

Iraq: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On October 10, 2020, representatives from various militias, calling themselves the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Commission, published a joint statement agreeing to suspend attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq in exchange for the Iraqi government presenting a plan for a U.S. withdrawal from the country. The following day, Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and other militias announced their agreement to the ceasefire. A KH spokesman also promised renewed violence if the United States chose to remain in Iraq. The joint statement did not set a deadline for an Iraqi plan of action, but the KH spokesman called for a parliamentary resolution by January 2021. (Source: [Reuters](#) [1])

On September 30, 2020, a series of rockets targeted a base used by the U.S.-led coalition near Erbil Airport in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdish officials blamed Shiite militias, which denied responsibility. Some Iraqi military members have anonymously told media that the only solution may be an armed confrontation between the Iraqi military and the Iran-backed militias. Between August 4 and August 18, 2020, at least 14 bomb and rocket attacks targeted Iraqi logistics convoys for the U.S. military, the U.S. Embassy, and bases housing U.S. soldiers, including in the vicinity of Baghdad's airport. There were no claims of responsibility, but authorities suspect Iran-backed militias. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo threatened to close the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad if the Iraqi government did not take action against militias. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [2], [New York Times](#) [3], [Al Jazeera](#) [4], [Voice of America](#) [5], [Al-Monitor](#) [6], [Agence France-Presse](#) [7], [Reuters](#) [8])

Overview

Since the 2003 downfall of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, violent extremist groups such as ISIS and Iranian-backed Shiite militias have capitalized on longstanding sectarian divisions among Iraq's Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish populations to radicalize Iraqis and expand their own influence. The Iraqi government has had to contend with balancing sectarian divisions in order to present a unified military front against ISIS.

Iraqi sectarianism has fueled extremism in the country, according to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. ISIS and other groups have used historic divisions between Iraqi Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, and other minorities to increase their recruitment. As president from 1979 until 2003, Saddam Hussein violently repressed opposition groups and maintained strict military control that inflamed Iraqi and regional Sunni-Shiite tensions. In September 1980, Hussein invaded neighboring Iran and launched a failed eight-year-long war during which both sides systematically rocketed each other's major cities and Iraqi Kurds aided Iran. In August 1990, Hussein's army crossed into Kuwait, occupying the country and declaring it a province of Iraq. The invasion led to the 1991 Operation Desert Shield in which a U.S.-led coalition forced Hussein to withdraw. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [9], [BBC News](#) [10], [U.K Defense Intelligence](#) [11], [New York Times](#) [12], [BBC News](#) [13], [New York Times](#) [12], [CNN](#) [14], [BBC News](#) [15])

In the aftermath of Hussein's 2003 removal from power, extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda and Jaysh al-Mahdi launched a violent insurgency against the Iraqi government. At the same time, Iranian-backed militias such as Kata'ib Hezbollah sought to gain influence in Iraq by joining the insurrection. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) emerged as a central actor in the insurgency, eventually expanding and changing its name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and began to seize territory in northwestern Iraq. After capturing Iraq's second largest city of Mosul in June 2014, ISIS declared an Islamic caliphate in captured portions of Iraq and Syria. Within its captured territory, ISIS enacted brutal discriminatory laws against non-Sunnis, particularly Iraq's Yazidi and Christian minorities. ISIS has also engaged in the widespread murder, kidnapping, and enslavement of these minorities, leading Amnesty International and other humanitarian groups to accuse ISIS of ethnic cleansing. In non-ISIS-held portions of Iraq, the group has engaged in suicide bombings, shootings, and other violent attacks targeting Iraqi government forces and civilians. Within its captured territory, ISIS has destroyed Iraqi cultural and religious sites, brutally enforced religious restrictions, and violently oppressed Iraqi minorities. (Sources: [Bloomberg News](#) [16], [Amnesty International](#) [17], [U.N. OHCHR](#) [18], [CNN](#) [19])

At its height, ISIS controlled more than 40 percent of Iraqi territory, but by April 2017 the U.S.-backed Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Global Coalition against ISIS had reduced ISIS's hold on Iraqi territory to less than 7 percent. As of March 7, 2017, the coalition had conducted more than 11,000 airstrikes in Iraq, destroying thousands of ISIS positions, vehicles, and other targets. Backed by U.S. airstrikes, the ISF continued to battle against ISIS forces in Mosul, which ISIS captured in 2014. The 100,000-strong ISF operation liberated the eastern side of the city from the militants in January 2017. On July 10, 2017, the Iraqi government announced the liberation of Mosul, where Baghdadi had declared ISIS's

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caliphate three years earlier. ISIS continued to lose territory in Iraq throughout 2017, and following the November 17 recapture of Rawa, the last ISIS-held town in Iraq, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared military victory over ISIS in the country. On December 9, Abadi announced that the Iraqi-Syrian border was fully secure. However, Iraqi officials fear that the group is shifting its strategy to that of a more traditional insurgency. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [20], [Reuters](#) [21], [Wall Street Journal](#) [22], [Independent](#) [23], [Global Coalition Against Daesh](#) [24], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [25], [Reuters](#) [26], [CBS News](#) [27], [Al-Monitor](#) [28], [Washington Post](#) [29], [CBS News](#) [30], [Business Insider](#) [31], [CNN](#) [32])

Iraqis remain divided on how to counter ISIS. Polling by ORB International revealed that as of July 2015, 56 percent of Iraqis opposed coalition airstrikes targeting the ISIS militants, despite 84 percent believing that ISIS has a “strongly negative” influence in the country. In addition, a March 2016 International Organization for Migration poll discovered that 80 percent of nearly 500 Iraqi migrants in living Europe cited “no hope for the future” as their primary reason for fleeing the country. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [33], [BBC News](#) [34], [ORB International](#) [35], [International Organization for Migration](#) [36])

The Iraqi government is also contending with Kurdish separatism. In the 20th century, Iraqi Kurdish separatists aided Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, particularly in capturing the key Iraqi border town of Hajj Umran. In recent years, Kurdish Peshmerga forces have joined the Iraqi government in fighting ISIS, but have also sought to use recaptured Iraqi territory as part of a future Kurdish state. Within the autonomous Kurdish areas, tensions between Kurds and Turkmens have resulted in riots, such as on July 28, 2008, when a Kurdish mob blamed Turkmen extremists for a suicide bombing in the city earlier that day and attacked Turkmen offices in Kirkuk. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [37], [New York Times](#) [33])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

During Saddam Hussein’s 24-year rule, he violently suppressed dissent and sought regional hegemony. At the same time, Hussein instituted policies that legalized the Muslim Brotherhood and expanded the influence of Salafism in Iraq. These policies directly contributed to the rise of militant Salafist groups in Iraq after Hussein’s regime was deposed in 2003. Iraq has since been a sectarian battleground between extremist Sunni groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS and predominantly Shiite Iraqi government forces and Iranian-backed Shiite militias vying for influence.

Baath Party

Created in 1951, the Arab Socialist Baath Party, also known as the Iraqi Baath (“renaissance”) party, advocated pan-Arabism, anti-colonialism, socialism, and secular nationalism. Under Baathist ideology, each individual Arab state is part of a larger Arab nation. The Iraqi Baathist party—headed by Assistant General Secretary Saddam Hussein—came to power in Iraq through a 1968 military coup led by General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr. Bakr assumed Iraq’s presidency and appointed Hussein to organize the Baath party’s militia and establish its security agencies. By November 1969, Hussein’s security team had effectively purged opposition rivals and dissidents, leading Bakr to promote Hussein to vice president and head of the Revolutionary Command Council. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [10], [BBC News](#) [15])

Hussein assumed the presidency in 1979 and immediately began to violently suppress any individual or group he viewed as a threat to his reign. Baathists who Hussein deemed disloyal were immediately detained or killed. Hussein promoted the purge as patriotism and advocated for loyalty to him rather than to the Baathist party and its ideology. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [10], [U.K Defense Intelligence](#) [11], [New York Times](#) [12])

In September 1980, Hussein invaded Iran in attempt to expand his influence in the Middle East. The eight-year-long war ended with a July 1988 ceasefire after both sides had rocketed each other’s major cities, resulting in major infrastructure damage and civilian casualties. In August 1990, Hussein’s army crossed into Kuwait, occupying the country and declaring it a province of Iraq. In January 1991, a 39-country coalition, led by the United States, deployed forces to Kuwait under Operation Desert Shield to force Hussein to withdraw. After a five-week aerial and ground campaign, the coalition liberated Kuwait on February 27, 1991. In April 1991, Hussein agreed to accept the terms of a U.N. cease-fire agreement, which subjected Iraq to a weapons-inspections program. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [12], [BBC News](#) [13], [New York Times](#) [12], [CNN](#) [14])

For the next decade, Hussein sought to convince the international community that he had discontinued his weapons

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programs. Simultaneously, Hussein falsely claimed he possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in order to appear militarily stronger to his enemies in Iran and Israel, according to the U.S. Department of Defense. Hussein consistently refused U.N. weapon inspectors access to document or destroy Iraq's collection of unconventional weapons. The United States invaded Iraq in March 2003 based on intelligence reports of an active WMD development program. The U.S. military ousted Hussein, who immediately went into hiding. He was captured in December of that year in Tikrit and executed in December 2006 after an Iraqi court convicted him of crimes against humanity. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [12], [CNN](#) [14], [BBC News](#) [13])

Since Hussein's overthrow, former Hussein loyalists have taken leadership roles in Iraq's extremist Salafist organizations. Iraqi officials estimate that at least 100 senior and mid-level ISIS leaders are former Hussein loyalists, including [Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani](#) [38] and [Abu Ayman al-Iraqi](#) [39]. In 1994, Hussein initiated the Faith Campaign, which integrated strict Islamic fundamentalist concepts into the Iraqi state. The words "God is great" were added to the Iraqi flag, amputation became a legalized punishment for theft, and the Muslim Brotherhood was legalized. A new wave of Salafism spread in Iraq as the Brotherhood expanded its activities. Simultaneously, as part of the Faith Campaign, Hussein ordered his military intelligence forces to infiltrate mosques, which had the effect of increasing Salafism within the ranks of Hussein's military forces. After the fall of the Hussein regime, the United States disbanded Iraq's military and purged Baathists from the government. Removed from their military roles, the Salafists from the former Baathist regime joined al-Qaeda in Iraq and other extremist organizations. ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi reportedly prioritized the recruitment of former Baathists. (Sources: [National Review](#) [40], [Washington Post](#) [41], [New York Times](#) [42], [Associated Press](#) [43], [Reuters](#) [44])

Iraqi Kurds

Kurds in Iraq as well as southeastern Turkey, western Iran, and northern Syria, have long sought the creation of an independent Kurdistan encompassing those areas. Kurdish separatists in Iraq have been responsible for terrorist attacks in the country. Iraqi Kurdistan is a semi-autonomous area in northern Iraq near the borders with Turkey, Iran, and Syria. Iraqi Kurdistan maintains its own parliament and its own security forces--the Peshmerga--which have aided in the fight against ISIS. (Sources: [Stars & Stripes](#) [45], [BBC News](#) [46])

British forces occupied Kurdish areas in 1918 following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Britain incorporated some of these areas, including Mosul, into Iraq the following year. In 1923, Kurdish rebels declared a short-lived kingdom in northern Iraq in defiance of the British occupation. In 1946, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) formed in Iranian Kurdistan. The KDP initially sought self-governance but shifted its focus to self-determination. Iraqi Kurds complained of increasing discrimination by the Iraqi government during the 1950s. After the 1958 overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy, Iraqi Kurds were promised autonomy in a new constitution, but Iraq temporarily dissolved the KDP in 1961 after a Kurdish rebellion. A 1970 agreement between the Iraqi government and the Kurds granted Iraqi Kurds autonomy, but further negotiations broke down and resulted in a new Kurdish rebellion in 1974. In 1975, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)--another Kurdish political party--broke away from the KDP. (Sources: [Federation of American Scientists](#) [47], [KDP website](#) [48], [PBS](#) [49], [BBC News](#) [46], [BBC News](#) [50])

When the Iran-Iraq War began in 1980, some Kurds sided with Iran and joined in attacks against Iraqi forces. In 1983, the two main Kurdish parties--the PUK and the KDP--openly rebelled against the Hussein regime. Beginning in 1987 toward the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi government killed tens of thousands of Kurdish civilians and fighters in an attempt to quash an uprising. Iraq formalized the operation in 1988 as al-Anfal ("the spoils"). Iraqi forces employed sarin, mustard, and other nerve gases, killing up to 100,000 Kurds during the almost-seven-month-long campaign, according to Human Rights Watch. A March 16, 1988, poison gas attack on the Iraqi town of Halabja killed approximately 5,000 Kurdish civilians. Fighting between the Kurds and Iraqi forces continued through 1991, when Kurdish Peshmerga forces seized the Iraqi cities of Irbil and Sulaymaniyah. An Iraqi blockade and infighting between the KDP and the PUK resulted in an Iraqi Kurdish civil war, which ended with a 1998 peace treaty between the two factions. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) [51], [BBC News](#) [52], [BBC News](#) [50], [BBC News](#) [46])

Another Kurdish faction, Jund al-Islam, began violently clashing with the PUK in 2001. Jund al-Islam became Ansar al-Islam (AAI) after the 2001 merger of Jund al-Islam with several other violent Kurdish groups. AAI seeks the creation of a sharia-based Islamic state. The U.S. government designated AAI as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2004 because of its "close links to and support from" al-Qaeda. AAI initially trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, and provided a safe haven in

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Iraq for al-Qaeda leaders fleeing the country after the U.S. invasion. AAI has since targeted Iraqi, U.S., and coalition forces in Iraq. Part of the group pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2014, but another faction within AAI has continued to fight against ISIS in Syria. In Iraq, AAI continues to target the Iraqi government and coalition forces. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [50], [U.S. Department of State](#) [53], [U.S. Department of State](#) [54], [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [55], [Long War Journal](#) [56])

Iraq granted its Kurdish population a semi-autonomous area in the north under the country's 2005 constitution. After ISIS began capturing territory in Iraq in 2014, Iraqi Kurds joined the fight to repel the terror group through the U.S.-backed Peshmerga forces. Iraqi Kurdish forces have attempted to hold certain territory that they liberated from ISIS in order to create an independent Kurdistan. For example, as of January 2017, Kurdish forces had dug a 650-mile trench around territory recaptured from ISIS in northern Iraq. Kurds have reportedly added 40 percent to their territory since 2014. However, Iraqi officials chastised Kurdish leaders for "getting ahead of themselves" before ISIS's defeat was complete. In September 2017, Iraqi Kurds voted for independence in a referendum, with an overwhelming 92 percent in favor. However, the Iraqi government rejected the referendum as unconstitutional. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) offered to "freeze" the result of the referendum and engage in dialogue with the Iraqi government. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [50], [Associated Press](#) [57], [Guardian](#) [58], [Reuters](#) [59], [CNN](#) [60], [BBC News](#) [61], [BBC News](#) [62])

ISIS and al-Qaeda in Iraq

[ISIS](#) [63]'s origins date back to the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion and deposal of Saddam Hussein. On October 17, 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group of jihadist fighters pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, calling themselves Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (the Organization of Jihad's Base in the Land of the Two Rivers), a.k.a. al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). In October 2006, AQI changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). In April 2013, ISI merged with the Nusra Front to form the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), although the Nusra Front subsequently broke away from the group. In June 2014, ISIS leader [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#) [64] declared an Islamic caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria and named himself caliph. (Sources: [Foreign Policy](#) [65], [National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism](#) [66], [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) [67], [Globalsecurity.org](#) [68], [New York Times](#) [69], [Al Jazeera](#) [70], [New York Times](#) [71], [Al Jazeera](#) [72])

Baghdadi is an Iraqi native who rose in the ranks of AQI. After the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Baghdadi created the militant group Jamaat Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamaah to target U.S. soldiers. Sometime between 2004 and 2009, U.S. forces captured Baghdadi and incarcerated him in the U.S. prison facility Camp Bucca in Iraq, where he met other future ISIS leaders. In April 2010, Baghdadi assumed the role of emir of ISI. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [73], [Newsweek](#) [74], [Brookings Institution](#) [75], [New York Times](#) [76])

ISIS has specifically targeted Shiites in Iraq. For example, two bombings over July 2-3, 2016, targeted Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad. The July 2 suicide bombing of a Baghdad shopping area killed more than 200 people and was Iraq's deadliest bombing in years. The bombings came a week after Iraqi forces recaptured the city of Fallujah from ISIS. In September 2014, Amnesty International reported that ISIS had "carried out ethnic cleansing on a historic scale in northern Iraq ... systematically target[ing] non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities, killing or abducting hundreds, possibly thousands, and forcing more than 830,000 others to flee the areas it has captured" since June 10, 2014. (Sources: [CNN](#) [77], [CNN](#) [78], [CNN](#) [79], [Amnesty International](#) [17])

ISIS has targeted Iraq's cultural and archaeological history as well. In February 2015, video emerged of ISIS fighters destroying ancient statues and other relics at a museum in Mosul. Also that month, ISIS militants burned the Mosul public library, which reportedly housed more than 8,000 rare books and manuscripts. Within three days in March 2015, ISIS razed the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud and the ancient city of Hatra, both in northern Iraq, destroying archaeological ruins. In July 2014, ISIS blew up the shrine at the reputed burial site of the biblical prophet Jonah in Mosul. After Iraqi forces retook Nimrud in November 2016, Mosul Museum employee Leila Salih surveyed the damage and told NBC News that ISIS had attacked Iraqis' "culture, our history, our memories. They tried to destroy the identity of Iraq." (Sources: [Fiscal Times](#) [80], [CNN](#) [81], [CNN](#) [82], [New York Times](#) [83], [NBC News](#) [84], [Agence France-Presse](#) [85], [NBC News](#) [86])

On June 21, 2017, as ISIS's situation in Mosul began to grow desperate, the group blew up the city's historic Great Mosque of al-Nuri, where Baghdadi had declared ISIS's caliphate in 2014. Built in the 12th century, the mosque included a leaning minaret called al-Hadba. UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova condemned the destruction, calling the mosque and the minaret "among the most iconic sites" in the city. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi called ISIS's destruction of the

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over-800-year-old mosque “an official announcement of their defeat” in Mosul. (Sources: [CNN](#) [87], [New York Times](#) [88])

ISIS has also tried to influence U.S. actions in Iraq through violence against foreign civilians. In August 2014, ISIS released a video entitled “A Message to America,” which showed a masked ISIS militant—nicknamed “Jihadi John” by former captives—beheading kidnapped American journalist James Foley and threatening to kill another such journalist, Steven Sotloff, if then-U.S. President Barack Obama did not end U.S. military operations in Iraq. That September, ISIS released “A Second Message to America,” a video of Sotloff’s beheading. Jihadi John has since been identified as [Mohammed Emwazi](#) [89], part of a four-member cell of British ISIS guards known by prisoners as “The Beatles” because of their accents. Emwazi died in a November 2015 U.S. drone strike in Raqqa, Syria. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [90], [U.S. Department of State](#) [91], [Washington Post](#) [92], [CNN](#) [93], [CNN](#) [94])

On August 4, 2014, ISIS began its assault on the Yazidi population in Iraq’s northern Sinjar province. ISIS has reportedly killed about 5,000 Yazidi men and taken captive thousands of women and children. Captured Yazidi men and boys were forcibly converted to Islam and enslaved for labor, while women and girls were sold into sex slavery. Additionally, Yazidi religious shrines were marked for destruction. According to a June 2016 report by the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), ISIS has “sought to destroy the Yazidis through killings; sexual slavery, enslavement, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and forcible transfer causing serious bodily and mental harm.” Approximately 400,000 Yazidis have been displaced as a result of ISIS. As of April 2017, ISIS continued to hold captive approximately 1,500 Yazidi women and children. (Sources: [Fox News](#) [95], [Associated Press](#) [96], [United Nations](#) [97], [BBC News](#) [98], [U.N. OHCHR](#) [18])

After ISIS began capturing territory in 2014, the terror group forced Iraqi Christians to convert to Islam under threat of death. ISIS also banned non-Islamic religious practices in the areas of Iraq under its control. As a result, Iraq’s Christian population has diminished from 1.4 million in 2003 to an estimated 150,000 to 275,000 in 2016. Iraqi Christians continue to come under attack in Iraqi-controlled parts of the country. On December 23, 2016, unidentified gunmen attacked Christian-owned shops selling alcohol in Baghdad, killing three people and wounding four others. Iraqi Christians have told media that they fear there is no future for them in Iraq. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [99], [CNN](#) [100], [CBS News](#) [101], [CNN](#) [19], [Knights of Columbus p. 222 & 223](#) [102], [Christian Times](#) [103], [Jerusalem Post](#) [104])

ISIS has relied on a combination of violence and incentives to recruit Iraqis. In January 2015, ISIS executed 15 people in the Nineveh Province who refused to join the terror group. Two suspected ISIS members captured in Mosul told Reuters in November 2016 that the group preys on sectarian divisions in Shiite-majority Iraq. Incarcerated Sunni ISIS fighters told Reuters that ISIS had offered them money, food, and promises to defend Sunnis against the physical beatings and other discrimination that they had suffered under the Iraqi government and army. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [105], [Reuters](#) [106])

ISIS has also utilized Iraqi schools to indoctrinate Sunni youth. After ISIS began seizing territory in 2014, the terror group allowed schools to continue operating but instituted gender segregation, strict dress codes for girls, and the banishment of so-called un-Islamic subjects such as music, history, and geography. During the 2015 school year, ISIS began instituting its own curricula with an emphasis on sharia (Islamic law) and Salafism, and many parents stopped sending their children to school as a result. According to a November 2016 statement by the international NGO Save the Children, more than 1 million children living under ISIS in Iraq between 2014 and 2016 either withdrew from school completely or were forced into an ISIS curriculum. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [107], [Save the Children](#) [108], [Al-Monitor](#) [109])

In October 2016, the Iraqi government released a report claiming that ISIS had indoctrinated and militarily trained 4,000 children to carry out suicide and other terrorist acts since 2014. In August 2015, Iraqi police in Kirkuk arrested a 15-year-old boy wearing a suicide vest. The teenager told authorities that ISIS had brainwashed him. In November 2017, another teen accidentally killed himself and five family members in their Mosul home after his suicide belt exploded prematurely. ISIS has kidnapped children as young as 8 to be indoctrinated. Europol has warned that these children will be the new generation of jihadists. (Sources: [Fox News](#) [110], [International Business Times](#) [111], [Al-Monitor](#) [28], [CNN](#) [112], [CNN](#) [113])

On July 10, 2017, the Iraqi government declared victory against ISIS in Mosul after an almost-nine-month battle. ISIS continued to lose territory in Iraq throughout 2017, and following the November 17 recapture of Rawa, the last ISIS-held town in Iraq, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared military victory over ISIS in the country. On December 9, Abadi

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announced that Iraq was “fully liberated” from ISIS and that the Iraqi-Syrian border was fully secure. In the months prior to ISIS’s defeat in Mosul, however, the Iraqi military reportedly witnessed ISIS commanders fleeing to a mountainous area in northeastern Iraq. Iraqi counterterrorism officials expect ISIS to launch an insurgency on the scale of al-Qaeda’s insurgency after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In May 2018, Iraqi and U.S. forces arrested five senior ISIS leaders, including a deputy to Baghdadi. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [21], [Reuters](#) [114], [Wall Street Journal](#) [22], [CBS News](#) [115], [Business Insider](#) [116], [CNN](#) [32], [Washington Post](#) [117])

According to a January 2018 UNICEF report, the war with ISIS displaced 2.6 million people between 2014 and 2017. Included within that number were 1.3 million children, according to UNICEF. According to a June 2018 Voice of America report, ISIS fighters seeking refuge have continued to displace people in the provinces of Kirkuk and Diyala. (Sources: [Voice of America](#) [118], [Reuters](#) [119])

As of spring 2020, Iraqi intelligence estimated ISIS maintained 2,500 to 3,000 fighters in the country. The terror group began to reassert itself in Iraq as the country faced the economic fallout of crashing oil prices and the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. ISIS is suspected of responsibility for a suicide attack on an Iraqi intelligence building in Kirkuk on April 28, 2020, as well as a May 1 coordinated attack on the Popular Mobilization Forces that killed 10. Speaking on condition of anonymity, Iraqi security officials told the Associated Press that ISIS is receiving supplies, food, transport, and shelter from local sympathizers. The officials expressed concern that ISIS was more organized and better equipped than it had been in years. In April 2020, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense announced ISIS had killed 82 civilians and 88 security personnel in Iraq since the beginning of the year. At least 294 people were wounded in those attacks. That month, Kurdistan Region Peshmerga Minister Shorsh Ismael warned ISIS saw a “golden opportunity” to reassert itself while the Iraqi government was distracted by the COVID-19 pandemic. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [120], [Associated Press](#) [121], [Associated Press](#) [122], [Kurdistan 24](#) [123], [Kurdistan 24](#) [124])

ISIS has taken advantage of the Iraqi government’s focus on the COVID-19 global pandemic. The terror group has called on its followers to strike while its enemies are distracted. ISIS has also used an economic crisis stemming from plunging oil prices as a recruitment tool. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [125], [Times](#) [126])

ISIS has launched a self-proclaimed “battle of attrition” campaign in Iraq. Iraqi officials noted in the spring of 2020 that in addition to exploiting government’s focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, ISIS was building up its forces by moving fighters from Syria to Iraq. Iraqi intelligence estimated there were 2,500 to 3,000 ISIS fighters in Iraq as of May 2020. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, marked in 2020 between April 23 and May 23, ISIS claimed responsibility for at least 260 attacks in Iraq, killing or wounding 426 people. Attacks included gun attacks, raids, ambushes of security forces, roadside bombs, and the murder of informers. On May 23, 2020, ISIS fighters attacked a police checkpoint on the outskirts of Zammar district in Nineveh province, killing three officers. Observers suspect the attack was revenge for the arrest of ISIS commander Abdul Nasser Qardash earlier that week. Some reports initially claimed Qardash was in fact newly appointed ISIS leader [Amir Muhammad Sa’id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla](#) [127], who used the pseudonym Abdullah Qardash. Iraqi security forces quickly retracted the claim and identified the captured militant as an ISIS leader who had once been considered as Baghdadi’s replacement. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [128], [Arab Weekly](#) [129], [Times](#) [126], [Daily Mail](#) [130], [Arab News](#) [131])

In August 2020, Under-Secretary for the U.N. Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Voronkov estimated ISIS maintained more than 10,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq. In September 2020, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein noted an increase in ISIS’s activities in Iraq and claimed the United Nations had underestimated its numbers. On August 28, an alleged ISIS sleeper cell crossed the border from Iraq into Syria and killed at least four members of the Syrian Democratic Forces. In October, Iraqi forces arrested more than a dozen ISIS officials in the country and killed a suspected ISIS financier. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [132], [France 24](#) [133], [Al-Monitor](#) [134], [Kurdistan 24](#) [135])

Al-Nusra Front (Hayat Tahrir al-Sham)

[Al-Nusra Front \(Hayat Tahrir al-Sham\)](#) [136] is primarily active in Syria, but has its origins in Iraq. In the early 2000s, al-Nusra Front leader [Abu Muhammad al-Golani](#) [137] was reportedly incarcerated in the U.S. prison facility Camp Bucca in Iraq. After his release in 2008, Golani resumed his activities with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) alongside future ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who had also been incarcerated in Bucca. Golani became head of al-Qaeda’s operations in Mosul. In 2011, Baghdadi sent Golani and other al-Qaeda fighters into Syria to take advantage of the power vacuum stemming from

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the civil war. The Golani-led Nusra Front announced itself in a January 2012 video. According to the U.S. government, AQI formed al-Nusra Front to “hijack the struggles of the legitimate Syrian opposition to further its own extremist ideology.” In April 2013, after Baghdadi unilaterally claimed that al-Nusra Front answered to his Islamic State in Iraq group (ISI, now ISIS), Golani broke ties with ISI and reaffirmed his allegiance to al-Qaeda central. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [138], [Long War Journal](#) [139], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [140], [BBC News](#) [141], [Al Arabiya](#) [142])

Muslim Brotherhood

Created in 1960, the [Iraqi Islamic Party](#) [143] (IIP) is the Iraqi branch of the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) [144] and the largest Sunni political party in the country. Though the IIP does not consider itself a formal branch of the Brotherhood, its leaders have acknowledged political and ideological ties to the Egyptian Brotherhood. The IIP originated from the Islamic Brotherhood Society, a social organization affiliated with the Brotherhood that was established in 1944. Iraq’s Baathist government banned the IIP in 1968, but Iraqi President Saddam Hussein granted greater freedoms to the IIP and other Islamist parties through his 1993 Faith Campaign. Nonetheless, the IIP could not formally operate as a political party until after the 2003 fall of the Hussein regime, when the transitional government Coalition Provisional Authority and Interim Iraq Governing Council formally lifted the ban on the IIP. (Sources: [Middle East Policy Council](#) [145], [Global Security](#) [146])

The IIP reestablished itself as a political party in the summer of 2003 and promoted the establishment of an Islamist state in Iraq through nonviolence. The IIP was the only existing Sunni party in Iraq from before the Baathist regime, allowing it to quickly reorganize and begin constructing mosques, medical clinics, media stations, and IIP offices throughout northwest Baghdad. The IIP quickly became the largest Sunni political party in Iraq. (Sources: [Global Security](#) [146], [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [147], [Middle East Policy Council](#) [145])

The Iraqi population reportedly viewed the IIP as a sectarian party largely responsible for rising anti-Shiite violence in the early 2000s. By the 2009 local elections, the IIP began to lose voters to other emerging Sunni parties. After national losses in Iraq’s 2010 parliamentary elections, the IIP attempted to use the Arab Spring movement to revive its party by holding demonstrations in Iraqi Sunni cities to highlight the Brotherhood’s victories across Arab League nations. (Sources: [Middle East Policy Council](#) [145], [Al-Monitor](#) [148], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [149])

According to IIP spokesman Fareed Sabri, tensions between Iraqi Sunnis and the Shiite government are high. Sabri accused the Shiite-majority government and military of targeting and suppressing the Sunni minority throughout the country. Sabri attests that many Sunnis in Iraq are afraid of the government and that the IIP is politically marginalized by the Shiite leaders because they are Sunnis. Nonetheless, several IIP politicians hold leadership roles in the Iraqi government, such as parliament speaker Salim al-Jabouri. He claims that the IIP is the only official Sunni party in the country. (Sources: [Al-Arabiya English](#) [150], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [149], [Public Radio International](#) [151])

Iran-Linked Shiite Militias

Since the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein, Iran has sought to extend its influence in Iraq through the financial and material support of Shiite militias. In March 2016, Ali Younusi, adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader [Ali Khamenei](#) [152], announced that “Iran is an empire once again at last, and its capital is Baghdad.” Led by [Qasem Soleimani](#) [153], the Quds Force of the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#) [154] has provided material and financial support for Iraqi Shiite militias in the fight against ISIS as well as during the anti-U.S. insurgency. Under Iranian influence, Iraqi Shiite militias have targeted U.S. forces in Iraq and refused to participate in anti-ISIS operations alongside U.S. forces. The Iranian government has also reportedly lobbied the Iraqi government to order its Shiite Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to specific action. One member of the PMF, identified only as Abu Hashem, told the *Guardian* that “without the Iranians we wouldn’t be able to do anything. If the Iranian advisers weren’t there, the battalions wouldn’t attack. Their presence gave the men confidence in the early days.” (Sources: [Guardian](#) [2], [Bloomberg News](#) [16], [Al Arabiya](#) [155], [Reuters](#) [156])

The PMF is Iraq’s 110,000-plus anti-ISIS volunteer forces also known as Hashid al-Shaabi. The PMF includes Iran-linked Shiite militia groups such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq, the Badr Organization, and Kata’ib Hezbollah. According to Reuters, these groups are “being deployed alongside Iraqi military units as the main combat force.” The Iraqi government created the

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PMF in June 2014 to unite various Shiite forces in the country in the fight against ISIS. According to PMF Deputy Commander Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes, also a commander of Kata'ib Hezbollah, Iran provides the PMF with “fundamental and direct support.” The U.S. Treasury Department had designated Mohandes, a.k.a. [Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim](#) [157], as an adviser to Soleimani. Both Mohandes and Soleimani were killed in a January 3, 2020, U.S. airstrike in Iraq. According to Abu Hashem, the PMF was originally modeled after Iran’s Basij militia, but the various factions insisted on fighting under their own flags and thus the PMF never fully integrated the factions into a singular military force. Mohandes united the factions under his forceful leadership, according to Abu Hashem. And when he died, fractures reemerged in the PMF between factions loyal to Iraq and those more loyal to the Iranian leadership. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [2], [CNN](#) [158], [Reuters](#) [159], [Al-Monitor](#) [160], [Long War Journal](#) [161], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [162], [CNN](#) [163], [Washington Post](#) [164], [Reuters](#) [156], [Washington Post](#) [165])

In August 2018, Iranian sources told Reuters that their government had transferred ballistic missiles to its Shiite proxies in Iraq. Further, according to the sources, Iran has begun aiding its proxies to construct their own missiles. A Western source told Reuters that Iran had transferred tens of missiles as a warning to the United States and Israel. According to Iranian and Iraqi sources, the Iranian government made the decision to boost its missile transfers to the Iraqi militias almost two years earlier with the intention of launching retaliatory strikes in case of a U.S. attack on Iran. The Iranian government immediately rejected claims that it was transferring missiles. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [166], [Reuters](#) [167])

The Iraqi government’s collusion with Shiite militants dates back to after the fall of the Hussein government. In 2006, the U.N. human rights chief in Iraq reported that hundreds of Iraqis were being tortured and executed by death squads working for Iraq’s interior ministry. In February 2006, the *Independent* wrote that “many of the 110,000 policemen and police commandos under the ministry’s control are suspected of being former members of the Badr Brigade.” On November 26, 2016, the Iraqi parliament passed a bill incorporating the PMF into the Iraqi security forces. Sunni politicians condemned the law as an attempt to sideline Iraq’s Sunni community. A statement from Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s office called the militia members “heroic fighters” who “need our loyalty for the sacrifices they have made.” Iran’s Khamenei has called the PMF “a national treasure” and an “asset for the present and the future that should be supported.” (Sources: [Independent](#) [168], [CNN](#) [158], [Reuters](#) [159], [Long War Journal](#) [161], [Al Arabiya](#) [169])

Formed in 2006, [Asaib Ahl al-Haq](#) [170] (AAH) is an Iranian-backed Shiite militia and political party operating primarily in Iraq, as well as in Syria and Lebanon. Until the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, AAH launched more than 6,000 attacks on American and Iraqi forces, as well as targeted kidnappings of Westerners. The group seeks to promote Iran’s political and religious influence in Iraq, maintain Shiite control over Iraq, and oust any remaining Western vestiges from the country. (Sources: [Voice of America](#) [171], [Washington Post](#) [172], [Middle East Security Report](#) [173], [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#) [174])

AAH broke away from the Mahdi Army (a.k.a. Jaysh al-Mahdi or JAM), the militia run by influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, in 2006. Following the December 2011 U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, AAH announced its intention to lay down its weapons and enter Iraqi politics. The group opened a number of political offices and religious schools and offered social services to widows and orphans. The Shiite-led Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki reportedly welcomed AAH into politics. The group formed the political bloc al-Sadiqun (the Honest Ones) and ran under Maliki’s State of Law bloc in the April 2014 Iraqi national elections, winning one seat. Since entering politics, however, AAH has continued to carry out sectarian violence, execute homophobic attacks, and threaten the interests of Western countries participating in strikes in Syria. (Sources: [Institute for the Study of War](#) [175], [Associated Press](#) [176], [Reuters](#) [177], [Middle East Security Report](#) [173], [Washington Post](#) [172], [Reuters](#) [177], [New York Times](#) [178], [Guardian](#) [179], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [180], [Daily Mail](#) [181], [McClatchy DC](#) [182], [Associated Press](#) [183], [Reuters](#) [184])

The [Badr Organization](#) [185] is a Shiite political party and paramilitary force that acts as “Iran’s oldest proxy in Iraq,” according to Reuters. Reuters notes that the group’s military wing is considered “perhaps the single most powerful Shi’ite paramilitary group” fighting in Iraq. Given the group’s deep ties to Iran and its political and military preeminence, analysts have compared the Badr Organization in Iraq to Hezbollah in Lebanon. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [177], [Foreign Policy](#) [186], [Reuters](#) [187], [Globe and Mail](#) [188])

Formed in 1983 as the Badr Brigades, the group operated out of Iran and originally served as the military wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an Iraqi Shiite political party aimed at importing Iran’s Islamic Revolution. During the Iran-Iraq War, SCIRI’s Badr Brigades fought alongside the IRGC against the Iraqi military. After the

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2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the Badr Brigades rebranded itself as the Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development, and publicly pledged to abstain from violence. Nonetheless, Badr leader Hadi al-Amiri has been accused of directly ordering attacks on up to 2,000 Sunnis between 2004 and 2006, during a Badr Organization-led sectarian war on Iraq's Sunni population. Today, the Badr Organization and other Shiite militias are "being deployed alongside Iraqi military units as the main combat force" in Iraq, according to Reuters. (Sources: [Middle East Forum](#) [189], [Foreign Policy](#) [186], [Globe and Mail](#) [188], [Washington Post](#) [190], [Wikileaks](#) [191], [Reuters](#) [159])

[Kata'ib Hezbollah \(KH\)](#) [192] is an Iranian-sponsored, anti-American Shiite militia formed in Iraq between 2006 and 2007. KH earned a reputation for planting deadly roadside bombs and using improvised rocket-assisted mortars to attack U.S. and coalition forces. KH is the only Iraqi Shiite militia designated as a terrorist organization by the United States. It is also reportedly the "most secretive" and elite of Iraq's predominantly Shiite militias. KH has long-standing ties to Iran's external military branch, the IRGC-Quds Force, as well as to Iran's proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [193], [Reuters](#) [194], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [195], [U.S. Government Publishing Office](#) [196], [Foreign Policy](#) [197], [Reuters](#) [177])

KH has since sent fighters to defend the Assad regime in Syria, allegedly at the behest of Quds Force head Qasem Soleimani. As KH switched from fighting U.S. forces in Iraq to combating Sunni rebels and extremists in Iraq and Syria, KH has continued to prioritize its anti-American agenda, repeatedly boycotting battles against ISIS in which the United States participates. KH has also promised to target American forces if they do not fully withdraw after ISIS is defeated in Iraq. The United States held KH responsible after more than 30 missiles struck an Iraqi military base in Kirkuk on December 27, 2019, killing a U.S. contractor and wounding U.S. troops. The United States responded on December 29 by striking five KH facilities in Iraq and Syria, killing 24 members of the terror group. On December 31, members of KH joined thousands of protesters outside the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in demanding a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. U.S. President Donald Trump held Iran responsible after a group of protesters breached the compound's walls, though they were repelled before they could reach the embassy itself. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [198], [Reuters](#) [199], [New York Times](#) [200], [Reuters](#) [201], [War on the Rocks](#) [202], [New York Times](#) [203], [Wall Street Journal](#) [204], [Wall Street Journal](#) [205])

In January 2018, the Badr Organization, KH, and AAH joined with other PMF units to form the Fatah Alliance political party ahead of Iraq's May 2018 elections. The alliance won 47 parliamentary seats in the election, and in June it allied with Muqtada al-Sadr's Sairoon Alliance after Sadr's party won the Iraq elections. On July 13, 2018, Iraqi protesters in the country's south attacked the political offices of Badr and other Iran-backed groups as they called for Iran to withdraw from Iraq. (Sources: [Middle East Institute](#) [206], [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#) [207], [Al-Monitor](#) [208], [BBC News](#) [209], [Jerusalem Post](#) [210])

On January 3, 2020, a U.S. airstrike killed Soleimani and KH leader [Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim](#) [157], a.k.a. Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes. KH joined other Iran-backed Iraqi militias in vowing revenge against the United States. The United States held KH responsible for multiple rocket attacks on Baghdad on January 4 and January 5 that wounded at least six. In March 2020, suspected Iranian-backed militias launched rocket attacks on Camp Taji north of Baghdad, killing three—two Americans and one British soldier—and wounding 14 others. The United States launched retaliatory airstrikes on KH weapons facilities. In response to continued attacks by Iran-backed militias, the Pentagon in late March 2020 reportedly ordered U.S. military commanders in Iraq to draw up plans to target and destroy KH. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [165], [Al Jazeera](#) [211], [CNN](#) [212], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [213], [Voice of America](#) [214], [Associated Press](#) [215], [BBC News](#) [215])

Beginning in the spring of 2020, new Iran-backed militias appeared to emerge and claim responsibility for attacks against U.S. interests in Iraq. Media analysts, however, reported that claims of responsibility by these groups appeared to be doctored or outright false. In May, Tha'r al-Muhandis Brigade ("Vengeance of al-Muhandis") released a video of a rocket attack on American helicopters. But media producers determined the video to be a montage of older footage. Other new groups participating in this reportedly fake campaign include Osbat al-Tha'irin, Ghabdhat al-Huda, Kata'ib Thourat al-Ishrin II, and Ashab al-Kahf. Ashab al-Kahf ("Companions of the Cave") first issued a threat against U.S. forces in April 2020. The group claimed responsibility for an attack on a military convoy in July 2020 in the Salaheddin province. Ashab al-Kahf also claimed responsibility for an August 11 bombing of a U.S. convoy along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border, but Iraqi, Kuwaiti, and U.S. sources denied the incident took place. Following the July attack, Iranian media reported that U.S. forces had no choice but to withdraw from Iraq. Foreign policy and media analysts in Iraq and the United States asserted that the video clips these groups are producing appear to originate from the same source and are meant to present an image that

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Iran-backed groups are still seeking revenge for the attack that killed Soleimani and Mohandes. (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [216], [Associated Press](#) [217], [Mehr News Agency](#) [218])

Financial and political developments in Iraq in the spring of 2020 threatened Iranian influence in the country. Former Iraqi intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kadhimi became Iraq's transitional prime minister that May, despite opposition from Iran-backed militias. KH had threatened a violent response if parliament approved Kadhimi. Upon his ascension to the office, Kadhimi appointed an American-trained general to head the interior ministry, which had previously been staffed by leaders of Iranian militias. Kadhimi also pledged to fight against government corruption, which has helped Iran gain influence in the Iraqi government. Iran-backed militias have also used anti-corruption protests as cover for violent activities, such as KH's December 2019 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Between 2014 and 2018, Kadhimi helped restore Iraq's relations with Iranian regional nemesis Saudi Arabia. He also reportedly has a close relationship with the Saudi monarchy, further threatening Iran's continued influence in Iraqi politics. In addition, the spread of COVID-19 in Iraq and collapsing oil prices put new financial pressure on the Iraqi government to seek aid from Arab neighbors, which seek to sway Iraq away from Iran's sphere of influence. Furthermore, Iraqi officials told the U.S. Department of State that Iranian-sponsored militias faced their own budgetary constrictions as the Iraqi government reassessed its financial priorities. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [219], [Bloomberg](#) [220], [Arab Weekly](#) [221])

On June 25, 2020, Iraqi forces arrested 14 KH members in an anti-terrorism raid ordered by Kadhimi. The KH members were allegedly planning an attack on Baghdad's Green Zone, which houses the U.S. Embassy and other diplomatic compounds. The following day, KH members in more than a dozen armed vehicles protested outside Kadhimi's residence, demanding the release of their compatriots. KH called the demonstration an attempt "to prevent the situation from spinning out of control." On June 29, citing a lack of evidence of wrongdoing, a judge within the PMF ordered the detained to be released to PMF custody for an internal trial. Following their release, the 14 KH members set fire to posters of Kadhimi, as well as U.S. and Israeli flags. KH told Iraqi media that it will never give up its weapons. (Sources: [Voice of America](#) [222], [Jerusalem Post](#) [223])

Ahead of an August 20, 2020, meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump, Kadhimi told the Associated Press that Iraq no longer needed direct military support on the ground from the United States. At the same time, the United States announced an additional \$204 million in humanitarian assistance to Iraq. In announcing assistance, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo renewed the United States' commitment to supporting Iraq's security forces, defeating ISIS, and curbing the influence of Iran-backed militias. Following his meeting with Kadhimi, Trump announced the United States had few troops left in Iraq, but they would help Iraq in the face of Iranian aggression. Kadhimi also welcomed U.S. business investment in the country. The United States had more than 5,000 troops in the country at the time of the meeting. U.S. military officials said any troop drawdown would be coordinated with the Iraqi government. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [224], [U.S. Department of State](#) [225], [Reuters](#) [226], [Associated Press](#) [227])

After the January 2020 deaths of Soleimani and Mohandis, the factions of the PMF fractured as they vied for influence and they have failed to unify into a cohesive force. Nonetheless, they are driven by a common narrative that the United States is unduly interfering in Iraq. The result has been an increase in attacks targeting U.S. interests. Between October 2019 and July 2020, at least 39 rocket attacks targeted American interests in Iraq. On September 9, 2020, the United States announced it would reduce its troop presence in Iraq from 5,200 to 3,000. On September 20, Pompeo informed Iraqi leaders the United States would close its embassy in Baghdad if the Iraqi government did not prevent the militias from launching attacks. Pompeo also threatened to "kill every Kata'ib Hezbollah" member as diplomatic officials leave Baghdad. According to Kadhimi, European officials had also threatened to withdraw from Baghdad if rocket attacks continued. On September 29, Kadhimi told more than two dozen foreign diplomats his government would protect their facilities from attack. PMF leader Falih al-Fayadh and Badr leader Amiri, who also heads the PMU-affiliated Fatah political bloc, joined other Iraqi politicians in condemning militant attacks on foreign diplomatic targets. Nonetheless, attacks continued in the following days as several militias rejected the ultimatum. An AAH statement called the U.S. Embassy a "military base of an occupying force" instead of a diplomatic mission. On September 30, a series of rockets struck a base near Erbil Airport in Iraqi Kurdistan used by the U.S.-led coalition. Kurdish officials blamed Shiite militias, which denied responsibility. Some Iraqi military members have anonymously told media that the only solution may be an armed confrontation between the Iraqi military and the Iran-backed militias. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [2], [New York Times](#) [228], [New York Times](#) [3], [Al Jazeera](#) [4], [Voice of America](#) [5], [Al-Monitor](#) [6])

On October 10, 2020, representatives from various militias, calling themselves the Iraqi Resistance Coordination

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Commission, published a joint statement agreeing to suspend attacks in exchange for the Iraqi government presenting a plan for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. The following day, KH and other militias announced their agreement to suspend attacks on U.S. interests on the condition the Iraqi government works toward a full U.S. withdrawal from the country. A KH spokesman also promised renewed violence if the United States chose to remain in Iraq. The joint statement did not set a deadline for an Iraqi plan of action, but the KH spokesman called for a parliamentary resolution by January 2021. (Source: [Reuters](#) [1])

Foreign Fighters

ISIS-occupied Iraq has been a destination for foreign fighters since 2014. The flow of foreign fighters into Iraq slowed as ISIS continued to lose control of territory in the country. By September 2016, the flow of foreign fighters crossing the Syria-Turkey border had decreased from 2,000 per month to 50. Given ISIS's loss of territory, U.S. officials reported in June 2016 that ISIS had shifted its messaging to encourage would-be foreign fighters to instead remain and carry out attacks in their home countries. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [229], [Soufan Group](#) [230], [Washington Times](#) [231])

Thousands of Iraqi Shiite militia fighters, including factions from the Popular Mobilization Forces, reportedly crossed the Syrian border in 2016 and 2017 to fight ISIS and aid Syrian government forces in the Syrian Civil War. One Iraqi Shiite militia, Harakat Nujaba, claimed that it sent 2,000 fighters to join the battle for Aleppo in August 2016. In April 2017, Iraqi Shiite militia fighters reportedly crossed the Syrian border to fight ISIS in the al-Hiri area of eastern Syria, but were pushed back into Iraq. In the same battle, the Iraqi Shiite militia Kata'ib Hezbollah reportedly fired rockets into Syria from across the Iraqi border. (Sources: [Rudaw](#) [232], [Al-Monitor](#) [233], [Los Angeles Times](#) [234], [Reuters](#) [235])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

The Institute for Economics & Peace's 2016 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked Iraq as the No. 1 country affected by terrorism in 2015. Iraq suffered a 17 percent impact on its GDP, the highest of 129 countries surveyed in the GTI. Iraq maintained its No. 1 rank in the 2016 GTI. (Sources: [Institute for Economics & Peace](#) [236], [Institute for Economics & Peace](#) [237])

ISIS

ISIS began capturing Iraqi territory in January 2014 when it seized control of Fallujah, Iraq. In June 2014, ISIS captured Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, followed by the city of Tikrit. From June to September of that year, ISIS carried out "ethnic cleansing on a historic scale in northern Iraq... systematically target[ing] non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities, killing or abducting hundreds, possibly thousands, and forcing more than 830,000 others to flee the areas it has captured," according to Amnesty International. ISIS has continued to launch suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks against Iraqi government and civilian targets, particularly against Shiite mosques and religious symbols. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [238], [New York Times](#) [239], [New York Times](#) [240], [Al Jazeera](#) [72], [Amnesty International](#) [17], [BBC News](#) [241], [CNN](#) [79], [Washington Post](#) [242])

Though U.S.-backed Iraqi forces have liberated all of the territory that ISIS captured in Iraq, the terror group has continued to pose a security threat in liberated territories. For example, ISIS claimed the December 11, 2016, double car bombings in Fallujah six months after Iraqi forces liberated the city. ISIS also continues to send suicide bombers into Baghdad and other government-held areas of the country. In October 2016, Iraqi forces began a campaign to liberate Mosul from ISIS. The terror group responded with bombings, ambushes, and other violence during the months-long campaign. (Sources: [CNN](#) [32], [Associated Press](#) [243], [Associated Press](#) [244], [Global Coalition Against Daesh](#) [245], [Washington Post](#) [29], [CNN](#) [246], [Reuters](#) [247], [Reuters](#) [248])

After announcing the liberation of Mosul on July 10, 2017, government officials expected ISIS to continue insurgent-style attacks throughout Iraq. Even as ISIS has lost territory, the group has continued to target Iraqi forces and civilians. ISIS claimed an April 4, 2017, attack in Tikrit that killed at least 31 people. The attack was one in a string of bombings throughout 2017 that killed at least 150 people. In each case, ISIS has either claimed responsibility or Iraqi authorities suspect the terror group of orchestrating the attacks. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [248], [Associated Press](#) [249], [BBC News](#) [250], [BBC News](#) [251], [Reuters](#) [252], [Reuters](#) [252], [Reuters](#) [253], [Reuters](#) [254])

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- **August 4, 2020 - August 18, 2020:**Fourteen bomb and rocket attacks target Iraqi logistics convoys for the U.S. military, the U.S. Embassy, and bases housing U.S. soldiers, including in the vicinity of Baghdad's airport. There are no claims of responsibility, but authorities suspect Iran-backed militias. Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [7], [Reuters](#) [8]
- **July 27, 2020:**Three Katyusha rockets strike the Camp Taji military base, damaging an Iraqi army helicopter but causing no casualties. Source: [Al-Monitor](#) [255]
- **July 24, 2020:**Four Katyusha rockets strike the Besmaya military base hosting U.S. troops. There are no reported casualties. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. The following day, U.S. forces proceed with plans to fully turn the base over to Iraqi control. Source: [Al-Monitor](#) [256]
- **July 6, 2020:**Two gunmen on motorcycles shoot and kill leading Iraqi researcher and ISIS expert Hisham al-Hashimi outside his home in Baghdad. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. ISIS and Iran-sponsored Shiite militias had previously threatened Hashimi. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi promises to pursue those responsible. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [257], [BBC News](#) [258]
- **June 23, 2020:**A liquor store explodes in Baghdad near the French embassy. KH releases a statement over social media blessing the explosion and sabotage of stores that sell alcohol. Source: [Jerusalem Post](#) [259]
- **June 15, 2020 - June 16, 2020:**Three rockets land near Baghdad's airport overnight. No damage or casualties are reported. Security forces trace the rockets to their point of origin on the outskirts of Baghdad and discover more rockets set up on wood platforms. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Defense Post](#) [260]
- **June 1, 2020:**An IED explodes underneath an Iraqi military vehicle in the town of Makhmour, killing two soldiers and wounding two others. Source: [Kurdistan 24](#) [261]
- **May 31, 2020:**In two separate incidents, unidentified militants kill two members of the Iraqi federal police and the PMF and wound six others. ISIS is suspected. Iraqi security forces in Basra arrest members of an ISIS sleeper cell allegedly planning attacks around the country. Source: [Kurdistan 24](#) [261]
- **May 23, 2020:**ISIS fighters attack a police checkpoint on the outskirts of Zammar district in Nineveh province, killing three officers. Observers suspect the attack is revenge for the arrest of ISIS commander Abdul Nasser Qardash earlier in the month. Source: [Arab Weekly](#) [129]
- **May 6, 2020:**Three Katyusha rockets land near the military sector of Baghdad airport. There are no reported casualties. Security forces discover the source of the rockets in the al-Barkiya area, west of Baghdad. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. It is the first rocket attack since March 26. The attack comes hours before a parliamentary vote to approve Mustafa al-Kadhimi as Iraq's new prime minister. Source: [Associated Press](#) [262]
- **May 4, 2020:**Gunmen attack an Iraqi army checkpoint between Kirkuk and Salahuddin, killing two soldiers. Separately, militants kill four members of the PMF in the village of al-Asiriya. ISIS is held responsible for the attacks. Source: [BBC News](#) [263]
- **May 3, 2020:**ISIS militants clash with PMF fighters in the village of Umm al-Karami, in Diyala province, killing five. A soldier is shot dead by a sniper in the Ain Laila area. Source: [BBC News](#) [263]
- **May 2, 2020:**Militants attack a police station in the village of Zaghaniya, in Diyala province, killing at least four. ISIS is held responsible for both attacks. A bomb in al-Uzaim kills one. Sources: [Kurdistan 24](#) [264], [Middle East Eye](#) [265], [BBC News](#) [263]
- **May 1, 2020:**Militants attack PMF fighters preparing a predawn meal late at night on May 1 in the village of Mekeeshfa, south of Tikrit. Six PMF fighters are killed in the fighting, while another three PMF fighters are killed and four are wounded by a roadside bomb as reinforcements arrive. Another PMF fighter is shot dead in the nearby Tal al-Dahab village. The military says the attacks were coordinated. ISIS is suspected of responsibility. Sources: [Middle East Eye](#) [265], [Associated Press](#) [121], [Associated Press](#) [122]
- **April 28, 2020:**Two militants drive to the gate of the Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Directorate in Kirkuk. A militant wearing an explosive vest gets out of the car and throws a grenade at the building. He then detonates an explosive vest. At least three security personnel are wounded. The second militant drives away. There are no immediate claims of responsibility, but security forces suspect ISIS. Source: [Associated Press](#) [120]
- **April 23, 2020 - May 23, 2020:**ISIS claims responsibility for at least 260 attacks in Iraq during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, killing or wounding 426 people. Attacks include gun assaults, raids, ambushes of security forces, roadside bombs, and the murder of informers. Source: [Times](#) [126]
- **April 21, 2020:**A roadside IED blows up under an army vehicle in the vicinity of the Um Hanta village in Diyala province, killing two soldiers.

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A sniper kills a police officer near a public university campus in Baqubah. A roadside bomb on the road connecting Quneitra and al-Lazakah villages in Nineveh province kills at least two. ISIS is suspected in all three attacks. Sources: [Kurdistan 24](#) [123], [Kurdistan 24](#) [266]

- **April 18, 2020:**Two rockets strike a Chinese oil facility south of Baghdad, causing minor damage. There are no reported casualties. A military official tells the Associated Press the rockets were launched by a militant group upset over a failed business proposition. Source: [Associated Press](#) [267]
- **April 6, 2020 - April 7, 2020:**On April 6, gunmen launch an overnight attack on a federal police checkpoint in the village of Daquq. Three roadside IEDs explode as reinforcements arrive, wounding three. On April 7, militants attack Peshmerga forces in the town of Kujalo, killing two. Separately, a roadside bomb blows up an Iraqi federal police convoy in the Daquq district of the Kirkuk province, wounding two. ISIS is suspected in all three attacks. Source: [Kurdistan 24](#) [268]
- **April 6, 2020:**At least three rockets strike the site of American oil field service company Halliburton in the Burjesia area of Basra. There is no damage reported. Security officials find a rocket launcher with 11 unused missiles on a nearby road. The missiles defused. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. It is the first rocket attack since June 2019 to target a U.S. oil company. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [269], [Associated Press](#) [267]
- **April 3, 2020:**An IED attack targeted a patrol of a commando regiment of the Diyala Operations Command in the outskirts of Maadan village. Source: [Associated Press](#) [121]
- **April 1, 2020:**A federal police officer is killed, and a battalion commander and brigadier general wounded in a security operation in the Makhoul mountain range in Diyala. Source: [Associated Press](#) [121]
- **March 2020:**On March 11, suspected Iranian-backed militias in Iraq launch rocket attacks from the Rashediya area of northeast Baghdad. The missiles target a military base at Camp Taji, 17 miles north of Baghdad. The attack kills three—two Americans and one British soldier—and injures at least 14 others. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the airstrikes are allegedly in retaliation for airstrikes previously carried out across the Iraqi border around the Syrian city of Abu Kamal. The next day on March 12 and into the morning of March 13, the United States launches airstrikes in the Baghdad region, hitting five locations targeting KH's weapons facilities. The strikes allegedly kill the IRGC's General Siamand Mashhadani, and four other IRGC members. According to Iraqi military officials, the airstrikes kill three Iraqi soldiers, two police officers, and a civilian worker. On March 14, 33 Katyusha rockets are launched by suspected terrorists targeting Camp Taji. The targeted section of Taji base houses U.S.-led coalition troops. The attack wounds three American and two Iraqi troops. The Iraqi military later finds seven rocket launchers and 24 unused rockets that were ready to launch in nearby Abu Izam. No group immediately claims responsibility for the attack and statements have yet to be released by Iraqi or American forces further detailing suspected perpetrators. The Pentagon reportedly orders U.S. military commanders in Iraq to draw up plans to destroy KH. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [270], [New York Times](#) [271], [BBC News](#) [272], [Associated Press](#) [215], [New York Times](#) [273], [Jerusalem Post](#) [274], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [213], [CNN](#) [275], [Reuters](#) [276], [Military.com](#) [277], [New York Times](#) [278]
- **March 10, 2020:**ISIS militants launch an attack in Khanaqin, Diyala province, where the Iraqi Army soldiers and the Popular Mobilization Forces are stationed. The attack kills two members of the Iraqi Army and one Shia Hashd al-Shaabi militia member. Source: [Kurdistan 24](#) [279]
- **March 8, 2020:**ISIS militants open fire on security forces belonging to Iraq's counter-terrorism forces and U.S.-led coalition forces in Makhmour, northern Iraq. The joint operation was a mission to eliminate a stronghold for the militant group in north-central Iraq. The attack kills two U.S. service members, U.S. Marine Corps Captain Moises A. Navas and Gunnery Sergeant Diego D. Pongo. Sources: [ABC News](#) [280], [Rudaw](#) [281]
- **February 29, 2020:**Security forces in Kirkuk conduct a search for unspecified terrorists who previously ambushed a security checkpoint north of Daquq district. The operation results in an exchange of gunfire, killing one Iraqi soldier, and injuring one other. It is suspected that ISIS members were involved in the attack. Source: [Rudaw](#) [282]
- **February 19, 2020:**Two gunmen break into the Kurdish village of Chakhmakha. They attack a youth recreation hub, killing four and wounding two others. It is uncertain if the assailants are members of ISIS, enemies of the Kurds, or the Baathists. However, ISIS regularly carries out attacks in territories close by. Source: [Rudaw](#) [283]
- **February 13, 2020:**A missile lands inside the K-1 base, which hosts U.S. troops, near Kirkuk. No casualties or injuries are reported. It is suspected that KH is behind the attack. Also that day, ISIS members attack a village of the Kurdish religious minority known as the Kakais in Khanaqin district. The attack kills two and wounds 10 others. Sources: [Epoch Times](#) [284], [Kurdistan 24](#) [285]
- **February 8, 2020:**ISIS militants ambush an army post in Salahuddin. The attack kills one soldier and wounds one other. According to Kurdistan 24, ISIS sleeper cells have intensified attacks to an almost daily basis in rural areas north of Baghdad and south of the Kurdistan region. Source: [Kurdistan](#)

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- **January 2020:** On January 3, a U.S. drone strike kills Qasem Soleimani, the head of Iran’s Quds Force, alongside the head of KH near Baghdad International Airport. The strike prompts calls for revenge by the Iranian leadership and Iraqi militias. The Iraqi parliament on January 5 calls on the government to expel U.S. troops from the country. On January 4, one rocket lands in the Green Zone but causes no injuries or damage. Other rockets land near the Balad Air Base, which U.S. and Iraqi forces jointly use. There are no immediate claims of responsibility but KH promises more retaliation. On January 5, KH warns Iraqi civilians to stay at least one kilometer away from U.S. bases and facilities housing U.S. troops. Later that evening, at least six Katyusha rockets strike inside Baghdad, wounding at least six people. Two of the rockets land near the U.S. Embassy but cause no casualties. A third rocket strikes a residence outside of the Green Zone, wounding four. Three other rockets fall in Baghdad’s Jadriya area. Separately on January 5, ISIS militants kill two Iraqi soldiers in Kirkuk. Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [287], [Al Jazeera](#) [211], [Fox News](#) [288], [Military Times](#) [289]
- **December 27, 2019 - December 31, 2019:** On December 27, 2019, more than 30 missiles are fired at an Iraqi military base in Kirkuk, killing a U.S. contractor and wounding U.S. troops. In response, a December 29 U.S. airstrike targets five KH facilities in Iraq and Syria, killing 24 members of the terror group. On December 31, thousands of protesters, including KH members, assemble outside the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad demanding a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, waving the KH flag, throwing rocks, and chanting “Death to America!” A group of protesters breach the walls of the compound but are repelled before they can enter the embassy itself. U.S. President Donald Trump blames Iran for the embassy breach and demands Iraqi forces protect U.S. lives and property. Sources: [New York Times](#) [203], [Guardian](#) [290], [Wall Street Journal](#) [204], [Wall Street Journal](#) [205]
- **December 9, 2019:** U.S. government officials release statements claiming Iran is behind a series of increasingly sophisticated rocket attacks on joint U.S.-Iraq military facilities in Iraq. In the last five weeks, there have been nine rocket attacks on or in the vicinity of Iraqi facilities that host US troops. Earlier in the day, four rockets strike an army base near Baghdad International Airport. At least six Iraqi personnel are injured. The rockets were fired from an adjacent neighborhood and hit a barracks for Iraq’s elite counterterrorism forces. Sources: [CNN](#) [291], [Washington Post](#) [292]
- **December 7, 2019:** ISIS attacks a Hashd al-Shaabi unit in the disputed province of Kirkuk. The attack results in the death of at least two Hashd al-Shaabi members, and the injury of three others. Source: [Kurdistan 24](#) [293]
- **December 6, 2019:** Unidentified assailants launch an attack on al-Hallani Square in Baghdad. At least 16 people are killed in the attack with dozens more wounded. Iraq has been rocked by mass protests since early October, leaving 460 Iraqis killed and 17,000 injured, Iraq’s High Commission for Human Rights said. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [294]
- **December 5, 2019:** Two mortars land inside Iraq’s Balad air base. There are no casualties in the suspected terrorist attack. Balad base hosts U.S. forces and contractors and is located about 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Baghdad. Source: [New York Times](#) [295]
- **December 3, 2019:** Five rockets land on Ain Al-Asad air base. The airbase hosts U.S. forces in Anbar province in western Iraq. No casualties are reported in the suspected terrorist attack. Source: [New York Times](#) [295]
- **December 2, 2019:** ISIS militants attack a Hashd Shaabi vehicle near the paramilitary’s outposts in Naft Khana. Two Hashd Shaabi members are killed and four others are wounded in the attack. Reinforcement forces arrive on the scene leading to fierce clashes, killing two more paramilitary members and wounding eight others. Source: [Xinhua](#) [296]
- **November 10, 2019:** A roadside bomb detonates next to a Special Forces vehicle outside of Kirkuk. Five Italian Special Forces soldiers are injured in the blast. The soldiers were part of a Special Forces team who were carrying out the “mentoring and training” of Iraqi armed forces involved in the fight against ISIS. It is expected that ISIS is responsible for the IED. Source: [Time](#) [297]
- **October 29, 2019:** An IED detonates in Jalawla area. The attack kills three people. Ansar al Islam claims responsibility for the attack. A longstanding al-Qaeda-linked jihadist group which now mainly operates in Syria, this is Ansar al Islam’s first attack in its native Iraq in five years. Though in July 2014, the Iraqi wing of Ansar al Islam suffered mass defections to ISIS. Though, the entirety of the organization did not go to ISIS, as its Syrian wing has remained independent. Source: [Long War Journal](#) [298]
- **October 21, 2019:** ISIS attacks a police force protecting Allas oilfield. The attack kills four and injures five others. In 2014, ISIS militants took control of Allas and nearby Ajil oilfields and extracted large amounts of oil to finance its operations, but the two oilfields were freed by the Iraqi forces in March 2015. Source: [Xinhua](#) [299]
- **October 10, 2019:** ISIS militants launch a gunfire and bomb attack in Diyala. While a gunman kills three and wounds four others, a roadside bomb explodes near a security vehicle, which kills and wounds three others. Source: [Xinhua](#) [300]
- **October 5, 2019:** Unknown gunmen attack the offices of television stations Al-Arabiya and Abu Nawas in Baghdad. Gunmen also attack the offices of Iraq’s Dajla and NRT news channels. The gunmen physically assault employees and smash equipment, but no casualties are reported. Some sources suspect that Kata’ib Hezbollah ransacked television

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stations that had been giving full or sympathetic coverage to the demonstrations. Sources: [U.S. News](#) [301], [Independent](#) [302]

- **September 21, 2019:** ISIS militants leave a bomb on a minibus which later explodes at a checkpoint near Karbala, a major Iraqi pilgrimage center.
The attack kills 12. The attack stands out because most of the ISIS's attacks have mostly focused on members of the Iraqi security forces, local mayors, and occasionally other civil servants. This attack specifically targeted the Shiite community during a particularly holy period. Source: [New York Times](#) [303]
- **September 10, 2019:** The U.S. Air Force launches airstrikes on Qanus Island, Saladin Province.
A spokesperson for the U.S.-led coalition said the strikes were aimed at destroying a "major transit hub" for ISIS forces moving between the Jazeera desert into the Mosul region. It was followed by a ground operation by Iraqi forces. Source: [Independent](#) [304]
- **August 27, 2019:** ISIS members attack an outpost manned by AAH in Yathrib, near Baghdad.
At least three paramilitary members are killed in the attack. ISIS members have frequently carried out hit-and-run attacks against security forces and civilians since Iraqi security forces defeated the insurgents in 2017. Source: [Xinhua](#) [305]
- **August 20, 2019:** Several blasts hit a position held by paramilitary forces next to Balad air base north of Baghdad.
This explosion follows a series of similar blasts that have targeted Iraq's Shiite paramilitary groups in the past few weeks. No casualties or injuries are reported, and it is uncertain who launched the attacks. Source: [U.S. News](#) [306]
- **August 13, 2019:** An explosion occurs at an ammunition depot in southern Baghdad.
At least one person is killed and 29 others are wounded. Earlier that day, an ammunition depot explodes inside a federal police military base, named Falcon, in Owerij area near the southern district of Doura. The explosion wounds several civilians. Source: [Xinhua](#) [307]
- **August 3, 2019:** A car bomb explodes outside a restaurant in Mosul.
The blast kills two and wounds another 10. It is suspected that ISIS is responsible for the attack. Source: [France 24](#) [308]
- **August 1, 2019:** Militants ambush the Sayed Ghraib area, killing three members of the PMF and two policemen in the process.
Separately, a mortar attack against Kurdish forces in Kola Jawi village kills two members of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government's Asayish internal security forces and wounds another 14. It is suspected that ISIS carried out both attacks. Source: [Reuters](#) [309]
- **July 19, 2019:** An unidentified drone bombs part of a base belonging to a Hashd al-Shaabi militia in Salahuddin, northern Iraq.
The bombing kills one person. Earlier that day, the Iran-backed militia is targeted in Amerli, in the Tuz Khurmatu district of Salahuddin. The unidentified drone attack kills an unreported number of Hezbollah fighters and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. It is uncertain who is responsible for the attack. Source: [Defense Post](#) [310]
- **May 30, 2019:** At least six improvised explosive devices detonate in Kirkuk.
The blasts kill at least four people and wound another 23. It is suspected that ISIS carried out the attacks. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [311]
- **May 26, 2019:** An Iraqi court sentences three French citizens to death after they were found guilty of joining ISIS.
Captured in Syria by a U.S.-backed force fighting the jihadists, they are the first French ISIS members to receive death sentences in Iraq, where they were transferred for trial. Source: [Guardian](#) [312]
- **May 19, 2019:** A roadside bomb hits a bus transporting a Shiite paramilitary group in the eastern town of Balad Ruz.
The attack kills seven and wounds 26. It is expected that ISIS targeted the Shiite forces. Also on the 19th, a roadside bomb detonates in the Tarmiyah area. The blast kills two. In another attack the same day, an explosive detonates near an army patrol also in the Tarmiyah area. The blast wounds two. It is suspected that ISIS is responsible for the attacks. Sources: [Fox News](#) [313], [Xinhua](#) [314]
- **May 19, 2019:** A missile is launched from Amana Bridge in Baghdad, reportedly aimed at the American embassy but landing in an empty field near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.
No casualties are reported. According to a senior official in the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Services (CTS) the rocket was launched by KH. Source: [Daily Beast](#) [315]
- **May 10, 2019:** A suicide bomber detonates his vest in a market in Sadr City.
The attack kills at least four civilians and wounds six others. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [316]
- **May 14, 2019:** KH attacks two Saudi Arabia oil facilities using explosive-laden drones launched from their base in Jurf as-Sakr on the outskirts of Baghdad.
Source: [CTC Sentinel](#) [317]
- **May 4, 2019:** PKK rebels launch mortar attacks from Iraqi territory.
Three Turkish soldiers are killed and one is injured in the attack. Source: [France 24](#) [318]
- **May 1, 2019:** AAH militants fire rockets at U.S. contractors working in Taji.
Local security forces arrest two AAH militants shortly after. Source: [CTC Sentinel](#) [317]
- **April 11, 2019:** Unidentified attacks open fire from a car in Sadr City district.
The attack kills three. Also on the 11th, a bomb detonates in Mullah Abdullah town in northern Kirkuk. The attack kills

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- two and injures one other. No group claims responsibility for either attack. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [319]
- **March 27, 2019:** Austrian authorities arrest a 42-year-old Iraqi man suspected of carrying out unsuccessful attacks on trains in Germany in October and December of 2018 and sympathizing with ISIS. In early October, a high-speed train hit a steel cable stretched over the tracks between electrification masts on the Nuremberg-Munich line. A window in the driver's cab was damaged but no one was injured. An Arabic-language note, which investigators have described as threatening but unspecific, was found nearby as well as other documents suggesting a link to ISIS. At Christmas, police found damage to overhead wires on a railway line in Berlin's eastern suburbs as well as a note in Arabic and an ISIS flag. Source: [Associated Press](#) [320]
 - **March 7, 2019:** Militants ambush a convoy of pro-government, Shiite Muslim paramilitary fighters in Makhmour. At least seven are killed and another 30 are wounded. It is suspected that ISIS fighters carried out the attack. Source: [Reuters](#) [321]
 - **February 23, 2019:** ISIS militants ambush a camp site near Therthar Lake. At least five fishermen are killed. Source: [Fox News](#) [322]
 - **January 30, 2019:** German police arrest three Iraqi refugees suspected of planning a terror attack in the state of Schleswig-Holstein. Investigators allege the two 23-year-olds, Shahin F. and Hersh F., downloaded bomb-making instructions from the Internet and tried to purchase a detonation device from the United Kingdom. British authorities were able to halt the shipment of the detonation device to Germany. Source: [Deutsche Welle](#) [323]
 - **January 28, 2019:** Roadside bombs detonates and strikes two police convoys in Shirqat, northern Iraq. Four officers are killed and 11 others are injured. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Arab News](#) [324]
 - **January 12, 2019:** The Al Forat satellite network, owned by AHH political rival Hikma, reports that AHH was involved in the assassination of Imad Jabar, a restaurant owner in the east of Baghdad. The report drives AHH and its leader to launch a fierce media campaign against Hikma, accusing the party of controlling state buildings and lands in the neighborhood of Jadiriya in Baghdad, and calling for large demonstrations near the party's headquarters to condemn the TV report. Source: [Asharq Al-Awsat](#) [325]
 - **December 25, 2018:** A car bomb explodes in the northern city of Tal Afar. The explosion kills two people and wounds 11. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [326]
 - **November 18, 2018:** A car bomb detonates near Tikrit. At least five people are killed and another 16 are wounded. No group claims responsibility for the attack although it is suspected that ISIS is responsible. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [327]
 - **October 23, 2018:** A vehicle packed with explosives detonates in a crowded market area in Qayyara, northern Iraq. At least six people are killed and 30 others are wounded. It is suspected that ISIS carried out the attack. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [328]
 - **October 19, 2018:** An Iraqi-born Chicago man is placed in federal custody and charged with using ISIS social media platforms to recruit violent jihadists. Federal investigators state that the web developer used written social media posts, audio clips, and videos to recruit terrorists. His detention hearing is scheduled for October 25, 2019. Source: [ABC 7](#) [329]
 - **October 8, 2018:** A group of suspected ISIS fighters open fire on security checkpoint in Mosul, killing two policemen. The militants escape after the attack. Source: [Iraqi News](#) [330]
 - **October 7, 2018:** A car bomb in southern Baghdad wounds at least four people. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Iraqi News](#) [331]
 - **September 17, 2018:** A bomb in western Baghdad wounds two soldiers. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Iraqi News](#) [332]
 - **September 12, 2018:** A car bomb outside a restaurant near Tikrit City kills at least six and wounds 42. There are no immediate claims of responsibility but police suspect ISIS of planting the bomb. Sources: [Reuters](#) [333], [Agence France-Presse](#) [334]
 - **September 7, 2018 - September 8, 2018:** On September 7, three mortars land in Baghdad's Green Zone, where the U.S. embassy is located. On September 8, The U.S. consulate in Basra is hit by rocket fire. There are no casualties or damage in either attack. Separately, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) fires seven missiles at an Iraqi base used by Iranian Kurdish dissidents, killing at least 11 and wounding dozens. The U.S. government blames Iran for the attacks on U.S. targets. Iran dismisses the allegations. On September 28, the U.S. State Department closed and evacuated its consulate in Basra. Sources: [CBS News](#) [335], [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#) [336], [Reuters](#) [337]
 - **August 30, 2018:** A suicide bomber drives a car into a checkpoint near Kirkuk, killing two policemen and wounding three. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [338]
 - **August 29, 2018:** A suicide car bomber drives into a checkpoint in western Iraq, killing at least eight and wounding three. ISIS claims responsibility. ISIS claims the attack killed 25, contradicting official numbers. Sources: [Reuters](#) [339], [Reuters](#) [338]
 - **August 22, 2018:** A suicide bomber explodes at the home of a former Iraqi lawmaker in the village of Asdira, killing at least six tribal militiamen and wounding seven others.

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The lawmaker is unharmed. There are no immediate claims of responsibility, but authorities suspect ISIS. Source: [Reuters](#) [340]

- **July 23, 2018:** Three gunmen attack the governorate building in Irbil, taking a guard hostage. Kurdish security forces kill the gunmen after a five-hour-long standoff that also leaves a government employee dead and two policemen wounded. There are conflicting government reports over whether two of the gunmen set off suicide explosives. Irbil officials suspect ISIS. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [341], [Deutsche Welle](#) [342], [Reuters](#) [343]
- **June 18, 2018:** Militants at a security checkpoint south of Mosul kill six people, including two members of the Hashd al-Ashaeri militia fighting alongside the Iraqi army. ISIS claims responsibility. Local officials say the militants use the fake checkpoints to target security personnel. Source: [Albawaba News](#) [344]
- **June 6, 2018:** An ammunition cache explodes inside a Shiite mosque in Baghdad, killing 17 and wounding 80. The mosque is frequented by supporters of cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose political alliance won 54 seats in Iraq's parliamentary elections the previous month. Police believe the weapons belonged to an armed group but do not know what caused the explosion. Source: [BBC News](#) [345]
- **June 2, 2018:** ISIS militants attack the village of al-Farahatayah in the Salahuddin province, killing 12 members of one family. Source: [Associated Press](#) [346]
- **May 24, 2018:** Eight militants attack a group of security officials in Kirkuk. Four of the militants are killed while the other four set off suicide bombs, killing two and wounding 15. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Anadolou Agency](#) [347]
- **May 23, 2018:** Police intercept a suicide bomber as he enters a park in Baghdad, but the bomber sets off his explosives before he can be captured. The explosion kills at least seven and wounds 16. The park is located in Shoala, a largely Shiite district of the capital. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Associated Press](#) [348]
- **May 1, 2018:** Gunmen kill at least eight civilians and wound three in the town of Tarmiya, north of Baghdad. ISIS claims responsibility and claims it killed 22. Sources: [Reuters](#) [349], [Reuters](#) [350]
- **April 22, 2018 - April 27, 2018:** On April 22, ISIS releases an audio message threatening to attack Iraqi parliamentary elections the May 12 parliamentary elections. ISIS threatens that anybody running or voting in the elections would be considered an infidel and subject to attack. On April 27, ISIS releases a video of its fighters executing what it called "two advocators" for the following month's Iraqi elections. Source: [Reuters](#) [351]
- **April 12, 2018:** Two bombs explode during the funeral of five PMF fighters in the town of Sharqat, killing 16 and wounding 14. ISIS claims responsibility. Separately, ISIS militants attack a police patrol in Kirkuk, wounding four. Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [352], [Iraqi News](#) [353]
- **April 7, 2018:** Two suicide bombers dressed as soldiers set off their explosives at the Al-Hal Party headquarters in the city of Hit, killing four and wounding seven. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [354]
- **April 5, 2018:** ISIS fighters attack a bus in Diyala province, killing several on board, according to Iraqi security sources. There are no further details on the casualties. Source: [Iraqi News](#) [355]
- **March 11, 2018:** ISIS militants raid the house of a local Sunni sheikh in Shirqat, south of Mosul, killing the sheikh, his son, and two others. In Nijana, south of Kirkuk, militants at a fake security checkpoint kill a Shiite family of five and a passerby. There are no immediate claims of the second attack. Source: [Reuters](#) [356]
- **February 18, 2018:** ISIS militants attack Popular Mobilization Unit security checkpoints in Hawija, south of Kirkuk, killing at least 27. It is the deadliest attack on the PMU since Iraqi forces reclaimed Hawija from ISIS in October 2017. The PMU promise to respond "with determination." Source: [CNN](#) [357]
- **January 15, 2018:** Two men set off suicide bombs in a Baghdad's Tayran Square commercial area where day laborers are gathering. The blasts kill at least 27 people and wound 64. ISIS claims responsibility and says it had targeted a gathering of Shiites. Sources: [Reuters](#) [358], [Associated Press](#) [359]
- **January 13, 2018:** A suicide bombing at a police checkpoint in northern Baghdad kills 10 and wounds another 10. ISIS claims responsibility. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [360], [Associated Press](#) [359]
- **December 9, 2017:** Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declares that the Iraqi military has "fully liberated" Iraq from ISIS and secured control of the Iraqi-Syrian border. Source: [CNN](#) [32]
- **November 21, 2017:** Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declares a military victory over ISIS in Iraq following the recapture of Rawa, the last ISIS-held town in the country, the previous week. Source: [Business Insider](#) [361]
- **November 10, 2017:** ISIS is driven out of its last stronghold in Iraq, the town of Rawa.

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- Source: [Business Insider](#) [361]
- **September 14, 2017:** Three suicide bombers carry out attacks on two restaurants and a police checkpoint on a highway near the city of Nassiriya, killing 84 people and wounding 93 others. ISIS claims responsibility for the attacks. Sources: [Reuters](#) [362], [Guardian](#) [363]
 - **July 10, 2017:** The Iraqi government declares victory over ISIS in Mosul, ending a campaign of nearly nine months to retake the city. Source: [Reuters](#) [364]
 - **June 21, 2017:** ISIS blows up the historic al-Nuri mosque in Mosul, from where the group initially announced its caliphate in June 2014. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi calls ISIS's act the "official announcement of their defeat" in Mosul. Source: [New York Times](#) [365]
 - **May 30, 2017:** Two car bombs detonate in the center of Baghdad—one outside of a busy ice cream shop—killing at least 26 people and wounding dozens of others. ISIS claims responsibility for both attacks. Sources: [BBC News](#) [366], [New York Times](#) [367]
 - **May 7, 2017:** Multiple ISIS suicide bombers dressed as Kurdish Peshmerga fighters attack an Iraqi military base hosting U.S. military advisers in Kirkuk. Two of the bombers explode their suicide belts at the base's gates, while Kurdish Peshmerga forces kill three of the attackers. The attack kills two and wounds six, though ISIS claims it killed and wounded dozens of "crusaders and apostates." Source: [Reuters](#) [248]
 - **April 23, 2017:** A group of 10 militants attempts to infiltrate a Federal Police helicopter base in Al-Areej, south of Mosul. Three of the militants and three policemen are killed in the ensuing battle, while the remaining seven militants escape. ISIS claims that two of the militants detonated explosive belts. It is the first major attack in Al-Areej since Iraqi forces recaptured the city from ISIS in February. Source: [Reuters](#) [368]
 - **April 4, 2017:** Approximately 10 militants wearing police uniforms enter Tikrit in a police vehicle, target a police patrol, and break into a police officer's house. Police kill three suicide bombers before they can set off their explosives, but two suicide bombers detonate their explosives, killing 31 people and wounding more than 40 others. ISIS claims responsibility. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [369], [Reuters](#) [254]
 - **February 14, 2017 - February 16, 2017:** Two bombings in Baghdad kill 24 people on February 14 and 15. On February 16, a car bomb kills at least 48 people in a predominately Shiite area of Baghdad. ISIS claims responsibility for the February 16 attack, saying that it targeted a "gathering of Shias." Source: [BBC News](#) [250]
 - **January 8, 2017:** Five suicide bombings in and around Baghdad kill 23 people and wound 37. A body taken from the scene of the first suicide bombing explodes in a morgue refrigerator. Officials say the body was of a second intended attacker who was killed by shrapnel from the first explosion. ISIS claims at least one of the attacks, saying that it wanted to kill Shiites. Sources: [CNN](#) [246], [Associated Press](#) [370]
 - **January 2, 2017:** A suicide bomber drives an explosive-filled pickup truck into a Baghdad market, killing at least 36 and wounding 52. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [Associated Press](#) [249]
 - **December 22, 2016:** Three suicide car bombs kill at least 15 civilians and eight Iraqi policemen in a market in Kokjali, a suburb of Mosul. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [371]
 - **December 11, 2016:** A suicide car bomber at a security checkpoint and a second bomb in a parked car near the city center kill eight people in Fallujah. ISIS claims responsibility. ISIS's Amaq news agency says suicide bombers are responsible for both attacks. Source: [Reuters](#) [247]
 - **November 24, 2016:** A car bomb explodes at a service station and restaurant in Hilla, Iraq, killing at least 80 people and wounding at least 40 others. ISIS claims responsibility. Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [372], [Associated Press](#) [373], [CBS News](#) [374]
 - **November 17, 2016:** A suicide car bomb kills at least 40 people and wounds more than 60 others at a police officer's wedding in Amiriyat al-Fallujah, Iraq. There are no immediate claims of responsibility, but police suspect ISIS. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [375]
 - **November 1, 2016:** Militants shoot or behead more than 300 Iraqi policemen and bury them in a mass grave in Hammam al-Alil, a town south of Mosul, Iraq. Iraqi authorities suspect ISIS of responsibility for the executions. Source: [Reuters](#) [376]
 - **July 2, 2016 - July 3, 2016:** Just before midnight on July 2, a suicide truck bomb kills more than 200 and wounds at least 175 in the Karrada shopping district in Baghdad. The bombing is the deadliest attack in Iraq in 13 years. Just after midnight on July 3, a bomb explodes at an outdoor market in Baghdad's Shaab neighborhood, killing five. Both neighborhoods targeted are predominately Shiite. ISIS claims responsibility for both bombings. Sources: [CNN](#) [77], [CNN](#) [78], [BBC News](#) [377], [CNN](#) [79]
 - **January 15, 2016:** Three Americans are kidnapped late at night from an apartment building in southern Baghdad. The area is reportedly under the control of Shiite militias. According to neighbors, the apartment building frequently

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- underwent raids by AAH. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [378], [Reuters](#) [379]
- **January 2016:**The Badr Organization engages in a series of abductions and killings targeting Sunnis throughout the month--retaliatory attacks that Human Rights Watch characterizes as "serious violations of international humanitarian law."
Source: [Reuters](#) [380]
 - **May 2015:**ISIS captures the city of Ramadi in western Iraq. Iraqi forces recapture the city late that December.
Sources: [New York Times](#) [381], [New York Times](#) [382]
 - **April 10, 2015:**ISIS launches an assault, which includes suicide and car bombers, on Ramadi, Iraq. The group seizes northern parts of the city by the end of the day. At least 10 Iraqi soldiers are killed and General Qassim al-Muhammadi, Iraq's military head in Anbar province, is wounded. Source: [CNN](#) [383]
 - **February 17, 2015:**ISIS militants burn to death 45 Iraqis, many of them suspected to be members of Iraqi security forces.
Source: [BBC News](#) [384]
 - **February 13, 2015:**ISIS launches a suicide attack on the al-Asad airbase in Iraq's Anbar province, where U.S. and coalition troops are training Iraqi forces. A Pentagon spokesman states that an estimated 20-25 extremists, disguised as Iraqi soldiers, are involved in the attack. Most are killed by their suicide vests or by Iraqi forces. No Iraqi or U.S. troops are killed, nor are U.S. soldiers involved in the gunfight. This comes after ISIS took control of a nearby town--their first territorial gain in months. Source: [Associated Press](#) [385]
 - **January 30, 2015:**ISIS attacks oil-rich Kirkuk in northern Iraq after months of fighting the Kurdish Peshmerga. The attack is possibly a diversion against Kurdish efforts to take Mosul, ISIS's stronghold. Brigadier General Shirko Fateh, the highest-ranking operational commander of the Peshmerga brigade, is killed by ISIS. Source: [CNN](#) [386]
 - **December 17, 2014:**ISIS fighter Abu Anas Al-Libi murders over 150 women and girls--some of whom are pregnant--for refusing to partake in sexual acts and marriage with ISIS fighters. The women and girls' bodies are buried in mass graves west of Baghdad. Source: [Al Arabiya](#) [387]
 - **October 19, 2014 - October 20, 2014:**On October 19, a suicide bomber kills 18 and wounds 35 at a Shiite mosque in Baghdad. Two roadside bombs in Baghdad also kill eight and wound 12. On October 20, four car bombs near the Shiite shrines of Imam Hussein and Abbas in Karbala kill 22 people and wound 51. Iraqi authorities suspect ISIS of responsibility for the bombings. Source: [New York Times](#) [388]
 - **October 14, 2014:**An ISIS bomber kills 24 and wounds 40 at a crowded checkpoint in a Shiite-majority neighborhood in Baghdad. Among the dead are Ahmed al-Khafaji, a Shiite member of parliament and of the Badr Organization. Source: [New York Times](#) [389]
 - **September 24, 2014:**ISIS militants blow up the "Green Church" in Tikrit, Iraq, an ancient and holy site for Christians. Source: [New York Times](#) [390]
 - **August 22, 2014:**A suicide bomber explodes at the entrance of a Sunni mosque in Iraq's Diyala Province. Shiite gunmen then storm the mosque and open fire, killing 60 people. Source: [New York Daily News](#) [391]
 - **August 11, 2014:**ISIS militants defeat Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the municipality of Jalawla, Iraq. Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [90]
 - **August 7, 2014:**ISIS fighters take control of Qaraqosh, the largest Christian municipality in Iraq. Tens of thousands of its residents flee. ISIS also takes control of the strategically vital Mosul dam, driving out Kurdish Peshmerga forces from several towns. Hundreds of thousands of Yazidis flee the area. Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [90], [Associated Press](#) [392]
 - **July 25, 2014:**ISIS blows up the shrine at the reputed burial site of the biblical prophet Jonah in Mosul. ISIS has destroyed numerous shrines and mosques that it considers in conflict with early Islamic principles. Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [85]
 - **July 2014:**An attack on a suspected Baghdad brothel kills 32 women and two men. AAH is suspected. Source: [Vice News](#) [393]
 - **June 29, 2014:**ISIS declares an "Islamic caliphate" from Diyala province in Iraq to Aleppo in northern Syria, and renames itself as simply the "Islamic State." ISIS proclaims the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as caliph, and urges Muslims to pledge their allegiance to him. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [72]
 - **June 10, 2014 - September 2, 2014:**ISIS carries out "ethnic cleansing on a historic scale in northern Iraq... systematically target[ing] non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities, killing or abducting hundreds, possibly thousands, and forcing more than 830,000 others to flee the areas it has captured," according to Amnesty International. The United Nations says more than 2,400 Iraqis are killed in June, the most fatalities in one month in Iraq since April 2005. Sources: [Amnesty International](#) [17], [Associated Press](#) [392]
 - **June 15, 2014:**AAH beheads two allegedly gay teenagers and throws their heads in the garbage. Source: [Vice News](#) [393]
 - **June 11, 2014:**ISIS insurgents take over Tikrit, hometown of Saddam Hussein and his clan.

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Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [90]

- **June 10, 2014:** ISIS insurgents take over Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, as Iraqi soldiers flee on foot and leave behind their weapons, vehicles, and uniforms.
After seizing Mosul and securing its hold over Nineveh Province, the ISIS militants move south toward Baghdad, taking over parts of Salahuddin Province along the way. Five days after the offensive, ISIS claims that it has executed 1,700 mostly Shiite Iraqi soldiers. The Iraqi military admits that at least 800 soldiers have been taken prisoner. ISIS also robs local banks and seizes U.S. military equipment left for the Iraqi army. Sources: [New York Times](#) [239], [New York Times](#) [240], [International Business Times](#) [394]
- **June 1, 2014 - July 9, 2014:** Sixty-one Sunni men are killed in villages and towns around Baghdad, according to a Human Rights Watch report.
Witnesses and government officials blame the deaths on AAH and other Shiite militias. Source: [New York Times](#) [200]
- **March 2014 - April 2014:** Forty-eight Sunni men are killed in villages and towns around Baghdad, according to a Human Rights Watch report.
Witnesses and government officials blame the deaths on AAH and other Shiite militias. Source: [New York Times](#) [200]
- **January 2014:** After days of intense fighting, ISIS militants take over major parts of Fallujah, destroy the police headquarters there, and declare the city an Islamic state.
Source: [New York Times](#) [395]
- **September 2013 - December 2013:** As many as 50 Sunnis are killed in Basra, Iraq, during a wave of violence blamed on AAH and other Shiite militias.
At least 59 Sunni families flee Basra and the neighboring Nasiriya province after threatening letters are left on the doors of families from Basra's main Sunni tribe. Source: [New York Review of Books](#) [396]
- **September 27, 2013:** A suicide bomber drives a mini-bus into the gates outside the headquarters of the Kurdish secret police in Irbil, capital of the Kurdish semi-autonomous region.
After the bus explodes, four additional attackers wearing explosives open fire on Kurdish forces. Police kill three of the attackers, but one sets off his explosives. A nearby explosives-filled ambulance detonates soon after emergency workers arrive. The attacks kill six and wound 62. It is the first attack in Irbil since 2007. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Stars & Stripes](#) [45]
- **August 23, 2013:** A series of more than a dozen explosions hit Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad during the morning commute, killing at least 65 and wounding dozens more.
The attacks follow a string of recent beheadings that are claimed by ISIS. Source: [New York Times](#) [397]
- **July 23, 2013:** As part of its "Breaking the Walls" campaign, ISI militants stage "carefully synchronized operations" to break members of the organization out of the Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons.
Al-Qaeda claims that 500 inmates are freed from the prisons, while Iraqi officials put the total at 800—with 400 of them recaptured or killed. Source: [New York Times](#) [398]
- **April 9, 2013:** ISI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announces that his organization has officially merged with the Nusra Front in Syria, forming the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).
However, the Nusra Front subsequently rejects the merger and remains a separate group. Sources: [New York Times](#) [71], [BBC News](#) [399]
- **January 14, 2012:** Militants detonate a bomb near a tent in Basra where Shiite pilgrims celebrating the holiday of Arbaeen are eating breakfast.
The explosion kills at least 53 and wounds more than 130. Source: [New York Times](#) [400]
- **November 14, 2011:** A roadside bomb kills U.S. soldier David Hickman, the last military casualty before the U.S. completes its pullout from Iraq.
AAH is later blamed for the attack. Source: [New York Times](#) [401]
- **August 15, 2011:** A series of 42 "apparently coordinated" attacks using suicide bombs, car bombs, and gunmen kill at least 89 people and wound 315 others across Iraq.
The attacks target Iraqi policemen and soldiers, as well as a market in Kut and a mosque in Yusufiya. ISI is suspected. Source: [New York Times](#) [402]
- **June 2011:** AAH and other Iran-backed militias execute attacks on U.S. military bases in Iraq, killing 13 U.S. soldiers.
Source: [New York Times](#) [403]
- **May 5, 2011:** A suicide bomber blows himself up at a police training center in the majority Shiite city of Hilla, killing 25 and wounding at least 75.
Source: [New York Times](#) [404]
- **October 31, 2010:** Gunmen wearing suicide vests attack a Catholic church in Baghdad, taking more than 100 people hostage.
During the ensuing siege, at least 30 hostages are killed and 41 are wounded. Source: [New York Times](#) [405]
- **May 10, 2010:** A series of shooting and bombing attacks in Baghdad, Fallujah, Samarra, Tarmiya, and Suwayra kill more than 100 people and wound hundreds.
Source: [New York Times](#) [406]
- **January 2010:** U.S. forces release AAH leader Qais al-Khazali from detention immediately following AAH's release of British hostage Peter Moore.
Soon after, AAH leadership reportedly moves to Iran, where they continue to direct attacks against U.S. forces,

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- Sadrists, and Iraqi political figures. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [407], [Institute for the Study of War](#) [173]
- **October 25, 2009:**Two car bombings strike the Iraqi Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, killing more than 155 and injuring more than 500. ISI claims responsibility. Source: [New York Times](#) [408]
 - **September 16, 2009:**AAH fires two rockets at the International (Green) Zone in Al Karkh district in Baghdad, injuring two civilians. The attack coincides with the end of a meeting between U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Source: [Global Terrorism Database](#) [409]
 - **July 17, 2009:**Militants attack an army base in Basra with mortar rounds, killing three American soldiers. Source: [New York Times](#) [410]
 - **April 23, 2009 - April 24, 2009:**On April 23, a woman detonates herself among a group of women and children waiting for emergency food aid in Baghdad, killing 20 and wounding at least 60. The next day, two suicide bombings near the revered Shiite shrine of Imam Musa al-Kadhim and his grandson kill at least 60. Sources: [New York Times](#) [411], [New York Times](#) [412]
 - **April 6, 2009:**Six car bombs detonate in Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad, killing at least 33 and wounding dozens. Source: [New York Times](#) [413]
 - **February 9, 2009:**A suicide bomber detonates his vehicle in Mosul, killing four American soldiers. Source: [New York Times](#) [414]
 - **January 2, 2009:**A suicide bomber detonates himself during a meeting of nearly 1,000 tribal leaders in Yusufiya, killing at least 24 and wounding about 40. Source: [BBC News](#) [415]
 - **December 11, 2008:**A suicide bomber detonates his explosives at a restaurant in Kirkuk on the Muslim holiday of Eid. The attack kills at least 55 people and wounds 120 others. There are no immediate claims of responsibility, but al-Qaeda is suspected. Sources: [Reuters](#) [416], [Daily Mail](#) [417]
 - **July 28, 2008:**A female suicide bomber blows herself up in Kirkuk in the middle of demonstrations against Iraqi legislation on limiting Kurdish autonomy. The attack kills 17 and wounds 47. An angry Kurdish mob blames Turkmen extremists and sets fire to Turkmen offices. At least 25 Turkmen guards are wounded. Ensuing clashes with Turkmen guards leave 12 Kurds dead and 102 people wounded. The riots are the worst ethnic clashes since the 2003 U.S. invasion. Also that morning, two women wearing suicide vests and a third carrying a bomb in a bag detonate their explosives in Baghdad, killing 32 people and wounding 64 others, all Shiite pilgrims. Altogether, the attacks kill at least 61 people and wound 238. Source: [New York Times](#) [33]
 - **February 19, 2008:**KH launches an IRAM attack at a U.S. base southeast of Baghdad. The attack by KH kills one U.S. civilian and injures additional coalition force personnel and U.S. civilians. Source: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [195]
 - **May 29, 2007:**More than 100 AAH militants raid Iraq's Ministry of Finance in Baghdad and kidnap Peter Moore, a British computer consultant, and his four security guards. The AAH attack is reportedly led and masterminded by Iran's IRGC-Quds Force. Sources: [Institute for the Study of War](#) [173], [Guardian](#) [418], [Guardian](#) [419]
 - **March 27, 2007 - March 28, 2007:**On March 27, ISI militants detonate truck bombs in markets in Tal Afar, killing 85 and wounding 183. On March 28, JAM gunmen storm homes in a Sunni neighborhood in Tal Afar, killing 70, kidnapping 40, and injuring 30. The JAM attacks are reportedly in retaliation for the previous day's bombings. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [420]
 - **March 12, 2007:**ISI militants douse with gasoline and set ablaze at least 31 houses in a predominately Shiite neighborhood of Diyala, Iraq. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [420]
 - **March 2007 - June 2008:**Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) launches a number of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and improvised rocket-assisted mortars (IRAMs) at U.S. targets in Iraq. Source: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [195]
 - **February 3, 2007:**A suicide bomber detonates a truck bomb in a heavily Shiite populated neighborhood of Iraq, killing 135. The bombing is the deadliest single attack since the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003. Source: [Reuters](#) [421]
 - **January 20, 2007:**AAH kills five American soldiers in an attack on the Iraqi government's provincial headquarters in Karbala. Sources: [Institute for the Study of War](#) [173], [CNN](#) [422]
 - **2007:**The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) continues its deadly bombing campaign, targeting predominantly Shiite populations. In January 2007, the U.S. begins its "surge," deploying an additional 30,000 troops to Iraq, completing the deployment in June that year, and bringing the total number of troops in Iraq to 150,000. Source: [New York Times](#) [423]
 - **July 17, 2006:**AAH claims responsibility for attacks on Coalition Forces in Karbala and Hillah in Iraq. Source: [Institute for the Study of War](#) [175]

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- **May 6, 2006:**Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) shoots down a British Lynx helicopter in Basra, Iraq, killing five. Source: [BBC News](#) [424]
- **February 22, 2006:**AQI militants dressed as Iraqi police commanders bomb the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq, one of the country's four major Shiite shrines, and the burial place of two of the 12 revered Shiite imams. The attack sets off a wave of intensified Shiite-Sunni attacks across Iraq. Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [425], [New York Times](#) [426]
- **2005:**AQI increases the frequency of attacks throughout the year, targeting U.S.-led coalition forces and Iraqi Shiites. In late 2005, during operations in Iraq, U.S. forces confiscate a letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri that describes the organization's long-term global strategy. The letter also criticizes Zarqawi for videotaping and distributing footage of beheadings, saying that such violence could alienate the Islamic world from al-Qaeda's cause. Source: [New York Times](#) [69]
- **May 2004:**In May, Zarqawi "inaugurates his notorious wave of hostage beheadings," making American citizen Nicholas Berg his first victim. Later that month, a suicide bomber with suspected ties to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi blows himself up near the U.S.-led coalition headquarters in Baghdad, killing the acting president of the Iraqi Governing Council, Ezzedine Salim. Sources: [Atlantic](#) [427], [New York Times](#) [428]
- **August 2003:**An August 7 car bombing of the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad kills at least 10 and wounds about 40. Two weeks later, a truck bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad kills 17—including the U.N. representative—and injures 100. Finally, on August 29, a car bombing outside of the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, Iraq—one of the holiest sites for Shiite Muslims—kills revered cleric Ayatollah Mohamad Bakr al-Hakim and 100 others. All three attacks are tied to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Sources: [CNN](#) [429], [CNN](#) [430], [CNN](#) [431]
- **August 2, 1990 - February 28, 1991:**On August 2, 1990, Iraq bombs Kuwait City and invades Kuwait. On November 29, 1990, the U.N. Security Council passes Resolution 678, imposing a January 15, 1991, deadline for Iraqi forces to withdraw and authorizing force if Iraq does not withdraw. On January 16, a U.S.-led coalition of 34 nations begin a 43-day bombing campaign of Iraq and Kuwait, which ends with the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi forces. Sources: [U.N. Security Council](#) [432], [U.S. Army](#) [433]
- **1980 - 1988:**On September 22, 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invades Iran, sparking an eight-year war. The United States provides support to both sides in a pitch to keep either side from dominating the region. On August 20, 1988, a U.N.-brokered ceasefire takes effect. Sources: [New York Times](#) [434], [New York Times](#) [435]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Anti-ISIS Counterterrorism

In January 2014, ISIS captured the city of Fallujah in Anbar Province. By June 2014, the militants had seized Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Following its capture of the Nineveh Province, ISIS continued south to capture swaths of territory throughout the Tigris Valley and Sinjar Province. Subsequently, the Iraqi government shifted the focus of its domestic counterterrorism operations to defeating ISIS. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [238])

On September 10, 2014, the United States formed the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, which is comprised of 73 countries, to counter the terrorist group's territorial gains. According to the U.S. State Department, coalition partners are "providing military support, impeding the flow of foreign fighters, preventing ISIS financing and funding, addressing humanitarian crises in the region, and exposing ISIS's true nature." Through Operation Inherent Resolve—the official name of the coalition's operation, the coalition has primarily focused on training, equipping, advising, and assisting the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), as well as Kurdish military forces. Eighteen coalition partners, including the United States, have deployed military personnel to Iraq to participate in operational missions. Twelve coalition members have conducted thousands of airstrikes in Iraq. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, the United States has taken the lead role among coalition partners in the air campaign against ISIS. As of June 21, 2017, the United States had conducted 8,882 of the coalition's total 12,996 airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq. On April 30, 2018, the coalition announced the "deactivation" of its land forces headquarters, signaling the end of major combat operations against ISIS in Iraq. The U.S.-led coalition declared that it would continue to provide training and development to the Iraqi military. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [238], [U.S. Department of State](#) [436], [Global Coalition Against Daesh](#) [437], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [438], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [25], [Reuters](#) [439])

At its height in 2014, ISIS controlled approximately 40 percent of Iraq. The State Department reported that while Iraq continued to experience a surge of terrorist activity in 2015, ISIS achieved no strategic victories after its capture of

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Ramadi in May 2015. By the conclusion of 2015, ISIS had lost more than 40 percent of its territory to the Iraqi military and Global Coalition efforts. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [440], [U.S. Department of State](#) [441], [Al Jazeera](#) [442])

In mid-October 2016, U.S.-backed Iraqi forces began a campaign to liberate Mosul. According to Iraqi military sources, ISIS fighters knew that Mosul was “their last land, so they [tried] their best to kill as many as possible.” In an audio recording released in early November 2016, Baghdadi urged his followers to fight to the death in Iraq. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [443], [BBC News](#) [444], [Washington Post](#) [29], [CNN](#) [445], [Washington Post](#) [446], [Al Jazeera](#) [447], [Reuters](#) [26], [CBS News](#) [27], [Guardian](#) [448])

As of March 2017, Iraqi forces had liberated the eastern half of Mosul and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared that the battle had reached its “final stages.” The same month, Baghdadi and ISIS’s leadership reportedly abandoned Mosul, leaving lower-level commanders to confront Iraqi forces. In April 2017, the Iraqi military estimated that ISIS held only 6.8 percent of Iraqi territory. That May, Iraqi authorities reported that they had killed ISIS’s military commander in western Mosul and recaptured key districts of the city. On July 10, 2017, the Iraqi government declared victory against ISIS in Mosul after an almost-nine-month battle. Iraqi officials tempered their celebrations, however, acknowledging that they still needed to clear away explosives and ISIS fighters hiding in parts of the city. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [440], [Reuters](#) [449], [Reuters](#) [450], [Newsweek](#) [451], [Reuters](#) [21], [Wall Street Journal](#) [22])

ISIS continued to lose territory in Iraq after its defeat in Mosul, and following the November 17 recapture of Rawa, the last ISIS-held town in Iraq, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared military victory over ISIS in the country. On December 9, Abadi announced that Iraq was fully liberated from ISIS and that the Iraqi-Syrian border was fully secure. However, Iraqi security officials have acknowledged that the group will likely shift its goal from capturing and ruling territory to carrying out insurgent-style attacks in the country. ISIS leaders have reportedly drawn up plans to revert back to guerrilla warfare after their territorial defeat. (Sources: [CBS News](#) [452], [Business Insider](#) [453], [Reuters](#) [21], [Al-Monitor](#) [28], [Washington Post](#) [29], [Reuters](#) [9], [New York Times](#) [454], [CNN](#) [32])

Iraq has continued to launch military operations against the remnants of ISIS in the country. Iraqi military forces are also cooperating with NATO forces to combat ISIS. In the first half of 2020, Iraq intensified efforts against ISIS and its leadership. For example, in coordination with the Iraqi government the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS targeted three ISIS camps in Kirkuk in June 2020. The following month, the Iraqi military launched a series of operations around the town of Tarmiyah north of Baghdad. The operation uncovered an underground ISIS training camp that the military alleged was used to train fighters against Iraqi military forces. Iraqi forces discovered at least five ISIS hideouts and several fugitives during the operation. (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [455], [Voice of America](#) [456], [Asharq Al-Awsat](#) [457], [Asharq Al-Awsat](#) [458])

The 2003 U.S. Intervention in Iraq

On March 20, 2003, the United States invaded Iraq under the suspicion that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. The U.S.-led intervention, called Operation Iraqi Freedom, quickly toppled the regime. Then-U.S. President George W. Bush declared an end of major combat operations in Iraq on May 1, 2003. The United States remained in Iraq to counter an Islamist insurgency, which gave rise to groups such as ISIS’s precursor, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). In U.S.-supervised elections in 2005, Iraqis voted along ethnic and sectarian lines and elected a Shiite coalition headed by influential cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. This consequently fueled the Sunni insurgency and resulted in additional attacks against U.S. and Iraqi forces. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [459], [CNN](#) [460], [New York Times](#) [461], [American Enterprise Institute](#) [462])

U.S. and Iraqi forces battled AQI and other insurgents out of their strongholds around Baghdad. On June 8, 2006, U.S. airstrikes killed AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi near the city of Baqubah, just northeast of Baghdad. By January 2007, Bush committed an additional 20,000 troops in an attempt to bring stability to Iraq. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [463], [New York Times](#) [464])

In the fall of 2006, U.S. forces began recruiting Sunni tribes and former insurgents to take up arms against AQI in a movement called the Awakening in hopes of improving security networks throughout the Anbar Province and nearby regions. In September 2008, the U.S. military handed over security responsibilities of the province to the Iraqi forces, taking its first step toward U.S. withdrawal from the country. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [465], [Understanding War](#) [466], [Long War Journal](#) [467])

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After taking office in January 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama announced his plans to remove U.S. combat forces from Iraq by August 2010 and to have U.S. forces in non-combat roles train, equip, and advise Iraqi forces until the end of 2011. On June 30, 2009, U.S. troops begin withdrawing from Baghdad and other Iraqi cities in accordance with an agreement made between the U.S. and Iraqi governments. By December 18, 2011, the final U.S. troops departed Iraq, ending a nearly nine-year campaign that left almost 4,500 U.S. soldiers and over 100,000 Iraqis dead. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [468], [New York Times](#) [469], [New York Times](#) [461], [American Enterprise Institute](#) [462])

Combating Terrorist Financing

In 2015, the Central Bank of Iraq issued a national decree to prevent transfers with banks and companies located within ISIS-held territory and halted the payment of salaries to government employees located within ISIS-controlled areas to prevent ISIS taxing those incomes. In July 2015, the Iraq government halted all payments to pensioners, civil servants, doctors, teachers, nurses, police, and workers at state-owned companies in ISIS-held regions. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [441], [Reuters](#) [470])

International Counter-Extremism

With the overwhelming rise of terrorist groups competing for power throughout Iraq, the Iraqi government has been too engaged in its own fight against terrorism to launch any significant or sustained counter-extremism efforts abroad. However, on February 24, 2017, Iraqi warplanes struck ISIS targets in neighboring Syria for the first time. An Iraqi government statement said that the strikes were in response to recent suicide bombings in Iraq. The strikes were coordinated with the Syrian government, according to the statement. The following month, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that Iraqi forces would continue to strike ISIS positions in neighboring countries, but only with the permission of those governments. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [471], [CNN](#) [472])

Combating Terrorist Financing

Since 2005, Iraq has been a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a regional organization that aims to combat terrorist financing and money laundering. From November 2013 to November 2014, Iraq held the MENAFATF presidency. According to the U.S. State Department, the task force reviews Iraq three times a year to address any identified deficiencies in its anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing plans. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [238])

ISIS has generated significant income from a range of sources, including oil smuggling, kidnapping, for ransom, looting, extortion, taxation, antiquities theft and smuggling, and foreign donations. The U.S.-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIS has taken military action against ISIS's ability to generate revenue by targeting the militants' energy infrastructure, including modular refineries, petroleum tanks, and crude oil collection points. Additionally, the United States has levied financial sanctions on banks, companies, and individuals across the world that have been linked to ISIS. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [238])

Public Opinion

ISIS

In July 2015, the BBC commissioned conflict environment research company ORB International to conduct a public opinion poll in Iraq and Syria. The pollsters surveyed more than 1,200 Iraqis across 10 of the country's 18 governorates. Eighty-four percent of those surveyed thought that ISIS was a "strongly negative" influence in the country. Over half (56 percent), however, opposed coalition airstrikes targeting ISIS militants. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [34], [ORB International](#) [35])

Iraqi Migrants

In November and December of 2015, the International Organization for Migration conducted a study called "Migration

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Flows from Iraq to Europe.” The study surveyed nearly 500 Iraqi migrants who departed Iraq in 2015 and were granted asylum in various European countries. Of the 473 surveyed, 80 percent cited “no hope in the future” as their primary reason for fleeing Iraq. When asked about their intentions to return, 67 percent said that they did not intend to return to Iraq, 21 percent were waiting to decide, and just 12 percent planned to return home. (Source: [International Organization for Migration](#) [36])

Opinion of United States

In its Arab Youth Survey 2016, the polling and market research firm Penn Schoen Berland surveyed 3,250 individuals, aged 18 to 24 years old, throughout 15 Arab countries, including Iraq. Of the 250 Iraqis surveyed across the cities Baghdad, Irbil, and Basra, 93 percent perceived the United States as an enemy, whereas only 6 percent perceived it as an ally. (Sources: [Arab Youth Survey 2016](#) [473], [Intercept](#) [474])