IRAQ
Weekly Insight Report
14 May – 20 May 2018
National Overview

Incidents This Week 121 Weekly Trend Down

- Hostile activity declined significantly this week, likely due to the onset of Ramadan and the continuance of an elevated security posture across the country in the post-election period.
- Overall levels of violence once again reduced across Baghdad province. Most notably, one SVIED attack occurred in Tarmiyah, subsequently claimed by IS. Media reporting was dominated by political machinations over attempts to form a new Iraqi Government.
- Ninawa remained the focal point for insurgent activity, though attacks were geographically spread, indicative of localised militant cells operating in the province. In northern Erbil, skirmishes between the TAF and PKK continued.
- Post-election tensions dominated reporting in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniya as opposition parties contested the election result. Insurgent activity also remained prevalent in the Makhoul Mountains area, in both Salah-al Din and Kirkuk.
- Levels of hostility remained low in Anbar, though insecurity in the Iraq / Syria border area continued, with several militant attacks noted.
- Southern Iraq remained stable though tensions were observed in the South East region over the elections. Most notably, a Sadrist facility in Maysan was attacked with IEDs and a Nasr candidate in Basra, challenged an IHEC decision to invalidate his election candidacy.
WEEKLY INCIDENTS BY PROVINCE: 14 May – 20 May 2018

*Indicates that the province comes under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government.
BAGHDAD (City & Province)

Hostile activity declined significantly in Baghdad this week, considered to be the result of the onset of Ramadan, and an elevated security posture during the post-election period. Insurgent activity continued in the Baghdad Belts areas. Most notably, IS carried out an SVIED attack against a funeral procession in Tarmiyah. Mortars also reportedly hit ISF positions in Radwaniyah district. Of note in the city, gunmen attempted to assassinate the Head of Baghdad al-Jadeed District Council.

NORTH (Ninawa, Dahuk & Erbil Provinces)

Ninawa remained the focal point for insurgent activity. The majority manifested in IED detonations, though incidents were geographically spread, assessed likely as freshly emplaced devices linked to localised militant cells. In Erbil, post-election tensions endured. Six Kurdish parties have joined forces to demand a manual re-count which provoked protest activity in the provincial capital. Turkish airstrikes also continued in the northern areas of the province, alongside skirmishes between TAF and the PKK.

NORTH CENTRAL (Tamim/Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala & Sulaymaniya)

Activity declined slightly in the North Central, however remained above average levels. Political tensions dominated reporting in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah, as opposition parties challenged the PUK’s landslide victory in both provinces. This provoked a series of demonstrations, and hostile incidents in Kirkuk province, notably in Kirkuk city. Insurgent violence also continued in Salah al-Din and Diyala, predominantly in the DRV and Khanaqin in Diyala, and the Makhoul Mountains in Salah al-Din.

WEST (Anbar Province)

Hostile activity declined in population centres along the Euphrates, largely the result of enhanced security measures for Ramadan and an enduring elevated ISF presence. However, the Iraq / Syria border regions in western Anbar remained insecure. IED detonations and a SAF attack against the Waleed Border Crossing were observed, which prompted large-scale military operations in the western Anbari desert.

SOUTH CENTRAL (Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Qadisiya & Najaf Provinces)

Incident levels subdued markedly this week, likely due to the onset of the religious period Ramadan and the implementation of provincial security plans. Indeed, arrests linked to low-level criminality continued to dominate reporting. Minor post-election tensions were also witnessed in Diwaniyah as the results were finalised.

SOUTH EAST (Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan & Basra Provinces)

Hostile incidents increased markedly in the South East this week. This included a rise of tribal SAF in Basra, alongside two IEDs involving modified explosives. The majority of the remaining detected activity continued to link to localised personal or business disputes, as well as criminality. The preliminary election results for the region were also announced, following a relatively peaceful election day. Most notably, an IED targeting a Fatah candidate was reported in Basra three days before the vote.
Baghdad

Incidents This Week 19  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 2: Reference Map & Incident Levels – Baghdad
Outlook

- **A notable decline in hostile activity this week.** This is very likely due to the onset of Ramadan on 17 May, and a continued heightened security posture during the post-election period. Indeed, instances of low-level activity are expected to remain subdued throughout the month of Ramadan. Insurgent activity continued in the ‘Baghdad Belt’ areas, predominately composed of IEDs targeting densely-populated soft targets. Three mortars also landed against IA and IP positions near Radwaniyah. Although mortar attacks in Baghdad province are not unprecedented, their use has fallen significantly over the last year. The weapons system and target suggests the attack was most likely carried out by Sunni insurgent groups. Inside the city, on 20 May, unidentified gunmen attempted to assassinate the Head of the Baghdad al-Jadeed District Council, Ali Mahdi, whilst he was leaving his residence in the district. Ali Mahdi – who is a Sadrist – was critically wounded in the attack. According to open sources, the victim was involved in a land dispute in Baghdad al-Jadeed. However, election-related violence is another probable explanation for this incident.

- **SVIED attack in Tarmiyah.** On 16 May, an SVIED detonated against a funeral gathering in Hamamiyat, Tarmiyah killing nine people and wounding 26 others. IS later claimed responsibility for the attack, reporting to have killed 11, and wounded 28 others, including IA Officers. IS went on to state that the funeral was for an IA Colonel, who they had killed two days earlier. This represents a sizable casualty count for the province, against a high-priority target, indicative of IS’s continued strength north of the capital. Indeed, despite an overall decline in militant activity in Baghdad over the last year, IS have continued to maintain a strong presence north of the city – likely facilitated by networks operating in western Diyala and southern Salah al-Din. As a result, Sunni militancy will almost certainly continue in the region over the short to medium term, notably in the Tarmiyah district.

- **Horse-trading stage between political factions begins.** On 18 May, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) formally released the results of the 2018 Election, after voting closed six days earlier. Sadrist-aligned Sa’iroun came in first with 54 seats, PMU-aligned Fatah came in second with 47, and incumbent Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s Nasr came in third with 42. Abadi’s poor performance is considered the result of various factors, including low voter turnout – which benefited Sa’iroun, as Sadr’s robust support base still turned out to vote in steady numbers. Following the election, political attention has now moved onto the formation of the next Iraqi Government. Notably, on 17 May, Hikma-leader Ammar al-Hakim and Muqtada al-Sadr announced that they would align to try and form a Government (together Hikma and Sa’iroun have 73 seats). Sadr has also held meetings with Prime Minister Abadi, and Fatah leader Hadi al-Ameri during the reporting period. Although no commitments were made to form a joint Government during these two meetings, there was also nothing to suggest they wouldn’t. Current Iraqi Shia politics is often broken down into two factions. The first – represented by Sadr and Hakim – have campaigned strongly on Iraqi nationalism, and have promised to build a cross-sectarian, anti-corruption Government, that limits Iranian influence in Iraq. The second – represented by Fatah and Nouri al-Maliki – are aligned closely with Iran and aim to carve out an influential future role for PMUs. Ideologically therefore, Abadi and Sadr/Hakim are considered more natural allies, as all three have campaigned on similar platforms. As things stand, it is therefore assessed more likely that Abadi would edge towards this grouping. Despite strong ideological differences, Fatah also siding with Sadr and Hakim should not be ruled out. Indeed, ideology is only one factor in Iraqi politics, and other components such as patronage networks, pragmatism and personal relationships also need to be considered. For example, following discussions with Ameri on 20 May, Sadr’s office announced that ‘the process of government formation...must include the participation of all the winning blocs’, which evasively suggests Sadr
is at least open to the idea of forming a coalition with Fatah. Indeed, due to the PMUs influence in the Iraqi ‘deep state’ (most notably in the MOI), Sadr may consider it more pragmatic to work alongside the group, rather than have them undermining future policy in opposition. That being said, Sadr and Fatah would need to overcome deep-rooted personal disputes and ideological differences. Notably, Sadr, Maliki and AAH share a mutual disdain for each other. Furthermore, Sadr holds contrasting views with Fatah over the future role of PMUs and Iranian-influence in Iraq. Despite this, pragmatism from both sides may push for a compromise, as Fatah would very likely prefer to be incorporated into the Government, rather than be side-lined into opposition. Furthermore, Iran has previously shown itself willing to attenuate Maliki if necessary, suggesting some of these challenges are not completely insurmountable.

Forecast

- **Short term**: An increase in political tensions is likely during the upcoming government formation phase as parties attempt to secure their ascendency into Ministerial positions and outmanoeuvre opponents. These tensions will likely result in an increase of intimidatory targeted explosive and SAF attacks, alongside sporadic more violent incidents. However, this threat will be mitigated by the robust security measures in place around the capital, with overall levels expected to remain within established parameters. It is likely that intra-Shia and sectarian tensions will become more pronounced in the post-election period. Low-level hostile activity is expected to remain subdued throughout the month of Ramadan. Protests will most likely also subdue during this period, although parties will likely continue to use demonstrations by their supporters – most notably the Sadrists – to achieve leverage in coalition negotiations. The enforcement of road closures, resulting in localised disruption, is expected to continue being an MO during these protests. High-profile attacks will continue to occur in Baghdad, though they will be sporadic. These are not expected to be destabilising, in part due to the robust ISF and PMU footprint. Asymmetric attacks are anticipated in the Baghdad Belts, and on the city’s outskirts in areas like Radwaniya, Mahmudiya and Suwaib. These will involve indiscriminate IEDs targeting ISF convoys and populated areas, alongside the occasional employment of more-sophisticated attacks, such as VBIEDs and SVIEDs. There is a heightened risk of insurgent attacks during the month of Ramadan, however as IS is significantly weakened, their ability to project into parts of the capital has been reduced. As a result, insurgent activity is not expected to increase beyond established parameters during this period. North of Baghdad, the insurgent threat emanating from Tarmiyah will remain extant. In the capital, activity will continue to be largely linked to low-level criminality, localised disputes and tribalism.

- **Medium term**: The danger posed by a limited insurgency in the Baghdad Belt area will continue. The return of IDPs to the Baghdad Belts and nearby regions is expected to exacerbate this threat, which has potential to develop in the medium term. The ISF/PMU presence will remain pervasive however, and will ensure that most insurgent violence remains localised. Sporadic VBIEDs and suicide attacks will continue in urban areas of central Baghdad, though robust security measures in the capital will limit the extent of attacks.

- **Long term**: The general outlook for the province remains stable, based on the consistent patterns of activity over the past year. An increase in insurgent attacks levels is possible, but this will not preclude normal commercial operations. This is particularly pertinent as IS returns to a traditional covert insurgency, typified by a focus on asymmetric attacks. However, the heavy ISF and PMU presence in the city and surrounding areas make a sustained surge in violence unlikely. Intra-Shia divisions represent a risk to the long-term political and security outlook in Baghdad and the country’s southern governorates.
North

Incidents This Week 14  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 3: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North
Outlook

- **Hostile activity increased in Ninawa.** A slight uptick in insurgent activity was observed this week, though attacks remained sporadic and geographically spread. For instance, roadside IEDs detonated in Tall Afar, Baaj district and Rak Rak, alongside the dismantling of devices in Abu Maria, and Tal Kayf. The explosions targeted a mixture of civilians and ISF, and are assessed likely as freshly emplaced devices most probably by localised insurgent cells. In Mosul, cache finds and arrests featured most prominently in reporting, indicative of the elevated ISF presence in the area. Civil Defence Units also embarked on a campaign to remove bodies from under the rubble in the city, reportedly recovering over 600 bodies in the 48 hours prior to 17 May. Most notably, the Centre for Security Information publicly denied that checkpoints in the Akeidat and Teyaran zones had been attacked by IS militants. In Kokjali, east of the city, reports also surfaced of ISF shooting a Shabak PMU member when their convoy refused to stop at a CP staffed by Iraqi soldiers. Isolated incidents of this nature are not unusual in Ninawa. Indeed, the Ninawa Guards, a Sunni militia, skirmished previously with PMU members in eastern Mosul in July 2017, over what was reported as the distribution of aid, which did not lead to a widened campaign of violence.

- **Turkish airstrikes continued in northern Erbil.** The Turkish Armed Forces continued their aerial campaign targeting the PKK in northern Erbil. On 15 May, Turkey’s Military Chief of Staff announced four PKK militants had been killed in airstrikes in Hakurk, followed by the targeting of 12 sites in the Rita, Matina, Sinat, Haftanin and Hakurk areas on 18 May. These resulted in the destruction of several weapons caches and PKK safehouses. These strikes were likely conducted in response to the PKK media centre announcing that 18 Turkish soldiers had been killed during skirmishes in the northern areas of Erbil on 14 and 15 May. Until an Iraqi Government is formed and a policy is set over Turkish incursions into Iraqi sovereign territory, this aerial campaign is likely to continue apace over the coming weeks.

- **Protest activity occurred in Erbil over the election result.** On 15 May, a large rally was called for in central Erbil by six Kurdish parties – Gorran, The Kurdistan Islamic Union, The Kurdistan Islamic Group, The Alliance for Democracy and Justice, The Kurdistan Islamic Movement and the Kurdish Communist Party – to contest the election results, over allegations of electoral fraud and vote rigging. All six parties have demanded a manual recount and accused the KDP of fixing the elections. Whilst there may be some truth to the allegations, all the stated parties failed to win a large proportion of the vote in the province, which has likely prompted the public nature of these accusations. The day prior to the rally on 14 May, Police Units deployed in central Erbil, warning that violence would not be tolerated following fatal post-election skirmishing in Sulaymaniya. Indeed, at the 15 May rally outside the UNAMI offices in central Erbil, Asayish reportedly opened fire on protestors whom had gathered in support of their political parties. Two civilians were injured, though attendees dispersed following the shooting. Violent scenes have also been witnessed in Sulaymaniya and particularly in Kirkuk over the voting result. Tensions will likely remain elevated in the near future, particularly as IHEC have failed to respond to the parties’ demands. As such, there is an increased likelihood of further civil action in the future, which has the potential to turn violent.
**Forecast**

- **Short term:** Overall levels of hostile activity are expected to subdue over Ramadan, though the threat of High Profile Attacks will remain elevated during this period. An increase in political affiliated violence is also expected as rival political blocs attempt to contest the vote, which will likely continue into the Government formation phase in Baghdad. More generally, militant attacks will gradually rise to the south of Mosul, including in Hammam al-Alil and Qayyara, alongside retaliatory violence against those with perceived links to the Sunni insurgency. The desert areas surrounding Hatra will remain a focal point for attacks, alongside other remote regions in Ninawa. Incident levels are also expected to slowly build in Mosul, however, will likely remain underreported. Meanwhile, political and sectarian strain will build, particularly in Mosul, as part of a struggle over power. Tensions linked to reconstruction funding will also increase, including among tribes and competing paramilitary factions stationed in liberated areas. Sporadic attacks on PMU forces will persist along the Iraq-Syria border. In northern Iraq, Turkish operations against the PKK will continue. This will be largely comprised of airstrikes and increased cross-border ground activity in the Kurdistan region, including in Erbil province. PKK forces will also undertake sporadic attacks against Turkish troops. Widened Turkish actions will provoke a considerable backlash from Iraqi politicians, possibly resulting in a period of increased tension between the countries.

- **Medium term:** Insurgent activity will continue to build across Ninawa, as militant networks regain operational capacity. The enduring presence of Iranian-backed PMUs in Tal Afar and disputed territory is likely to increase tensions with local Sunni and minority actors, as well as with Turkey and the US. Both sectarian and political tensions are likely to rise as disputed territory transitions to Federal governance, and displaced citizens begin to return. Iranian-aligned PMU forces will continue to secure the frontier with Syria. They will highlight ongoing cross-border attacks to advocate widening their operations against IS into Syrian territory. Turkish operations against the PKK will continue, and possibly expand.

- **Long term:** A decentralised insurgency is expected to persist in Ninawa. Political tension and rivalries will increase over the long-term, due to disputes over governance and territory. PMUs will seek to dominate the Ninawa desert region, adjacent to the Syrian border. Turkey’s objections to the PKK and YBS presence in the north will exacerbate existing tensions. The enduring presence of Iranian-backed PMUs will also result in hostilities with local actors. Mosul will see a patchwork of armed and political actors attempt to strengthen their position and gain localised authority. This will likely result in sporadic violence between rival groups.
North Central

Incidents This Week 61  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 4: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North Central
Security Overview

Iraq Weekly Report

Outlook

- **Political parties demand an election recount in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah.** Tensions have continued to rise in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah following the announcement of the 2018 election result. The PUK won comfortably in both provinces - in Kirkuk, the PUK won half of the available 12 seats, and in Sulaymaniyah they won eight out of 18. Kurdish parties including Gorran, the Alliance for Democracy and Justice, the Kurdish Communist Party and the Islamist blocs have strongly disputed the results, claiming the KDP and PUK manipulated electronic voting systems to their benefit. In Kirkuk, Sunni and Turkmen factions have also contested the PUK’s victory. In response to these allegations, UN Representative to Iraq Jan Kubic, released a statement calling for IHEC to ‘deal seriously with all complaints’ and carry out a partial manual recount, notably in Kirkuk. IHEC have however been reluctant to move ahead with these demands. Indeed, despite the UN’s statement, it is unclear how a manual recount would address the problem. For example, issues with paper ballots were also widely reported. Notably, it is alleged that ballot boxes were destroyed. Videos have also circulated online claiming to show votes being removed, and fabricated ones being added. As a result, the manual vote is likely to be just as contestable as the electronic one. As both options (maintaining the electronic vote and carrying out a manual recount) are unlikely to address the issue, tensions will very likely remain elevated in both Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah over the short to medium term. Increased outbreaks of civil unrest can be expected during this period.

- **Political violence in Kirkuk following election result.** On 16 May, IHEC announced that gunmen had seized several voting offices in Kirkuk and were holding staff hostage. The gunmen reportedly demanded IHEC change the election result. The demands issued by the attackers indicate they are not aligned with the PUK, and most likely were attached to other armed groups operating in the province. These reports were later denied by ISF in the city, who claimed CTS were protecting polling stations, and ballot boxes were secured. Violent incidents were also recorded elsewhere in Kirkuk. Most notably, on 15 May, CTS forces opened fire on hostile anti-PUK demonstrations at voting centres in Kirkuk city. Five protestors were wounded during these clashes. The next day, a vehicle was discovered in Shorja, Kirkuk. One of the passengers – a child – had been shot dead and two others wounded. Images of the car showed it was flying a PUK-flag. On 17 May, a ‘sound bomb’ also detonated near the Kirkuk Provincial Council Building. In response to rising hostility in the city, it has been announced that ISF reserve forces will be deployed to help stabilize the situation.

- **Insurgent activity increased in Makhoul Mountains region.** There was a notable increase in militant attacks in the Makhoul Mountain areas of Salah al-Din and Kirkuk. For example, on 13 May, ISF repelled an IS attack on Baiji refinery, killing six insurgents. This reportedly included Ahmed Khattab al-Janabi, a high-ranking member of IS in Salah al-Din. On the same day, a roadside IED detonated in Baiji killing one PMU member and wounding three others. The next day, six PMU fighters were killed by an IS sniper in the Makhoul Mountains. In response, Baiji Operations Command announced an imminent operation – involving ISF and PMU forces – into the mountain range to clear insurgents. Security forces also discovered an IED factory near Baiji Power Station on 18 May. The building contained chemicals and materials used in the construction of explosive devices, and had been cordoned off to look like a deserted building. Militant attacks also continued on the Kirkuk side of the Makhoul Mountains. Of note, on 15 May, IS released a video showing the beheading of two Sunni tribal PMU members in Zab. The next day, IS attacked units near a cemetery in Zab killing two PMU fighters. In a likely related incident, Iraqi Air Force carried out airstrikes in Zab on 17 May, reportedly killing 12 members of IS and destroying six safehouses. The Makhoul Mountains have historically been a safe-haven for militants, due to its inherently difficult-to-secure, rugged and remote terrain. This has notably been the case following the territorial defeat of IS, as insurgents – particularly those that were based in Hawija – have
regrouped in the area. With ISF unlikely to control this territory over the short to medium terms, the Makhoul Mountains will almost certainly continue to provide safe haven to IS. This will continue to detrimentally impact security in northern Salah al-Din and western Kirkuk, alongside other parts of the North Central region.

**Forecast**

- **Short term:** Tamim province will continue to drive hostile incident levels in the North Central region, despite the elevated ISF presence. Federal Police forces and PMUs will struggle to stifle the growing insurgency in the short term. Established networks of IS tunnels and safehouses constructed during their occupation of Hawija will facilitate attacks, and the existence of safe-havens in nearby mountains will also hamper the counter-insurgency operation. As such, Hawija district will remain a focal point for insurgent violence. The potential for the insurgency to spill over into Salah ad-Din and Diyala is increasing, as ISF prove unable to contain the flow of fighters moving in and out of Tamim. The growing insurgency in Tarmiyah, in the northern Baghdad Belts, will continue to threaten security in central and southern Salah ad-Din, primarily Samarra, Dujail and Balad districts, prompting security operations in the Balad – Tarmiyah corridor. Though temporarily stable, the situation in Tuz Khurmato will likely regress, as the area acts as a transport hub for insurgents moving north between Diyala and Tamim. Kirkuk City will witness continued violence, particularly against ISF-PMU elements, with these incidents expected to slowly build. Allegations of election tampering in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniya will very likely provoke increased civil unrest against the PUK and IHEC. This will likely further worsen ethnic tensions in Kirkuk province, notably within Kirkuk city, leading to an attendant rise in political violence. Elsewhere, sporadic high-profile attacks will continue across the North Central, particularly in urban population centres. The security situation will remain turbulent along the Diyala River Valley and in the province’s northern zones, with militant attacks persisting against both civilian and military targets. Militant violence will also continue in central and northern Salah ad-Din, mostly striking PMUs and Shia civilians.

- **Medium term:** Hostile activity will build in Diyala, Salah ad-Din and Tamim. There is a substantial risk that ISF/PMU forces will fail to contain the growing violence, and that the Sunni insurgency will continue to regenerate. This will result in a significant deterioration in security in Tamim and across Diyala – particularly in rural or semi-rural areas in its north-east, and along the Diyala River Valley. Significant urban centres across the region will remain key targets for insurgents. The continuation of political disputes between Kurdish, Shia Arab, and Turkmen groups will prove susceptible to outbreaks of violence.

- **Long term:** In both Salah ad-Din and Diyala provinces, long-term stability depends on political efforts to engage moderate Sunnis and counter the influence of certain Shia elements to prevent sectarianism. Tensions between Baghdad and Erbil will remain over the status of Kurdish-majority zones, as well as between local community stakeholders.
West

Incidents This Week 6
Weekly Trend Down

Figure 5: Reference Map & Incident Levels – West
Outlook

- **Hostile activity subdued along the Euphrates.** The elevated ISF presence and ongoing security operations have almost certainly ensured that incident levels remain low. Similar to recent weeks, arrests under Article 4 (Terrorism) charges and cache finds dominated reporting, indicative of an amplified security posture. This will likely endure throughout Ramadan, given the propensity for insurgent groups to conduct High Profile Attacks during this religious period. However, two incidents of note occurred in this zone. In Halabsa, west of Fallujah, Local Police units detained a 15-year-old male reportedly wearing a suicide vest in a taxi. Reporting suggests the detainee had taken drugs and was recruited by IS to attack civilians celebrating the election results. Whilst the incident has not been widely reported, it is typical of IS strikes observed in the past. However, it is assessed highly likely that instances of militant attacks remained low during the election period due to the robust security measures in place, coupled with a degraded insurgent operational capability. An IS mortar strike was also detected in Kubaisa (reported 14 May) on election day, though no casualties were reported. IS subsequently claimed the attack, stating they had sought to cause delays to the vote.

- **Insecurity endured along the Iraq / Syria border.** Two IEDs detonated IVO Akashat, killing two PMU members and injuring two Anbari police officers respectively. Meanwhile, on 16 May, the 4th Regiment of the Border Guards announced they had repelled an IS attack at the Waleed Border Crossing (WBC) linking Iraq and Syria. Official reporting has suggested that three soldiers were wounded during the skirmish, however some open sources put casualty figures at seven. This strike was almost certainly conducted by IS militants embedded along the porous border between Iraq and Syria. Indeed, the insurgency in the western areas of Anbar is likely being fuelled by the IS presence across the border, affecting the movement of fighters and supplies into established safe havens in the central Anbari desert. Evidencing this, PMU operations in the border area discovered a number of tunnels and weapons caches, which were destroyed without incident. Highly likely in response to the attack on WBC, ISF announced that a Ramadan security operation had launched in the desert areas south of Qaim, and in the zones punctuating the Waleed, Trebil and Ahrar border crossings.

- **Accusations of electoral fraud continued.** Last week’s allegations from The Minister of Electricity, Qassim al-Fadhawi indicated that some polling stations in Ameriya did not actually open, but still registered votes. Mohammed Fathi, a spokesman for the Abrun political bloc also stated that ballot boxes were breached in IDP camps in 18 Kilo, Habbaniya, Qaim and the Ameriya area. Video footage then surfaced on 16 May purportedly showing the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) staff opening voting boxes in Ameriya, and counting or shifting votes. This will almost certainly fuel any extant allegations of electoral fraud emanating from the province, though the footage remains unverified. Pertinently however, since IHEC released the official result late on 18 May accusations appear to have subdued.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Ramadan presents attractive timing for insurgents to conduct High Profile Attacks, though this threat will be partially mitigated by robust security measures, particularly around Mosques and in population centres. Insurgent violence is expected to slowly rise across the province as the security posture is inevitably relaxed. An increase in expeditionary attacks along the Iraqi-Syrian border is also expected, though this risk will be mitigated to an extent by the high PMU presence along the frontier. Instances of insurgent violence will continue to predominately target PMU and ISF units. The frequency of HPAs will gradually build in urban centres as the insurgency decentralises, with Hit, Fallujah and Ramadi the primary targets. Low-level violence will persist along the northern bank of the Euphrates and in the towns located throughout the province’s remote desert regions. The International Highway will remain a target for militant attacks, as ISF struggle to secure this strategically important route. Tensions between local powerbrokers are likely to build over control of the Highway, increasing the likelihood of affiliated violence. As election results are finalised and accusations of electoral fraud gain traction, political tensions are likely to heighten, increasing the likelihood of low-level political affiliated violence. Political conflict within the Anbar Provincial Council will also rise as focus turns to the formation of the new Iraqi Government and powerbrokers seek to solidify position and secure financial interests in relation to the reconstruction of former IS-held territory. This will result in a power struggle emerging amongst key influencers in the province, likely leading to elevated levels of violence involving competing tribal and militia factions.

- **Medium term:** It is anticipated that militant attacks will build over time, as the insurgency further decentralises across the province and reconstruction efforts lead to the widespread return of IDPs. The return of IDPs is also likely to lead to an increase in retaliatory violence, particularly against those deemed linked to IS, even through familial connections. There are likely to be attempts to strengthen provincial security capacity as the ISF security posture is relaxed, and local security forces take over responsibility. ISF will continue to try to secure the International Highway and build fixed installations at strategic locations throughout the province.

- **Long term:** In the longer-term, security forces will maintain control over all the population centres along the Euphrates River. IS remnants will remain present in desert areas near Tharthar Lake to the north and Rutba to the south. Militant activity will build into a relatively high-intensity insurgency across Anbar, through a network of decentralised cells. Anbar will remain susceptible to militant attacks in the long term, especially if IS maintains a heavy presence in the Euphrates River Valley of Eastern Syria.
South Central

Incidents This Week 1  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 6: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South Central
Outlook

- **Hostile activity subdued in the South Central.** This is largely the result of enhanced security measures in place for the commencement of the religious period of Ramadan. Hostile activity traditionally subdued over the month, alongside decreased levels of low-level criminality and a rise in arrests for activity considered to be haram. Indeed, detentions for alcohol and narcotics trafficking continued to dominate reporting across the region.

- **Post-election tensions observed in Diwaniyah.** Sadrist supporters gathered in central Diwaniyah on 18 May to demand that Moqtada al-Sadr form a Government absent of external threats or pressures. The attendees threatened to stage further protests should this not occur. The Irada movement, headed by Hanan al-Fatlawi, has also accused Ammar al-Hakim’s political party, Hikma of stealing their votes in the province. A complaint has been lodged with the Independent High Electoral Commission over this matter by Irada. It is assessed, however, more likely that the challenge has resulted from Fatlawi losing her Parliamentary seat. Accusations of electoral fraud and vote rigging are expected to continue over the next week as parties that underperformed in the election challenge the veracity of the count. An attendant rise of civil action is probable as politicians seek to galvanise their voting base to support calls for IHEC to conduct a manual recount.

Forecast

- **Short term:** Overall activity levels will likely reduce during Ramadan. However, religious festivals such as Ramadan present an attractive target for insurgents, increasing the threat of High-Profile Attacks. The areas most at risk are assessed to be northern Babil and western Karbala, as they border the Anbari desert. The political fallout of any such attack will fuel localised political instability, as security officials and politicians seek to displace blame. This will also result in further disagreement over the return of Sunni IDPs. Despite this, IS have been significantly weakened, lessening their ability to project into areas of southern Iraq. As a result, insurgent activity is not expected to increase beyond established perimeters. Low-level SAF, kidnaps, murder, and intimidatory IEDs will feature prominently in reporting. Following the announcement of the 2018 Election result, sporadic intimidatory attacks are expected to continue against party interests. Meanwhile, protest activity will persist, with electricity privatisation, the water crisis, employment and service provision being key drivers.

- **Medium term:** There is likely to be a small but perceptible increase in low-level insurgent attacks in northern Babil in the medium to long term, as IS attempts to re-establish and consolidate local networks. HPAs are expected to increase incrementally, including in urban centres like Karbala and Hilla. However, incidents linked to Sunni militancy will likely remain a minor proportion of activity in the region.

- **Long term:** High-profile attacks will increase as Sunni insurgents revert to asymmetric tactics. Militants will also attempt to reach symbolic Shia targets in the Najaf and Karbala areas. Because of the significant presence of ISF and PMUs in the area, it is highly unlikely that levels of violence will reach the scale witnessed during 2013-2014. Progress by the Baghdad Government on social and economic reform and anti-corruption measures will have a significant impact on the levels of protest activity in the region.
South East

Incidents This Week  19  Weekly Trend  Down

Figure 7: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South East
Hostile activity decreased across the region. Recorded incidents remained within the established patterns of activity, with key drivers continuing to be low-level criminality, tribalism and localised disputes. Overall levels of hostility will likely remain subdued over the month of Ramadan, which began on 17 May. In Maysan, the main incident of note was the detonation of multiple IEDs at the ‘Malik al-Astar Foundation’ Religious Hall on 15 May. The devices caused substantial damage to the infrastructure of the facility. The Foundation is also reportedly affiliated with the Sa’irun political bloc. Whilst motivations for the attack are not explicitly clear, the attack was conducted at night, suggesting that it was designed to be an intimidatory rather than mass casualty attack. Pertinently, the attack happened in the early hours of the morning after the National Elections, in which Sa’irun’s performance exceeded expectations. It is therefore assessed as likely that the attack was driven by political factionalism. In Dhi Qar, the kidnapping of Faraj al-Badri on 9 May, during the previous reporting period, prompted localised demonstrations to demand that information on his disappearance be released by officials. Badri’s car was found abandoned in Fadhiliyah, prompting his sister to report him missing whilst claiming he had been kidnapped. ISF, however, are reportedly refusing to confirm the veracity of this claim, instead suggesting that he is simply missing. Badri is a well-known anti-corruption activist in Dhi Qar and as such there is a belief amongst locals that his disappearance is related to his activity. Should this be proven, it further reinforces the inability of civil society to put pressure on political figures and organisations that they see as being detrimental to good governance, without fear of repercussions. Elsewhere in Dhi Qar, on 16 May, tribal fighting took place between the al-Maash and al-Ba’ayyat tribes in Rifai. Activity in Basra was predominately driven by low-level criminality and personal disputes. Levels of tribal SAF receded this week, though continued to be evident across the province. For instance, on 15 May, five men from the Salhi tribe opened fire on the house of a Police Major from the Fartousi tribe following a tribal dispute. No casualties were reported, and as such, the incident is assessed as intimidatory violence. Evidence of organised crime also persisted within the province as large narcotic seizures continued to be reported. The risk of this spilling over into violence was highlighted on 13 May when IP attempted to arrest a Garamsha tribal figure for drug trafficking in Nahr Umr. The tribesman reportedly resisted arrest, resulting in a drawn out SAF engagement, during which he was killed.

Post-election tensions reported between the Tamimi tribe and Nasr candidate. On 16 May, a Tamimi tribal figure and political candidate, Sheikh Muzahim al-Tamimi, challenged a decision by IHEC to void his candidacy after the elections. IHEC reported that he had been barred from running in the 2018 National Elections by the Accountability and Justice Commission due to having previously been a Ba‘athist officer in Saddam Hussein’s military. Initial reporting suggested that the Tamimi tribe were preparing to escalate the situation into a violent confrontation if the decision was not reversed, warning of ‘dire consequences’ if IHEC’s decision stood. A tribal ‘atwa’ was subsequently issued with an expiry date of 18 May so that Sheikh Muzahim could lead a delegation to Baghdad to resolve the situation and, according to the Sheikh, recover paperwork that proved his eligibility to run in the elections. 18 May passed both without incidence and without a resolution to the situation. A protest was subsequently scheduled for 22 May by members of the Tamimi tribe, though this was later postponed under direction from the Sheikh. At the time of writing, the situation remains unresolved amidst reports that Sheikh Tamimi is still in Baghdad. As such, the possibility of increased protest activity over the coming week is highly likely if the delegation is unable to have the Sheikh’s candidacy ratified by IHEC.
Forecast

- **Short term**: The overall security outlook for the South East remains stable. Low-level violence will most likely remain subdued over Ramadan. Hostile activity will be largely driven by localised disputes and low-level criminality, consisting of SAF incidents, kidnapes, intimidatory IEDs, and murders. Tribal fighting will remain most prevalent in areas north of Basra City, and to a lesser extent in northern and south-eastern Dhi Qar, and southern Maysan. The ongoing ISF security operations in Basra will continue to target criminal elements and service arrest warrants issued in Baghdad. The operation will remain focused on parts of the city and on northern Basra, including areas such as Qurna, Madain, Dayr, Qarmat Ali, Qibla, and Sharish. Tribal fighting is expected to return to previously established levels as the security campaign winds down. Ongoing explosive activity and tribal fighting is likely to prompt reactive security operations, as well as elicit political commentary. The negotiation phase between major political factions will continue now that the results of the National Elections have been confirmed. Sporadic attacks against party interests are expected to continue during this phase, as groups try to intimidate opponents.

Key drivers of civil action in the region will continue to be electricity privatisation, electoral reform, unemployment, and demands for greater inward provincial investment, particularly in the provision of municipal services, such as electricity and sewage networks. Regional water scarcity has the potential to provoke widespread protest activity, should measures to alleviate the affects not be implemented. An attendant rise in provincial political tension is likely to be observed, as local actors seek to displace responsibility for inability to rectify the problem.

- **Medium term**: Demands for reform, election issues, employment-related grievances, and widespread opposition to plans for the privatisation of electricity provision are expected to be the dominant themes of protest activity in the South East. Political rivalries will steadily build ahead of provincial elections, currently scheduled for December 2018. The expected intensification of these conflicts will likely result in an increase in low-level activity against party interests in southern governorates. In the past, this type of activity included small IEDs detonating outside party offices, UVIEDs targeting affiliated persons or SAF against offices or private residences.

- **Long term**: The outlook for the Southeast in the longer-term is stable. Hostile activity is most likely to arise in the form of low-level SAF. Criminality and tribal confrontations will continue to present a risk of kidnap, SAF exchanges, and intimidatory IEDs. The frequency of HPAs occurring in the region will likely rise as insurgents in northern Babil and western Anbar return to asymmetric tactics. This is not expected to reach a level that will impact commercial operations. Protests over service provision and employment in the region will also continue.
**Muslim holidays are often determined by local sightings of lunar phases; dates given are approximate.**

**Sunni and Shia' celebrate the Prophet's birthday on different days, though the Sunni date is usually used to designate the national holiday.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAH</td>
<td>Asa’ib Ahl al Haq (League of the Righteous)</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Jaish al Mukhtar</td>
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<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
<td>JRTN</td>
<td>Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al- Naqshbandia</td>
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<td>CQA</td>
<td>Close Quarters Assassination</td>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Local National</td>
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<td>EFP</td>
<td>Explosively Formed Projectile</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Modus Operandi</td>
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<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of Iraq</td>
<td>NSTR</td>
<td>Nothing significant to report</td>
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<tr>
<td>HG</td>
<td>Hand Grenade</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Private Security Company</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Iraqi Army</td>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Private Security Detail</td>
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<td>IDF</td>
<td>Indirect Fire</td>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Small Arms Fire</td>
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<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
<td>SVBIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISIL / IS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ Islamic State</td>
<td>SVIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vest IED</td>
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<td>IPS</td>
<td>Iraqi Police Service</td>
<td>TTPs</td>
<td>Tactics, Techniques and Procedures</td>
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<td>IZ</td>
<td>International Zone</td>
<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
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<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaish Al Mahdi (Mahdi Army)</td>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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Iraq Weekly Report

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For more information on this report please contact:

**Beatriz Sanchez-Garrido**

*Senior Information Analyst*

[Beatriz.sanchez-garrido@constellis.com](mailto:Beatriz.sanchez-garrido@constellis.com)

For all enquiries on Constellis’ advisory & consulting services please contact:

**Mark Allison**

*Vice President*

*Crisis & Risk Services*

[Mark.allison@constellis.com](mailto:Mark.allison@constellis.com)

[www.constellis.com](http://www.constellis.com)