Executive Summary
Iraq Weekly Report

National Overview

Incidents This Week 193  Weekly Trend Down

- Levels of violence returned to average after a spike over recent weeks.
- The most important development this week was the Kurdish referendum, which was held on 25 September amid intense regional and domestic tension.
- In the North, violence was subdued, largely due to a reduction in hostile incidents in Ayyadiya and Mosul.
- ISF began an offensive against IS-held territory in Hawija, recapturing ground north of the Zab River.
- The focus of Anbar reporting was a successful offensive into IS-held territory near Anah, with operations likely to continue.
- The south was subdued, most likely the result of increased security measures.

Figure 1: Regional Incident Levels

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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.
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BAGHDAD (City & Province)
Activity rose slightly, though remained around average levels. Violence was in-keeping with typical patterns. Dominating reporting, however, was the KRG decision to proceed with an independence referendum. This has triggered a period of extreme tensions both domestically and regionally, which will persist for the coming reporting period at least.

NORTH (Ninawa, Dahuk & Erbil Provinces)
A substantial decline in hostile activity was observed in the North from the reported 38 last week to 16. This was largely due to a reduction of incidents in Ayyadiya district. Following last week’s rise of events in Mosul, an increase in security operations have dampened activity in the area. One notable incident occurred in Sinjar where PMU forces clashed with the Protection of Sinjar Units.

NORTH CENTRAL (Tamim/Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala & Sulaymaniya)
Hostile incidents were only slightly changed from the previous week. In Diyala, growing evidence of a maturing insurgency emerged, especially around the Himreen Lake. However, the focus of reporting was on the commencement of an operation to recapture parts of IS-held territory in Kirkuk.

WEST (Anbar Province)
Reported attacks changed only slightly this week. However, the most pressing development came in the upper Euphrates, and the start of an offensive to recapture Qaim. Progress was steady, with security forces meeting increased resistance after liberating Anah.

SOUTH CENTRAL (Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Qadisiya & Najaf Provinces)
Another decrease in hostile activity was reported in the South Central region, returning to within average levels recorded for 2017. The bulk of events related to localised disputes and low level criminality, as per established trends. Insurgent activity remained focused in Northern Babil, particularly around the Jurf al-Sakkar area.

SOUTH EAST (Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan & Basra Provinces)
A notable decline in hostile incidents occurred this reporting period. Following last week’s spike in activity in Maysan, activity returned to normal levels with three events recorded. Reported activity also fell substantially in Basra province, likely due to enhanced security measures implemented for the period of Muharram. Across the region, events were largely related to low-level criminality and localised disputes. Changes to Dhi Qar’s security operations have been implemented following a Parliamentary Security Committee review of the province.
Baghdad

Incidents This Week 66  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 2: Reference Map & Incident Levels – Baghdad
Kurds vote in referendum but Abadi refuses to negotiate. On 25 September, the KRG held its independence referendum. At the time of writing, no results have been formally issued, with a KRG spokesman announcing that these would likely be released within 72 hours. However, as expected, preliminary results (probably based on somewhat unreliable exit polling) indicates a landslide ‘yes’ vote. Shortly after the vote, Prime Minister, Haidar al Abadi, stated unequivocally that he would not be willing to negotiate on the outcome of the referendum, maintaining that it was unconstitutional and had been blocked by Iraq’s federal courts. Notably, the 72-hour window before formal results are issued is a long period between polls closing and results released. Typically, in a well-run election, no more than 24 hours is required to count votes, especially for a relatively small-scale election. This indicates that, for the time being at least, KRG President Massoud Barzani is seeking to use the results as leverage for negotiations with Baghdad, meaning relations will remain tense for the next day or two. Indeed, notions that the referendum result will provide a basis for Kurdish independence are misguided; regional, domestic and international actors oppose this, making recognition of ‘statehood’ impossible under international law. With Barzani no doubt well aware, the next few days are likely to reveal that the referendum was more a means to pressure Baghdad for concessions, rather than a serious attempt to achieve statehood.

Abadi has deliberately distanced himself from any negotiations, stating on the day of the referendum that he would not allow Barzani to use the referendum as a basis for talks. However, talks behind the scenes are inevitably taking place. Barzani has already indicated that he wants federal Iraq to withdraw to pre-2003 borders. If this is a central demand for the KRG, it will inevitably prove a redline for Baghdad, who will wish to reassert control over territory filled by Peshmerga during the 2014 expansion of IS. Another point that the KRG will almost certainly raise relates to budget payments. The KRG remains tied to Iraq for budget allocation, which over recent years has resulted in delayed or refused payments and lengthy periods of negotiations. The KRG may seek to secure greater guarantees on payment delivery, as well as the constitutionally apportioned 17%. Given that this latter point does not reference more sensitive territorial issues, it may prove a more achievable negotiating outcome.

On a wider political level, the referendum has left a tense legacy. Iran opposes the referendum because it could embolden separatist sentiment within its Kurdish minority. Almost certainly on this basis, Iraqi PMUs with obvious Iranian leanings have threatened military action against the KRG if the referendum was held. In disputed areas, this has raised tensions along frontlines. On 25 September, a minor skirmish was reported around the Tuz area, though this was downplayed and even flatly denied by both sides. In northeast Diyala, tensions have also been running high, particularly between Mandali (controlled by federal forces), and the mainly Kurdish-held Khanaqin. For its part, Turkey has also made threatening overtures, mounting maneuvers along the KRG border area. Tensions both regionally and domestically are likely to remain high for at least the coming reporting period, and further skirmishes are expected in disputed territories.
Forecast

**Short term:** Tensions are likely to remain fraught over the coming week as the fallout of the KRG referendum becomes clear. Fierce and threatening rhetoric, including threats of direct military confrontation, are likely to persist. Protest activity and isolated violence against Kurdish interests in Baghdad is also probable. As IS continues to lose territory, it is expected that high-profile retaliatory attacks will continue in Baghdad. These attacks are not expected to be destabilising due to the high ISF and PMU presence in central Baghdad and surrounding Baghdad belts. Insurgent violence is expected to dominate reporting in the north, south and west of Baghdad province. As the insurgency regrows in northern Babil, asymmetric attacks in southern Baghdad province and city are expected. This will likely be made up of indiscriminate IED attacks against populated areas, such as markets in Suweib and Radwaniyah. More sophisticated attacks, such as VBIEDs, are likely in the southwest of Baghdad city. In northern Baghdad, security is expected to deteriorate further. Reactive security operations are expected to quell insurgent violence, although they often result in only temporary displacement of militant cells. In central Baghdad, the majority of incidents will remain linked to low-level criminality, localised disputes and tribalism.

**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 continue in the urban areas of central Baghdad. The threat from IS to Baghdad is expected to increase as the movement de-centralises. The upcoming Kurdish referendum is likely to result in political tension between the Central and Kurdish Governments as well as strained diplomatic relations with regional power players.

**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 16  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 3: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North
Hostile incidents decreased substantially this reporting period. This is largely due to a decline in reported activity around Ayyadiya district and in Mosul. In Mosul, security operations launched following last week’s rise in hostility resulted in a number of IED finds and arrests. It is assessed the reduction in activity in Ayyadiya does not represent territorial gains for ISF, but rather a lull in the fighting. In central Ayyadiya, a SAF incident resulted in the death of one PMU soldier and ISF intercepted a SVIED, shooting the attacker dead before he could detonate his vest. There is likely still a sizeable presence of IS militants in the district, denied a safe escape route from the mountainous areas as the surrounding zones are heavily fortified by PMU forces. It is anticipated hostility will rise as the militants regroup. Sporadic SAF incidents occurred in villages surrounding Tal Afar. These likely represent opportunistic attacks, conducted by small IS cells forward deploying from the group’s current haven in the Ayyadiya mountains. In Tal Safouk, western Ninawa, PMU forces announced an artillery bombardment of IS fighters south of the border crossing in Syria. They alleged the group were preparing to attack Iraqi forces in the area. In southern Ninawa, PMU engineers have begun to regenerate Qayyara airfield to assist operations in the area. Given the airfield’s proximity to Hawija, it is most probably related to the impending liberation, though it is possibly indicative of the force establishing a permanent presence.

Clashes reported between PMU forces and the Protection of Sinjar Unit. On 22 September, an armed skirmish took place between members of the Imam Ali Brigade PMU and the PKK aligned Protection of Sinjar Unit, north of Sinjar in Khanzour. The PMU unit was reportedly transiting through the area on its way to Rabia on the Iraq / Syria border when the scuffle began. Fierce fighting erupted, which lasted several hours following a dispute at a checkpoint manned by the Sinjar Unit. Given that both sides share a cordial relationship, the disagreement is likely to have been the result of a localised personal dispute between deployed fighters. Reported casualty figures vary, but a version briefed by PUK official Ghiyath al-Surji suggests three PMU fighters were wounded with another 12 detained. Al-Surji also suggested members of the Imam Ali Brigade tried to enter territory controlled by the Sinjar Unit, igniting the violence. Conversely, Major-General al-Karawi, representing the PMU forces, denied any clash had occurred and said the news was “unfounded”. It is likely the PMU have sought to downplay the incident as it occurred amid the backdrop of the Kurdish independence referendum. Indeed, on the 21 September, a representative of the Yezidi National Assembly, MP Haji Kendour, called on the Iraqi Government to send PMU forces to Sinjar to prevent the region’s participation in the referendum. Hansour inferred that those in the area did not want to be part of Kurdistan, and condemned the Kurdish units for maintaining control over the area by force. Given the political tension and military posturing surrounding the controversial vote, there will have been no appetite for a publicised battle involving PMU forces in disputed territory.
Security Overview

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Forecast

- **Short term:** Ongoing clearance operations in Mosul will result in numerous weapons seizures, IED finds and residual detonations. Sporadic attacks carried out by IS remnants are almost inevitable, including suicide attacks launched by sleeper cells and by IS fighters who escaped the Old Town. The ISF drawdown in the city has seen many security responsibilities handed over to local and Federal Police units, which will likely result in a steady heightening of violence. Indeed, a gradual increase in asymmetric attacks is expected across the liberated areas of Ninawa province more generally, as insurgent cells regroup. Political and sectarian tensions will build as the last pockets are cleared, and a power struggle ensues. Most ISF troops will be redeployed from Tal Afar district, though clearance operations in the mountains around Ayyadiya are expected to continue. Sporadic militant attacks on PMU forces will persist along the Iraq-Syria border. Tensions related to the Kurdish independence referendum will continue, with isolated incidents of violence possible in disputed areas. Politically, the announcement of the result will almost certainly ignite a period of prolonged tension between Kurdistan and the Iraqi Federal Government.

- **Medium term:** Insurgent activity will continue to build across Ninawa, particularly in Mosul, as militant networks regain operational capacity. The enduring presence of Iranian-backed PMUs in Tal Afar is likely to increase tensions with local Sunni actors, as well as with Turkey and the US. Rivalries in Sinjar between Kurdish-aligned forces and PKK-backed Yazidi militias is expected to mount. These hostilities may result in sporadic outbreaks of armed conflict, and are expected to heighten regional tensions with Turkey. 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, as well as further south along the border. This will provoke considerable opposition, including from Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

- **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 between KDP Peshmerga – the KDP being allied to Turkey – and PKK affiliates. 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 52  Weekly Trend Down

Figure 4: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North Central
Offensive into Hawija likely to prove straightforward militarily, but politically complex. On 20 September, Prime Minister Haidar al Abadi visited Makhmour ahead of a proposed offensive into Hawija. Previously hamstrung by wrangling over Kurdish participation, Abadi announced shortly after the visit that the offensive would begin, despite a lack of clarity over coordination of the Kurdish Peshmerga. By 21 September, an assault prong moved south from the eastern bank of Shirqat township, capturing small villages with little apparent resistance. Progress by Federal Police was notable, prompting an announcement from the operations commander, Yahya Rasoul, that the operation would be rapid. Also on 21 September, the Joint Operations Command confirmed that the Peshmerga role would be limited to securing forward lines, essentially ruling them out of an offensive role in the operations, which was to be the expected Kurdish position. Over the subsequent 24 hours, reported progress remained solid, with reports of numerous villages in the plains north of the Zab River recaptured. Concurrently, operations began into the Zawiya and Namil areas located on the west bank of the Tigris north of Bayji. Flanked by the Makhoul Mountains to its west, and IS-held territory to its east, Zawiya and Namil had remained outside of ISF control. IS responded by attacking advancing forces along the only major route through the mountains, including with at least one SVBIED. A third prong involving PMUs from the 16th, 18th and the 52nd PMU Brigades, alongside Emergency Police and a Commando Brigade moved into the Zarka area, south of Hawija. An area that has suffered from increasing insurgent activity, this prong was designed to cut off a southerly escape route for insurgents from Hawija into Mutaybijiya. At the current rate of advance, security forces are likely to be capable of recapturing the remaining Hawija areas in a matter of weeks, and probably within a fortnight. However, crossing the Zab river and moving further into IS-held territory will effectively narrow the territory between Federal forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga. Given tensions over the independence referendum, there is a small chance that this offensive will be postponed, and in the last 24 hours, there has been no further advance detected from this position.

Diyala violence fails to abate, despite counterinsurgency operations. Throughout the week, violence persisted along the Diyala River Valley (DRV) and around the Himreen Lakes area. Activity in the lower DRV, northeast of Baqubah, involved airstrikes against suspected insurgents in the orchard area around Mukhaisa, which followed violence over recent weeks. More pressing, however, is the situation north of Muqdadiya, between Mansouriyah and the areas flanking the Himreen Lake. At least seven IEDs were reported from the Mansouriyah area alone, and there was also a suicide attacker interdicted in Muqdadiya. This represents an increased momentum, and confirms previous assessments that Diyala’s insurgency is growing more capable.
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**Forecast**

- **Short term:** It is possible that security forces will continue the offensive towards Hawija in the near-term. However, with current tensions running high over the Kurdish independence referendum, a temporary pause at the current forward lines is deemed more likely, thereby maintaining a buffer between PMUs and Peshmerga forces holding lines southwest of Kirkuk. In areas where PMU and Peshmerga elements share boundaries, sporadic clashes are highly likely. There is a small, but not entirely discountable possibility that these clashes will trigger a conflict spiral that results in a sustained period of violence between forces aligned to Baghdad and Kurdish Peshmerga.

  Sporadic high-profile attacks are anticipated across the North Central, particularly targeting urban centres. Northwest Diyala will remain chronically insecure, and violence levels are expected to climb. 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 and Zarka. It is probable that militant activity in Kirkuk will remain subdued, although it will present an attractive target for occasional HPAs.

- **Medium term:** Hostile activity will build in Diyala and Salah ad Din. There is a substantial risk that ISF/PMU 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 across Diyala – particularly in rural or semi-rural areas, and along the Diyala River Valley. 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. 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. When Hawija is retaken, the post-conflict period will reflect localised competition and inter-communal violence between Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen.

- **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.
West

Incidents This Week 36  Weekly Trend  Up

Figure 5: Reference Map & Incident Levels – West
Outlook

- **Activity levels largely unchanged in West.** Of particular note this week were residual incidents related to the recent offensive through Akashat, which saw several IEDs and a VBIED find. However, despite continued events, most of this activity reflected passive action, rather than active insurgents, who are most likely to have withdrawn north towards Qaim. The only other incident of note came in the Karma area, northeast of Fallujah, when ISF surrounded three SVIEDs, killing two before a third detonated his explosives. The remainder of detected activity was in-keeping with usual patterns.

- **Qaim liberation operation likely to become more challenging as resistance to advance grows.** At the start of the reporting period, General Abdul Amir Yarallah announced that an operation had begun to liberate Rayhana, south of Anah. The assault came from three axes, and involved a joint force of ISF, IP, Sunni tribal fighters, with support from IA helicopters and International Coalition airpower. Within 24 hours, Rayhana fell under complete control of advancing forces, with only minor harassing counterattacks detected, and the next target was Anah. Forces continued towards Anah, where detected resistance was fiercer, involving several SVBIEDs, IEDs and sustained gun battles. The Chechnya District, on the southern fringes, witnessed most of this activity, almost certainly because it was the first layer of urban defence. Indeed, once this was overcome, the town quickly fell, and by end of the 21 September, only 100m remained outside of ISF control. Forces did manage to push further west than Anah, with an even greater level of resistance detected. Over the coming weeks, security forces are likely to continue their advance, although several factors will mean an increasing amount of resistance. Most important is that the area is considered a strategically important foothold for operations into the Anbar desert, without which sustaining desert cells with supplies and fighters will be more difficult. This view was echoed by the Anbar Security Council, who claimed that Qaim represented IS's strategic centre. With a ready resupply route from IS-held Deir al Zour in Syria, IS will find the resupply of fighters and weapons to the battle more straightforward, making resistance fierce, particularly around Qaim.

Forecast

- **Short term:** Security forces will continue their advance towards Qaim, though resistance will become fiercer as they approach Qaim itself. This is likely to push overall incident levels higher over the coming week. Sporadic HPAs will continue, mostly in urban centres. Hit, Fallujah and Ramadi will represent the primary targets. Activity in Ramadi is expected to gradually increase. Insurgent attacks will persist along the International Highway, particularly in the Rutbah and 160 Kilo area. Political conflict looks likely to remain settled in the near-term, but this will not sustain, particularly as the bidding process for lucrative reconstruction contracts begins.

- **Medium term:** It is anticipated that militant attacks will continue to build as the insurgency further decentralises across the province, and reconstruction efforts lead to the increased return of displaced civilians. Political and tribal violence is likely to worsen over the medium term, particularly as groups compete for reconstruction contracts. Mounting violence is likely to result in political calls to strengthen local tribal groups and build local security capacity.

- **Long term:** In the longer-term, security forces will achieve and maintain control over all the population centers along the Euphrates River. IS remnants will remain present in desert areas near Tharthar Lake and in the province’s western desert zones. Militants will engage in a high-intensity insurgency across Anbar through a network of de-centralised 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 9  Weekly Trend Down

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

- **Hostile incidents declined this reporting period.** This can be attributed to increased security measures across the South Central region for the period of Muharram. As per established trends, events were largely linked to criminality and localised conflict. Following a dispute in Wasit, on 20 September, one man was shot dead and another wounded in Naminiyah. This was followed by an IED in the Hay al Jihad area, Kut on 21 September. No casualties were reported, only material damage, suggesting this attack was intended to be intimidatory. In Najaf, ISF cleared a grenade attached to a residential gate in the Hay al-Askari area, also likely to be intimidatory. There has been a notable rise in protest activity this week, particularly in Qadisiyah, though established drivers remain the same. Namely, a lack of municipal services such as electricity and potable water as well as the demand for employment and electoral reform.

- **Insurgent activity remained clustered in northern Babil.** Two SAF incidents targeting PMU forces resulted in one dead in the Buhairat area and two others injured in Shamsi. A military operation on 19 September uncovered IS safehouses and a large weapons cache in the Fadhiliya area of Jurf al-Sakkar. Jurf al-Sakkar has historically been an insurgent stronghold, having been under the control of IS through most of 2014. It is highly likely insurgents retain a footprint in the area which is growing in capability, evidenced by continuing instability in northern Babil. Political fallout over the security situation rumbles along, though has been comparatively subdued this week. This, however, is likely to change following the discovery of four bodies displaying evidence of torture in Alexandria on 24 September. This comes amidst a backdrop of accusations by Sunni locals that rogue elements of the security forces are involved in targeted violence along sectarian lines. Babil Provincial Council’s continued refusal to allow IDPs to return will likely exacerbate tensions inflaming political friction between provincial and central authorities.

- **Karbala Provincial Council dismisses a Security Director.** In a unanimous vote on 19 September, the Council dismissed the Provincial Security Director of Intelligence and Terrorism, Tahseen Abdul-Jabbar, in absentia. This followed evidence provided by the Head of the Provincial Security Committee that supported allegations of impropriety within the division. Following his dismissal, the file was passed to the judiciary for review. A request has been made to Haider al-Abadi to immediately send a replacement and place a travel ban on Jabbar. The decision follows the discovery of an alleged network within the division that had established an illegal prison in violation of human rights clauses regarding detainees. The issue first emerged at the start of September, when the Head of the Provincial Security Committee, Aqil al-Masoudi, outlined allegations regarding Jabbar’s protection of senior figures providing support and finance to insurgent networks. Initially this was explained as an informant system, though no evidence was submitted to support the assertion. A meeting was then held on 12 September in the Karbala Provincial Council that decided to hold a questioning session, to which Jabbar failed to turn up and was subsequently dismissed.
**Forecast**

- **Short term:** Activity in the South Central region will remain relatively low, typified by minor hostile activity driven by a mixture of personal and financial disputes, as well as general criminality. SAF events, kidnaps, murder, and intimidatory IEDs will feature prominently in reporting. Enhanced security measures are in place for Muharram which will likely result in a short-term reduction in criminality across the region. Security has also been tightened in Karbala, Babil and Qadisiyah as a result of the attacks in Dhi Qar on 14 September. Northern Babil will remain the area most affected by insurgent activity. Sporadic HPAs are also likely to occur in the South Central, particularly in Babil and Karbala. The political fallout of any HPA will fuel localised political instability, as security officials and politicians seek to displace blame. This will result in further disagreement over the return of Sunni IDPs. Protest activity will persist, including those events related to anger over electricity shortages. Other protest themes will include employment-related grievances, service provision, plans to privatise the electricity sector, and calls for electoral and IHEC reform.

- **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. Incidents linked to Sunni militancy will likely remain a minor proportion of activity in the region, however. The frequency of employment-related demonstrations is expected to build 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 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.
South East

Incidents This Week 14  Weekly Trend  Down

Figure 7: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South East
A sharp reduction in hostile activity was recorded in the region. This is largely the result of a decrease in incidents in both Maysan and Basra. In Maysan this represented a return to average levels following a spike in activity last reporting period, with two recorded in comparison to seven. Both incidents were likely linked to localised disputes. On 18 September, an intimidatory IED detonated outside a residence in Uruba causing material damage only. Lastly, a policeman opened fire on two civilians following a disagreement injuring two and killing a bystander. In Basra, enhanced security measures have been in place since the Dhi Qar attack on 14 September, likely contributing to the lull as well as the onset of religious period Muharram. The majority of recorded events were SAF incidents with one IED detonation and grenade attack. Both are assessed to be intimidatory in nature with no casualties recorded, just material damage to residential property in Qarmat Ali and Madaina, respectively. Of the five events involving SAF, two were directly related to tribalism. The first was a personal dispute amongst neighbours from the Shagamba and al-Ramah tribes, which is unlikely to result in further hostility. The second occurred in the Madaina area between members of the Haidari tribe, killing one and injuring two others, including a female. This skirmish was linked to a historical tribal dispute and is likely to witness further flare ups of violence. The remaining three related to local disagreements and low-level criminality as per established trends. On 18 September, two individuals were arrested for intimidatory SAF at the local Mayor’s house in Zubayr. Official sources report this was in revenge for the Mayor passing information regarding a wanted individual to the police. Meanwhile on 22 September, two men were arrested for shooting at the former Basra Governor, Sheikh Mansour al-Tameemi, after a disagreement between his bodyguards and members of the Beit Zaware al-Idan tribe. There are no reports of residual hostility following the Sheikh’s intervention. Following this, on 23 September, an unknown gunman shot at the father of the current Basra Governor, Assad al-Idani, father’s house with only material damage recorded. Though a tribal connection exists between these two events, there is no indication that they were linked in any way.

New security procedures implemented in response to 14 September attacks. On 18 September, the House of Representatives voted to implement a number of recommendations drafted by the Parliamentary Security Committee, after their review of security in the province. Measures included, additional checkpoints along major transit routes, an uptick in intelligence efforts, increased information exchanges and enhanced cooperation between security units. Border patrols have also been stepped up in joint operations with Muthanna to fortify the porous desert areas adjacent to Anbar. Controversially, the recommendations included the order to expedite the death sentences of detainees convicted under terrorism charges. On 24 September, 40 prisoners held in al-Hout prison were executed. Dhi Qar Governor, Yahya al-Nasiri indicated that from now the local Government would not allow a period of detention after an individual had been convicted of a terrorist crime but would carry out the death sentence as soon as possible. This is a kneejerk reaction to placate anger amongst the electorate, and is unlikely to result in a lasting shift in legislation. The executions, however, have likely increased the chance of the province being subject to a reprisal attack in the near future by IS militants.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Basra Operations Command have implemented a tailored security plan for the religious festival Muharram, which will result in a temporary reduction in criminality. Similarly, security postures across the region have been amplified, thus a lull in hostile activity is anticipated. The overall outlook for the South East remains stable. Hostile activity will consist largely of SAF, kidnaps, intimidatory IEDs, and murders with most reported incidents linked to business or personal disputes, and low-level criminality. Tribal fighting will remain most prevalent in areas north of Basra City, and to a lesser extent in northern Dhi Qar and southern Maysan. Meanwhile, protests related to various grievances will continue, including those over poor electricity provision and the perceived lack of investment and job opportunities provided by oil companies. Politics in Basra are likely to remain relatively stable in the short term, following a recent period of instability.

- **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 elections, including those between the Sadrist movement and the Dawa Party. 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 rise as the security environment continues to deteriorate in western Anbar and northern Babil, though not to a level that is expected to impact commercial operations. Alongside demonstrations focused on reform and corruption, there will be ongoing protect activity regarding employment-related concerns and service provision.
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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAH</td>
<td>Asa’ib Ahl al Haq (League of the Righteous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQA</td>
<td>Close Quarters Assassination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFP</td>
<td>Explosively Formed Projectile</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HG</td>
<td>Hand Grenade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Iraqi Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Indirect Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>Iraqi Security Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ Islamic State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPS</td>
<td>Iraqi Police Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IZ</td>
<td>International Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaish Al Mahdi (Mahdi Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Jaish al Mukhtar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRTN</td>
<td>Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al- Naqshbandia</td>
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<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Local National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Modus Operandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSTR</td>
<td>Nothing significant to report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Private Security Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Private Security Detail</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPG</td>
<td>Rocket Propelled Grenade</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Small Arms Fire</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVBIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vehicle Borne IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vest IED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTPs</td>
<td>Tactics, Techniques and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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</table>
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