoting community engagement, and supporting public safety initiatives.
Syrian Political Process Seeks to strengthen the capabilities of stakeholders to participate in the Constitutional Committee and work with other UN-convened negotiations in support of UNSCR 2254.	Supported workshops and dialogue sessions to help bridge the gap between local community-based organizations and their local constituents by facilitating initiatives to ensure political inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and outreach.
Humanitarian Mine Action Seeks to clear explosive hazards contamination from areas liberated from ISIS to allow for broader stabilization efforts.	Surveyed, marked, and cleared explosive remnants of war and IEDs from key critical infrastructure sites and areas liberated from ISIS. Delivered explosive ordnance risk education to displaced persons and at-risk communities to teach them about the hazards of explosives. Provided local capacity building support.

Source: State, response to State OIG request for information, 3/18/2024.

USAID-funded Stabilization Activities in Syria During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Elections and Political Processes Seeks to enhance participation of citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in transitional or electoral processes in Syria and improve inclusive citizen-governance relationships in northeastern Syria. Duration: 4 years (ends August 2025) $12 million award	**Peace Building:** Leveraged connections with tribal and religious leaders to understand local community demands and address immediate drivers of tension. Held six dialogues with civil society organizations and influential civic figures to reduce hate speech, negative media mobilization and incitement. **Training and Capacity Building:** Provided training and capacity building to 40 local actors trained in best practices for transparent, accountable, and effective local governance. **Community Dialogue:** Sustained engagement with Syrian stakeholders resulted in tangible action by civil society organizations to hold authorities accountable in northeastern Syria. Facilitated 37 dialogues and roundtables to date on issue identification, effective communications, conflict analysis, and negotiations and mediation for local communities. **Advocacy Campaign:** Worked with a group of civil society organizations on 11 new campaigns with a range of ideas and objectives focusing on addressing al-Hol returnees and the wider community's key needs and priorities.

Program	Activity Highlights
Growing Agriculture and Incomes in Syria (GROW) Seeks to improve agricultural production, increase food security, and increase incomes for farmers and agribusiness in non-regime areas of Syria.Duration: 3 years base with 2 option years (ends August 2028) $42 million award	**Program Start-Up:** The GROW program was awarded on September 27, 2023, and is in its start-up phase.
Syria Livelihoods Project Increases equitable income generation and access to services for women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, and creates an inclusive enabling environment for economic recovery. Duration is 5 years (July 2020–July 2025) $14.55 million award	**Career Opportunities:** Placed 416 job seekers with disabilities in vacant positions; 220 have completed their 6-month, part-paid internships and are now permanently employed. Provided training to a local NGO on entrepreneurship and business plan development to 331 beneficiaries. **Case Management: Worked with local authorities to support to more than 18,000 persons with disabilities.** Launched a case management system that registers, assesses and refers persons with disabilities, channeling individuals to support services that meet their economic, health and social assistance needs both within the de facto authority in Northeastern Syria SANES and to external specialist service providers. As of the quarter, the program has registered 2,968 beneficiaries with disabilities and referred 126 to requested service providers. **Career Guidance:** Delivered employment readiness sessions and career guidance to 2,307 persons with disabilities through a local disabled persons organization. The beneficiaries can also receive financial support for their businesses, job placements, or referrals to other specialist service providers. **Technical support to North Syria Network's Job-Matching Website (NSjobs.net):** This is an ongoing activity aimed at improving the NSjobs.net website, a job-matching platform operating in northeastern, to serve new users and give vulnerable populations access to employment opportunities. The upgraded job matching website received over 240,000 visits since its release. **Accelerating Inclusive Economic Recovery:** This activity is implemented by a local partner to support increased resilience for persons with disabilities in Hasakah and Qamishli to the impacts of climate change, supports internships in green jobs, and expansion of green micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) owned by or employing persons with disabilities. **Improving Services for Returnees and Host Communities:** Supported women returnees from al-Hol and women from host communities, including placing 600 women in paid internships, providing technical and financial support to 198 MSME owners, and establishing a Women's Center for Economic Empowerment in Raqqa, Tabqa, and Dayr az-Zawr.

Program	Activity Highlights
Economic Management for Stability in Northeast Syria Economic Management for Stability in Northeast Syria Aims to stimulate private sector-led growth and investment for job creation, reduce corruption, and improve the transparency of regional governing authorities, and ultimately reduce the dependency on foreign assistance in non-regime held areas. The program enlists senior advisors to initiate policy dialogue and advisory support in critical economic governance and private sector-led growth areas. Duration: 3 years (ends September 2024) $14 million award	**Macro-Financial Management:** Carried out a large-scale GDP estimation survey that sought to obtain data that would enable the estimation of annual GDP by sector for years 2021 and 2022; the growth rate achieved during this period for GDP in real terms; and the measurement of changes in producer prices over that period. **Payments System:** Worked with the Central Monetary and Payments Office (CMPO) to address reform areas that are fundamental prerequisites for the successful establishment of a robust Digital Payments System in northeastern Syria. **Banking Regulation/Compliance: Assisted the CMPO to develop two licensing regulations: one for banks and the other for microfinance institutions.** The CMPO board approved the regulatory frameworks in January 2024. Assisted the CMPO with expanding and intensifying its outreach efforts to exchange houses to increase the number of license applications. These activities contributed to a major increase in license applications, which rose to over 450 by the end of the quarter, representing well over 80 percent of exchange house operations. **Agricultural Reform: Worked with DAANES officials to advance agricultural strategy and subsidy transformation plans.** Worked with DAANES on establishing the Center for Agricultural Excellence and Innovation which aims to promote increased agricultural productivity, increase food availability, lower food prices, higher farm income, and a decreased need for agricultural and food subsidies. **Private Sector Engagement/Competitiveness Enhancement:** Conducted visits to more than 30 prospective and existing partner firms to evaluate the partnership potential of newly identified firms as well as the possibility of expanding existing partnerships to drive further sustainable productivity improvements and job creation. This concerted effort resulted in the development and subsequent approval of 10 new Partnership Agreements, a number of which were forged with existing partner firms. Under each of these new PAs, USAID will provide the concerned firm with comprehensive support aimed at significantly enhancing its competitiveness through operational efficiency improvements and expanded market linkages. **FDI Attraction Support:** Supported SMEs and investors, who executed transactions valued at $6.6 million ($773,000) is in foreign direct investments. **Business/Investment Enabling Environment:** Collaborated with DAANES to finalize three best practice compliant regulatory frameworks: the Executive Regulation on Business Registration; the revised Investment Regulation; and the Public Procurement Regulation.

Program	Activity Highlights
Essential Services, Good Governance, and Economic Recovery Aims to restore essential services, including power, water, and health in non-regime held areas in northeastern Syria. Duration: 5 years (May 2020–May 2025) $49.9 million award	**Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from Al Hol in Raqqa–Case Management System and Capacity Building:** The program is tracking and monitoring returnees through the established case management system (CMS) and is linking the returnees to a suite of social, economic, and property services to facilitate reintegration. During this quarter, the program made 475 referrals and closed 468 referrals. Throughout the quarter, 76 returnee families continued to be active and engaged in the CMS and in regular communication with the program. In late January 2024, the program completed a grant with the Raqqa Civil Council (RCC) Social Affairs and Labor Committee and their Community Care Center; which was the first of a three-phase case management system (CMS) capacity building approach. **Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from Al Hol in Raqqa–Service Provision:** The program is providing transitional shelter support for returnees through two grants, as well as enhancing electricity provision in Raqqa city. With program support, a local civil society organization completed basic rehabilitation for nine host residences that are housing returnee families on February 4. Another local organization has been providing transitional shelter for an additional 33 returnee families in Raqqa throughout this quarter. Supported the rehabilitation of five transformation centers that are now providing improved electrical services to neighborhoods. **Enhancing Provision of Electricity in Raqqa City–Phase II:** Supported a civile society organization to purchase materials for the Energy Commission in Raqqa, including 23 new electrical transformers, circuit breakers, cables, control panels, and accessories. **Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from Al Hol in Dayr az-Zour–Case Management System and Capacity Building:** The program is coordinating with the Dayr az-Zawr Civil Council (DCC) Social Affairs and Labor Committee to prepare for al-Hol returnees that are anticipated to return to Dayr az-Zawr. During this quarter, the program supported the DCC Social Affairs and Labor Committee implemented an activity to 1) prepare a receiving area for the returnees, 2) provide basic office equipment and furniture to their newly established Community Care Center offices, 3) participate in a needs assessment to identify the specific areas where capacity building is required for oversight and management of the CMS, and 4) coordinate with service providers and develop the CMS referral network. The program and the DCC Social Affairs and Labor Committee completed the participatory, comprehensive needs assessment in February and continues to await the Syrian returnees. **Reintegration of Syrian Returnees from Al Hol in Dayr az Zawr–Service Provision:** The program is prepared to provide immediate transitional shelter support for returnees upon their return to Dayr az Zawr. Supported a local organization to secure and furnish 45 shelters that are available immediately for returnees that require transitional housing support. **Establishment of Hasakah Table Eggs and Fertilized Eggs Production Farms:** Supported the General Directorate of Agriculture and Animal Welfare in Hasakah to rehabilitate farm facilities in order to establish a table egg production farm and fertilized egg production farm. During this quarter, the local authority completed civil works, electrical works, and installation of equipment at both facilities. The establishment of the egg production farms will also reduce dependence on imports and promote self-sufficiency, thus fostering resilience and stability. **Establishment of Pasta Factory in Hasakah:** Supported the Department of Community Projects and Cooperatives in Hasakah to establish a pasta factory that will strengthen food security, promote economic recovery, and reduce reliance on imports. During this quarter, the department completed the civil works, plumbing works, and electrical works for the new facility.

Source: USAID Middle East Bureau, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/20/2024.

APPENDIX E
USAID Humanitarian Assistance Programs

USAID-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Iraq During the Quarter

Program	Activity Highlights
Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene	Provided water, sanitation, and hygiene services in Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Anbar provinces. This included solid waste management, desludging and de-blocking services, and hygiene promotion activities, benefiting 5,403 individuals in the targeted camps and collective centers.
Shelter and Settlements	Provided critical shelter upgrades and a distribution of non-food item kits to vulnerable internally displaced person households in Diyala province. The critical shelter upgrades included rehabilitations to windows, doors, ceilings, locks, corridors, hand-rails on stairs, and hand-washing basins. In addition, families received a distribution of a kit that included blankets, bedsheets, mattresses, a stove, jerry cans, a kerosene heater, an electrical heater, a kitchen set and a carpet.
Protection	Provided awareness sessions on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation; case management services; and referrals through a protection center in Ninewa province and other organizations.
Humanitarian Coordination, Information Management, and Assessments	Conducted a Nationwide Cross-Cutting Needs Assessment among out-of-camp IDP and returnee households. Through in-person surveys covering key provinces across the country including Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Sulaymaniyah.
Food Assistance	Provided unconditional food assistance to Syrian refugees and other crisis affected people.

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

Source: USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/20/2024.

APPENDIX F
Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 6 and 7 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 6.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of March 31, 2024

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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

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

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

Evaluation of DoD Support to the Development of the Iraqi Security Forces' Operational Logistics and Sustainment Capabilities
To assess the effectiveness of the DoD's support for the development of operational logistics and sustainment capabilities for the Iraqi Security Forces.

Audit of DoD Reimbursement from the State of Kuwait in Accordance with the Defense Cooperation Agreement
To determine whether the DoD requested and received reimbursement from Kuwait for services provided by the DoD in accordance with the Defense Cooperation Agreement.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Worldwide Protective Services III Initial Training Consolidation Initiative
To determine whether the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's efforts to consolidate initial Worldwide Protective Services III training have improved training quality, enhanced oversight, and achieved the envisioned cost savings.

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

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

Table 7.

Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of March 31, 2024

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Audit of International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) Program
To determine whether International Cooperative Administrative Support Services ICASS payments were appropriate and supported.

APPENDIX G
Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 8 and 9 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects related to OIR.

Table 8.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Agencies, as of March 31, 2024

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Followup Audit of the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) for Iraq and Syria
To determine whether the actions taken by the DoD in response to the recommendations in Report No. DODIG-2020-061, "Audit of the DoD's Accountability of Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund Equipment Designated for Syria," February 13, 2020, improved the accountability and safeguarding of equipment provided to Iraqi Security and Vetted Syrian Opposition forces through the Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund.

Audit of the DoD's End-Use Monitoring of Equipment Provided to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
To determine whether the DoD is conducting end-use monitoring of equipment provided to Saudi Arabia in accordance with DoD policy.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of the Design of the Power Plant at the New Consulate Compound in Erbil, Iraq
To determine whether the Department of State followed Federal and State requirements and guidelines in the planning, design, construction, and commissioning of the power plant at Consulate General Erbil.

Audit of the Department of State's Efforts to Counter Iran-Backed Groups
To determine whether the Department of State's efforts to counter Iran-backed groups have 1) strategically developed and implemented with goals and objectives; 2) executed to promote coordination among implementing bureaus, posts, and interagency partners; and 3) designed to measure performance results and inform adjustments in its approach.

Table 9.

Planned Oversight Projects Related to OIR by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of March 31, 2024

ARMY AUDIT AGENCY

Army's Operational Contract Support Plans
To determine if the Army's Operational Contracting Support packages supported joint contingency operations planning.

ACRONYMS

Acronym	
ACC-DTA	Army Contracting Command–Detroit Arsenal
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CBI	Central Bank of Iraq
CID	U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
CLIPSO	Contract Linguist and Intelligence Program Support Office
CTEF	Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund
CTS	Counterterrorism Service
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DLITE	DoD Language Interpretation and Translation Enterprise
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
ESSA	Eastern Syria Security Area
EUM	end-use monitoring
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
IDP	internally displaced person
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOC	international oil company
IRI	Islamic Resistance in Iraq
IRGC-QF	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force

Acronym	
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
JOC-I	Joint Operations Command–Iraq
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KNC	Kurdish National Council
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KSF	Kurdish Security Forces
MoPA	Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs
NCIS	Naval Criminal Investigative Service
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NPI	New Partnerships Initiative
NUP	new and underutilized partners
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OPCW	Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OUSD(P)	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SFA	Syrian Free Army
State	Department of State
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
WFP	World Food Programme
YPG	People's Protection Units

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