

BASRA

Weekly Insight Report

18 February – 24 February 2017



Summary

Incidents this Week | **17**

Weekly Average | **11**

Weekly Trend | **Up**

- ◆ Five IEDs were reported across Basra over the reporting period, all of which were intimidatory in nature. (18,20,21,21 & 24 February)
- ◆ In addition there were five SAF incidents, three of which were linked to tribal disputes. (17,18,18,18, & 22 February)
- ◆ There were two IHEC focused protests in Basra. (22 & 24 February)

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Basra Weekly Incident Levels - 12 Months

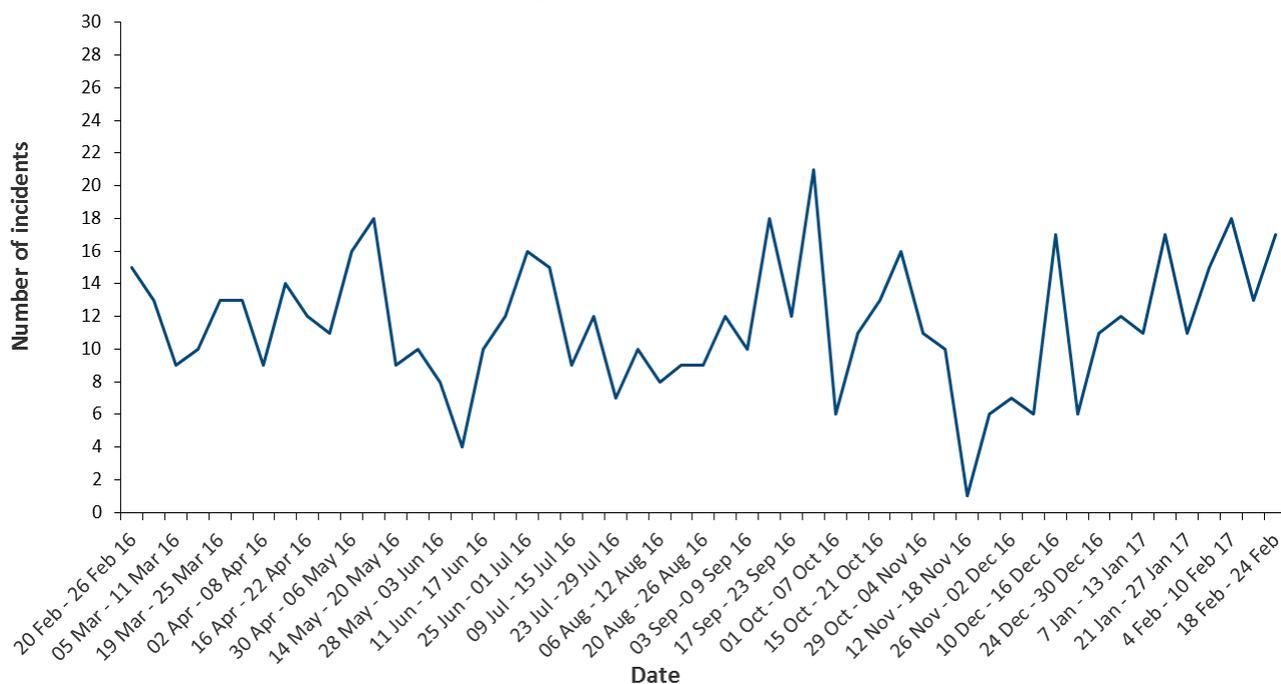


Figure 1: Basra Weekly Incident Levels 20 February 2016 – 24 February 2017

Incidents Overview

Basra Province saw a total of 17 hostile incidents. This represents a slight increase on the 13 recorded during the previous reporting period but is still consistent with the frequency of activity in recent weeks. Incidents of SAF featured heavily in reporting, alongside five IED incidents, two body finds, a murder, a grenade, and a kidnapping incident.

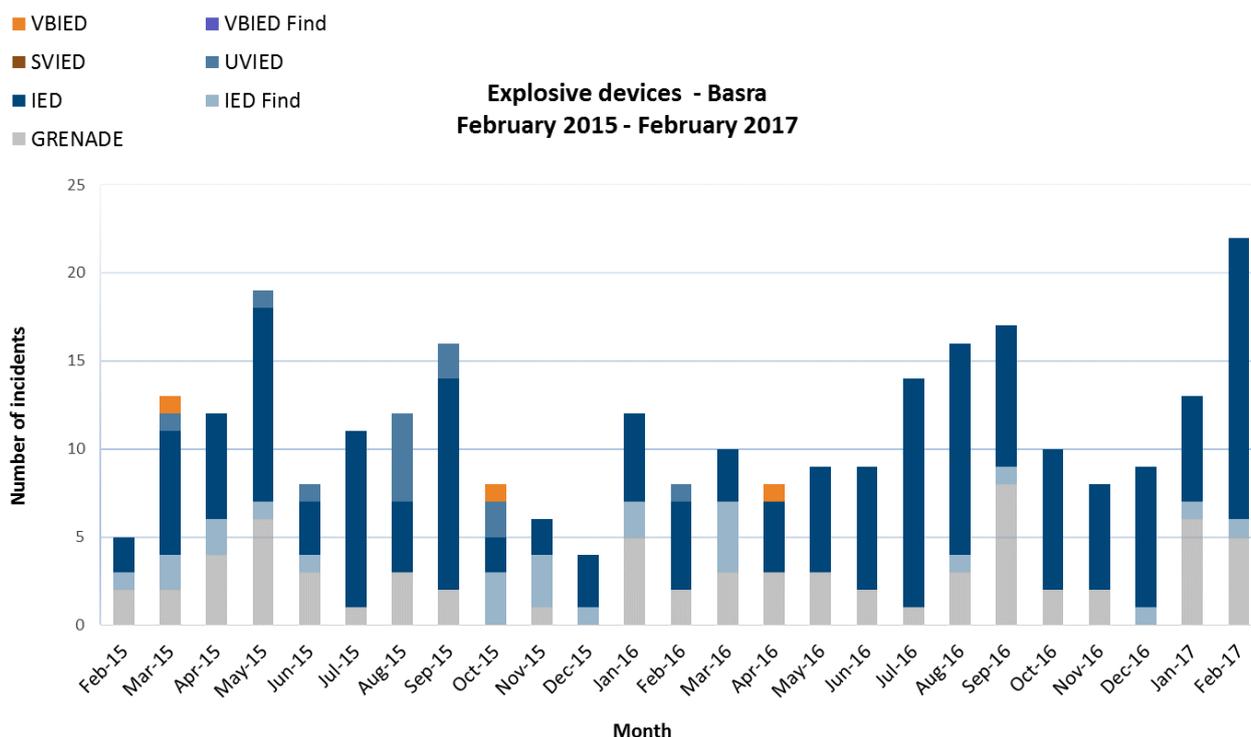


Figure 2: Explosive Devices in Basra, February 2015 – February 2017

SAF

Five cases of SAF were recorded in Basra province. One of these was the result of a negligent discharge that killed a man on 22 February, three were linked to tribal disputes, while a fifth was isolated in nature and caused no casualties. Of the three SAF incidents linked to tribal activity, two were connected to the long-running Halaf-Garamsha dispute. On 17 February, the two tribes exchanged SAF for approximately an hour in the Nashwa area until ISF arrived. A Halaf tribesman was killed in the clash. This was followed by the killing of a Garamsha tribesman in Hay al-Kifaat, Basra City, the following day. A local source reported the gunmen were from the Halaf tribe and that this was retaliation for the death of the Halaf tribesman the previous night. The Halaf – Garamsha dispute featured heavily in reporting throughout 2015 and early 2016 before an ‘atwa (truce) was negotiated in April 2016. The first violation of this truce occurred on 9 December 2016 with the murder of a Halaf tribesman in Hartha. Garamsha tribesmen were subsequently arrested for the murder. A number of minor incidents have occurred since then, but the truce has largely remained intact after the Halaf tribe announced it would not retaliate until after the Garamsha tribesmen appeared in court. Although the truce was adhered to until December 2016, it was not universally popular amongst the tribesmen. Local sources reported that in the run-up to the peace treaty in

April, several factions on both sides argued against negotiating an *'atwa* because they wanted to avenge the death of relatives. While the truce stands, the structure of tribes – formed of numerous sub-tribes and clans – means larger tribes are less cohesive. Local sources also report that sub-tribes, or even some families, regularly argue that truces do not apply to them and that they are free to retaliate against other tribes. The death of a Halaf tribesman on 17 February and the killing of a Garamsha tribesman the day after significantly raises the prospect of a return Halaf – Garamsha conflict, because the factions who initially argued against the truce in April are likely to petition for revenge. Pertinent for commercial entities, these tribes inhabit a number of locations adjacent to Route Topeka, and a return to levels of violence seen in 2015 and early 2016 would likely result in some level of disruption along this route.

Separately, a SAF exchange between the Bitut and Albu Salim tribes on 18 February in the Hay Tariq area of Khamsa Meel resulted in no casualties. The lack of casualties lessens the probability of further conflict between these two tribes. The Bitut tribe have been involved in a number of disputes in recent weeks, the most notable of which is the Bitut – Hamadna feud. The most recent manifestation of this feud occurred in Qarmat Ali on 15 February when a SAF exchange left an individual dead and three others wounded. The skirmish was followed by a 15 day *'atwa*, which is due to expire during the coming reporting period. Local sources report tension is still high between the two tribes, and official sources confirm that IA units have maintained a presence in Qarmat Ali since 15 February in order to monitor the situation. Whilst this indicates further violence between the Bitut and Hamadna is anticipated, the presence of ISF in Qarmat Ali will likely mitigate the escalation of any further SAF exchange in the short term. However, it is unlikely that the deployment will extend beyond a few weeks.

IED

This week saw five IED incidents, which is consistent with the previous reporting period. No casualties were reported and all incidents bore the hallmarks of intimidatory attacks. All devices detonated outside the victims' house or building. The targets included a policeman in Jumhurriya on 18 February, a civilian in Hay al-Hussein on 20 February, a Directorate of Electricity employee in Muwafaqiya on 21 February, and a civilian in 21 February. Two percussion IEDs weighing each were placed 2.5 meters apart outside the house of a civilian in Yassin Khraibet on 24 February. The devices detonated simultaneously and no casualties were reported. Although two IEDs were used, this intent was still likely to have been intimidatory.

Checkpoint incident

At 2300hrs on 21 February, IP at Shahid Canan Checkpoint in Tanuma stopped a vehicle containing several PMU members and requested proof of identity. A disagreement broke out and the vehicle later returned with a number of other PMU members who then detained two IP officers present at the checkpoint before transporting them to a PMU office in Tanuma. The IP members were released after one hour in captivity. The BaOC Commander General (CG) travelled to the PMU office and arrested three individuals, and a judge later issued an arrest warrant for the PMU commander responsible for the PMU group in question. Confrontations between ISF and PMU forces are rare but not unprecedented, with several minor incidents recorded during the previous year. The swift response from the BaOC CG highlights ISF's willingness to apply the law to PMU forces on the rare occasion an incident occurs.

Demonstrations

There was slight increase in the number of demonstrations in Basra with six events recorded this week. The two key protest themes were employment and electoral reforms as well as one protest held on 18 February in Tuwaysa by engineers demanding the introduction of legislation to ensure their safety. On 20 February, a small number of Maritime Studies graduates demonstrated outside the Port Authority in Maqil demanding employment. Meanwhile, on 21 February up to 150 Ministry of Electricity employees demonstrated at the Tuwaysa roundabout in Kut al-Hajjaj, demanding the payment of overdue salaries and the allocation of permanent staffing contracts.

There were two demonstrations calling for the dismissal of Independent Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC) members. On 22 February, approximately 20 individuals demonstrated outside the IHEC building in Tuwaysa, reportedly organised by an activist linked to State of Law (SoL). This was followed by a demonstration of up to 450 individuals outside the IHEC building in Tuwaysa on 24 February, where local sources report there was a large Sadrist component present alongside a small number of non-Sadrist protesters. At the same time, a small number of protesters gathered outside the BPC for routine Friday demonstrations. Sadr has called for the replacement of IHEC members and subsequent electoral reform - as determined by the reformed IHEC membership. Nuri al-Maliki has called for the dismissal of IHEC members after their tenure ends later this year, and has also signaled his desire to see electoral system changes that favour larger parties. The SoL-linked protest on 22 February was likely a response to public discontent currently aimed at IHEC.

Outlook

The outlook for Basra Province remains stable. Activity is expected to remain formed of IEDs, SAF incidents, and grenades, the majority of which will be driven by personal disputes and general criminality. Tribal feuds will persist north of Basra City in areas adjacent to Route Topeka. Casualties sustained during recent conflict between the Halaf and Garamsha, as well as the Bitut and Hamadna raises the likelihood of retaliatory SAF exchanges and targeted killings of tribesmen in Basra Province.

Unemployment is expected to continue at its current rate, sustaining the current levels of crime seen in recent months. It is probable that this will contribute to a gradual increase in the rate of kidnappings and other financially-motivated crimes. However, kidnapping will remain almost exclusively focused on the local population.

The 2017 budget will also drive a number of protest movements as government spending in key areas is reduced. Alongside employment-related protests, demands for improved service provisions will drive demonstrations against local authorities. This is particularly likely in the event that the Basra Provincial Council is forced to cancel contracts for municipal service providers, such as cleaning and sewage disposal companies. Additionally, as the provincial elections approach, protests demanding the overhaul of the Independent High Electoral Committee (IHEC) will continue, alongside events focusing on changes to the country's electoral system. Further, political movements will seek to bolster their Iraqi nationalist credentials by leading demonstrations on arising issues, such as those witnessed against the ratification of the Khor Abdullah waterway agreement with Kuwait.

With provincial elections now scheduled for 16 September, it is expected that rivalries will intensify as campaigning begins. Tense relations between Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law and Muqtada al-Sadr's Sadrist Trend in particular are likely to impact on Basra Province. The intensification of political conflicts is likely to result in an increase in low level activity against party interests in the south. 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. However, the majority of these attacks in the southeast tend to be intimidatory in nature. Additionally, the underlying political tensions heighten the likelihood of politically motivated demonstrations.

It is likely that sporadic attacks against businesses and individuals suspected of involvement in the facilitation of *haram* activities will continue over the short to medium term. Though most are expected to be intimidatory in nature, they may escalate, particularly if warnings to cease involvement in these lucrative practices are not heeded by business owners in Basra. Further, if the perpetrators indeed form part of Basra's conservative community, as seems probable, similar incidents could increase ahead of the 2017 Provincial Elections, as those involved attempt to boost their Islamist credentials.

Crime

Incidents this Week | **76**

Weekly Average | **53**

Weekly Trend | **Down**

Due to the violent nature of some criminal incidents (such as SAF, grenade attacks, murder and kidnap), it is necessary to include them in both Incident and Crime figures.

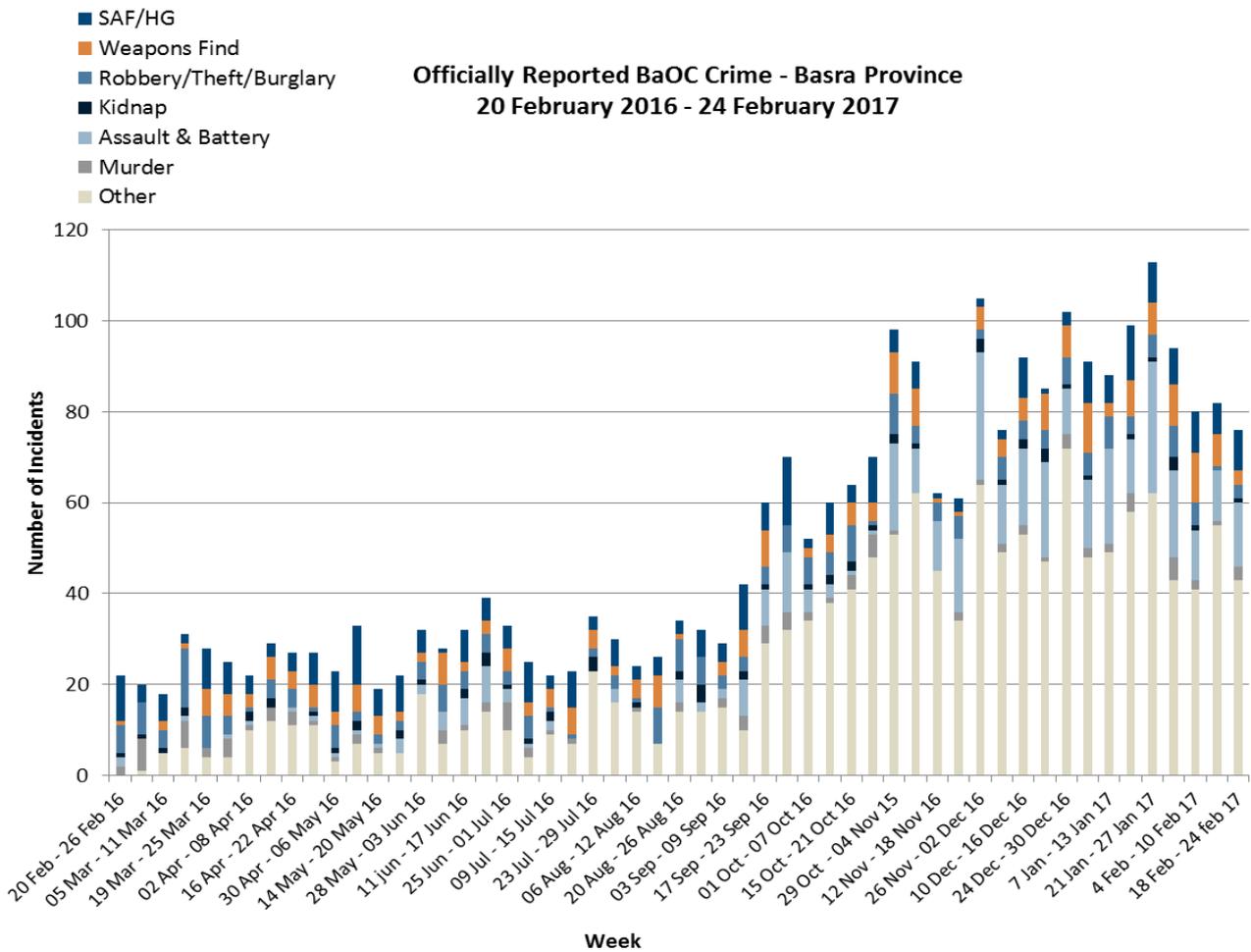


Figure 3: BaOC officially reported crime in Basra Province 13 February 2016 – 24 February 2017

PMU-organised anti-terrorism conference held in Basra

On 18 February, the Popular Mobilisation Unit (PMU) Committee organised an anti-terrorism conference in Basra. Experts from Iraq and several other countries presented research to political and security officials, members of the judiciary and media representatives. It was focused primarily on non-military counter-terrorism strategies, particularly in the social, economic, religious and political sectors. According to Basra PMU commander Ammar Fares Ma'touq, the conference highlights an intent by the PMU leadership to engage in the fight against terrorism beyond a purely military level. He added that the militia umbrella intends to organise further events in the scientific, cultural and media spheres. (*al-Sumaria, 18 February*)

COMMENT: Though PMU officials highlighted the international nature of the anti-terrorism conference, the event was dominated by those backing the narrative of the country's primary militia groups. While most were Iranians, given that country's close links with Iraqi PMU components, others hailed from allied Shia communities within Lebanon, Yemen and Bahrain. Unsurprisingly, some papers put forward by these researchers focused on the influence of Sunni states on the roots of militancy in the region. Participants also stressed that there had to be a greater emphasis placed by decision-makers on the economic, psychological and social aspects of terrorism. A recommendation drafted during the conference stated that punitive and military measures were not enough, and that those involved in anti-terrorism must extend beyond these avenues. The organisers suggested that PMU bodies have recognised this, and will seek to play a greater role outside security provision. This was echoed by one Iranian participant, who stated that the conference underlined the importance of the PMUs as socio-political actors. It is likely that this event was aimed, at least in part, at delivering this message. With the political ambitions of some militias becoming increasingly apparent, it seems probable that their leaders will aim to further promote their non-military credentials as elections approach. For example, it was recently announced that a new PMU agency would be created in Basra to build on the group's social welfare programmes.

Iraq and Iran pledge to increase coordination in oil sector

Jabbar Ali al-Luaibi, Iraq's Minister of Oil, announced that he and the Iranian Minister of Petroleum, Bijan Zangeneh, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) during a meeting at Luaibi's office in Baghdad on 20 February. Luaibi described the talks as positive and paved the way to coordinate their strategies within OPEC to achieve the goals of. Al-Luaibi also announced that Zangeneh had talked of the possibility of accepting Iraqi students who wish to further their studies in the oil and gas sector in Iran. The memorandum agreed upon the formation of a committee to implement joint projects along the border as well as increase coordination between the two countries in the oil sector. The memorandum also invited Iranian companies to invest in Iraqi oil and gas infrastructure. (*20 February, Sumaria News*)

COMMENT: The implementation of joint projects along the border would be positive for both countries economically, and coordination with respect of OPEC strategies might also bring some benefit. However, the upside to the oil and gas industry in Iraq would be modest at best. In fact, one aspect of the above MoU – namely the offer to train Iraqis in Iran – has the potential to cause issues in the longer-term. Should Iran grant scholarships to Iraqis to study oil and gas-related courses, it is likely to result in greater numbers of graduates returning to an already saturated job market. Notably, Basra has witnessed periodic protest activity from graduates demanding employment, centred mainly around the SOC Makina building. These tend to become more frequent following graduations. Given Iran's high unemployment rate (over 16% according the Iranian Central Bank), it is highly unlikely that Iraqis will find work in Iran. That said, any announcement at the MoU stage should always be treated cautiously, with many such agreements never resulting in concrete developments

DATE	EVENT	COMMENT
24 Apr 17	Laylat Al-Isra Wal Miraja (Prophet's Ascension)	Religious and national holiday; widespread business closures.
1 May 17	Labour Day	National holiday
11 May 17	Sha'abaniya	Religious and national holiday; widespread business closures.
27 May 17	Ramadan	Islamic Holy Month; Muslims fast from sunrise to sundown.
27 or 28 Jun	Eid al-Fitr (end of Ramadan)	Religious and national holiday.
14 July 17	Republic Day	National holiday

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAH	Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous)	LN	Local National
BFA	Basra First Alliance	MO	Modus Operandi
BPC	Basra Provincial Council	NSTR	Nothing significant to report
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal	PMU	Popular Mobilisation Units
GOI	Government of Iraq	PPL	Provincial Powers Law (Law no. 21)
HG	Hand Grenade	PSC	Private Security Company
IA	Iraqi Army	PSD	Private Security Detail
IDF	Indirect Fire	RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
IED	Improvised Explosive Device	SAF	Small Arms Fire
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces	SoL	State of Law coalition
IS	Islamic State	SVIED	Suicide Vest IED
IP	Iraqi Police	UVIED	Under-Vehicle IED
IZ	International Zone	UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
IGFC	Iraqi Ground Forces Command	VBIED	Vehicle Borne IED

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