National Overview

Incidents This Week 239  Weekly Trend Up

- There was a notable increase in incidents this reporting period, with four out of five regions witnessing a rise in activity.

- Reporting was dominated by a double suicide attack targeting ISF and civilians in Basra Province on 19 May.

- In the North, ISF made steady gains, although announcements regarding progress are increasingly inaccurate. Tensions rose around Sinjar, between PMU and KDP-aligned forces.

- Baghdad witnessed three high-profile attacks, and a notable rise in overall activity.

- Violence in Anbar increased, although there were some signs that security forces were bolstering their capability.

- Violence remained high in Salah ad Din and Diyala. There was also continued tribal/militant violence in Abu Saida.
As a result of the open conflict between ISF and IS in the northern and central regions of the country, the weekly incident totals annotated in red are not representative of actual levels of activity taking place. The real totals for these provinces and regions will be significantly higher than those officially recorded.
Regional Summary
Iraq Weekly Report

BAGHDAD (City & Province)
This week saw a total of 76 incidents, an increase on the previous reporting period. Three high-profile attacks were recorded, as well as an armed exchange between PMU forces and ISF. Otherwise, activity was mainly low-level, and mostly criminal in nature.

NORTH (Ninawa, Dahuk & Erbil Provinces)
There were 28 incidents recorded in the North, an increase from the previous week. Progress was made on the north-western front in the Mosul campaign, though CTS units were unable to make major headway into Zanjili, which abuts the ‘Old Town’. PMUs continued their campaign towards the Syrian border, capturing numerous villages around Qayrawan. However, their advance into Yazidi territory has heightened tensions with the Kurds.

NORTH CENTRAL (Tamim/Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala & Sulaymaniya Provinces)
A total of 70 incidents were recorded in the North Central, a negligible decrease on the previous reporting period. Patterns of insurgent activity remained largely consistent in Salah ad-Din. Most incidents were clustered in the north, though several notable attacks on PMU and Peshmerga positions took place in the province’s east. Overall incident levels increased slightly in Diyala, including a steady frequency of IED events. Notably, a VBIED attack was thwarted outside Baquba. Security operations were undertaken in insurgent hotspots in the Himrin area.

WEST (Anbar Province)
There was a total of 36 hostile incidents in the western region this week, a marked increase on last week’s 20. Despite an increase, there were indications that security forces were improving their capability, with an announcement that K9 units would be deployed at city entrances, and over 3000 IP members had been granted authority to return to active service.

SOUTH CENTRAL (Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Qadisiya & Najaf Provinces)
A total of three hostile events were recorded for the second consecutive week. In-line with established trends, all incidents were low-level and isolated in nature. Several provinces also raised their state of alert following a high-profile attack in Basra.

SOUTH EAST (Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan & Basra Provinces)
The South East saw a total of 26 incidents, a notable increase on 20 recorded during the previous week. Insurgents prosecuted a High-Profile Attack (HPA) in Basra Province on 19 May, killing 11 and wounding 42. Beyond this, tribal fighting continued in Basra and ISF were deployed to Sayid Dakhil, Dhi Qar, in light of raised tribal tensions.
Baghdad

Incidents This Week 76  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 2: Reference Map & Incident Levels – Baghdad
Outlook

- **A notable increase in hostile incidents in Baghdad.** Overall, most incidents continued to relate to low-level criminality. There was a rise in SAF incidents this week, particularly in Sadr City, but nearly all were criminal in nature or appear to be linked to localised disputes. Of note was the increase in insurgent activity in the South west areas of the province. With ISF heavily focused on fortifying the northern areas, particularly around Tarmiya, the south has seen a further decline in security, allowing insurgents some freedom of movement. There tends to be an uptick in activity in the run up to Ramadan, reflecting an increased intent rather than an enhanced operational capability. This trend is expected to continue and will likely focus on the southwest of the province. In this week alone, in the southwest, five IEDs, two IED finds, two SVBIEDs and one SVIED have occurred, all bearing the hallmarks of insurgency related attacks.

- **Three HPAs occurred in Baghdad.** The first occurred on 18 May in Rasheed South, near a checkpoint on the highway injuring six ISF personnel. The other two were in Dora district on 19 May. One SVBIED detonated at Adhwaniya checkpoint, the entrance to Abu Disheer, swiftly followed by a SVIED at the police station nearby. The Ministry of Interior announced 24 were killed with ten police officers and five civilians injured. IS subsequently claimed the blasts. BOC also announced the dismantling of a VBIED in Karrada, central Baghdad without incident. An uptick of IS attacks is anticipated as sleeper cells re-emerge to conduct retaliatory attacks. Post-Mosul IS will return to a covert insurgency, likely of smaller cells operating independently. The predominant attack methodology used will be SVBIEDs and SVIEDs with the expectation that these will increase in higher profile areas across Iraq such as central Baghdad. However, ISF security measures in central Baghdad are clearly still effective, evidenced by the detonations hitting checkpoints before entering the centre of the city. This will offer some level of protection from IS in the densely populated urban areas of the city, desired targets for the group for mass casualty attacks.

- **A PMU and ISF dispute escalated to a SAF exchange,** late in the evening on 18 May. Open source reporting indicates there was a verbal argument between an Asa‘ib Ahl al Haq (AAH) fighter and an ISF officer at a checkpoint. The AAH member called for backup and when they arrived opened fire, resulting in injuries to both parties and the death of one ISF soldier. Post-Mosul, friction is expected as PMU fighters return to their places of origin, especially with the current lack of clarity over their future role. Confusion over how, or if these largely Iranian backed groups will be integrated into ISF is highly likely to cause localised disputes with security forces. Haider al-Abadi has recently approved the formation of an emergency regiment made up of local Sunni tribal members to garrison Tarmiya in the north. Indications are that the central Government will approve PMUs being used to fortify their local areas alongside ISF troops. However, splits in Shia political blocs over these types of policies have been apparent, with Moqtada al-Sadr already taking a vocal stance. On 24 March, he called for the PMUs to be disbanded once the fight against IS has concluded at a rally in Tahrir Square. These discussions have implications, since they will likely shape future security configurations, but also because of the sectarian sensitivities that underpin political debates on this issue.
**Forecast**

- **Short term:** Heightened activity levels are expected to continue in the run up to Ramadan (scheduled to start on 27 May), with more HPAs likely, probably in the form of VBIEDs. SAF incidents and IED detonations will remain the prominent methodology for lower-level attacks, interspersed with intimidatory grenade detonations. In line with existing trends, areas in the south and west will see most insurgent activity. Attacks in markets in Suwaib and Madain look set to endure. The high tempo of ISF activity in the northern Baghdad belt area, particularly in Tarmiya, will continue to stifle insurgent operational capability. A return of IDPs to southern Baghdad is unlikely to result in an immediate decline in security. On a political level, Muqtada al-Sadr will continue to attempt to revive his protest movement with further mass demonstrations in Baghdad. Inter-shia political tensions, particularly as alliances are built in advance of the elections, and sectarian divisions will continue to build as campaign season gets underway.

- **Medium term:** The return of IDPs to the Baghdad ‘belts’ is expected to result in the re-emergence of a limited insurgency and minor civil unrest as resources become stretched. ISF/PMU presence will be robust, and is likely to ensure that most insurgent violence remains localised. VBIEDs and suicide attacks are expected to increase in the urban areas of central Baghdad. The probability of IS retaliatory attacks will increase as the group continues to come under pressure from ISF in Mosul.

- **Long term:** The general outlook for the province remains largely stable, based on the consistent patterns of activity over the past year. An increase in insurgent attacks is anticipated, but this will not preclude normal commercial operations. This is particularly pertinent as IS return to a traditional covert insurgency, typified by asymmetric attacks, once they lose the last of their territory. However, the heavy ISF and PMU presence in the city and surrounding areas makes 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. It is likely both intra-Shia and sectarian divisions will increase in the run up to the 2018 elections. Coupled with the return of PMU forces post-Mosul this is likely to cause considerable tension as sensitive political and sectarian negotiations take place.
North

Incidents This Week 28  Weekly Trend  Up

Figure 3: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North
Outlook

- ISF pushed further into north-western Mosul. While security forces made headway, they continued to prematurely announce the capture of districts. In some instances, this has been due to the re-infiltration of insurgents into newly-liberated zones. More often, it has been used as a propaganda tool to further the political narrative of unrelenting successes. This has been particularly evident in the release of official ISF maps detailing the extent of their advance. Detailing all purported victories and omitting reversals, stagnation or erroneous reporting, the ISF maps are now highly misleading. Heavy fighting was reported this week in the neighbourhoods of 17 July, Rifaii, Siha, Hay al-Uraybi and Iqitisadin, all of which have been declared cleared on multiple occasions. Nonetheless, ISF are making steady progress towards the encirclement of the Old Town district. They moved into Najjar, which marks an important stepping stone towards the Tigris. Despite considerable effort, however, CTS units have been held up in Zanjili, in part due to well-prepared defences and the increased deployment of SVBIEDs. This led the Iraqis to drop tens of thousands of leaflets over the area, warning citizens against the use of vehicles. The Federal Police heightened their use of artillery fire into the southern Old Town area in the latter stages of the reporting period, with its commanders indicating that this was in preparation for an imminent, large-scale assault. This has been stated on numerous occasions, however, and has resulted in little or no forward momentum.

- PMU advances in Sinjar heightened Kurdish tensions. Progress was made towards the liberation of Qayrawan, one of two Sinjar sub-districts. PMUs captured more than 15 villages to its north, east and south, along with Sinjar Airport. Small IS units put up resistance in each hamlet, although they have been unable to operate effectively in intervening areas due to the flat, open terrain. Multiple SVBIEDs have been deployed, though they have generally been destroyed before reaching their targets. Counter-attacks have also been launched, with little success. Under mounting pressure, IS has attempted to coerce local tribes into fighting against PMUs. On 16 May, the Albu Matiyut Sheikh was kidnapped along with 19 other elders. IS demanded the Sheikh incite members of his tribe to fight, but he refused. IS warned the tribe its elders would be killed if they did not oppose the PMUs. Instead, the Albu Matiyut began fighting against IS. The dominant narrative to emerge this week involved rising hostility between PMUs and the Kurds. Specifically, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and its leader, KRG President Massoud Barzani, condemned PMUs for pushing into Yazidi territory. He claimed an agreement between Erbil and Baghdad to keep Iranian-backed PMUs out of these zones had been broken by militia commanders. Barzani warned that Shia PMUs present a direct threat to the Yazidis. Rather than representing the Yazidis, however, Barzani opposes the offensive due to the challenges it presents to the KDPs own political interests. The KDP previously had control over Sinjar, until its forces withdrew ahead of the IS advance in 2014. It has since struggled to reassert its hold, in part due to Yazidi resentment and the increased influence of the PKK-aligned Yazidi YBS militia, which the KDP has undermined at every opportunity. The PMUs, on the other hand, have built relatively cordial relations with the YBS, and have involved Yazidis in their latest offensive. The PMU presence has thus complicated the KDP push for local hegemony. Further, several local tribes – which had previously backed the Peshmerga – have joined the PMU assault. Fearing the decline of KDP influence, and that PMUs may later attempt to enforce a central government territorial claim, Barzani has threatened a Peshmerga intervention if the Shia forces do not withdraw. To avoid a direct PMU-Kurdish confrontation, Prime Minister Abadi dispatched a delegation to mediate. This has done little to moderate the rhetoric. The situation has the potential to quickly escalate, particularly if PMUs provide further “assistance” in liberating Yazidi territory, as suggested by deputy leader Abu Madi al-Muhandis. In the wider regional context, Turkey has also warned it will not tolerate the spread
of Iranian influence into Sinjar, or allow the position of the Yazidi YBS militia – and by extension the PKK – to be strengthened.

**Forecast**

- **Short term:** The ISF assault into north-western Mosul will make further progress. ISF will continue to push towards the Tigris, and will likely isolate the Old Town in the next month. The offensive will be hampered, however, by pressure to minimise civilian casualties. IS will also launch frequent counterattacks, some of which will succeed in temporarily displacing ISF from recently recaptured territory. It is unlikely that any major advance will be made into the Old Town in the near term, until the remainder of the city is taken. To prevent the Iraqi government from establishing any sense of normalcy or security in East Mosul, IS will continue sporadic mortar and rocket attacks – as well as the use of weaponised drones. It will also carry out occasional HPAs, particularly using SVIEDs and VBIEDs. No changes to the forward lines around Tal Afar are anticipated, though IS will continue to launch attacks against the forces besieging the town. PMUs will continue to push towards the Syrian border, liberating Qayrawan before approaching Ba’aj district. Tensions between PMUs and Massoud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) will remain elevated, and may escalate if PMUs advance further into Yazidi territory. Hostility between the KDP and the Yazidi YBS militia will also persist, and renewed violence between them is foreseeable.

- **Medium term:** The Mosul offensive will slow due to the compact and residential character of West Mosul’s ‘Old Town’. Fighting will be further complicated by the use of human shields. Nonetheless, ISF are expected to capture the remainder of West Mosul during the medium term. After its total encirclement, the operation to seize Tal Afar will commence, though only after West Mosul is liberated. In the interim, there will be continued disagreement over the involvement of PMUs in this offensive. It is highly likely that IS will commit considerable resources to Tal Afar’s defence. Indeed, the severance of the last road into the Tal Afar pocket – and the failure of IS offensives to re-open the road link to Syria – will ensure that militants will fight intensely, as there is no escape route.

- **Long term:** IS will lose control over Ninawa Province’s populated areas, though a decentralised insurgency is expected to follow. 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 between KDP Peshmerga – the KDP being allied to Turkey – and PKK affiliates.
North Central

Incidents This Week 70  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 4: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North Central
Insurgents launched several major attacks in eastern Salah ad-Din. On 18 May, IS carried out a dawn assault on ISF positions between Bir Ahmed and Zarkha. It appears that the attacks targeted points near the intersection of Peshmerga and PMU defensive lines. This tactic has been used on a number of occasions in Tamim and eastern Salah ad-Din. It is likely intended to heighten confusion, exploit security gaps, and to prevent an effective and coordinated response. Dozens of militants were involved in the operation, which included several SVIED detonations. The attackers were repelled after two to three hours of fighting, in which both PMU and Peshmerga forces sustained casualties. At least 12 insurgents were killed, and others wounded or captured. The assault originated from the southern edge of the IS-held ‘Hawija Pocket’, with the perpetrators believed to have crossed into Salah ad-Din near Zarkha. This spurred renewed calls for the commencement of the long-awaited Hawija offensive, with officials stating that further delays would undermine the security of multiple provinces. Though Peshmerga Brigadier General Mohammed Reger recently stated that troops and equipment were ready, ISF remains embroiled in the seven-month-long Mosul campaign. Additionally, there is continued disagreement over the make-up of forces that will undertake the offensive into the Sunni-dominated region. Notably, Kurdish and Sunni Arab leaders are opposed to the involvement of Shia PMUs. On 21 May, a high-level security meeting to help iron out this issue was held in Kirkuk. The gathering was attended by Peshmerga and PMU commanders, along with politicians and officials from Baghdad, Kirkuk and the KRG. However, the deep political frictions are unlikely to be speedily resolved, and it is improbable that the campaign will begin soon. Several days after the attacks between Bir Ahmed and Zarkha, a similar assault was launched against PMU positions outside Amerli. Seven militants were killed, and an SVBIED driving towards security forces destroyed.

A high level of hostile activity was recorded in Diyala. Incidents were clustered in two main areas. The first was the Diyala River Valley. The region to the north-east of Baquba saw a slight spike in activity, notably including the thwarting of a VBIED attack on 21 May. ISF members at a new checkpoint on the road between al-Sada and Abbara witnessed an individual abandon his vehicle after sighting the security presence, before fleeing into nearby orchards. A subsequent search of the vehicle found it to contain more than 150kg of explosives. Diyala officials stated that the VBIED was intended for Baquba. They added that the attack was prevented due to the outward extension of security lines ringing the province’s urban zones, a recent strategy to close off secondary access points. Elsewhere, Abu Saida saw continued violence. This mostly involved IEDs placed on rural roadways, which killed several soldiers and civilians. Isolated IDF was also recorded, including against the village of Zaghniya. Further north, insurgent activity persisted in Sherwain. For example, militants assaulted two tribal PMU outposts, inflicting several casualties before withdrawing towards the al-Zour basin. These attacks, along with several nearby IED detonations, illustrate that last week’s security operation to clear the basin did little to blunt local insurgent capabilities. The second hub of activity in Diyala was found along its border with Salah ad-Din, an area which recently experienced a period of relative quiet. It is likely that the increase in incident levels indicates the re-infiltration of insurgents, following the conclusion of security deployments on either side of the frontier. The activity consisted largely of IED and IDF events, particularly in the Adhaim region. Militants also destroyed electricity towers and burned 450 dunums (112 hectares) of agricultural land. It is assessed that the latter represents a tactic to increase civilian displacement, and prevent the return of IDPs. Insurgents have established a strong presence in abandoned villages and farmland along the border. This has provided them with considerable freedom of movement, as well as mostly unhindered access to safe-havens and weapons stores. Following calls to re-settle these areas, further intimidatory violence is anticipated, as militants attempt to protect and maintain their local bases of operations.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Violence will persist in the Diyala River Valley, particularly IED detonations, SAF and IDF. Abu Saida is expected to remain insecure, with outbreaks of tribal fighting taking place against a backdrop of low-level militant attacks. A rise in hostile activity between Amerli and Qara Tappa is anticipated, though frequent security operations will attempt to stymie the insurgent presence in the lower Himrin area. Northern Salah ad-Din will remain a primary driver of incident levels, with regular asymmetric attacks in the Shirqat-Bayji corridor. The Baiji-Haditha road and Siniya will face ongoing instability, as will the Alas-Ujail oilfields. Salah ad-Din’s central and southern zones will witness a steady increase in incident levels, including sporadic HPAs in urban locations like Samarra and Tikrit. Insurgent violence along the Salah ad-Din – Diyala border will slowly build, following a period of relative quiet in the wake of major security operations. It is probable that militant activity in Kirkuk will remain subdued, although it will present an attractive target for occasional HPAs.

- **Medium term:** It is probable that hostile activity will build in Diyala and Salah ad Din. Although activity levels will be lower in Tamim province, Kirkuk and other significant urban centers across the north central region will remain key targets for insurgents seeking to perpetrate high-profile attacks. Underlying tensions between Kurdish, Shia Arab, and Turkmen groups will prove susceptible to outbreaks of violence in Tamim and eastern Salah ad-Din, particularly in the event of an escalation of ongoing political disputes.

- **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 parts of Tamim Province – the disputed areas – as well as between local stakeholders. When Hawija is retaken, the post-conflict period will reflect localised competition and inter-communal violence between Arab, Kurd and Turkmen.
West

Incidents This Week 36  Weekly Trend  Up

*Figure 5: Reference Map & Incident Levels – West*
Outlook

- **There were 36 incidents this week.** This is a notable increase in activity but in line with recent reporting periods which have seen a consistent number of incidents since March. On the outskirts of Ramadi, ISF foiled a VBIED attack at the 7km marker. Inside Ramadi, several IEDs were reported, including devices which destroyed the houses of two Sunni tribal volunteers. This type of incident is expected to become more prevalent, as previous insurgent patterns return in the post-IS period. The most serious incident reported this week occurred on 15 May, when gunmen wearing suicide vests in Haditha fired at civilians. When ISF arrived, a clash ensued, with all four gunmen killed. This incident follows a VBIED attack in central Haditha on 5 May, which was the first high-profile attack there this year, and adds credence to the assessment that insurgent capability in the Haditha area is maturing.

- **Anbar strengthening security measures.** At the start of the reporting period, the Anbar Police Chief, Hadi Razeef, announced that security forces would develop further a department to train K9 sniffer dogs in explosive detection. Razeef clarified that this was a precautionary measure, which came following ‘limited’ security breaches. In a further move, Razeef confirmed that he had received MoI approval to reinstate 3150 policemen who had been suspended from service. These measures will bolster the policing capability in liberated areas, which has proven difficult owing to shortages in IP members. In March this year, complaints were lodged by Anbar Provincial Council (APC) members who claimed that thousands of IP members had been prevented from returning to active service, despite having been through the interview vetting process, which investigates any links to IS. At the time, as is the case now, security forces were bogged down trying to consolidate control over cleared areas, as a clandestine insurgency began to redevelop. The introduction of K9 assets to entry and exit points of urban areas will also prove a significant addition to security efforts. Most VBIED incidents have been restricted to the outskirts of cities thus far, demonstrating that insurgent capability inside these urban areas is currently limited. K9 assets will be an effective force multiplier in stifling efforts to smuggle explosives – either fully constructed devices or material – into cities like Ramadi and Fallujah. In conjunction with greater police numbers, this could ultimately cause the insurgency in cleared areas to plateau, thereby freeing up offensive forces for the operation to recapture the remainder of the Euphrates River Valley.

- **ISF operations reducing violence around Rutba.** Over the course of 2017, violence around Rutba had been persistently intense, with frequent complex attacks on ISF stationed in and around the town. Through May, this violence slowed, almost certainly because offensive counterinsurgency operations increased. Throughout this reporting period alone, there were at least four reported ISF successes, including cache finds, insurgent arrests and one operation in Ziyab that saw seven insurgents killed on 18 May. This built on operations earlier in the month, which have led to a sharp fall in overall incident levels. By way of indication, only one single IDF attack was recorded throughout this week. Although there will inevitably be undetected lower level incidents, this is also true for previous months. Furthermore, that this trend has emerged over the course of several weeks indicates that this is highly unlikely to be a natural week-to-week lull, but rather an early indication that security may be improving.
**Forecast**

- **Short term:** Despite positive signs the ISF is strengthening its capability, it is unlikely to have any major bearing on incident levels in the near-term. The overall frequency of activity will fluctuate around the current levels. Given ISF priorities in Ninawa Province, frontline positions in the Ana area – which almost certainly require an influx of ISF to advance – will remain static. An ongoing pattern of low-level IDF and SAF attacks in the Sakra area will cause local officials to continue to put pressure on Baghdad to advance forward positions to IS-held Ana. Despite a number of clearing operations in the Rutba area, ISF convoys in western Anbar will remain vulnerable to insurgent ambushes. These will likely form the majority of activity in western Anbar, aside from regular coalition airstrikes in Qaim. Elsewhere, hostile acts will gradually increase throughout the province in ISF-held territory, particularly in the Fallujah and Ramadi areas. IS attacks in the lower Euphrates area near Dulab, Kubaysa, and Hit are likely to occur on an intermittent basis.

- **Medium term:** It is anticipated that militant attacks will build steadily as insurgents regroup, and reconstruction efforts lead to a return of displaced civilians. Political and tribal violence is likely to worsen over the medium term, particularly as groups compete for reconstruction contracts. In addition to the residual insurgent presence, these tensions will contribute to overall activity levels. Increased violence is likely to result in political calls to strengthen local tribal groups in order to bolster security. Operations to clear the Ana – Qaim corridor will likely commence in the medium to long term, once the Mosul operation has concluded.

- **Long term:** In the longer-term, security forces will achieve and maintain control over all of the population centres along the Euphrates River. IS remnants will remain present in desert areas near Thar Lake and in the province’s western desert zones. Militants will engage in a high-intensity insurgency across Anbar through a network of decentralised cells, similar to previous patterns of insurgency before the “caliphate” was established. Northwestern Anbar will remain susceptible to IS attacks in the long term, given the heavy IS presence in the Euphrates River Valley of eastern Syria.
South Central

Incidents This Week 3  Weekly Trend No Change

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

- For the second consecutive week, there were three incidents in the South-Central region. The frequency of hostile events dropped marginally during the previous reporting period following several weeks of slightly higher rates of activity. Recorded activity across the region remained isolated in nature, primarily driven by personal disputes and general criminality. At the start of the week, two gunmen directed SAF at a civilian’s home in the Quds area of Najaf, injuring three individuals. The incident was reportedly prompted by a family dispute. Separately, two gunmen shot and injured a man and his wife following a tribal feud in Hamzah, Qadisiyah, on 19 May. On the same day, a hand grenade detonated outside the house of an individual in the Jihad area of Diwaniya, only material damages were recorded. This incident was almost certainly intimidatory in nature. Meanwhile, on 18 May, the Supreme Administrative Court in Baghdad ratified the decision of the Administrative court – made on 13 March – when it ruled in favour of overturning the dismissal of Wasit’s former Governor, Mahmoud Abd al-Rida Mulla Talal, in November 2014. The former governor is now free to return to his former post. His return won’t affect the political demographic of Wasit Provincial Council as his replacement, Malik Khalaf Waladi, was also a member of Muwatatin. However, due to his tumultuous relationship with Wasit’s State of Law (SoL) coalition, his return is likely to prompt a deterioration in the relationship between Muwatatin and SoL in Wasit. Separately, a number of provinces announced a heightened state of alert and increased security measures on 20 May following the insurgent attack in Basra Province in the South-East region on 19 May.

- Wasit Provincial Council file lawsuit against Minister of Electricity. On 17 May, the Deputy Chairman of Wasit Provincial Council’s Legal Committee, Urabi Zamili, issued a press statement announcing the council voted to file a lawsuit against Qasim Fahdawi, the Minister of Electricity. Zamili announced that the lawsuit was prompted by the widespread opposition to plans to privatisate the provision of electricity. The current governor of Wasit, Malik Khalaf Wadi, claimed that the timing of the privatisation plans were not suitable for the province and that the Ministry of Electricity had not sufficiently justified the shift towards the private sector. He noted that the provincial council had formally rejected the ministry’s plans on several occasions and that this was supported by residents of Wasit Province who have regularly voiced their concerns. The most significant anti-privatisation protest in recent weeks occurred on 16 April when up to 600 individuals in Kut demonstrated against the ministry’s proposals. Currently, a relatively small percentage of households are assessed to pay for their electricity in southern Iraq. Wasit is not the first province to reject plans put forward by the ministry, but their decision to file a lawsuit will likely have repercussions for the province in the short to medium term. On 13 May, the Ministry of Electricity filed a lawsuit against Falah al-Ziadi, Governor of Muthanna, for reportedly preventing a potential Jordanian investor from entering the province on 14 March. Whilst the lawsuit filed by Wasit Provincial Council on 17 May is best understood as a form of legal protest, and will likely have a minimal impact on the privatisation process. It is likely Fadhawi will respond in kind with a punitive measure against the provincial council as was the case with the governor of Muthanna.
Forecast

♦ **Short term:** Activity levels will likely reduce during Ramadan. However, religious festivals such as Ramadan present an attractive target for insurgents, raising the prospect of high-profile attacks. Most at risk will be most northern Babil and western Karbala. Demonstrations will increase, as widespread anger over electricity shortages leads to localised protests. Demonstrations will also be driven by employment-related grievances, demands for improved service provision as well as widespread rejection of plans to privatise electricity provision. Low-level protests demanding electoral reform are also expected to continue. Beyond this, the bulk of hostile activity will continue to be driven by a mixture of personal and financial disputes as well as general criminality. SAF events, kidnap, murder, and intimidatory IEDs will continue to feature prominently in reporting.

♦ **Medium term:** There is likely to be a small but perceptible increase in the frequency of low-level insurgent attacks in northern Wasit and northern Babil in the medium to long term, as IS attempts to re-establish and consolidate its local networks. However, incidents linked to IS militancy will likely remain a minor proportion of activity in the region. The frequency of employment-related demonstrations is expected to incrementally increase in the medium term. Elevated unemployment will also drive a gradual increase in acquisitive crime.

♦ **Long term:** Progress by the Federal Government in political and economic reform, as well as anti-corruption measures, will have a considerable influence on the level of civil unrest in the South Central region. High-profile attacks will increase as IS reverts to insurgent tactics – after losing significant territory in northern and western Iraq – and re-establishes its clandestine networks. IS militants will also attempt to reach symbolic Shia targets in the Najaf and Karbala areas, in order to increase sectarian tensions and portray strength in light of territorial losses. Because of the significant presence of ISF and PMUs in the area, however, it is highly unlikely that levels of violence will reach the scale witnessed during 2013-2014.
South East

Incidents This Week 26  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 7: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South East
Outlook

- **IS claimed responsibility for HPA in Basra Province.** On 19 May, authorities received intelligence indicating two SVBIEDs had entered the province, prompting Basra Operations Command (BaOC) to order the enforcement of a defensive ring around the entrance points to Basra, and along main routes to the city. At 1800hrs, an SVBIED detonated at a checkpoint on Route Tampa. A total of 11 individuals were killed and 42 others wounded, and four vehicles destroyed by the detonation. Shortly after this, a lone gunman travelling in a second VBIED – also on Route Tampa - exited his vehicle and opened fire on a checkpoint approximately 10km south of the initial attack. An OPF member was killed in this second incident. Nearby ISF members from a separate unit approached the scene before killing the gunman. The vehicle in which the insurgent was travelling then detonated, causing no further casualties. IS claimed responsibility several hours later. Sabah al-Bazuni, Chairman of the BPC, contended that insurgents used Akashat in western Anbar as a staging post for this incident. While the exact location of the departure point of the devices is unlikely to become apparent, this incident was undoubtedly expeditionary in nature. This is the first insurgent attack since April 2016 and marks the end of Basra’s longest period without a HPA since the withdrawal of US Forces in 2011. Insurgent attacks in Basra have historically favoured soft civilian targets in metropolitan areas rather than checkpoints in relatively rural locations. It is assessed that the first detonation occurred at the checkpoint on Route Tampa because ISF were on high-alert and the device had been, or was about to be discovered. It is also likely the second attacker was either forced into a premature attack or may have been attempting to flee after the initial detonation occurred earlier than intended. The locations of the attacks were probably not the designated targets and as such, it is unlikely that the events of 19 May mark an intended deviation from IS’s established modus operandi. There is no evidence to suggest that oil and gas infrastructure in the vicinity of Route Tampa were the intended targets as suggested by a small number of open sources. This marks a modest success for ISF in that they were able to prevent insurgents from reaching their likely targets and prosecuting a significant attack in a more densely populated area. More broadly, this attack does not alter the overall security climate in Basra or the wider South East region in the long-term. Insurgents are periodically able to prosecute expeditionary HPAs in the region. The recapture of Mosul is expected to drive the decentralisation of the current insurgency, prompting an increase in the frequency of militant attacks in the South East on a scale witnessed during the pre-Caliphate phase. For Basra, this pattern entailed high-profile attacks on civilian targets on an approximate 3-6 month basis. However, it should be noted that Ramadan – projected to begin on 27 May - presents an attractive target for Sunni extremists and therefore attacks during this period do not necessarily contradict this assessment.

- **Tribal fighting anticipated in Sayid Dakhil, Dhi Qar.** On 17 May, a Rapid Reaction Force secured the Sayid Dakhil area alongside all roads leading to the town ahead of expected clashes between the al-Ibrahim and Nasrallah tribes after an ‘atwa (peace treaty) between reportedly expired this week. The two tribes clashed most recently on 22 December after an individual killed a taxi driver belonging to the opposing tribe. Dakhal Radi, a member of Dhi Qar’s Provincial called on tribal elders to address the underlying dispute before an outbreak of violence occurs.
Forecast

- **Short term**: The outlook for the South East remains stable. The increased level of security effected after the 19 May HPA in Basra will be maintained across the South East in the short term. A similar state of alert is likely to persist throughout the Ramadan period. The frequency of activity is also expected to drop slightly, with the exception of assaults which typically rise during this period. Intimidatory IEDs by conservative religious elements on distributors of alcohol in Basra City are likely. Separately, although no official comments have been made, it is likely that the large-scale search and arrest operation (Operation *Wathaba Assad*) in Maysan that has run since 1 May, will conclude in the near term. Meanwhile, protests will continue to focus on anti-privatisation of the electricity sector. The rising temperature means power cuts will become more frequent, driving electricity protests. Typically, these involve small numbers of locals burning tyres on roads, mainly at night time, and tend to have only minimal impact on commercial operations.

- **Medium term**: Reform-led demonstrations, employment-related grievances, and widespread opposition to plans for the privatisation of electricity provision are expected to drive protest activity in the south-east. High levels of unemployment are expected to result in a gradual rise in financially motivated crime, particularly as public spending slows. Political rivalries will build, including those between the Sadrist movement and the Dawa Party. An expected intensification of these conflicts ahead of the elections will likely 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.

- **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. Alongside demonstrations focused on reform and corruption, there will be ongoing protect activity regarding employment-related concerns and service provision.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 May 17</td>
<td>Ramadan Begins*</td>
<td>Month-long fasting period, considered the most holy period in the Islamic calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 or 28 June 17</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan ends)</td>
<td>Religious and National Holiday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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.

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
<td>JRTN</td>
<td>Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al- Naqshbandia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQA</td>
<td>Close Quarters Assassination</td>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Local National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFP</td>
<td>Explosively Formed Projectile</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Modus Operandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of Iraq</td>
<td>NSTR</td>
<td>Nothing significant to report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HG</td>
<td>Hand Grenade</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Private Security Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Iraqi Army</td>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Private Security Detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Indirect Fire</td>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Small Arms Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Small Arms Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>Iraqi Security Forces</td>
<td>SVBIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vehicle Borne IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL / IS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ Islamic State</td>
<td>SVIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vest IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPS</td>
<td>Iraqi Police Service</td>
<td>TTPs</td>
<td>Tactics, Techniques and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IZ</td>
<td>International Zone</td>
<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaish Al Mahdi (Mahdi Army)</td>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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</table>
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