

Topical Note

**Iraq: Security situation and internally  
displaced people in Diyala, April 2015**

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## **SUMMARY**

Diyala appears as a highly restive province. It has an ethnically/religiously diverse population. Extensive battles over territory have taken place throughout 2014 and 2015. Government forces reinforced by Shia militias and Kurdish peshmerga forces have eventually retaken control after having driven ISIL out of the province. ISIL had taken control of large areas in 2014. ISIL is, however, still capable of challenging them in hit-and-run actions behind their lines. The civilian population is under heavy pressure. Extensive abusive action against representatives of most population groups is being reported. Government protection appears to be weak. Daily life appears to suffer under shortages and malfunctioning public services.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Diyala province borders Iran to the east, Baghdad to the southwest, Salahaddin to the West, Wassit to the south and Suleimania to the north. Most of the population has connections with agriculture. The population is a mix of Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. Both the Kurdish autonomous government (KRG) and the government in Baghdad make claims on parts of the districts of Khanaqin and Kifri, and the subdistrict Mandali in the Baladruz district.

Diyala has had a lot of security problems throughout the year. After a worsening of the situation from 2006, the situation improved in late 2008. Still, armed operations with bombs and assassinations continue to occur. Amongst the factors which have caused the most unrest, the UN analysis department for Iraq (JAPU) counts the unresolved questions between the government and KRG, poor public services and economic opportunities, particularly with regards to reintegrating local armed groups (JAPU 2015).

In 2003, the Kurdish Peshmerga forces took over control of the Khanaqin district and parts of the Kifri district. From then, these parts of Diyala have been de facto controlled by the Kurdish autonomous government (KRG), while the central government in Baghdad has also made claims for them. The tensions between KRG and the central government have persisted until today. From 2008, the Iraqi armed forces have had a presence in the area and have occasionally come very close to open confrontation between them and the Peshmerga forces.



Diyala. Administrative districts (Wikipedia).

The security situation in the province has generally been in turmoil since 2003. In 2006, the provincial capital of Baquba was declared a "capital" in an Islamic "caliphate," which ISIL's precursor in Iraq, al-Qaida (AQI), set a goal of creating. Diyala was declared a separate "wilayat" (province) in this "caliphate." Even if the caliphate did not materialise, violence in the province still increased. Baquba was recaptured by the foreign coalition forces at the time and by local tribes in 2007.

Persistent tensions between the various population groups have continued to nurture violence in the province. In recent years, political violence against police and the military doubled and particularly affected Shiite Muslim civilians in places where many people are gathered. However, neither have the Sunni Muslims been spared from political violence.

It is difficult for independent observers to get into many of these conflict areas. Much of the information which comes out ultimately derives from local residents and from parties in the conflict. The information may have passed through several hands and may be difficult to verify. Many media reports may turn out to contain errors and inaccurate representations. Last but not least, there is a "battle for the truth" and a battle between "tales" about what it is all about. We should thus assume that access to reliable sources is limited.

## **2. THE SECURITY SITUATION**

The current security situation is characterised by a combination of heavy sectarian tension and conflict, extensive military operations and major political turbulence. Over 2014, ISIL captured positions in Muqdadia, Baquba and up along the Diyala River. Shiite militias who were already in the province stepped up in the same areas to fight ISIL. Both directed attacks against the population, which has speeded up internal flight (Lewis 2014, p. 14). The situation made the province into a "war zone" according to Chulov (2014).

Towards the end of 2014, the army and Shiite militias increased the pressure on ISIL and in January the government declared that it had driven ISIL out of all populated areas in the province (AFP 2015). As of April 2015, no parts of the province were still under the control of ISIL (ISW 2015a).

Still, this does not mean that peace has prevailed. During the retreat, ISIL rigged numerous explosives in the streets and houses and still conducts deadly attacks, although on a smaller scale, e.g. with homemade bombs (Simpson 2015). From the other side, it is largely reported that the Shiite militias who chased out ISIL commit extensive abuse themselves (HRW 2015b).

In the parts of the province which are under de facto Kurdish control, the Iranian-supported Shiite militias have gradually begun to come in. In our opinion, it cannot be ignored that a conflict between them and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces may be developing. A member of the Kurdish Regional Parliament's Peshmerga committee told Landinfo (meeting 2015) that they expected major conflicts with Shiite militias in such places. Their presence created great uncertainty and it would perhaps be very difficult to get them out.

## 2.1 "HOT SPOTS"

The front lines have moved a lot over 2014 and 2015. Both military operations and other conflict-related violence have "wandered" between different places. The places the sources have mentioned most in connection with conflict-related violence are described in the following.

- **Muqdadiya, far north in the Baquba district**

The city is in the middle of the province. It has been changing hands since last summer. In June, ISIL moved in and the army withdrew. Later in June, the army came back reinforced by the Shiite militia Asaib al-Haq and began attacking from the south (Sly & Hauslohner 2014). In late January this year, the city and surrounding areas were eventually recaptured (ISW 2015d).

Meanwhile, there were reports of continued attacks by ISIL against villages in the Muqdadiya area (Shafaq News 2015d).

- **Mansouriyah, far south in the Khanaqin district**

The city is on the highway between Baquba and Kurdistan, and is not very far from Lake Hamrim which supplies the province with water. It was recaptured by the army and Shiite militias in late January 2015 (ISW 2015d). ISIL has reportedly set a large number of explosive charges in private homes and other buildings. The charges affect both the military and civilians when they unwittingly trigger them (Simpson 2015).

- **The Sherwin area north of Baquba**

Villages in this area were cleared of ISIL in February 2015, in operations conducted by Shiite militias coordinated with the government army (NINA 2015). Before they withdrew, ISIL is said to have set mines in 1,400 houses and 12 mosques in various villages in the area according to EIFA (2015), an association of European Parliamentarians interested in Iraq.

- **Barwanah, just west of Muqdadiya**

In January, it was reported that Shiite militias had besieged the village and massacred over 70 civilians there (ISHM 2015). Eyewitnesses who BBC spoke with said that they had seen a mixture of military personnel, armed civilians and security forces from the army who had occupied the village, where many from nearby villages had taken refuge. Then the armed men dragged boys and men out of their houses, gathered them together, beat them and insulted them, then took them behind a house and shot them one by one. Afterwards, the militias maintained the siege and prevented medical care from getting in (BBC 2015).

- **Udhaim**

Udhaim served as a hub in ISIL's east-west connection between the various fronts they operated in central Iraq. Loss of this city would break ISIL's main connection across Iraq (Lewis 2014, p. 12). Army forces and Shiite militias retook the city itself in February 2015 (ISW 2015d).

- **Khanaqin district with the cities Jalawla and Saadiya**

Besides the two cities of Saadiya and Jalawla, there are 36 villages here, of which 27 are Arab and nine Kurdish (Landinfo 2010b, p. 10). Saadiya and Jalawla are of

strategic importance due to their location near KRI and Iran (al-Akhbar 2014). Many months of fighting have hit the two cities hard. The relationship between Peshmerga forces on the one hand and the forces on the other side now seems tense.

- **Jalawla**

The population here has mostly been Arabic. The Kurds in the city are a minority and dropped to seven percent in 2010 (Landinfo 2012, p. 22).

In July last year, ISIL took over the city after having driven out the Kurdish Peshmerga forces there. From then until November, control of the city alternated between ISIL on the one side and a combination of Peshmerga, army forces and Shiite militias on the other side. In November last year, it was finally taken back by Peshmerga, the army and Shiite militias (BBC 2014).

80 percent of the city was destroyed by then, according to Rudaw (2014). A damage estimate based on satellite photography conducted by UNOSAT/UNITAR (2015) estimates extensive damage to a total of 1,771 affected structures. Of these, 395 reportedly were completely destroyed and 698 moderately damaged. The Peshmerga forces and Shiite militias are now said to control their own parts of the city (Kittelsson 2015).

A well-informed source in Erbil who follows the security situation daily and who wants to remain anonymous reported (e-mail 2015b) that in March last year a mass grave was found with civilian ISIL victims in the vicinity of a military camp between Jalawla and Saadiya. There are also reports about two mass graves in the area with the remains of Shiite Muslim Turkmen who ISIL reportedly killed, but these two graves have not been found. About 200 people are said to be missing after ISIL abducted them.

When the Badr militia invaded, they reportedly raised their own flag and the Iraqi flag over the main police station. Journalists who tried to take pictures were shot afterwards, according to the Kurdish news agency BasNews (Hawrami 2014).

Jalawla was reportedly almost uninhabited November last year. Most residents are said to have fled to camps for internally displaced people in the area. Originally, the city had about 30,000 inhabitants, according to Kittelsson (2015). According to her, a limited number of residents were permitted to visit what was left of their homes during the day, in order to hold inspections of them. They were not allowed to stay there.

- **Saadiya**

Saadiya was taken by ISIL in June last year (Roggio 2014). As in Jalawla, ISIL was then pressed out by Peshmerga and Shiite militias in November (Hawrami 2014). According to Hewramy (2014), Iranian forces have been central to this operation. According to Rudaw, the Shiite Muslim Badr militia have made clear that they had no intentions of handing over control of the city to Kurdish forces and it had now to remain under the army's control (ISW 2015a).

- **Kifri, district capital in Kifri district**

The Shiite Muslim Badr militia moved in and took over Kifri in November last year. This has reportedly occurred under protest from the Kurdish mayor and booing and



rock throwing from the population. The reaction from the inhabitants was met with shooting, according to Hawrami (2014).

- **Baquba, provincial capital**

In the summer of 2014, Baquba was subject to fierce fighting between ISIL and the Shiite militia AAH (Chulov 2014). ISIL got as far as to take over parts of the city, but was then turned back. The army and Shiite militias took control, but ISIL began directing attacks against them from many surrounding villages with Sunni Muslim populations (Middle East Eye 2014). This activity has continued until now and ISIL also conducts attacks inside the city with people they have there.

For example, in the course of two days in March 2015, a well-informed source in Baghdad who follows the security situation daily and who wants to be anonymous, reported the following events in Baquba (e-mail 2015a):

- Homemade bombs set off against police patrols, two injured
- Governor gunned down by unknown men
- Three Kurdish civilians abducted by unknown men
- Car driven by civilian shot by unknown men
- Bomb exploded at a private residence
- Male body found with gunshot wounds

As stated, the frequency of events is high, particularly considering the relatively small population of just over 135,000 in 2009 (IAU Iraq 2009, March).

## **2.2 RELATIVELY STABLE PLACES**

What can be considered to be stable places in this troubled province will be relative to the overall security situation. The places which are listed in the following may be referred to as relatively stable: Control is no longer uncertain, but there can still be armed actions as well as attacks against the civilian population.

- **The areas south and east of Baquba**

The area south of Baquba extends south towards Baghdad and is partially included in the so-called Baghdad belt, an area around the capital consisting of residential, agricultural and industrial areas, roads and rivers. With its connections towards the northeast and with a central border crossing to Iran, the area between Baquba and Baghdad has been subject to fighting between the army, Sunni and Shiite militias during the year.

In order to get control here, ISIL tried to gain control of the roads towards Baghdad going along the Diyala River (ISW 2014, p. 8). So far this has not happened and the area south of Baquba is now said to be under the government's control (ISW 2015a).

However, it is not completely untroubled, for example, there were reports of an attack directed at a market in the city of Balad Ruz in February this year, where six were killed and 25 wounded (Shafaq News 2015c). In early April, two police officers were injured by a car bomb which went off in Kana, 15 km southeast of Baquba, according to an anonymous source in Erbil who follows the situation daily and who we consider reliable (e-mail 2015a).

- **Khanaqin**

From last year, the city and the area have been subject to repeated attacks from ISIL, although they were always beaten back. For example, a major ISIL attack was turned back in October (Shafaq News 2014a). Meanwhile, armed groups conducted attacks inside the city with car bombs, as reported in September last year (Shafaq News 2014b). In November, the city was secured by the Kurdish Peshmerga. From then on, the presence of Iraqi Shiite militias and Iranian army units has reportedly begun to increase (Hawrami 2014).

## **2.3 WHO HAS CONTROL WHERE?**

Diyala is roughly divided between a KRG-controlled area in the north and east and government-controlled areas in the rest of the province. In 2014, ISIL took major parts of the government-controlled areas, but was pressed out again in 2015. Meanwhile, the Kurds retained control over most of the parts of the province where the Kurdish population is in the majority.

### **The army and Shiite militias**

An army division which is not led by the army itself, but by the Badr militia, along with units from other Shiite militias, is now said to dominate in the areas ISIL previously held up through the province along the Diyala River, according to Knights (2015). They are said to have taken control over these cities:

- Baquba
- Muqdadiya
- Mansouriyah
- Udhaim
- Sadiya

### **Kurdish Peshmerga**

- Khanaqin district

The district is largely controlled by Kurdish Peshmerga (ISW 2014).

- Khanaqin and Jalawla

According to ISW (2015a), Kurdish forces now have control in the cities of Khanaqin and Jalawla.

- Kifri

According to Hawrami (2014), the Badr militia moved into Kifri in November. It reportedly occurred under protests from the KRG-affiliated mayor, according to Hawrami (2014). We found no information regarding whether the relationship between the Shiite militias and the city's Kurdish government was later resolved.

### **ISIL and affiliated groups**

Even though ISIL and affiliated groups no longer have control over areas in the province, they still have a noticeable presence in many areas. Their continued presence is expressed in the form of pinprick attacks against government forces with snipers and car bombs.

### **3. CONFLICT-RELATED VIOLENCE**

The violence in Diyala has been characterised by sectarian conflicts, resistance to the government and others who are considered to be government supporters, in addition to an ongoing tense relationship between the Peshmerga forces and the army/Shiite militias (Landinfo & the Swedish Migration Board 2014, p. 13).

#### **3.1 THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE IN FIGURES**

In 2014, Diyala proportionally had the highest conflict-related death rate in the civilian population, next to Salahaddin. The two cities of Baquba and Muqdadiya have had a particularly high death rate (IBC 2014).

Measured in civilian casualties, according to UNAMI (2015) Diyala was the hardest hit province in March after Baghdad, with 51 civilians killed and 75 wounded. In February, the figures were 73/69 and in January, they were 114/49. UNAMI does not provide any explanation for the decline from January. This is possibly because ISIL was driven into retreat and the fighting has subsided. We have not found comparative figures which show the frequency of events for the province in general and per location within the province.

#### **3.2 WHO IS BEHIND THE VIOLENCE?**

The Iraqi government forces, Shiite militias and ISIL emerge as the dominant agents of violence. It is reported that the Shiite militias, government forces and ISIL have committed extensive and very serious attacks. There are no corresponding reports about the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. One explanation of this could be that the Kurdish forces are more disciplined than the other parties and that they operate in terrain with a predominantly Kurdish population who trusts them. Another reason could be that the Kurds generally are viewed with less suspicion and resentment than the other parties by the media reporting from the areas where they operate. However, the existing reports on Kurdish attacks are discussed below.

In the following, we will go into the individual parties' use of violence.

##### **3.2.1 Government forces**

The government forces were deployed to defend the parts of the province which ISIL has not taken over and recapture the areas ISIL has taken. The army is also supposed to secure Baghdad's supremacy over the de facto Kurd-controlled areas, but so far has not managed to do this. There is a general perception that the government forces have weak morale and lack the capacity to handle the fight against ISIL on their own. They are dependent on significant support from Shiite militias, Peshmerga, Iraqi and U.S. Air Forces and U.S. and Iranian military advisors. The police – both the civilian *Iraqi Police* (IP) and the anti-terrorist police *Federal Police* (FP) – participate as support for the army in many places (ISW 2015c).

##### **3.2.2 Shiite militias**

The Shiite militias operating in Diyala consist of large and small militia groups who operate more or less outside the Iraqi military command structure. Some of them have existed for many years, while others have been formed more recently. In the

sources, they are sometimes referred to by their own name, and sometimes under the umbrella term *Popular Mobilisation Units - PMU (Hashd al-Shaabi)*.

PMU were first built up through general mobilisation in the summer of 2014, when ISIL was on the march towards Baghdad. Soon after, PMU is reported to have become a generic term for Iraqi Shiite militias in general, according to GlobalSecurity.org (2015). From the Iranian side, weapons and volunteers must have been acquired from early on.

Though PMU are paid by the Iraqi government, they are reported to have entered an Iranian chain of command. The Iraqi military authorities are said to have only limited control over them. Formally, PMU is subject to an Iraqi governing body, but this body is led by a former leader of the Badr militia, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who works closely with the leader of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Qassem Suleimani. PMU reportedly have often taken leadership responsibilities in the recent military operations against ISIL. According to Global Security, PMU is now developing in the direction of a standing Shiite militia which operates in parallel with the regular Iraqi forces.

The activities of the most frequently mentioned militias are described below.

- **The Badr militia**

The Badr militia is the largest of the Shiite militias and was formed in Iran about 30 years ago. Back then, it consisted of Iraqi deserters from the war between Iraq and Iran. The forces were trained and equipped by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. In 2003, they moved 10,000 men into Iraq in the wake of the fall of Saddam Hussein. The militia is closely affiliated with the political party the Islamic Supreme Council (ISCI). The Badr militia now operates partially under the PMU umbrella and in reality was reportedly in command in the battlefield in Diyala (ICG 2015). Under its leadership, large areas with Sunni Muslim populations were recaptured and secured.

- **Asaib Ahl al-Haq**

Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) is a militia with extensive combat experience, including years of efforts against the U.S. occupation forces. In the campaign against ISIL in Diyala, it has played an important military role, partially under the PMU umbrella.

- **Kata'ib Hezbollah**

This militia was formed during the U.S. occupation and led an effective campaign against their forces. After the U.S. withdrew in 2011, the militia entered a less active period. They then engaged in the Syrian civil war, but were eventually called back and mobilised in Iraq during ISIL's offensive in 2014. The militia is now participating partly under its own name and partly under the PMU umbrella.

- **The Khorasan brigades (*Saraya Khorasani*)**

This is a relatively new group which is reported to have been formed with Iranian assistance. It is said to be close to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as it uses the same logo. The militia conducts military operations against ISIL. Its movements are not necessarily coordinated with the army, but are not hindered by it either. The militia has asserted itself well militarily in relation to the other Shiite militias, according to Qaidari (2015).

### **3.2.3 ISIL and affiliated groups**

As long as ISIL had control, they terrorised the population in well known ways. UNAMI/OHCHR (2014, p. 19-20) reported on killings ISIL had committed in July and August:

- "Mass executions" of captured police and government soldiers.
- The bodies of 12 men with gunshot wounds were found last year in the village of Tawakkul northeast of Baquba after ISIL had taken the area the day before.
- 19 civilian Sunni Muslims were executed in Saadiya for refusing to swear allegiance to ISIL. ISIL had previously announced a list of 19 named tribal leaders who were reportedly killed for the same reasons.
- The remains of four police officers with gunshot wounds to the head were found in Baquba.
- A Sunni Imam in Baquba was killed because he had denounced ISIL.

ISIL's continued pinprick attacks in the areas they previously controlled create major problems for the civilian population and present a danger.

### **3.2.4 Kurdish Peshmerga**

The Peshmerga forces are primarily engaged in keeping the Kurdish-populated areas under de facto KRG control. They are not coordinated with the Iraqi army. When ISIL had control of central Diyala, they directed a large number of attacks from there against Kurdish areas. This led to heightened military activity there. After ISIL was driven out, the Shiite militias came into the place. In 2015, this led to tensions between Peshmerga and Shiite militias in some places and there were some skirmishes (Yonker 2015).

## **4. POPULATION COMPOSITION**

Diyala province has 1.65 million inhabitants, of whom 55 percent are Sunni Muslims, 25 percent are Shiite Muslims and 20 percent are Kurds. Another ten percent are divided amongst Christians, Turkmen and Yezid (SIGIR 2011).

### **4.1 ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND THEIR CORE AREAS**

The Sunni Muslim Arab population dominates in the central parts of the province. In the southern and southeast part, there is a mixed settlement of Sunni and Shiite Muslim Arabs. In the northern and north-eastern areas, there are primarily Kurdish settlements, even though the districts also contain a significantly Arab population. The Kurds here are mostly Shiite Muslims. In the north-western area of Diyala, there is a Turkmen area (Landinfo 2010, p. 5).

#### **Kurds**

The Kurds are the majority in the northern parts of the province, particularly in:

- Northern parts of the Khanaqin district
- Parts of the Kifri district

- Mandali subdistrict far east in Baladruz district, by the Iranian border east of Baghdad. We do not have information about whether the majority of Mandali is Kurdish today, but the Kurds themselves consider Mandali to be part of their traditional core areas (GlobalSecurity.org 2011).

### **Turkmen**

Turkmen live scattered throughout the province, in different places in Kifri and Khanaqin districts and in Mandali. The largest concentrations are to be found in Qara Tapa, subdistrict of Kifri district, according to a research report from the Turkish Center for Strategic Middle East Studies (Erkmen 2009, p. 7-8).

According to Minority Rights Group (MRG 2014), 40 percent of Turkmen living in Iraq are Shiite Muslims. Many of them live in Diyala.

### **Arabs**

The bulk of the Arab population is in the southern half of the province:

- Southeast Khanaqin district
- Muqdadiya district
- Baquba district
- Baladruz district

All population groups are also represented outside their core areas, for example, Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen all live in Muqdadiya. Both Sunnis and Shiites are otherwise represented within each of these groups (HRW 2015b).

## **4.2 WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VARIOUS GROUPS?**

The years of conflict seem to have strongly affected the relationship between the various population groups. In many places, the population comes under significant pressure from various groups who alternate having control. In places where the control remains unresolved for a longer time, the population is easily caught in the crossfire between the warring parties. For example, Diyala's governor expressed concern last year that those responsible for the violence were out to create religious conflict (Lewis 2014, p. 7).

In addition to religious tensions are the ethnic ones. These have plagued the province for decades. While previous regimes took measures to "Arabise" the Kurdish and Turkmen areas, after 2003 the Kurds held a "re-Kurdification" in the same areas. The Turkmen feel slighted and under pressure from both Kurds and Arabs (MRG 2014). In the course of 2014, these latent tensions got an extra boost.

According to an article in The Guardian (Chulov 2015), there is now a growing number of Sunni Muslims in Baquba taking steps to make a formal name change to the Shiite-sounding name in order to avoid danger in the face of Shiite militias, e.g. at checkpoints. "There is no trust between the Iraqis," says one of the newspaper's sources in the city, who also tells of an increased demand on the population registry's offices for Sunni Muslims wanting to change their names.

## **5. VULNERABLE GROUPS**

According to IOM (2014c), no targeted attacks have been directed against specific groups, even if the violence in the province generally follows sectarian lines. In our opinion, this means that who is vulnerable depends on who has control of the place

where the person lives. Thus, in reality most population groups are vulnerable to one or another of the players in the conflict.

## **5.1 SHIITE MUSLIMS VULNERABLE TO ISIL**

In 2013, when ISIL began to escalate in Diyala, the message to Shiites was clear: The war against "apostates" (*rafidah*), a term ISIL uses for Shiite Muslims, would primarily be fought in Diyala (Lewis 2014, p. 7). If ISIL were to control the province permanently, many Shiites would have to leave. This threat against Shiites now seems to be weakened, but the pinprick attacks ISIL now conducts against Shiite militias, the army forces and the police also affect civilians.

## **5.2 SUNNI MUSLIMS VULNERABLE TO THE ARMY AND SHIITE MILITIAS**

It is reported that the army and Shiite militias commit bloody reprisals against Sunni Muslims and in many places prevent Sunni Muslims from returning. In many places, their behaviour scares the local population into fleeing (Khalel & Vickery 2015).

In February, HRW (2015b) reported that the attacks Shiite militias committed in Sunni areas in Diyala had escalated. The residents were reportedly chased from their homes, kidnapped and in some cases summarily executed. According to HRW, at least 3,000 people had fled from the Muqdadiya area just since June last year. From October last year, many began to return, but many were allegedly prevented from returning. For example, in villages in the Muqdadiya district, Shiite militias reportedly prevented over 40 families from returning to their homes because they supposedly cooperated with ISIL. However, north of this district over 1,200 families have returned to about 40 villages (ISW 2015b).

Below are examples of attacks which were reported as having been conducted by specific agents.

### **5.2.1 Attacks against Sunni Muslims committed by specific agents**

- The army and militia combined

Army soldiers, anti-terrorist forces and Shiite militiamen have collectively burned down civilian homes last summer, according to HRW (2015b).

Knights (2015) writes that various militias within PMU have been responsible for some of the worst attacks:

- Massacre of 34 civilian Sunni Muslims in a mosque in Imam Wais last August
- Killing of at least 72 Sunni Muslim men and boys in Barwana
- Prevention of Sunni Muslim civilians from returning to their homes in areas along the main road between Baghdad and Kirkuk.

UNAMI/OHCHR (2014, p. 19-20) refers to general statements from civilians about abductions, executions and burnings of private homes. One of them told about an elderly man and two of his neighbours in the village of Sansal, all Sunni Muslims, who were killed in their home by people from anti-terrorist forces and a Shiite militia operating together. Another told about a unit from the army having threatened civilians with being arrested and executed if ISIL attacked the unit. A third said that the army and Shiite militias had blown up and burned down homes in the village of Harweena in the Muqdadiya district. Three internally displaced people said that

people from the army and AAH had killed 17 or 18 Sunnis in the village of Nofal in the same district. At a police checkpoint south of Baquba, two civilians were reportedly abducted by militiamen.

UNAMI/OHCHR (p. 21) also reports that PMU units, possibly with support from a local tribe, attacked a Sunni mosque in the village of Bani Wais in the Khanaqin district. During the attack, they fired on those who had come to pray, both inside the mosque and when they tried to flee. Dozens were reportedly killed. When the militias left the place afterwards, they fired on people and buildings along the road they were following. According to the report, units from the army and police were within sight, but didn't interfere, even though a police officer at a checkpoint was shot down in the process.

- **The Badr militia**

HRW (2015a, p. 2), at an inspection of destroyed villages in, amongst other, the Khalis district in Diyala, was told by the local inhabitants that Badr people had helped to destroy and plunder private homes, businesses, mosques and public buildings in a large number of villages.

According to HRW (2015b), such measures are intended to drive out Sunni Muslims from areas with mixed population which ISIL previously held. They quote in this context the leader of the Badr militia, Hadi al-Amiri, who last Christmas sent the following greeting to residents of Muqdadiya: "Judgement day is approaching. We will attack until nothing is left. Is my message clear?"

- **Asaib Ahl al-Haq**

In the winter, people from AAH reportedly led attacks on the villages Bulour, Matar, Aruba, Hurriyya, and Sudur and Harouniyya in the Muqdadiya district, where about a thousand Sunni Muslim families live. A resident HRW (2015b) spoke with said that AAH had burned down almost 50 houses in these villages in addition to shooting at private homes with rockets and mortars.

The local population HRW (2015b) spoke with said that militiamen from AAH, volunteer Shiite militiamen and Iraqi anti-terrorist units began harassing residents in villages near Muqdadiya last June, just after ISIL conquered Mosul. In October, those who had fled heard that the militia had left the area and began to return home. Many then went back to the houses the militiamen had burned down. Shortly afterwards, the militias showed up again and began kidnapping people and shooting around in the streets, in the air and at private homes and in some cases people were executed.

UNAMI/OHCHR (2014, p. 19-20) says that AAH performed extrajudicial executions, including hanging 15 men from lamp posts in Baquba in July. There is no doubt that these men were ISIL people or civilian Sunni Muslims. They must have been captured during a campaign which several Shiite militias conducted, with harassment and abductions of local Sunni Muslims in the Baquba area. Four other Sunni Muslims must have been hung on lampposts at other places in the city, according to OHCHR/UNAMI.

According to UNAMI/OHCHR (2014, p. 21), AAH has also been accused of deliberately destroying civilian infrastructure. Last June, nine houses were reportedly



destroyed in the village of Ballor in the Muqdadiya district and five Sunni mosques at other places in the district.

- **Kata'ib Hezbollah and the Khorasan brigades**

HRW was on an inspection of destroyed villages in the Khalis district in Diyala and was told (HRW 2015a, p. 2) by local residents that people from Kata'ib Hezbollah and the Khorasan brigades had helped destroy and loot private homes, businesses, mosques and public buildings in a large number of villages.

### **5.3 ARABS IN KURD-CONTROLLED AREAS**

It is reported that Kurdish Peshmerga have conducted attacks in places with mixed Kurdish and Arab populations, such as in the Saadiya/Jalawla area. Representatives of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Jalawla have also told BBC (2014) that they would not allow Arabs who had fled to the area during Saddam Hussein's regime's Arabisation campaigns to return there.

There are reports of discrimination against Arabs in many places in Kurd-controlled areas in Diyala. In Khanaqin, Arab internally displaced people are not allowed to purchase cars and are not issued food rations cards (Ebdullah 2014). The measure is likely intended to prevent Arab internally displaced people from becoming permanently established in the area.

It is also reported that KRG will prevent Arabs they believe having cooperated with ISIL from returning to their homes. In a meeting between KRG President Barzani and Arab tribal leaders in March last year, Barzani pointed out that tribes with members who cooperated with ISIL in areas the Peshmerga forces liberated would not be allowed to return there (Shafaq News 2015b).

### **5.4 MINORITIES**

The Kurds primarily have protection through KRG's security agencies and Peshmerga forces. Even though Kurdish Peshmerga largely prevented ISIL from taking control of the Kurdish-populated areas, they have not been able to similarly prevent Shiite militias from taking positions there. This has, as we have seen, led to tensions between Shiite militias and Peshmerga in some places, such as in Kifri (Hawrami 2014).

The other large minority in Diyala, the Turkmen, are reported to have a more uncertain protection. In Diyala, the Turkmen have their own settlements in Kifri and Khanaqin districts, which are largely under de facto Kurdish control. Even though the Turkmen here are protected from ISIL through Peshmerga's presence, they are still subject to uncertainty. According to MRG (2014), the Turkmen have been subjected to violence and attacks from all sides, KRG, central government and Sunni militias as well as Shiite militias. Turkmen organisations have accused Kurdish authorities of having failed to protect them and for adding pressure to them having to flee from areas where KRG has de facto control. The Iraqi government also fails the Turkmen, says MRG. The government's view is that they lack the ability to protect Turkmen settlements from attacks, while at the same time the Turkmen are prevented from forming their own armed forces.

MRG further points out that the Turkmen have not kept their original tribal structure either. In our opinion, the lack of tribal structure further weakens a minority's opportunities to protect its members.

## **5.5 PEOPLE AFFILIATED WITH THE IRAQI AND KURDISH GOVERNMENTS**

ISIL and affiliated groups have, according to UNAMI/OHCHR (2014, p. 19-20) abducted people who served in or could be associated with the army, police, Iraqi government or KRG, and who had refused to cooperate with ISIL.

One could assume that government officials who were present and cooperated with ISIL would have problems with the army and Shiite militias when they enter places ISIL previously controlled. However, most of those who cooperated with ISIL have fled and travelled to areas under ISIL's control, such as Mosul, according to Kittilsson (2015).

## **5.6 OTHER GROUPS**

There have been reports of isolated incidents which have affected people in different categories listed below. We have had reports of systematic persecution of the groups they represent, but due to occupation or other special circumstances, they can sometimes be in danger from armed fighters.

- **Doctors, teachers and journalists**

There have been reports that people who ISIL considered to be potential threats – doctors, teachers and journalists – have been abducted. Such abductions have reportedly occurred in all places controlled by ISIL and affiliated groups and in other places where ISIL has been involved in conflict. Many of the people abducted were not found again. UNAMI/OHCHR (2014) reports that ISIL has also destroyed the property of such people.

- **Religious leaders and tribal leaders**

Religious leaders and tribal leaders who refused to cooperate with ISIL were reportedly abducted and not found again later and according to UNAMI/OHCHR (2014), it is reported that the houses of such leaders have been blown up in various places in the province.

The leaders of local tribes have often had to make difficult choices when control of their areas has changed hands. For example, Reuters (Coles 2014) reported that as long as the fighting continues, many leaders of the Arab tribes in the Jalawla area are placing bets on who will take over their areas. The Kurds have proposed that the leader of one of the tribes, Feisal al-Karwi, should place a militia from his tribe under Peshmerga command, something which al-Karwi would not accommodate even if his tribe was interested in getting ISIL out of the area. Al-Karwi was in doubt about whether such cooperation would eventually lead to the Kurds dominating Jalawla, something he was not interested in, as he believed Jalawla should be an Arab city.

According to Coles, the result was that while ISIL had burned down his house because he had previously refused to cooperate with them, he and the tribe were now suspected by the Kurds of supporting ISIL.

In a report from ISW (2015b), it was mentioned that another local tribal leader no longer wanted to cooperate with the Shiite Muslim PMU militia after unidentified persons had shot down the leader of the court of appeals in al-Khalis.

- **People whose recreational activities ISIL believes violates Islam**

A tragic, but somewhat curious example, was discussed by the U.S. news station NBC (Bruton 2015) which reported that ISIL had abducted 15 young boys from a village in Diyala and shot a couple of them because they had an old hobby in Iraq of keeping pigeons. Since the pigeons had to be fed at a time when it was prayer time, ISIL believed that raising pigeons was un-Islamic and that those who practiced it had to be killed. According to NBC, the view that the hobby took attention away from religious devotion was the aggravation.

## 5.7 ARE MINORITY MEMBERS PROTECTED IN AN AREA WHERE THEY CONSTITUTE A MAJORITY?

Based on what we have discussed so far, it seems to us that the situation will be approximately as described below for the following groups.

- **Kurds** The Peshmerga forces which ensure the Kurd-controlled areas protect the Kurdish population to the best of their ability. They and the local Kurdish security agencies still are not able to turn back individual attacks from ISIL and other insurgent groups.
- **Turkmen** Turkmen depend on protection from either Peshmerga or the central government's forces. They are not allowed to have their own effective armed forces. However, within PMU there are reports of Turkmen units in Kirkuk province, and that such units fight together with Peshmerga (Shafaq News 2015). As Shiite Muslims, the government will not pursue them on a sectarian basis, but if ISIL should become strong in their areas again, they will very likely be in danger.
- **Sunni Arabs in government controlled areas** As we have documented above, Sunni Arabs are subject to many serious attacks from government forces and Shiite militias.
- **Sunni Arabs in Kurdish controlled areas** The Kurds have traditionally competed with the Arabs over domination in areas which KRG now de facto controls.
- **Shiite Muslim Arabs** In the government-controlled areas, they are protected by the army and Shiite militias, and at the same time they are vulnerable to ISIL and other Sunni Muslim groups still operating there. In KRG-controlled areas, they will not be persecuted on a sectarian basis, but may be vulnerable to discrimination, as with Arabs in general.

## 6. CRIME AND GOVERNMENT PROTECTION

No systematic crime statistics for Diyala are available. A review of daily reports from a well-informed source in Baghdad who wants to remain anonymous (e-mails 2014 and 2015) shows a highly uneven reporting of crime by the types murders, robberies, kidnappings and discovery of bodies with fatal injuries. It is not clear

whether these findings relate more to terrorism than ordinary crime. It is also not clear how the information on crime was obtained.

With a serious lack of government authority in large parts of the province last year, we must generally assume that conditions have been ripe for crime. In the material we have seen from the anonymous source in Baghdad, it is sometimes stated that both the army and the police have arrested criminals. At the same time, it is very difficult to estimate the extent of crime and the government's intervention.

In KRG-controlled areas, KRG has had a more stable control than the government has had in the province in general. In an assessment of government protection, a distinction should probably be made between the Kurd-controlled and government-controlled areas.

## **6.1 GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS**

In the government-controlled areas, it is assumed that government protection has been largely lacking last year, partially because the province has been through an unusually turbulent year, even by Iraqi standards, and partially because the government in many places seems to be persecuting citizens for sectarian reasons rather than protecting them.

In cases where the police normally can be expected to intervene based on a report, it seems they do not have the sufficient capacity to do this, particularly if the situation involves a Shiite Muslim militia. HRW (2015b) mentions a villager who went to the police for help finding her son, who she thought was abducted by Shiite militias, was told that "there are some things we cannot do."

Similarly, the army has also seemed to arbitrarily deprive inhabitants of protection as often as providing it in areas they have recaptured from ISIL. In the same report, HRW says that the government reacts with arbitrary arrests and executions of those thought to be terrorists. In addition, "the government hammers away at civilians in areas they conquer from ISIL," after ISIL having done the same. In this climate, the residents of such places do not have anywhere to turn for protection, according to HRW.

The way Prime Minister al-Abadi has commented on information about massacres committed by Shiite militias has not increased confidence in the government being neutral to how the civilian population has related to ISIL. Alabbasi (2015) reported that the Prime Minister, for example, instead of ordering an investigation, accused "infiltrators who were trying to denounce the government's victory" of having committed the mentioned massacre in Barwara. Such statements are probably primarily intended to cast doubt on the government's willingness to clean up the Shiite militias' activities.

It is also doubtful whether the Prime Minister has enough power to bring the Shiite militias under control after a future victory over ISIL. The armed forces under his control have increasingly fewer resources, while the militias' resources are increasing. The ministries responsible for defence and security are in the hands of his political rivals and in reality play the role of the militias' logistical backbone. Therefore, ICG (2015) believes that the balance is continuing to swing in favour of the militias and that they are the ones who have the power to determine what will

happen during and after their military operations. The attacks we have seen in areas they have taken from ISIL seem to confirm this.

According to UNAMI/OHCHR (2014, p. 21), the governor of Diyala announced last August that local defence groups would be formed called National Defence Brigades. These would protect civilians against attacks from various militias. We have not heard further information about this having happened or if so, how the brigades have worked.

## **6.2 KURD-CONTROLLED AREAS**

In the Kurd-controlled areas, the picture may be somewhat different. There the police's loyalty has been divided between Kurdish regional and Iraqi central governments. Both the police and administration generally compete with KRG and the central government on exercise of authority (GlobalSecurity.org 2012). In contested areas such as Khanaqin and Kifri, KRG has placed its people in senior positions. In turn, they have recruited crews locally and thus have filled the ranks with a large number of Kurdish personnel (Knights 2010, p. 29-30).

Most Kurds in the police in the contested are considered to be loyal to KRG. On the other hand, Arabs in the police are considered to be loyal to the central government. UNAMI noted in their report on the human rights situation in Iraq (UNAMI 2012, p. 13) that Arabs, Turkmen and other smaller minorities are generally sceptical of the police in the contested areas. The reason must be that they believe the police are dominated by the Kurds.

We assume that where Shiite militias and the army have not taken control in places the Kurds were in control of since 2003, little has changed in this situation, even if we allow for the possibility that the government's behaviour may have scared Sunni Muslim Arabs into preferring Kurdish dominance. Both Sunni and Shiite Muslim Arabs live in these areas (Ekurd 2011).

Corruption is generally very widespread in the police and to some extent in the justice system in the contested areas, according to a report (2013) on the level of corruption in Iraq published by U4, a resource centre for anti-corruption at Chr. Michelsen Institute. Even though the report is a few years old, we have no reason to believe that the picture presented there has changed significantly. In addition to the tug of war between the central government and KRG over influence over police and administration, we must assume that the corruption contributes to weakening government protection of citizens in the contested areas.

On the outskirts of the Kurd-controlled areas in places where Peshmerga has been engaged, there have been reports that Peshmerga soldiers have raided places where they have helped to drive out ISIL, such as Jalawla, according to Rudaw (Mahmood & Fraidon 2014, 16 December). In the same article, Jalawla and the neighbouring city Saadiya were referred to as "lawless ghost towns."

## **7. DAILY LIFE**

### **7.1 PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

There seems to be a major lack of public services in Diyala.

Particularly in the areas contested by the KRG and the central government, according to a report in *Kurdish Globe* (Mohammed 2010), there is very little willingness to invest public money. For example, in Jalawla the drainage lines have long been tight and rusty, the drinking water system has not been maintained or developed for the past 50 years and only one school has been built since 1979. At best, the drinking water supplies are said to work two hours a day out of every day. The power supply is reportedly so overloaded that the residents themselves had organised two large generators to operate the pumps in the city's drinking water facilities. Not just in Jalawla, but also in Saadiya, Qara Tappa and the Hamrin area, the conditions are said to be equally deplorable, according to the report in *Kurdish Globe*.

JAPU (2015) reports that Diyala is also currently experiencing particularly serious difficulties with water supply, mainly due to insufficient inflow of water resources from the Hamrin dam. As a result of this, almost half the population, an average of 46 percent, has unreliable access to drinking water. In Muqdadiya district, this proportion is as high as 74 percent. Many have to get drinking water directly from a lake, stream or river. In Muqdadiya, this is 47 percent of all households, in Kifri, 43 percent and in Baladruz, 40 percent.

This must have been even worse when ISIL took control of the Hamrin dam in 2014. Early this year, this led to such poor water supply in Baladruz that it led to protest demonstrations there, according to ISW (2015e).

In a plan from the EU for humanitarian efforts (2014), it was pointed out that the conflict and violence lead to generally limited freedom of movement and thus lead to reduced access to public services in affected areas. In the EU plan, it was also pointed out that the government since last June has held back transfers of public funds to areas which were under the control of armed groups, something which directly affected the government's capacity to ensure provision and function of public services. We assume that this primarily refers to areas previously controlled by ISIL, but we have no information about whether the transfer have been resumed in these areas after ISIL has been driven out.

The news agency Iraq News (Berwari 2014) also reports that the conflict has affected the public infrastructure for delivery of services. The agency also refers to the General Directorate of Health's new building in Baquba having been blown up.

### **7.2 FOOD SUPPLY, PRICES AND JOBS**

As recently as last January, ISIL still had control over most of the Muqdadiya area north and northeast towards the Lake Hamrin, where the dam is located. According to ISW (2015e), from there they directed intense attacks southwards against Muqdadiya such that it caused considerable disruption to daily life and great agitation in the public.

The World Food Programme (WFP 2015b) reports on Diyala that the prospects for winter crops are uncertain as a result of the conflict-related violence, which has limited opportunities to utilise systems for irrigation. Thus the amount of arable land

is becoming smaller. However, so far food prices have stayed at a normal level and the supply lines for food products have remained open. Allocations of food rations through the public PDS system (Public Distribution System) are relatively regular, according to WFP.

However, WFP reported a month later that the average purchasing power had been reduced by nearly a quarter in Diyala from February to March 2015. In February, purchasing power went from 25 baskets of food to only 19 in March (WFP 2015a, p. 3).

Job opportunities have been reduced due to the conflict, according to the EU (2014).

## **8. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE**

### **8.1 FIGURES**

#### **Number**

Since 2006, Diyala has been the host province for a large number of internally displaced people. The province has experienced a dramatic negative change in the security situation and the local economy, which has led to many fleeing since the summer of 2014. Many families were displaced due to the general violence and direct threats. The Khanaqin district has the most internally displaced people in the province, about 60 percent live here (IOM Iraq 2014b).

According to IOM, there were a total 161,136 internally displaced people in Diyala as of March 2015. An entire 157,092 of these are originally from the province. The rest of the internally displaced people come from Salah al-Din (2,898 people), Ninewa (348 people), Anbar (786 people) and Baghdad (12 people), and Diyala is host province for six percent of the internally displaced people in Iraq (IOM Iraq 2015, p. 5-6).

Internally displaced people from Diyala who have fled the province have mainly gone to Suleimania (44,610 people), Kirkuk (31,566 people) and Baghdad (21,324 people). In total, 258,108 people originally from Diyala have fled. This constitutes ten percent of the total number of internally displaced people in Iraq (IOM Iraq 2015, p. 4-5).

OCHA reports that about 8,600 families returned to Khalis (5,400), Khanaqin (500) and Muqdadiya (2,700) in February and March 2015 (OCHA 2015b, p. 4).

#### **Housing conditions**

As of early March 2015, there were three camps for internally displaced people in Diyala. There is also a camp under construction (CCCM Cluster Iraq 2015). All three of the camps are in Khanaqin and as of September 2014, more than 1,500 internally displaced families lived there (IOM Iraq 2014b, p. 3).

In September 2014, IOM (2014b, p. 3) made a summary of the four main forms of housing for internally displaced people in the province:

- rented housing (26 percent)
- housing with relatives (20 percent)
- abandoned/public buildings and unfinished buildings (17 percent)
- camps or transit camps (16 percent).

A few are staying in religious buildings, school buildings and other formal and informal settlements (IOM Iraq 2015, p. 7).

The total number of people in IOM's summary is 158,892.

### **Needs and aid schemes**

The general access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Diyala is poor and there is a great need for maintenance and construction of facilities (Save the Children Iraq 2015, p. 5).

Spontaneous and increasing returns to Muqyadiya create an urgent need to build and expand infrastructure. Local authorities have asked humanitarian organisations to help improve water, sanitation and electricity (UNHCR 2015, p. 2-3).

Families who live in camps are particularly vulnerable to food and water shortages. In September 2014, 88 percent of the internally displaced people in Diyala did not have access to enough food, 40 percent did not have access to enough water and 25 percent did not have access to functioning health services (IOM Iraq 2014b, p. 3).

A summary from CCCM Cluster Iraq and the REACH Initiative from October 2014 shows that the water supply to the three camps in Diyala (Al Yawa New, Al Yawa Old and Bahari Taza) either were delivered in tanks or come from a communal well. The minimum standard for number of litres of water per person per day is 20 litres. In the camps in Diyala, access to water per person is between 21 and 30 litres of water (CCCM Cluster Iraq & REACH Initiative 2014, p. 2).

Local authorities in Diyala said in January 2015 that there was an increasing need for core relief items, tents and the ability to place more internally displaced people in camps, particularly in Khanaqin (OCHA 2015a, p. 3).

Save the Children (Save the Children Iraq 2015) conducted a survey in February 2015 of 2,152 families in Diyala in order to map access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The results show that 73 percent have access to latrines, 58 percent have access to water storage/water tanks and 75 percent have access to showers (p. 4). Over half get their drinking water from wells and 32 percent from rivers/streams. Only 7 percent consider their drinking water to be clean and safe. A third of the families have the opportunity to purify the water before drinking (p. 4-5).

## **8.2 ACCESS RESTRICTIONS TO THE PROVINCE**

We did not find any information to suggest that the authorities have implemented restrictions on access to travelling into the province. However, unofficially it seems that the local authorities or the military in some places has introduced access restrictions. For example, OCHA (2014a, p. 1) reported that Kurdish forces had refused internally displaced people access to Khanaqin and Kalar. Those who were rejected later gained admission to Kifri, according to OCHA.



Similar local restrictions may well also occur in other places without us having specific knowledge of it.

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