National Overview

Incidents This Week 153     Weekly Trend Up

- Overall hostile incident levels increased negligibly this week, remaining at the lower end of established parameters.
- Hostile activity fell in the capital, with insurgent activity centred in the ‘Baghdad Belt’ areas.
- Ninawa continued to be the focal point for violence in the North, with attacks taking place largely in rural areas like Hatra and Tal Safouk. Media reporting was dominated by the transfer of security responsibilities in Mosul.
- The North Central region saw a marked increase in incidents. A high frequency of attacks was recorded in Tamim, particularly in Hawija district, as well as in north-eastern Diyala. A security operation against the ‘White Banners’ was carried out in the Tuz Khurmatu area.
- In Anbar, militant activity was clustered along the Euphrates. Notably, an SVIED attack targeted an ISF checkpoint in Ramadi.
- Incident levels fell in the South-East, likely due in part to actual and planned military operations in Basra and Dhi Qar.

Figure 1: Regional Incident Levels
WEEKLY INCIDENTS BY PROVINCE: 05 - 11 February 2018

*Indicates that the province comes under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Comparative of Previous Week:

Increase ▲ No Change □ Decrease ▼

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.
BAGHDAD (City & Province)
Hostile activity decreased in Baghdad, with a notable reduction in incidents – including UVEIDs and SAF – within the city limits. Key incident drivers remained low-level criminality and localised disputes, with insurgent activity most prevalent in the ‘Baghdad Belt’ areas. Security operations were launched near Abu Ghraib and the northern town of Tarmiyah, targeting militant elements.

NORTH (Ninawa, Dahuk & Erbil Provinces)
Ninawa remained the focal point for hostile activity in the region. Attacks took place primarily in the province’s remote areas, including Hatra and Tal Safouk. The area along the Tigris to the south of Mosul also saw continued activity. Media reporting was focused on the transfer of security responsibilities in Mosul to local police units, with PMUs reportedly shifting to the city’s outskirts.

NORTH CENTRAL (Tamim/Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala & Sulaymaniya)
Hostile activity increased markedly in the North Central. Insurgent attacks remained prevalent across Tamim – particularly in Hawija district. Diyala also experienced a deterioration in security, with militants conducting frequent attacks against both military and civilian targets. Elsewhere, a large-scale military operation was launched in the Tuz Khurmatu region, aimed at the so-called ‘White Banners’ movement.

WEST (Anbar Province)
Hostile activity increased this week, predominantly driven by events in Ramadi and Fallujah. Most notably, there was an SVIED attack on an ISF checkpoint and an armed assault on a police station in Ramadi. Towns and villages along the Euphrates, such as Rawa, and the rural areas to the northeast of Fallujah, also continued to witness militant activity. Similarly, insurgent attacks persisted in the Qaim – Rawa corridor.

SOUTH CENTRAL (Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Qadisiya & Najaf Provinces)
Hostile activity remained low in the South Central. Insurgent activity was subdued in northern Babil, with one IED recorded. Security operations continued in the area. An outbreak of tribal fighting was also reported in Babil. Elsewhere, activity remained low-level and in line with established trends. Of note were a number of Article IV (Terrorism) arrests in Wasit.

SOUTH EAST (Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan & Basra Provinces)
There was a significant drop in hostile incidents in the South East, primarily in Basra and Dhi Qar. This is considered to be, at least in part, the result of actual and planned ISF operations. IED attacks also fell in Basra, with only one recorded. The remainder of hostile activity in the province was low-level, and linked to personal and financial disputes. Several outbreaks of tribal fighting were also reported in Dhi Qar and Maysan.
Baghdad

Incidents This Week **42**  
Weekly Trend **Down**

*Figure 2: Reference Map & Incident Levels – Baghdad*
**Outlook**

- **Hostile activity decreased in Baghdad.** The recently increased prevalence of SAF and UVIEDs in the city, notably in the southwestern districts, dissipated this week. Those incidents that did occur were likely linked to low-level criminality and personal or business disputes, as per established trends. Insurgent activity continued in the Baghdad Belt areas, with established hotspots including Tarmiyah, Taji, Abu Ghraib, Mahmudiyah and Madain continuing to see the most activity. Notably, a security operation took place in Tarmiyah over four days, after an insurgent sniper team targeted ISF forces in the area. The operation saw a series of raids and searches throughout the district, as well as the implementation of a curfew. Notably, ISF tracked a woman wearing an SVIED before successfully cornering her in an empty school, forcing her to detonate the device. She was the only casualty of the blast. Whilst female suicide bombers are relatively uncommon, they became more prevalent during 2017 campaigns, such as the battle for Mosul. Indeed, reporting suggests that women in conventional combat roles became more common within IS, in response to sustained losses.

- **US ‘drawdown’ reported in Iraq.** On 5 February, the Associated Press (AP) indicated that US forces had begun to reduce their service levels within Iraq, with official sources confirming that US personnel are redeploying to Afghanistan. A subsequent statement from Iraqi Government spokesman Sa’ad al-Hadithi, suggested that the process of shipping out of up to 60% of US personnel in Iraq was ‘underway’. However, Coalition Forces Director of Operations, Brig. Gen. J. Braga, noted that “although force composition may change over time … we will retain an appropriate amount of capabilities, as well as an advisory presence”. Indeed, whilst the official narrative emanating from the Pentagon is that the US are not withdrawing from Iraq, a limited drawdown has been underway for some months. The Pentagon stated on 6 December 2017 that US troop numbers in Iraq stood at 5,200, and that this figure was ‘trending down’, to reflect the fact that fewer US forces were required in theatre to support Iraqi forces kinetically. This position supports Braga’s explication of the redefined US role in Iraq. It has also been reported that the US is pressuring its European NATO allies to establish an official, long-term train-and-advise mission in Iraq, to maintain its capacity building trajectory. This further underscores that the US plans represent a strategic shift, rather than a withdrawal. Therefore, whilst it is likely that combat elements will continue to redeploy from Iraq, training elements will certainly remain. For instance, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen indicated on 10 February that when the Bundeswehr’s mission to train Peshmerga forces expires in March, a new Iraq-wide mandate will be established. Despite the stated intent of the US and its allies to remain in-country, the media spotlight on an apparent US withdrawal has catalysed a strong response across the Iraqi political spectrum, particularly from anti-US parties keen to leverage the situation to their benefit. Iranian-aligned PMUs, for instance, argue that Iraq has enough troops and battlefield experience now to justify them advocating a complete withdrawal. The Parliamentary Security Committee, by contrast, says that US forces are still required to support a developing intelligence infrastructure and for training. Opponents to Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, such as Nouri al-Maliki, have attempted to capitalise on the situation to garner support from an anti-US base, by pressuring Abadi into formalising the rumour and establishing a roadmap to complete withdrawal. However, the situation may also present Abadi with an opportunity to out-maneuvre his opponents, by promoting a visible reduction that he can use to pre-empt any electioneering on the issue of ongoing US presence in Iraq. Indeed, a statement from the Prime Minister’s office on 6 February appeared to adopt such a position, noting that “the government has a plan to gradually reduce the number of international collation forces in Iraq, but we do not want there to be a vacuum”.

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Forecast

- **Short term:** Political tensions are likely to steadily increase as key players seek to develop advantageous political alliances. This will almost certainly result in a rise of low-level political violence, generally intimidatory and targeting affiliated party interests. Overall levels of activity are however expected to remain relatively low. High-profile attacks will continue to occur in Baghdad, though they will be sporadic. These are not expected to be destabilising, in part due to the robust ISF and PMU footprint. Ongoing asymmetric attacks are anticipated in the Baghdad Belts, and on the city’s outskirts in areas like Radwaniya, Mahmudiya and Suwaib. These will involve indiscriminate IEDs targeting ISF convoys and populated areas, alongside the occasional employment of more-sophisticated attacks, such as VBIEDs and SVIEDs. North of Baghdad, violent incidents will remain clustered in Tarmiyah and Taji. In the capital, activity will be largely linked to low-level criminality, localised disputes and tribalism.

- **Medium term:** The danger posed by a limited insurgency in the Baghdad Belt area will continue. The return of IDPs to the Baghdad Belts is expected to exacerbate this threat, which has potential to develop in the medium term. The ISF/PMU presence will remain pervasive however, and will ensure that most insurgent violence remains localised. Sporadic VBIEDs and suicide attacks will continue in urban areas of central Baghdad. Indeed, the threat from IS militants to Baghdad is expected to slowly increase as the movement decentralises, though robust security measures in the capital will limit the extent of attacks. Political rivalries will build in the capital as election campaigning begins in earnest, with its typical low-level attendant violence.

- **Long term:** The general outlook for the province remains stable, based on the consistent patterns of activity over the past year. An increase in insurgent attacks levels is anticipated, but this will not preclude normal commercial operations. This is particularly pertinent as IS returns to a traditional covert insurgency, typified by a focus on asymmetric attacks. However, the heavy ISF and PMU presence in the city and surrounding areas 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 as the 2018 elections draw near.
North

Incidents This Week 17  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 3: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North
Outlook

- **Ninawa remained the focal point for hostile activity.** Insurgent attacks were most prevalent in the province’s remote regions, particularly around Hatra. This area saw an uptick in activity, including several attacks on villages and the Geneva Military Airport. Militants were reported to have captured four PMU members, including a commander, during one assault on the latter facility. An IS member wearing a suicide vest was also shot dead while approaching PMU forces near Hatra. Elsewhere, militants carried out multiple attacks against PMU forces manning the border with Syria, especially around Tal Safouk, while clashes were also reported during an ongoing military operation in the Hamm al-Alil region. In Mosul, few incidents of note were recorded. One IED detonated in the city’s west, which wounded an ISF member. Troops conducting clearance operations also came across several militants hiding in a tunnel in the Old Town area. One killed a soldier before being shot dead, whilst the others managed to escape. Most reporting was focused on the transfer of security responsibilities. A high-level meeting on this topic was held this week in Mosul, chaired by CTS chief Talib Shagati. It was attended by local security leaders, PMU commanders and the Ninawa Governor. In the wake of the meeting, PMUs were observed to shift towards residential districts on Mosul’s outskirts, with the IA 20th Division deploying outside the city. Local police units dispersed through Mosul’s central districts, as part of a provincial security plan endorsed by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. While some emergency units will remain for a time inside the city – in anticipation of any sudden changes in the security environment – the plan calls for security authorities in central districts to be transferred to local IP forces.

- **Yazidi militias clashed in the Sinjar region of western Ninawa.** On 10 February, fighting broke out between rival Yazidi forces in the Snuni area of Sinjar district. The fighting was between the PKK-aligned Sinjar Protection Units (YBS) militia and the Ezidkhan Brigades. The clashes broke out after the YBS brought down an Ezidkhan flag. Light and medium weapons were employed during the conflict, in which several casualties were reported. The Ezidkhan Brigades are a Yazidi paramilitary unit created in 2017. It was formed under the PMU banner, after Yazidi fighters began joining the Hashd al-Shaabi offensive to expel IS from western Ninawa, near the border with Syria. This included traditionally Yazidi territory in the southern Sinjar region. Although the YBS had previously enjoyed relatively cordial relations with the PMUs, tensions increased after hundreds of its fighters left to join the Ezidkhan Brigades. Some left for financial and practical reasons – following offers of PMU pay and promises that liberated territory would be handed over for self-governance. Others aired ideological motivations, stating that they opposed entrenched PKK/Kurdish dominance over their region. This situation caused problems for the Sinjar Reconstruction Council – a local governance body created under the aegis of the PKK – which had envisioned cementing a YBS-backed administration that would act in the PKK’s interests. The growing PMU presence has challenged the Council’s authority, especially after they began installing Shia notables or Ezidkhan-linked Yazidi elements into local administrative and military posts. The YBS and the Sinjar Reconstruction Council also condemned alleged brutality by PMU units, including the Ezidkhan Brigades, accusing them of extortion and of carrying out revenge attack on Sunni Arab tribes. The entrance of PMUs to the region has certainly complicated the political and security situation in Sinjar, which was already embroiled in a struggle for power between the YBS/PKK and elements aligned with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Outbreaks of inter-factional violence such as that recently seen in Snuni will continue to take place sporadically, as rival actors seek to gain local supremacy. More generally, the situation in Sinjar foreshadows a widening of political divisions in Ninawa, as suppressed societal divisions come to the forefront. This will be exacerbated by the provincial political vacuum, which has encouraged conflict over resources and appointments, and by low-level intra-communal violence between Arab, Yazidi and Kurdish communities.
Forecast

- **Short term:** It is probable that there will be a temporary lull in overall activity in parts of Ninawa, as IA units move into and assert control in new areas of operation, under the recent provincial security plan. Security responsibilities in Mosul City are also to be transferred to local police units under this plan, which will over time likely result in an increased level of hostile activity. Militant attacks and retaliatory violence is also expected to gradually rise along the Tigris River south of the city, including in Hammam al-Alil and Qayyara. The south-eastern desert areas surrounding Hatra will remain a focal point for attacks against ISF. Meanwhile, political and sectarian strain will build, particularly in Mosul, as part of a struggle over power. Reprisal attacks against former members of IS and their family members will persist in the short to medium term. In Sinjar, the continuing presence of PMUs is likely to result in localised hostility rising, occasionally escalating to violence. Tensions linked to reconstruction funding will also increase, including among tribes and competing paramilitary factions stationed in liberated areas. Sporadic attacks on PMU forces will persist along the Iraq-Syria border. In northern Iraq, Turkish operations against the PKK are expected to continue. This will likely comprise of airstrikes and occasional cross-border raids. Military operations in the Kurdish areas of Afrin across the border in Syria is likely to drive an increase in protest activity across Erbil, and to a lesser extent, other areas of Kurdistan.

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

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

Incidents This Week  59  Weekly Trend Up

Figure 4: Reference Map & Incident Levels – North Central
A major security operation was undertaken in Tuz Khurmatu district. On 7 February, a campaign was launched to clear the mountainous areas surrounding the town, in eastern Salah ad-Din. The operation was targeting the so-called ‘White Banners’ movement. Though it covered a considerable expanse, the campaign achieved few tangible results. Several gunmen were killed, and IEDs, caches and a VBIED destroyed. It is likely that the fighters sheltering in the hills dispersed ahead of the advancing forces – assisted by the topography of the terrain and the lengthy warning they had been given. Various described as separatist, militant or criminal, the White Banners have been engaged in armed attacks on PMUs and ISF, along with banditry against local citizenry. The violence has been primarily directed at Turkmen, however. Whether those involved represent a cohesive and established organisation remains debatable, though they are almost certainly Kurds. For months, there had been reports that Kurdish IS elements – unable or unwilling to return to their areas of origin – had been filtering into this zone, after escaping the collapse of IS territorial holdings in Hawija. This was followed by Baghdad’s recapture of disputed territories, and subsequent ethno-sectarian violence in Tuz Khurmatu. Both factors resulted in Kurdish displacement, alongside heightened anger against ISF and paramilitary forces. Former insurgents and displaced Kurdish fighters may have, over time, coalesced into loose bands as allies of convenience, before shifting focus onto Turkmen PMUs and civilians. Attacks certainly began to occur more regularly – particularly IDF barrages – and with greater organisation. It was around this time that the presence of the White Banners as a group ‘announced’ through Kurdish media interviews with ‘volunteers’, and later through statements by security officials. Though likely to partly represent a media construct, at least initially, local sources reported that this helped to attract other Kurdish fighters to the area, keen to join a campaign against government-aligned troops.

Insurgent activity increased in Diyala. Attacks were spread across the province, though were particularly prevalent the north and north-east. In Mandali district, militants attacked the home of tribal leader Sheikh Haitham al-Houm. There were no casualties, as the perpetrators were engaged by the Sheikh’s security team, which had been boosted after he was targeted in a complex attack a month earlier. That event saw several suicide attackers storm his home after the detonation of a VBIED. Several of the Sheikh’s relatives were killed, including his wife and daughter. The tribal leader is known for his anti-IS position, and had received threats after calling for a tribal uprising against militants. Saadiya and Qara Tappa also saw continued violence. This included IEDs, targeted attacks on local notables, and assaults against security outposts. For example, the Mukhtar of Asakra Village was killed during an armed attack on his residence in Saadiya. Several incidents also highlighted ongoing instability along the Baghdad-Kirkuk roadway, particularly parallel to the Salah ad-Din border. Most notably, three men were kidnapped after their vehicles were stopped by insurgents at a roadblock. One of the cars was later abandoned during an attack on a security post near the border. Another noteworthy incident saw gunmen in a vehicle fire upon a barber shop with a PKM machine-gun in the Bakhtiar area of Khanaqin. The attack killed seven people and wounded three. The victims were mostly Kurdish youths from the al-Zargoush tribe, who had been displaced from Saadiya. Three Arab males were subsequently arrested. The attack – which leaders blamed on extremists hiding in nearby mountains – led to widespread criticism of security leaders. Interior Minister Qassim al-Araji led a delegation to the province, where he met with the Diyala Governor and the Provincial Police Chief. After announcing an investigation into the recent violence, he pledged the government’s support to strengthen security and combat the local militant presence. The security environment has certainly deteriorated across wide swathes of northern Diyala in recent months, with insurgents operating with relative ease from a number of rugged safe havens – particularly in the Himrin Mountains. ISF have launched multiple operations attempting to clear these zones, with little success.
Forecast

- **Short term:** Tamim province will almost certainly continue to drive hostile incident levels in the North Central region, as Federal Police forces attempt to stifle the growing insurgency. An established network of IS tunnels and safehouses constructed during their occupation of Hawija will likely facilitate attacks, hampering counter-insurgency operations in the zone. As such, Hawija district will remain a focal point for insurgent violence in Tamim, with the potential to spill over into northern Salah ad-Din should militants begin to come under pressure from ISF. The situation in Tuz Khurmatu is expected to stabilise temporarily, though will likely regress as Federal forces relax their security posture. Following the conclusion of a recent operation in the area, renewed attacks by armed groups are expected, including mortar fire directed from surrounding mountains into the town, alongside instances of intra-communal violence. Elsewhere, sporadic high-profile attacks will continue across the North Central, particularly in urban population centres. Common targets will include tribal figures and ISF/PMU positions. The security situation will remain turbulent in north-eastern Diyala, with militant attacks persisting against both civilian and military targets.

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

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

Incidents This Week  15  Weekly Trend  Up

Figure 5: Reference Map & Incident Levels – West
Hostile activity returned to Ramadi and Fallujah. Both Ramadi and Fallujah experienced IED incidents, following a period of several weeks in which there were no IED detonations detected within either city limits. Notably, on 8 February a SVIED targeted a security checkpoint in the Sufi district of Ramadi. The perpetrator, who was wearing a suicide vest, rode a motorcycle up to the ISF checkpoint before detonating the device, killing one and wounding 14. The incident led to a heightening of security protocols in the city, with security checkpoints set up at all major entry/exit points. Additionally, on 10 February, fighting broke out between a tribe from Ramadi’s Albu Alwan area and its local police force. Gunmen from the tribe attempted to storm a police headquarters in Albu Alwan, but were successfully repelled by ISF, who managed to arrest three of the assailants at the scene. The assault took place in the early hours of the morning, and led to a large security cordon being imposed in the area. This resulted in four further arrests. Whilst it is unclear what caused the incident, reports suggest that it could be linked to a disagreement over the administration of justice to an IS member being held in police custody. Overall, levels of hostile activity remained low in Fallujah, though an IED detonated at a gas station on the highway to Baghdad, killing three civilians. Agricultural areas to the northeast of Fallujah continued to be centres of insurgent activity, notably in Karma, where ISF operations to clear caches and safe houses continued. Towns and villages that line the banks of the Euphrates also show persistent signs of militancy. Security operations took place in the town of Rawa, which resulted in engagements with IS militants hiding in tunnel networks. Incidents in the Qa’im border area decreased this week, though it is assessed that the largely ungoverned border regions south and north of Qa’im will continue to act as zones where militant cells rebuild operational capability. As such, an increase in low-level attacks is expected in Qa’im city and the surrounding sub-districts. The remainder of activity was largely indicative of ongoing clearance operations, including cache finds in the Qa’im - Rawa corridor, and the areas surrounding Fallujah.

Water Ministry highlights importance of improving Haditha Dam. Ministry of Water Resources (MWR) official, Hassam al-Janabi, visited the Haditha Dam in Anbar province on 9 February, concluding that the dam is in urgent need of funds, to upgrade legacy equipment and improve water security in the region. During the campaigns against IS in Anbar province, the dam was repeatedly targeted by insurgents, but the al-Jughayfa tribe from Haditha successfully held out for two years, and prevented any major damage being done to the installation before the town was liberated. Haditha Dam, Iraq’s second largest, sits at the entrance to the Haditha Lake on the Euphrates, in the middle of the al-Baghdadi - Rawa corridor. It is integral to the generation of hydroelectricity, regulation of Euphrates flow rates, and the provision of water to irrigate the rich arable land in the surrounding areas. Whilst the dam supposedly allows limited water releases for agriculture, pervasive violations committed by farmers has reduced the water available to other recipients, contributing to water scarcity in the region. The exploitation and lack of enforcement renders the provincial quota system ineffectual. These combined factors are having a critical impact on the southern provinces by reducing waterflow along the Euphrates, which also increases water salinity downstream. The situation is being further exacerbated by far below average rainfall, prompting the MWR to issues warnings of severe water scarcity this summer. Plans by Turkey to fill its Illisu Dam in March 2018 could have a potentially catastrophic effect on water availability in Iraq during the upcoming summer. Indeed, video footage of the Euphrates in the Rawa area released on 12 February shows water levels to be drastically low, with the river bed on show. The problems of exploitation and flow along the Euphrates are unlikely to be ameliorated without a multi-sector strategy involving substantial investment in both the dam and the connecting irrigation systems, a coordinated approach to halt endemic quota abuses, improvements to infrastructure, and negotiations with states upstream.
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Forecast

- **Short term:** Overall insurgent activity is expected to remain relatively low over the short term. Sporadic retaliatory attacks will emerge in the areas of al-Qa’im and Rawa, as well as in Ana and along the Houran Valley. Violence will slowly rise across the province, particularly after a drawdown of military personnel commences and less experienced police units assume responsibility for security. An increase in expeditionary attacks along the Iraqi-Syrian border is expected as SDF units redeploy away from the border region to support the operation in Afrin. Instances of insurgent violence will continue to predominately target tribal volunteers and ISF, alongside occasional attacks against civilians. The frequency of HPAs will gradually build in urban centres as the insurgency decentralises, with Hit, Fallujah and Ramadi the primary targets. Low-level violence will persist along the northern bank of the Euphrates, particularly in Albu Dhiyab. ISF operations will take place in the province’s remote desert regions, but these are not expected to incur particularly strong resistance. Political conflict in the Anbar Provincial Council will heighten as focus turns to the reconstruction of former IS-held territory. This will result in a power struggle emerging amongst key influencers in the province, leading to elevated levels of violence involving competing tribal and militia factions.

- **Medium term:** It is anticipated that militant attacks will build as the insurgency further decentralises across the province, and reconstruction efforts lead to the widespread return of IDPs. The return of IDPs itself will likely lead to an increase in retaliatory violence, particularly against people deemed collaborators of IS and the families of IS fighters. Political conflict in the Provincial Council following the liberation is likely to rise as a power struggle ensues, increasing the probability of political and tribal violence over the medium term. There are likely to be attempts to strengthen provincial security capacity as the ISF security posture is relaxed, and local security forces take over responsibility. ISF will continue to try to secure the International Highway.

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

Incidents This Week: 4

Weekly Trend: No Change

Figure 6: Reference Map & Incident Levels - South Central
Hostile activity remained low in the South Central. In northern Babil, insurgent activity was subdued, with only one recorded incident attributable to Sunni militancy. On 9 February, three people were injured when a roadside IED detonated near a local market in al-Haswa. IED attacks against densely populated soft targets – notably markets - are a well-established modus operandi of insurgents operating in the southern ‘Baghdad Belts’ region. In comparison, IED attacks in northern Babil have predominately targeted PMU and ISF personnel. The incident’s location, and attack pattern, likely indicates that the attack emulated from south of the capital. ISF operations also continued in northern Babil. This follows a number of insurgency-related cache finds and arrests made during the previous reporting period. Also on 9 February, tribal fighting was reported in Nile between two families. A teenage boy was killed during the conflict. Hostile activity in the remainder of the South Central was low-level, and in line with established patterns. Of note, however, were five men arrested in unspecified locations of Dhi Qar and Wasit under Article IV (Terrorism) charges. This formed part of a joint operation between the Directorate of Military Intelligence and provincial security forces. Although Article IV is ostensibly used for terrorism related arrests, it is widely deployed by ISF for its increased powers of arrest. The article is therefore often used in incidents related to criminality or tribal violence, which is likely to explain a number of these apprehensions.

Political conference held in Babil. On 8 February, representatives from District and Provincial Councils in Iraq – outside the Kurdistan region – held a conference in Babil to identify and pursue areas of common interest. Members of the Federal Government were also in attendance, including a representative for Parliament Speaker Salim al-Jabouri and members of the House of Representatives (HoR). In a statement issued following the conference, attendees reiterated well-known grievances of local administrations in Iraq, including the need for increased financial and administrative powers, a review of electricity privatisation reforms, and employment opportunities. Of note, participants called for a recent amendment to the ‘Law of Governorates Not Incorporated into a Region’ (Law no. 21 of 2008, or the Provincial Powers Law) to be scrapped. This follows a HoR vote on 14 January to amend the legislation, to reduce the number of seats on Provincial Councils, and abolish Local Councils. Supporters of the reforms argue that the amendments will lower costs and streamline local government, therefore improving efficacy. Furthermore, the changes would theoretically reduce competing voices and agendas in the legislature, allowing policy to be passed more easily. Critics of the reforms, including the Sadrist movement, have argued that the changes are politically motivated, and designed to increase the power of larger blocs, who would almost certainly increase their power share under the new system. Opponents have also suggested that the reforms would weaken other policy objectives such as decentralisation, as the resulting smaller local governments would struggle to take on any extra workloads. Although protest activity related to the HoR vote has to date been limited, the conference’s statement highlights that there is continued opposition to the reforms. Future protest activity related to the issue should therefore be expected. This will particularly be the case should the Federal Government go ahead with the more radical changes, such as the abolishment of Local Councils.
Forecast

- **Short term**: Activity in the South Central region will remain low, typified by minor hostile activity driven by a mixture of personal and financial disputes, as well as general criminality. SAF events, kidnap, murder, and intimidatory IEDs will feature prominently in reporting. 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 such attack will fuel localised political instability, as security officials and politicians seek to displace blame. This will also result in further disagreement over the return of Sunni IDPs. Indeed, political conflict over the return of IDPs, particularly to northern Babil, is expected to intensify in the run up to the elections, and provoke a rise in localised sectarian tensions. Protest activity will persist, with electricity privatisation, the water crisis, employment and service provision being key drivers.

- **Medium term**: There is likely to be a small but perceptible increase in low-level insurgent attacks in northern Babil in the medium to long term, as IS attempts to re-establish and consolidate local networks. HPAs are expected to increase incrementally, including in urban centres like Karbala and Hilla. However, incidents linked to Sunni militancy will likely remain a minor proportion of activity in the region. The frequency of employment demonstrations is expected to build in the medium term, alongside those related to upcoming elections. Indeed, there is likely to be an increase in minor political violence during the campaigning period. Elevated unemployment will also drive a gradual increase in acquisitive crime.

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

Incidents This Week  16  Weekly Trend  Down

Figure 7: Reference Map & Incident Levels – South East
Security Overview
Iraq Weekly Report

Outlook

♦ **There was a significant drop in hostile incidents in the South East.** Activity fell in both Dhi Qar and Basra, with negligible increases recorded in Muthanna and Maysan. The drops in Dhi Qar and Basra are a likely result of actual and planned security operations in both provinces. For example, the BaOC launched a series of operations in Umm Shuqaij, Kharbutiya, al-Madaina and Abu al-Khasib. Similarly, Dhi Qar provincial security forces carried out movements in Shatrah and Nasiriyah. Although the tangible results of these operations were limited, they came amidst expectations of a widened security campaign, which likely helped to deter outbreaks of hostility. Explosive incidents also fell in Basra, following several weeks of above-average activity. Last week, for instance, three IEDs detonated targeting premises suspected of participating in practices considered forbidden in Islam. One IED incident recorded this week is believed related to the recent violence. On 10 February, a percussion bomb detonated outside a civilian residence in Ahrar. No casualties were reported, and the explosion only resulted in material damages to the front gate. Due to the late-night timing and location of the device, it is most likely to have been intimidatory in nature. The homeowner’s children had previously been arrested and released for drug consumption, with local sources reporting that alcohol was also sold from the premises. Attacks against those participating in *haram* practices are assessed to be carried out by conservative religious elements. This hostility is expected to continue sporadically in the run up to the 2018 Elections, as groups aim to showcase their Islamic credentials. Individuals within these movements are also suspected of participating in illicit industries, making economic motives also a likely factor. The remainder of hostile activity in Basra remained low level and linked to personal and financial disputes. Outbreaks of tribal fighting were also reported in Maysan and Dhi Qar. Notably, on 7 February, two rounds of tribal SAF were reported in Amarah and Majer al-Kaber. IP responded to both incidents and made fourteen arrests. A policeman was also killed responding to the Amarah incident.

♦ **Security operation against tribal violence to begin in Basra.** There has been a significant ISF build-up in the province, in anticipation of an operation to address long-running provincial security challenges, notably tribal hostility. Personnel that have arrived in the province include battalions from 9th Armoured Division, Military Intelligence Directorate, Rapid Reaction Forces, Counter Terrorism Service, and Military Police. The operation will reportedly be led by the Joint Chief of Staff, General Abdul al-Amir Yasarallah. This follows a period of perceived high levels of tribal hostility, resulting in significant political pressure to address the issue. Notably, the Head of the BPC Security Committee Jaabar al-Saadi, and Basrawi MP Faleh al-Khazali, repeatedly demanded additional ISF be deployed to the province. The troop movements also follow a series of meetings between Basra Governor Assad al-Idani, and high-ranking officials in Baghdad to discuss provincial security, including a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on 3 February. Supporters of the deployment argue that current levels of tribal hostility are in-part the result of a security vacuum created when the IA 14th Division – previously stationed in Basra – was redeployed to Baghdad in June 2014. The resulting drop in provincial security capacity allowed armed groups to become more assertive in the province, as the State weakened its ability to impose itself. With the operation having been public-knowledge for more than a week, many wanted individuals (who were to be arrested during the operation) are believed to have already fled the province. Furthermore, tribesmen have reportedly prepared and hidden their weapons. As a result, the operation will most likely struggle to overcome traditional hurdles to tribal disarmament. It is therefore assessed likely that tribal violence will return to normal levels, once operations are completed. Official sources report that further battalions from the 9th Armoured Division and Counter Terrorism Service have still to arrive in the province, after which the operation will commence.
Forecast

- **Short term:** The overall security outlook for the South East remains stable. Hostile activity will be largely driven by localised disputes and low-level criminality, consisting of SAF incidents, kidnaps, intimidatory IEDs and murders. Tribal fighting will remain most prevalent in areas north of Basra City, and to a lesser extent in northern and south-eastern Dhi Qar and southern Maysan. An ISF operation to combat tribal fighting in Basra will commence in the immediate future, likely resulting in a temporary lull in provincial tribal hostility. However, it has been reported that tribes have already prepared for the operation and hidden weapons. As a result, the additional troops will most likely struggle to overcome traditional hurdles to tribal disarmament. Tribal fighting should therefore be expected to return to normal levels once the operation is completed. Local authorities in Basra will come under further pressure from IED detonations. Indeed, the frequency of IED events is expected to remain elevated ahead of the elections, in part due to an apparent resumption in a campaign of violence targeting undesirable elements. However, the frequency of these incidents will also likely fall during the period of the operation. Key drivers of protest activity in the region will continue to be electricity privatisation, electoral reform, unemployment, and demands for greater inward provincial investment, particularly in the provision of municipal services, such as electricity and sewage networks. Demonstrations relating to privatisation are expected to build in Basra and Dhi Qar, due to growing tribal support for civil action.

- **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. The expected intensification of these conflicts will likely result in an increase in low-level activity against party interests in southern governorates. In the past, this type of activity included small IEDs detonating outside party offices, UVIEDs targeting affiliated persons or SAF against offices or private residences.

- **Long term:** The outlook for the Southeast in the longer-term is stable. Hostile activity is most likely to arise in the form of low-level SAF. Criminality and tribal confrontations will continue to present a risk of kidnap, SAF exchanges, and intimidatory IEDs. The frequency of HPAs occurring in the region will likely rise as insurgents in northern Babil and western Anbar return to asymmetric tactics. This is not expected to reach a level that will impact commercial operations. Protests over service provision and employment in the region will also continue.
**Forecast of Events 2018**  
*Iraq Weekly Report*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 March 18</td>
<td>Nawrouz</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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<td>1 May 18</td>
<td>Labour Day</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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<td>2 May 18</td>
<td>al-Sha’baniyah</td>
<td>Religious Event, Karbala</td>
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<td>15 – 17 June 18</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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<td>21 – 24 August 18</td>
<td>Eid al-Adha</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 September 18</td>
<td>New Hijri Year</td>
<td>National Holiday, Shia</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 September 18</td>
<td>Ashura</td>
<td>National Holiday, Shia</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 October 18</td>
<td>al-Arba-iniyah</td>
<td>Religious Event, Karbala</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 November 18</td>
<td>Birth of the Prophet Mohammad</td>
<td>National Holiday</td>
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* 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>
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<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
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<td>CQA</td>
<td>Close Quarters Assassination</td>
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<td>EFP</td>
<td>Explosively Formed Projectile</td>
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<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of Iraq</td>
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<td>HG</td>
<td>Hand Grenade</td>
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<td>IA</td>
<td>Iraqi Army</td>
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<td>IDF</td>
<td>Indirect Fire</td>
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<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISIL / IS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ Islamic State</td>
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<td>IPS</td>
<td>Iraqi Police Service</td>
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<td>IZ</td>
<td>International Zone</td>
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<td>JAM</td>
<td>Jaish Al Mahdi (Mahdi Army)</td>
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<td>JM</td>
<td>Jaish al Mukhtar</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRTN</td>
<td>Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al- Naqshbandia</td>
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<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Local National</td>
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<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Modus Operandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSTR</td>
<td>Nothing significant to report</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Private Security Company</td>
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<td>PSD</td>
<td>Private Security Detail</td>
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<td>SAF</td>
<td>Small Arms Fire</td>
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<td>SVBIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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<td>SVIED</td>
<td>Suicide Vest IED</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTPs</td>
<td>Tactics, Techniques and Procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
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<tr>
<td>VBIED</td>
<td>Vehicle Borne IED</td>
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