

US State Department Country Report on Terrorism 2019

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Executive Summary

Background

Country Reports on Terrorism 2019 is submitted in compliance with Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f (the “Act”), which requires the Department of State to provide to Congress a full and complete annual report on terrorism for those countries and groups meeting the criteria of the Act.

It consists of various chapters:

- Chapter 1: Country reports on Terrorism – a detailed overview per country
- Chapter 2: State Sponsors of Terrorism
- Chapter 3: The Global Challenge of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear Terrorism
- Chapter 4: Terrorist Safe Havens
- Chapter 5: Foreign Terrorist Organizations – a detailed description of their capacities, history, alliances, current activity rate
- Chapter 6: Legislative Requirements and Key Terms
- Appendix B: Terrorism Deaths, Injuries, and Kidnappings of U.S. Citizens

In the current report, all chapters are relevant to Iraq.

Highlights:

- ✓ Most of the information covers the continuous interventions of Iran in Iraq, either directly via the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and/or via its backed Shia militias. It also analyses the radical Islamic groups’ activity with ties to the Syrian current civil and military unrest, operating in an expected underground mode, following the defeat of ISIS/L’s so-called caliphate. ISIS/L continues to be a threat to the national stability, especially in the bordering regions with KRI, where there are gaps of control between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Peshmerga, due to the disputed status of these territories.
The report commends KRG as an example of border control and as having an inter-ministerial counterterrorism coordination mechanism, a gap still to be covered by the Iraqi Authorities on their side.
However, 2019 presented an improvement in terms of casualties all over Iraq: 534 civilian deaths and 1,121 injured, a decrease of almost a third compared to 2018 (Appendix 1)

- ✓ Iraq is a pivotal member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and a participant in all Coalition Working Groups (Foreign Terrorist Fighters, Counter-ISIS Finance Group, Stabilization, and Communications). The report emphasizes the commitment of Iraq to the global coalition fighting terrorism. As an example for that, chapter #3 mentions the training the Global Threat Reduction Program (GTR) gives the Iraqi forces to detect WMD threats (initiatives, material, capacities) in formerly controlled ISIS/ISL territories
- ✓ Minor paragraphs include the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, especially those who involve the PKK and the Ansar Al-Islam (Appendix 5)
 - As a general note, 16 terrorist groups are mentioned in relation with Iraq, out of which 7 have (nowadays: loose) alliances with the other 9 that are active on Iraqi territory.
 - 2 out of the 16 have, as mentioned, relation with the KRI territory.
 - 1 out of the 16 (IRGC) is also a terrorism-sponsor.
- ✓ Iraq is not included in the USAID educational program to counter-terrorism (Appendix 4.9)

Appendices: Summaries of the various chapters related to Iraq

Appendix 1: Chapter 1 -- Country Reports on Terrorism

In December, Kataib Hizballah (KH) launched a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base hosting U.S. and Coalition forces, killing one American civilian contractor and wounding several U.S. and Iraqi service members. In an immediate response to that attack, the United States carried out precision strikes against five targets associated with KH in Iraq and Syria. On December 31, Iran instigated an attack by demonstrators, including Iran-backed terrorists and militia members, on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, which resulted in damage to embassy property.

ISF remained in nominal control of territory liberated from ISIS. ISIS continued to present a serious threat to Iraqi stability, undertaking targeted assassinations of police and local political leaders and using IEDs and shooting attacks directed at both government and government-associated civilian targets, in support of a violent campaign to reestablish a caliphate. ISIS sought to reestablish support among populations in Ninewa, Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah ad Din and Anbar provinces, especially in the areas of disputed control between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal government, where the division of responsibility for local security is unclear. Attacks by Iran-backed Shia militia groups on Iraqi bases hosting U.S. and Defeat-ISIS Coalition forces increased in 2019, killing and wounding American and Iraqi service members. KH continued to operate in Iraq and in some cases sought to enter local politics by backing provincial candidates. The Iraqi Authorities issued Executive Order 237, which required all Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), including those backed by Iran, to operate as an indivisible part of the armed forces and be subject to the same regulations; however, many of these groups continued to

engage in violent and destabilizing activities in Iraq and neighboring Syria, including attacks on and abductions of civilian protesters.

The PKK continued to conduct attacks in Turkey.

1.1. 2019 Terrorist Incidents

According to the Federal Intelligence and Investigation Agency within Iraq's Ministry of Interior, acts of terrorism, violence, and armed conflict with ISIS killed more than 534 civilians and injured more than 1,121 in 2019 as of December 1. This was a decrease from 2018, when roughly 900 civilians died and 1,600 were injured. ISIS continued to carry out suicide and hit-and-run attacks throughout the country with 844 attacks during the year. The most significant of these was a bus bombing in September that killed 12 Iraqis near the major pilgrimage site of Karbala. In addition, Iran-backed Shia militia groups are believed to be responsible for more than a dozen rocket or indirect fire attacks targeting U.S. or Coalition targets in Iraq in 2019, including the December 27 attack in which KH launched more than 30 rockets at an Iraqi base hosting U.S. forces in Kirkuk, killing one American contractor and wounding several American and Iraqi service members. Other prominent terrorist attacks included:

- On January 11, vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated in a market in al-Qa'im, on the Syrian border in western Anbar, killing two civilians and injuring 25 others.
- ISIS targeted truffle hunters mostly in Anbar province, kidnapping more than 44. On June 1, nine bodies were found west of the town of Rutba, some 300 kilometers west of Anbar's provincial capital Ramadi.
- On November 8, a car bomb exploded near a restaurant in Mosul, Ninewa governorate, killing 13 people and wounding 23 others.
- On November 16, an IED exploded in Baghdad's Tahrir Square where anti-government protesters gathered. There were no reported casualties.
- On November 29, ISIS attacked Kurdish security force (Kulajo Asayish) headquarters in Kifri district, Diyala governorate, killing three Asayish members, including the unit's director.
- On December 4, an ISIS tactical element comprising 10 to 15 members conducted an attack against the Ministry of Peshmerga's 3rd Regional Guard Brigade, killing three and wounding two others.
- On December 31, Iran-backed Shia militia groups, including KH, participated in an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, which resulted in significant damage to embassy property.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Iraq made no significant changes to its counterterrorism legal and law enforcement framework in 2019.

Border security remained a critical capability gap, as the ISF has limited capability to fully secure Iraq's borders with Syria and Iran. While border security along the periphery of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (KRI) is robust and administered by various security units under the Kurdish Ministry of Interior, the border with Syria south of the KRI remained porous and vulnerable to ISIS and other terrorist networks, as well as to smuggling and other criminal enterprises. Iran backed (Popular Mobilization Forces) PMF units continued to maintain a presence at Iraq's major border crossings. The Iraqi government re-opened the Iraq-Syria border crossing in al-Qa'im under Border Police control, though various PMF units positioned themselves to the north and south of the main checkpoint.

Iraq and the United States partnered to close a gap in border security through broader deployment of and upgrades to the U.S.-provided Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES). The Ministry of Interior shared biometric information upon request on known and suspected terrorists and shared exemplars of its identity documents with the United States, INTERPOL, and other international partners, though there remained no agreement or arrangement in place that would support the implementation of an intended U.S. program to facilitate biometric information-sharing on both terrorist and criminal suspects. In the Disputed Internal Boundaries, ISIS continues to exploit the security vacuum between Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga Forces. Recent attacks in the northern Diyala and activities along Qarachogh Mountain indicate ISIS presence. Counterterrorism efforts in the Disputed Internal Boundaries areas have been hampered by the lack of coordination between Peshmerga and ISF, mainly due to the relationship between the KRG and the Government of Iraq. Additionally, Iraq has taken preliminary steps to partner with UNITAD in the collection of digital, documentary, testimonial, and forensic evidence to support the prosecution of ISIS members for their atrocity crimes committed in Iraq.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Iraq is a member of Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF). Iraq is also a member of the Defeat - ISIS Coalition's Counter-ISIS Finance Group (CIFG). In 2019, the KR-I began setting up its own Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Committee that will coordinate across relevant KRG ministries and work with the KR-I Terrorism Finance Unit.

The Government of Iraq – including the Central Bank of Iraq, law enforcement, security forces, and the judiciary – continued to dismantle ISIS's financial networks and safeguard Iraq's financial institutions from exploitation by ISIS. Efforts include:

- Iraq cooperates closely with the U.S. government on multiple U.S. designations under U.S. CT authorities.
- Iraqi and Kurdish agencies coordinating actions with the U.S. Departments of Defense and the Treasury against Afaq Dubai to disrupt and curtail ISIS's logistical infrastructure and its ability to generate, store, and use funds for recruiting and paying its fighters and for its operations.
- Iraq shared a list of banned exchange houses and money transfer companies with regional regulators and tasking judicial action against more than a dozen individuals and companies suspected of illicit financial activity. These actions ranged from business closures to arrests of suspects.

1.2 Countering Violent Extremism: Iraq remained active in its strategic messaging to discredit ISIS, including through its membership in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Communications Working Group, and engaged with U.S. military and civilian counterparts to develop a wide range of capabilities to build national cohesion and combat terrorist ideology. The Government of Iraq and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS also implemented stabilization, reconciliation, and accountability programs to strengthen locals' ability to counter terrorist radicalization and recruitment.

Many Iraqi ISIS fighters remained in Iraqi custody, along with ISIS-affiliated foreign women and children. Iraq acknowledged that the return and reintegration of family members of suspected ISIS supporters, as well as the provision of fair and equal justice, are important to prevent future terrorist radicalization and violence. However, more than 1.4 million Iraqis remain displaced within Iraq, and more than 30,000 – mainly women and children – reside in the al-Hawl IDP camp in Syria. Iraq publicly stated it has no intention of housing Iraqi ISIS fighters with the general prison populations in Iraqi prisons. The lack of separate, secure detention facilities within Iraq delayed Iraqi efforts to repatriate additional Iraqi fighters detained abroad.

1.3 International and Regional Cooperation: Iraq continued to work with multilateral and regional organizations – including the UN, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, NATO, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, INTERPOL, and the Arab League – to support CT efforts.

Appendix 2: Chapter 4 -- Terrorist Safe Havens

Terrorist safe havens described in this report include ungoverned, under-governed, or ill-governed physical areas where terrorists are able to organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train, transit, and operate in relative security because of inadequate governance capacity, political will, or both.

As defined by section 2656f(d) of Title 22 of the U.S. Code, the terms “terrorist sanctuary” and “sanctuary” exclude the territory of a country the government of which is subject to a determination under section 4605(j)(1)(A) of Title 50 [deemed under Section 1768(c)(2) of the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2019 (NDAA FY19) to refer to section 1754(c) of the NDAA FY19 as of August 13, 2018]; section 2371(a) of Title 22; or section 2780(d) of Title 22.

KH, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), continued to maintain an active presence in Iraq targeting U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi forces. On December 27, KH launched a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base near Kirkuk, killing an American civilian contractor and wounding several U.S. military service members and Iraqi personnel. In response, on December 29, the United States carried out military strikes in Iraq and Syria targeting KH. On December 31, Iran-backed terrorists attacked the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, resulting in no casualties but damaging the embassy exterior.

Supported by the 81-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the Government of Iraq maintained nominal control of the territory retaken from ISIS in 2019. ISIS remained a terrorist threat in Iraq in 2019, carrying out suicide, hit-and-run, and other asymmetric attacks throughout the country. The United States continued to engage with the Government of Iraq to deny ISIS access to Chemical, Biological, Radioactive and Nuclear (CBRN) materials (chapter 3 in the US Department's Report).

Appendix 3: Multilateral Efforts to Counter Terrorism

Relevant working groups with Iraqi participation, founded by Turkey and the US in 2011 and co-chaired by the US and Jordan: Countering Violent Extremism, Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law, Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs).

The League of Arab States (LAS) is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Twice a year, LAS meets with member states' Ministries of Justice and Interior in Tunis, Tunisia. Counterterrorism efforts are also highlighted in the annual summit in March and in its annual ministerial in September. In 2019, the Arab League Council of Ministers passed a resolution on counterterrorism efforts, stressing the importance of member states' implementation of the UN Counterterrorism Strategy, as well as intensifying joint Arab action to address the phenomenon of terrorist fighters returning from areas of conflict and their families. The resolution also urged its member states to develop appropriate national legislations to prosecute and to punish for the use of forged identity and travel documents to move to conflict zones per national laws.

Appendix 4: Long-term programs and initiatives designed to counter terrorist safe havens and recruitment

4.1. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

Countering terrorist radicalization and recruitment is an essential counterterrorism tool. The US strategy to defeat terrorism includes efforts to build the capacity of local actors to defeat terrorism at its source. In 2019, through bi-lateral and multilateral engagement, the Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau) emphasized four key areas in strategy formulation, diplomatic engagement, and foreign assistance programming.

4.2. Countering Terrorist Ideologies

4.3. Countering Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes

4.4. Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Rehabilitation and reintegration of former terrorists as well as ISIS-associated family members has become a pressing concern for the global community. The CT Bureau coordinated global engagement on the rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs and ISIS associated families repatriated from Syria and Iraq. This led multiple countries to update their approaches to

rehabilitation and reintegration, which, in turn, could encourage other nations to agree to repatriate their citizens from Syria and Iraq.

4.5. Counter-Messaging

4.6. International Platforms to Advance CVE

- Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund (GCERF): Since its inception in 2004 as the global CVE fund, GCERF has raised more than \$85 million from 14 governments. This year, GCERF was able to bring on two new donors - Denmark and Spain. GCERF operated in seven countries – **none of them is Iraq**.
- Hedayah: Hedayah continued advising and assisting governments and training civil society in CVE strategies and approaches, and providing them new tools. **Iraq is not part of the initiative**.

4.7. Civilian Counterterrorism Capacity-Building Programs

The United States supports various programs to build the capacity of law enforcement to counter terrorism, including by strengthening the ability of justice and corrections officials to counter terrorism. The Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism funds and oversees the following capacity building programs: the Antiterrorism Assistance program, the Countering Terrorism Finance program, Counterterrorism Engagement with Allies, the Terrorist Interdiction Program, and the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF).

4.8. Reward For Justice

The Department of State's counterterrorism rewards program, Rewards for Justice (RFJ), was established by the 1984 Act to Combat International Terrorism, Public Law 98-533 (codified at 22 U.S.C. § 2708). RFJ's goal is to bring international terrorists to justice and prevent acts of international terrorism against U.S. persons or property.

Under this program, the Secretary of State may authorize rewards for information that leads to the arrest or conviction of anyone who plans, commits, aids, or attempts international terrorist acts against U.S. persons or property; that prevents such acts from occurring in the first place, that leads to the identification or location of a key terrorist leader; or that disrupts terrorism financing. **It can be an inspiration to the counter-terrorist fight in Iraq as well.**

Appendix 5: Related terrorist groups to Iraqi territory:

1. Al Ashtar
2. Ansar Al-Islam (link to KRI)
3. Hizballah
4. Kataib Hizballah
5. IRGC
6. ISIS (might still be in the vicinity of the KRI)

7. ISIL (same as above)
8. Jaysh Rijal Al-Tariq Al-Naqshabandi (on the border with KRI)
9. PKK (link to KRI)

5.1. Groups with alliances with the former ones and/or with history of presence on the Iraqi soil (i.e.: joint combat and/or training) and/or history of training armed elements currently present on the Iraqi soil:

1. Ansar Al-Sharia in Benghazi
2. Ansar Al-Sharia in Darnah
3. Asbat Al-Ansar (low and limited operational capacity)
4. ISIS-Bangladesh
5. ISIS-Pakistan
6. ISIS-Philippines
7. ISIS-West Africa