



Home Office

# Country Policy and Information Note

## Iraq: Sunni Arabs

Version 3.0

January 2021

# Preface

## Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

## Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

## Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

## Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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# Assessment

Updated: 21 December 2020

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by state, non-state, 'rogue' state or 'hybrid actors' because he or she is an Arab who is a Sunni Muslim.

### 1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 Popular Mobilisation Forces/Unit are sometimes referred to as 'hybrid actors' due to them sometimes operating with the state and at other times competing with it, pursuing their own agendas. For information on 'hybrid actors' see the country policy and information note on [Iraq: Actors of Protection](#).

1.2.2 Although (most) Kurds in Iraq are also Sunni Muslims this note applies to Arab Sunni Muslims only (hereafter referred to as 'Sunnis').

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## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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### 2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Daesh (also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant (ISIS/ISIL)) have been responsible for serious human rights abuses and is a prescribed terrorist organisation in the United Kingdom.

2.2.2 If there are serious reasons for considering that the person has been involved with or supports Daesh, then decision makers must consider whether one of the exclusion clauses is applicable.

2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.

- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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## 2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Actual or imputed race and religion (Arab and Sunni Muslim).
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the particular person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.4 Risk

- 2.4.1 Sunnis, though outnumbered by the Shia majority in Baghdad and with mixed living areas diminishing, are still represented in society and government. Although a minority group within the country, there are areas – particularly in western and central Iraq – where they form the local majority. In May 2018, a national election changed the political landscape when a coalition between Shias, secular Sunnis and communists won the largest number of seats in the Iraqi parliament (see [Sunnis in Iraq](#) and [Political context and timeline](#)).
- 2.4.2 There are reports that Government forces have abused Sunnis, subjecting them to arbitrary arrest, detention, forced disappearance, torture and other degrading treatment on account of their alleged affiliation or support for Daesh, despite the end of major military operations against Daesh in late 2017 (see [State treatment](#)).
- 2.4.3 Reports also suggest that some Sunnis have experienced discrimination in regards to public sector employment as a result of de-Baathification (see [State treatment](#) and the country policy and information note on [Iraq: Baathists](#)).
- 2.4.4 However, unless the particular activities of a person have brought them to the government’s adverse attention or that they regard them as having supported or had Daesh affiliation, in general the treatment of Sunnis by the state is not sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition that it will reach the high threshold to constitute persecution or inhuman or degrading treatment.
- 2.4.5 The most recent Country Guidance case pertaining to Iraq is [SMO, KSP & IM \(Article 15\(c\); identity documents\) Iraq CG \[2019\] UKUT 400 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 24-26 June 2019 and promulgated on 20 December 2019 (hereafter referred to as ‘SMO’). The Upper Tribunal (UT) in this case looked at the levels of indiscriminate violence and the humanitarian situation across Iraq, identity documents and internal relocation. While considering risk under Article 15(c) and the ‘sliding scale’ (n.b. the UT did **not** consider risk of persecution for a convention reason as part of this CG case) the UT held that ‘Insofar as it might have been thought in the past that Sunni males

would automatically fall under suspicion of ISIL sympathy, we agree with the respondent that that is no longer the case' (para 296). Therefore, although those who are suspected of supporting Daesh would be at increased risk under the Article 15(c) sliding scale (see paragraph 425(4) and the country policy and information note on [Iraq: Security and humanitarian situation](#) for more information), Sunni males would not automatically be suspected of being Daesh sympathisers.

- 2.4.6 The onus is on the person to show why the state authorities regard or will regard them of having affiliation to Daesh and that the authorities will treat them adversely because of this.
- 2.4.7 A number of sources state that the Shia militias mobilised in response to the Daesh insurgency in 2014 and integrated into the security forces from March 2018 (see [Rise of Daesh and formulation of Popular Mobilisation Forces/Units](#)) have been responsible for human rights violations against Sunnis. Despite efforts to gain control of the militias and fully integrate them into the armed forces, many groups continue to defy central government command and control (see [Political context and timeline](#)). For more information on the Popular Mobilisation Units/Forces and how they are characterised within the Iraqi security apparatus see the country policy and information note on Iraq: Actors of [Protection](#).
- 2.4.8 There are reports of the Popular Mobilisation Units/Forces (PMUs/PMFs) being involved in kidnapping, extortion, murder, torture and destruction of property. There are also reports of continuing arbitrary arrests and forced disappearance, many based on allegations of Daesh affiliations from local communities, particularly from those in areas formerly held by Daesh (see [Shia militia abuses](#)). There are also reports that some Sunni Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are being blocked from returning to their home areas by the militias. Sunnis, particularly IDPs are also vulnerable to abuse and suspicion of Daesh affiliation, particularly at security checkpoints run by the militias (see [Shia militia abuses](#) and [Freedom of movement](#)).
- 2.4.9 In general Sunnis do not face treatment which is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition to reach the high threshold to constitute persecution or inhuman or degrading treatment. However, a Sunni may be able to demonstrate a real risk of persecution or serious harm from a PMF/PMU depending on their personal profile, including their age and gender, family connections, profession, past experiences and origin. Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk. The onus is on the person to demonstrate this.
- 2.4.10 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities. Similarly, where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from a PMF/PMU (a 'hybrid actor'), they are unlikely to be able to avail themselves to the protection of the authorities.

2.5.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection. See the country policy and information note on [Iraq: Actors of Protection](#).

2.5.3 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.6 Internal relocation

2.6.1 The Upper Tribunal in [SMO](#) held:

'Where internal relocation is raised in the Iraqi context, it is necessary to consider not only the safety and reasonableness of relocation but also the feasibility of that course, in light of sponsorship and residency requirements in operation in various parts of the country. Individuals who seek to relocate within the country may not be admitted to a potential safe haven or may not be permitted to remain there.' (paragraph 425 (46))

2.6.2 The UT also held that:

'...Relocation to Baghdad is likely to be reasonable for Arab Shia and Sunni single, able-bodied men and married couples of working age without children and without specific vulnerabilities. Other individuals are likely to require external support, ie a support network of members of his or her family, extended family or tribe, who are willing and able to provide genuine support. Whether such a support network is available is to be considered with reference to the collectivist nature of Iraqi society, as considered in [AAH \(Iraq\)](#).' (paragraph 425(48)).

2.6.3 For more information about and an assessment of reasonableness of internal relocation within the different areas of Iraq see the [Iraq: Internal relocation, civil documentation and returns CPIN](#).

2.6.4 For general guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.7 Certification

2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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# Country information

Section 3 updated: 21 December 2020

## 3. Sunni demography

3.1.1 In June 2020, the United States Department of State (USSD) published its report on religious freedom in Iraq, covering events in 2019. It stated:

‘The U.S. government estimates the total population at 38.9 million (mid-year 2019 estimate). According to 2010 government statistics, the most recent available, 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Shia Muslims, predominantly Arabs but also including Turkoman, Faili (Shia) Kurds, and others, constitute 55 to 60 percent of the population. Sunni Muslims are approximately 40 percent of the population, of which Arabs constitute 24 percent, Kurds 15 percent, and Turkomans the remaining 1 percent. Shia, although predominantly located in the south and east, are the majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the west, center, and north of the country.’<sup>1</sup>

3.1.2 The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) stated in its Iraq Country Information Report published in August 2020:

‘International observers estimate that approximately 97 per cent of the population is Muslim... Shi’a Muslims, who are predominantly Arab but who also include members of other ethnic groups, constitute 55 to 60 per cent of the overall population, with Sunni Muslims comprising approximately 40 per cent. Around 60 per cent of the Sunni population is Arab, and around 37.5 per cent Kurdish, with the remainder Turkmen. In the Iraqi context, ‘Sunni’ is generally used as shorthand for Sunni Arab, with Kurds and Turkmen regarded primarily as ethnic rather than religious groups...

‘Sunnis form the majority in the west and centre, while Kurds are the majority in the KRI in the north. The increase in sectarian tensions and a deepening focus on communal identity in the years following the March 2003 US led invasion has seen a reduction in the number of “mixed” areas in Baghdad. Mixed Sunni-Shi’a communities live in the districts of Rusafa and Karada, with smaller mixed communities also in the districts of Doura, Rasheed, Karkh, Mansour and Kadhimiya. Shi’a communities dominate suburbs such as Sadr City, Abu Dashir and Al Doura, while significant Sunni communities reside in Abu Ghraib, A’adamia, Rusafa, Za’fariana, Doura and Rasheed.’<sup>2</sup>

3.1.3 In February 2019 the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a report citing various sources entitled ‘Iraq: Key socio-economic indicators’ and stated:

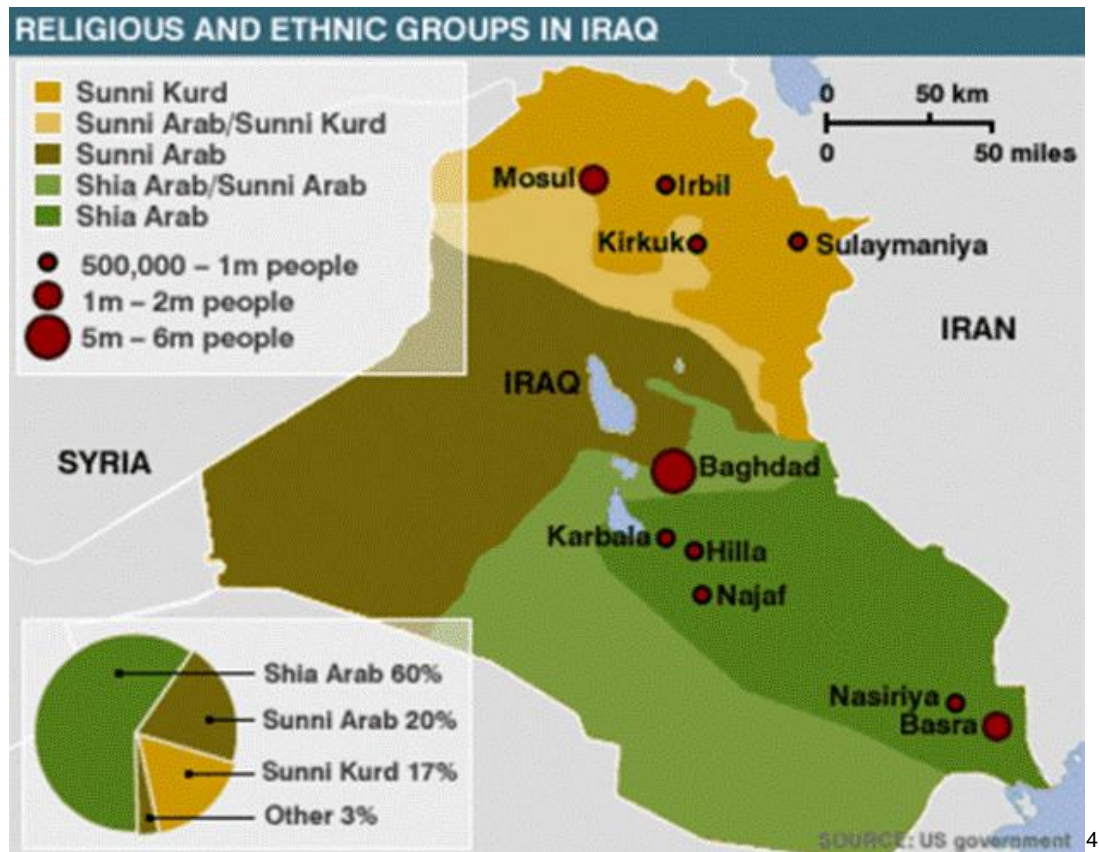
‘...Baghdad is “one of the few areas” with a mixed Sunni and Shia Muslim population, next to a number of smaller Christian communities... IOM [International Organization for Migration] explains that many families left Baghdad due to previous sectarian violence which peaked in 2006-2008. Families resettled along sectarian lines in Sunni and Shia neighbourhoods, which continue to divide the city, especially after the predominantly Sunni

<sup>1</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq](#)’, (section I), 10 June 2020

<sup>2</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iraq](#)’, (p10,11), 17 August 2020

neighbourhoods of Al Adhamia had a wall built around it to “isolate it” from Shia areas. However, in some neighbourhoods Shi’a and Sunni families peacefully coexist, “and there are cases of isolated Sunni families in strongly Shi’a neighbourhoods such as Sadr City where they have managed to gain the protection of neighbours and militias”.<sup>3</sup>

- 3.1.4 Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective published an article in November 2015 which included the following map showing the different religious and ethnic groups across Iraq:



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Section 4 updated: 21 December 2020

#### 4. Political context and timeline

- 4.1.1 In May 2020 the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) published an Iraqi timeline since the 2003 war. It stated:

‘After Saddam Hussein’s ouster in 2003, Iraq’s new leaders struggled to chart a democratic course after decades of dictatorship. Two events were pivotal. First, the U.S. decision to bar the long-ruling Baath Party [for more information see the [CPIN Iraq: Baathists](#)]—and the way it was implemented—created a political vacuum. Second, disbanding the military—alienating hundreds of thousands of trained men with no alternative—left a security void. Iraq suffered through a civil war, political turmoil, widespread

<sup>3</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Report Iraq: Key Socio-Economic Indicators](#)’, (pp29-30), February 2019

<sup>4</sup> Origins, ‘[The Secular Roots of a Religious Divide in Contemporary Iraq](#)’, November 2015

corruption, sectarian tensions and an extremist insurgency that seized a third of the country. Iraq has evolved through four rocky phases.

'The first phase, the initial transition between 2003 and 2007, started with a U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority...The transition included building new parties, recruiting and training new military forces, creating nascent civil society, and drafting new laws. In 2005, Iraqis voted on a new constitution, which introduced individual rights, including for religious and ethnic minorities.

'The political balance of power—dominated for centuries by Sunnis—shifted dramatically. For the first time, the Shia majority claimed the prime minister's slot and had sufficient leverage to control key ministries and other levers of the state. For the first time, Iraq also had a Kurdish president...Sunnis, who had dominated the state under Saddam, maintained the key position of parliamentary speaker but lost many other powers.

'The transition also witnessed the outbreak of sectarian tensions, symbolized by the bombing of the al-Askari shrine, a Shia holy site, in early 2006. The blast destroyed the famous gold dome and triggered violence across Iraq for years.'<sup>5</sup>

4.1.2 For more information on sectarian tensions and conflict see [Islam's Sunni-Shia divide and sectarian conflict](#).

4.1.3 The USIP publication further stated:

'The second phase, from 2007 to 2011, was marked by the U.S. military surge of an additional 30,000 troops—adding to 130,000 already deployed—to help stem the escalating bloodshed. The surge overlapped with the so-called "Awakening" among Iraq's Sunni tribes. They turned against the jihadi movement and started working with U.S. troops. The collaboration initially contained ISI [Islamic State in Iraq]. By 2011, the United States opted to withdraw from Iraq, with an understanding from the Baghdad government that it would incorporate the Sunni tribes into the Iraqi security forces to contain the sectarian divide.

'The third phase played out between 2012 and 2017, as the government of Iraq did not follow through on promises to employ and pay the minority Sunnis who had fought the jihadis. Thousands of Sunnis were detained. By early 2013, tens of thousands of Sunnis participated in anti-government protests in Ramadi, Fallujah, Samarra, Mosul and Kirkuk. The Sunnis accused then Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of exclusionary sectarian policies...

'The Shia-dominated government's failure to follow through with the Sunnis allowed ISI to reconstitute. The underground extremist movement recruited thousands of Sunnis, including beyond Iraq's borders. In 2013, it expanded into Syria and rebranded again as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Its militia captured Fallujah in December 2013. Despite having far more numbers, the Iraqi army crumbled. By June 2014, ISIS took control of a third of the country...'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> USIP, '[Iraq Timeline: Since the 2003 war](#)', 29 May 2020

<sup>6</sup> USIP, '[Iraq Timeline: Since the 2003 war](#)', 29 May 2020

4.1.4 The same source further stated:

‘A fourth phase began in 2018 after the government regained control over all Iraqi territory. In May 2018, a national election redesigned the political landscape. Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr led an unlikely coalition with secular Sunnis and communists that won the largest number of seats while an Iran-backed block came second. Parliament elected veteran Kurdish politician Barham Salih as president and Muhammad al-Halbusi, a 37-year-old Sunni lawmaker, as speaker. Salih designated Adil Abdul al-Mahdi, a 76-year-old economist and veteran Shia politician to be prime minister.’<sup>7</sup>

4.1.5 On 29 April 2020 Bertelsmann Stiftung (BS) published its 2020 country report on Iraq and stated the following regarding the appointment of Adel Mahdi as prime minister:

‘Since 2003, Iraq has been governed through consensus politics. Despite the victory of [the] Saairun [party] in the federal elections in 2018, Adel Abdul-Mahdi was asked to form the new government. Because no political force was able to secure a majority in parliament, the consensus was that Abdul-Mahdi should form the cabinet. This decision was endorsed by Saairun. Abdul-Mahdi is the first Iraqi prime minister since 2005 who does not belong to the Dawa Party. He enjoys the trust and respect of most Shi’ites and Kurds, and reasonable support within the Sunni community. Thus, it is possible that he could rule the country effectively, de-escalate conflicts and build trust between Iraq’s various communities.’<sup>8</sup>

4.1.6 The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) stated:

‘On July 1, 2019, Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi issued a decree ordering the militias of the PMF [Popular Mobilisation Forces – see [Popular Mobilisation Forces/Units](#)] to choose between full integration into the Iraqi armed forces or disarmament by July 31 [2019]. If the groups oppose integration, they will be considered outlaws. The prime minister’s decree stated that the PMF factions have to choose between either political or paramilitary activity and if they choose politics, they are not allowed to carry weapons. The decree was an attempt by Abdul Mahdi at gaining influence over the Iran-backed militias, which boast more than 120,000 fighters’<sup>9</sup>

4.1.7 In regard to the decree mentioned above, the USSD stated in its ‘Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Iraq’ published in June 2020 that:

‘The Government of Iraq issued Executive Order 237 which required all Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), including those backed by Iran, to operate as an indivisible part of the armed forces and be subject to the same regulations; however, many of these groups continued to defy central government command and control and engaged in violent and destabilizing activities in Iraq and neighboring Syria, including attacks on and abductions of civilian protesters’<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> USIP, ‘[Iraq Timeline: Since the 2003 war](#)’, 29 May 2020

<sup>8</sup> BS, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report Iraq](#)’, (Section: Political Participation), 29 April 2020

<sup>9</sup> CEP, ‘[Kata’ib Hezbollah](#)’, (Executive Summary), nd

<sup>10</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report on Terrorism 2019 – Iraq](#)’, (Section: Overview) 24 June 2020



4.1.8 Following anti-government protests towards the end of 2019 Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi announced his resignation in November 2019 in response to a call by Iraq's most prominent Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, for a change in leadership<sup>11</sup>.

4.1.9 On 7 May 2020 Al Jazeera published an article entitled 'Iraq forms new government after six months of uncertainty' and stated:

'Iraq's parliament has approved a new government, after six months without one, as parties squabbled until the last minute over cabinet seats in backroom deals. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Iraq's intelligence chief and a former journalist, will head the government but will begin his term without a full cohort of ministers after several candidates were rejected, it was announced on Wednesday [6 May 2020].

'...Former Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who has been leading a caretaker administration, resigned last year after thousands took to the streets calling for the departure of Iraq's ruling elite accused of driving the country into dysfunction and economic ruin. The battle over government portfolios since Abdul Mahdi's resignation in November prevented two previous nominees for prime minister from forming a cabinet.

'...To earn the vote of confidence, Kadhimi had to appease the main political parties by letting them pick ministers in his cabinet - an informal yet deeply entrenched power-sharing system known as apportionment. "He had 10 percent of freedom to choose his cabinet, and 90 percent were determined by the parties and blocs," political analyst Fadel Abu Ragheef explained.

'Some parties which did not secure ministries, including Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law alliance and Iyad Allawi's National Coalition, boycotted the vote. Kadhim Al Shammery, a member of the National Coalition, criticised the voting process, which he said was dominated by the Shia parties.

"This is a strange approach and it's a dangerous precedent in the Iraqi political scene. The candidates of his cabinet - that's 12 ministers - were presented to the Shia parties, and they gave their point of view but it was not shared with the rest of the political parties. It's as if the Shia powers are the guardians of the political process, he told Al Jazeera.

'Al Jazeera's Simona Foltyn, reporting from Baghdad, said: "To many, his appointment signals the preservation of the status quo rather than a first step on the road towards the change they have demanded."

'A few demonstrators convened to express their disapproval of the new government at Baghdad's Tahrir Square on Wednesday. "Any government that is formed inside parliament without the opinions of protesters will be rejected," said Abdullah Salah, who was at the gathering.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> USIP, '[Iraq Timeline: Since the 2003 war](#)', 29 May 2020

<sup>12</sup>Al Jazeera, '[Iraq forms new government after six months of uncertainty](#)', 7 May 2020

## 5. Sunni-Shia divide and sectarian conflict

### 5.1 Background and rise of sectarian conflict

- 5.1.1 An article entitled 'Islam's Sunni-Shia Divide, Explained' published on 31 July 2019 by History stated:

'Though the two main sects within Islam, Sunni and Shia, agree on most of the fundamental beliefs and practices of Islam, a bitter split between the two goes back some 14 centuries. The divide originated with a dispute over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the Islamic faith he introduced.

'Today, about 85 percent of the approximately 1.6 billion Muslims around the world are Sunni, while 15 percent are Shia, according to an estimate by the Council on Foreign Relations. While Shia represent the majority of the population in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan, and a plurality in Lebanon, Sunnis are the majority in more than 40 other countries, from Morocco to Indonesia.

'Despite their differences, Sunni and Shia have lived alongside each other in relative peace for most of history. But starting in the late 20th century, the schism deepened, exploding into violence in many parts of the Middle East as extreme brands of Sunni and Shia Islam battle for both religious and political supremacy.'<sup>13</sup>

- 5.1.2 For more information on the background and origins of the Sunni-Shia divide within Islam see the BBC article entitled '[Sunnis and Shia: Islam's ancient schism](#)' and the Council on Foreign Relations' (CFR) article entitled '[The Sunni-Shia Divide](#)' which also includes a timeline looking at the origins of the schism going back to 632AD.

- 5.1.3 The CFR article published in November 2017 provided a [timeline](#) for the events that led to the modern sectarian tensions and conflict within Iraq. It stated that in March 2003:

'A coalition led by the United States invades Iraq and ends Saddam's regime and centuries of Sunni dominance in Iraq. Sectarian violence erupts as remnants of the deposed Ba'ath party and other Sunnis, both secular and Islamist, mount a resistance against coalition forces and their local allies, the ascendant Shia community. Shia militias also emerge, some of which also oppose the U.S. military presence. Foreign Sunni militants, many affiliated with al-Qaeda, flock to Iraq to participate in what evolves into a sectarian war. Iranian influence in Iraq grows dramatically as Tehran backs Shia militants, as well as the Shia political parties that come to dominate the electoral process.'<sup>14</sup>

- 5.1.4 An article entitled 'Sunni vs Shia: the roots of Islam's civil war' published on 29 August 2017 by The New Statesman stated:

'The fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and his replacement by a democratically elected, Shia-led government was a shock to Sunnis and

<sup>13</sup> History, '[Islam's Sunni-Shia Divide, Explained](#)', 31 July 2019

<sup>14</sup> CFR, '[The Sunni-Shia Divide](#)', (Section: Modern Tensions), 6 November 2017

especially to the Gulf monarchies, whose Sunni elites may not have liked Saddam but liked the Shia regime even less and saw any improvement in the position of the Shias as a front for the regional advance of Iran. The situation was worsened by the politically immature pro-Shia partisanship of Nouri al-Maliki's Iraq government after his election as prime minister in 2006. This made Iraqi Sunnis feel even more marginalised, after many of them had been ejected from the army and the government by the US-led coalition.

'The humiliation of the Sunnis in Iraq and the spread of Wahhabi ideology led to support for al-Qaeda and a spate of bombings from 2003 against Shia targets and shrines, such as the destruction of the dome of the shrine at Samarra in February 2006. Large numbers of Shias were also killed in suicide and car bombings. Shias responded in 2004-05 with large-scale killings of Sunnis by militia death squads.'<sup>15</sup>

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## 5.2 Rise of Daesh and formulation of Popular Mobilisation Units/Forces

### 5.2.1 An article published by the BBC in December 2015 focused on the origins of Daesh and stated:

'IS [Islamic State] can trace its roots back to the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian. In 2004, a year after the US-led invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden and formed al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which became a major force in the insurgency.

'After Zarqawi's death in 2006, AQI created an umbrella organisation, Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). ISI was steadily weakened by the US troop surge and the creation of Sahwa (Awakening) councils by Sunni Arab tribesmen who rejected its brutality.

'Baghdadi, a former US detainee, became leader in 2010 and began rebuilding ISI's capabilities. By 2013, it was once again carrying out dozens of attacks a month in Iraq... In April 2013, Baghdadi announced the merger of his forces in Iraq and Syria and the creation of "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (Isis).

'...At the end of December 2013, Isis shifted its focus back to Iraq and exploited a political stand-off between the Shia-led government and the minority Sunni Arab community. Aided by tribesmen and former Saddam Hussein loyalists, Isis took control of the central city of Falluja.

'In June 2014, Isis overran the northern city of Mosul, and then advanced southwards towards Baghdad, massacring its adversaries and threatening to eradicate the country's many ethnic and religious minorities. At the end of the month, after consolidating its hold over dozens of cities and towns, Isis declared the creation of a caliphate and changed its name to "Islamic State".'<sup>16</sup>

### 5.2.2 In March 2019 EASO published a report, citing various sources, focusing on the security situation in Iraq. The report stated that 'During the ISIL

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<sup>15</sup> The New Statesman, '[Sunni vs Shia: the roots of Islam's civil war](#)', 29 August 2017

<sup>16</sup> BBC, '[What is "Islamic State"?](#)', 2 December 2015

offensives, the army and police collapsed; 14 Iraqi Army and six Federal Police brigades collapsed entirely...The successive catastrophic defeats of the Iraqi army led to the re-mobilisation of Shia militias in Baghdad and in the Iraqi south, and to a battle to stop the advance of ISIL.<sup>17</sup>

### 5.2.3 The same source further stated:

'The PMUs [Popular Mobilisation Units] were established after the defeat, and subsequent withdrawal of the ISF [Iraqi Security Force] from Mosul in June 2014; however, the original militias long predate the creation of the PMU. After the collapse of the ISF in the face of ISIL in 2014, the PMUs were reinforced following the religious ruling (fatwa) declared by the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, in which he called on volunteers to exercise their "duty to fight" (Wajib al- Kifah) in the offensive against ISIL.'<sup>18</sup>

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Section 6 updated: 21 December 2020

## 6. State treatment

### 6.1 Overview

#### 6.1.1 Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated in its World Report 2019 for events in 2018 that:

'Under the guise of fighting terror, Iraqi forces arbitrarily detained, ill-treated and tortured, and disappeared mostly Sunni men from areas where ISIS was active and failed to respect their due process and fair trial rights. The years of fighting across the country left at least 1.8 million Iraqis still displaced in 2018. Iraqi authorities imposed security measures against individuals and families perceived as having relatives who supported ISIS in the past in what amounted to collective punishment.

'...Iraqi forces arbitrarily detained some ISIS suspects, predominately Sunni men, many of them for months. According to witnesses and family members, security forces regularly detained suspects without any court order, arrest warrant, or other document justifying arrest and often did not provide a reason for the arrest.

'...Iraqi military and security forces have forcibly disappeared predominately Sunni Arab males in the context of counterterrorism operations, as well as in other cases. A range of military and security actors are responsible for the enforced disappearances, many of which took place at checkpoints or the homes of suspects. Despite requests from the families of the disappeared for information, Iraqi authorities have given none.'<sup>19</sup>

#### 6.1.2 An article entitled 'Sunnis from Anbar plead for the release of loved ones by Iraqi security' published by Rudaw in January 2019 stated:

'Families and the local government in the Iraqi province of Anbar are demanding for Baghdad and the Shiite militias to release some 2,000 people who were arrested fleeing the ISIS conflict.

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<sup>17</sup> EASO, '[Country of Origin Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)', (pp16-17), March 2019

<sup>18</sup> EASO, '[Country of Origin Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)', (p24), March 2019

<sup>19</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2019: Iraq – Events of 2018](#)', 17 January 2019.



"My sons were arrested at the Razaza checkpoint. There were taken one by one. We don't know whether the checkpoints were installed to protect people or to make them disappear," said Talal Sabaawi.

'They don't know where to turn for help. "I have visited just about every institution. I also went as far as Baghdad, but it did not yield any results," Sabaawi added. People claim there are children, youth and the elderly among those arrested.

'...Anbar Governor Ali Farhan has reached out to various entities. "We have tried various ways to find those people, but so far the efforts have been fruitless. We have all their names and details documented, and these have been delivered to the commander-in-chief the prime minister, and the joint operations" he said.

'More than 1.8 million Iraqis remain displaced because of the ISIS conflict. Many are Sunni Arabs. They increasingly complain of political disenfranchisement and Iraq's security institutions becoming dominated by Shiite Arabs.'<sup>20</sup>

6.1.3 In May 2019 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees published a report citing various sources entitled 'International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Republic of Iraq' which stated:

'Individuals of mostly Sunni Arab identity, and particularly, but not exclusively, men and boys of fighting age from formerly ISIS-held areas, are reported to collectively be suspected of being affiliated with, or supporting ISIS. Since 2014, civilians of this profile have regularly been subjected to a range of retaliatory acts of violence and abuses at the hands of state and non-state actors, including during anti ISIS military operations, during and after flight from ISIS-held areas, following the retaking of these areas, as well as during ongoing security operations against ISIS remnants.

'As a general rule, criminal action against persons reasonably suspected of criminal acts is entirely legitimate but must be in line with relevant legislation and must respect due process requirements. However, observers note that the ISF, affiliated forces and Kurdish security forces regularly impute an ISIS affiliation to individuals on the basis of broad and discriminatory, often overlapping criteria, including:

- Religious and ethnic background (Sunni Arab or Turkmen);
- Sex and age (men and boys of fighting age);
- Family and tribal background, including place of origin; and/or
- Residency in a formerly ISIS-held area at the time of ISIS control.

'A suspicion of involvement with ISIS is regularly raised against persons of these profiles without regard to the nature of their involvement, i.e. whether it was voluntary or forced and of a civilian or military nature. Individuals of these profiles are reported to be arrested on the basis of questionable evidence such as statements from secret informants or inclusion on "wanted lists" administered by different security actors.

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<sup>20</sup> Rudaw, '[Sunnis from Anbar plead for the release of loved ones by Iraqi security](#)', 22 January 2019

'In the context of military operations against ISIS between 2014 and 2017, civilians of these profiles are reported to have been targeted by ISF, affiliated forces, and Kurdish security forces for arbitrary arrest and detention, abduction, enforced disappearance, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, as well as extra-judicial killing. During this time, in conflict areas and elsewhere, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of perceived ISIS affiliates and supporters were reported to mostly occur at screening centres and checkpoints, from homes and IDP camps, as well as during security raids.

'Since the end of major military operations against ISIS in late 2017, clearing operations and arrest campaigns against ISIS suspects in areas retaken from ISIS and elsewhere reportedly continue. Persons suspected of involvement with ISIS, including persons who were not involved in violent acts, or who were forced to cooperate with ISIS, were economically dependent on keeping their job in the public sector (e.g. civil servants, doctors in public hospitals, teachers) under the ISIS administration, or who were merely living in an area while it was under ISIS control, are at risk of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, extra-judicial killings, and unfair trials that can result in the death sentence on account of their alleged affiliation or support for ISIS.'<sup>21</sup>

6.1.4 The USSD human rights practices in Iraq in 2019 report published in March 2020 stated:

'As in previous years, there were credible reports that government forces, including Federal Police, NSS [National Security Service], PMF, and Asayish, abused and tortured individuals—particularly Sunni Arabs—during arrest, pretrial detention, and after conviction. Former prisoners, detainees, and international human rights organizations documented cases of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment in Ministry of Interior-run facilities and to a lesser extent in Ministry of Defense-run detention facilities...

'...The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. Despite such protections, there were numerous reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions, predominantly of Sunni Arabs, including IDPs.

'...There were numerous reports of arbitrary or unlawful detention by government forces, including ISF, Federal Police, NSS, PMF, Peshmerga, and Asayish. There were no reliable statistics available regarding the number of such acts or the length of detentions. Authorities often failed to notify family members of the arrest or location of detention, resulting in incommunicado detention if not enforced disappearance...Humanitarian organizations also reported that, in many instances, central government forces did not inform detainees of the reasons for their detention or the charges against them. Most reports of arbitrary or unlawful detention involved suspected members or supporters of ISIS and their associates and

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<sup>21</sup> UNHCR, '[Protection Considerations...People Fleeing the Republic of Iraq](#)', (pp59-61), May 2019

family members. Individuals arbitrarily or unlawfully detained were predominantly Sunni Arabs, including IDPs.<sup>22</sup>

6.1.5 The USSD report on religious freedom in Iraq published in June 2020 stated:

‘Some Sunni Muslims continued to speak about what they perceived as anti-Sunni discrimination by Shia government officials in retribution for the Sunnis’ favored status and abuses against Shia during the Saddam Hussein regime. Sunnis said they continued to face discrimination in public sector employment as a result of de-Baathification, a process originally intended to target loyalists of the former regime. Sunnis and local NGOs said the government continued the selective use of the de-Baathification provisions of the law to render many Sunnis ineligible for choice government positions, but it did not do so to render former Shia Baathists ineligible. Some Sunnis said they were often passed over for choice government jobs or lucrative contracts by the Shia-dominated government because the Sunnis were allegedly accused of being Baathists who sympathized with ISIS ideology.’<sup>23</sup>

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## 6.2 Freedom of movement

6.2.1 A report published by EASO in February 2019 entitled ‘Internal Mobility’, citing various sources, stated:

‘Crossing checkpoints is a daily fact of life in Iraq; passing through checkpoints requires giving one’s identity by providing identification papers. Checkpoints are frequently run by different armed actors aligned with the government with unclear rules and subject to the “whims” of those running the checkpoint.

‘...According to the Director of Minority Rights Group International (MRG) who spoke at an EASO meeting of Iraq COI experts in April 2017, checkpoints may be run by a variety of different militias, often with “different sectarian or ethnic identities” and giving the opinion that “it has become impossible to move around in the country unless your paperwork is in order and unless in many cases you are from the right ethnic or religious group that enables you to have access to that particular region or governorate of Iraq” and having “immediate consequences for the safety of individuals”. Security forces at checkpoints reportedly run people’s names through names databases of wanted persons suspected of IS affiliation, and according to Human Rights Watch can be detained and disappeared or risk detention.

‘...A Norwegian Embassy official interviewed by Landinfo for a 2017 report stated that at checkpoints, Sunnis have more difficulty crossing checkpoints as they can be particularly targeted for arbitrary arrest on suspicion of sympathy with ISIL and as such may be subjected to abuse. UNHCR gives the assessment that Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkmen from former ISIL-areas are reportedly particularly “at risk of discriminatory treatment” when crossing checkpoints through road movements between governorates and between Baghdad airport and the city.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq](#)’, (Section 1), March 2020

<sup>23</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq](#)’, (Section 2), 10 June 2020

<sup>24</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Internal mobility](#)’, (pp17-19), February 2019

## 6.2.2 The USSD report published in March 2020 stated:

‘The constitution and law provide for the freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government did not consistently respect these rights...In some instances, authorities restricted movements of displaced persons, and authorities did not allow some IDP camp residents to depart without specific permission, thereby limiting access to livelihoods, education, and services. Many parts of the country liberated from ISIS control suffered from movement restrictions due to checkpoints of PMF units and other government forces. In other instances, local authorities did not always recognize security permits of returnees nor comply with the central government’s orders to facilitate, but not force, returns.

‘...Multiple international NGOs reported that PMF units and Peshmerga prevented civilians, including Sunni Arabs and ethnic and religious minorities, from returning to their homes after government forces ousted ISIS.’<sup>25</sup>

## 6.2.3 For more information on freedom of movement see the [Iraq: Internal relocation, civil documentation and returns CPIN](#).

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Section 7 updated: 21 December 2020

## 7. Popular Mobilisation Forces/Units

### 7.1 Overview

7.1.1 The Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) / Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) are called al-Hashd Al Shaabi in Arabic<sup>26</sup>.

7.1.2 In March 2019 EASO reported, based on a range of sources:

‘Rapidly expanded to halt the advance of ISIL in June 2014, the original objective of the PMU in 2014 was to repel ISIL. Benefiting from the combat experience of existing Shia militias prior to 2014, the PMU evolved into a military force that proved capable of bringing ISIL advances to a standstill and reclaiming territory relinquished by the Iraqi army. The PMU filled the security vacuum created after the collapse of the Iraqi armed forces and emerged as “both a pivotal military and political actor”. Foreign Policy magazine noted in January 2018 that PMU militias continue to provide support to the overstretched Iraqi Army, especially on the local level.’<sup>27</sup>

7.1.3 A joint report published in November 2018 by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and Landinfo, the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, stated:

‘A low estimate of the total size of the PMUs is that they at least have 120,000 members. The PMUs consist of many different militias, out of which the majority are Shia militias. There are Shia militias that are supported by Iran, whilst others have a more internal nationalist agenda. There are also Shia militias who have been driven by the Syrian war and have been fighting in Syria. The ethnic and religious minorities do also have their own PMUs, such as Turkmen, Christian, Yezidi and Shabak PMUs etc. There are some

<sup>25</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq](#)’, (Section 1), March 2020,

<sup>26</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)’, (p8), March 2019

<sup>27</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Report Iraq: Targeting of Individuals](#)’. (p17), March 2019

Sunni PMUs that consist of 17,000-25,000 members. Most of them were established in late 2014 in alliance with the Iraqi government to fight ISIS.

'The recruitment to the PMUs is entirely on a voluntary basis. Many join the PMUs for economic reasons, because the salaries are attractive, compared to the rest of Iraq. The PMUs are very influential and they are popular among the majority of the population for their effort to defeat ISIS; they are active in promoting themselves through PR campaigns and media coverage; and they are closely linked to the most important political parties in Baghdad. However, the unclear hierarchy of the PMUs is seen as a major challenge. The PMUs are officially a subject of the Ministry of Interior of Iraq (Mol), but not all PMUs are reporting to the Mol and the government does not control all armed actors.'<sup>28</sup>

7.1.4 In March 2020 the USSD published its report on human rights practices in Iraq, covering events in 2019. The report stated:

'The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a state-sponsored umbrella military organization composed of approximately 60 militia groups, operated throughout the country. Most PMF units were Shia Arab, reflecting the demographics of the country, while Sunni Arab, Yezidi, Christian, and other minority PMF units generally operated within or near their home regions. All PMF units officially report to the national security advisor and are under the authority of the prime minister, but several units in practice were also responsive to Iran and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.'<sup>29</sup>

7.1.5 BS stated in its April 2020 country report:

'In March 2018, the Shi'a aligned Paramilitary Forces (PMF), numbering between 120,000 and 140,000 troops, legally became part of the Iraqi security apparatus, despite numerous accusations of war crimes committed by PMF soldiers on Iraq's Sunni population during the fight against the IS group.

'...The PMF's integration in the security apparatus is seen as a further politicization of the armed forces in favor of the Shi'a community and there are fears that the PMF will extend their reach within the security apparatus. This adds to the legacy of former prime minister Nuri al-Maliki (2006 – 2014) who had politicized Iraq's army and police. Maliki had appointed several former Ba'thist commanders, who were loyal to him, to key army divisions. As a result, those officers regained the ranks they had lost due to the United States' de-Ba'thification policy.'<sup>30</sup>

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## 7.2 Shia militias

7.2.1 The EASO report looking at the security situation in Iraq published in March 2019 and citing various sources stated:

'The Shia PMUs forces are mainly led by senior Iranian proxy leaders, responding to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Quds Force.

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<sup>28</sup> DIS / Landinfo, '[Security Situation and the Situation for IDPS...](#)', (p22), 5 November 2018

<sup>29</sup> USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq](#)', (Exec. Summary), March 2020

<sup>30</sup> BS, '[BTI 2020 Country Report Iraq](#)', (Section: Political Transformation), 29 April 2020



The Shia PMUs respond to directives from an unofficial executive commission, or Shura Council, dominated by senior pro-Iranian leaders, like the Badr organisation, AAH [Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (The League of the Righteous)], KH [Kataib Hezbollah (Battalions of the Party of God)] and other pro-Iranian figures. These forces have in general a separate chain of command than the ISF. Subsequently, they decide as to whether they will implement orders issued by the prime minister, or ISF, or whether to take a different approach. The Iranian backed forces do not respond to the Prime Minister, but do coordinate many activities with the ISF. There were isolated gun battles between the PMUs and the ISF during the 2018 period which illustrates the power struggles between these forces and the “inability of the Iraqi government to exert control over these forces”.

‘...The FP [Federal Police] accompanies the PMUs on “every major PMF-led operation” and the previous two head commanders of the FP were also Badr members. According to ISW [the Institute for the Study of War], FP commanders who are not sympathetic to the PMU are likely to be “intimidated into cooperating”, and those who do not comply may be forced into retirement, or re-assignment or into administrative positions to make space for Badr or militia members. The PMUs that are aligned with Iran, especially Badr, have considerable influence and alignment over the Iraqi Ministry of Interior...PMUs have been seen as “blatantly partisan” in relation to their political party connections, and behaving in a lawless manner, and competing with ISF forces in territories liberated from ISIL.’<sup>31</sup>

#### 7.2.2 The same source further stated:

‘The Shia PMUs are divided into three main categories:

1. The Iranian-backed militias which have strong relations with Iran and its security apparatus, particularly the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The militias mainly include influential groups like the Badr Organisation, AAH, KH, and Saraya Talia al-Khorasan which proliferated in the areas liberated by ISIL. The Iranian backed militias are also considered the most active and most capable militias inside Iraq. According to ISW, these militias appear to have control over some army units (especially in Diyala), and have freedom of action in areas of responsibility of several other Ministry of Defence Operations Commands (especially in Salah al-Din and Kirkuk).
2. The Hawza militias (also called al-Hashd al- Marji'i): are smaller groups affiliated to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. They are linked to a shrine complex (utbah). They are not connected to political parties.
3. Other politically affiliated militias: refers to armed groups not aligned with Iran, but also linked with Shia political parties. Muqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam (Peace Brigades), and the Islamic Supreme Council (ISCI) militias are considered the most capable of these groups.’<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)’, (p25), March 2019

<sup>32</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)’, (pp25-26), March 2019

## Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq

- 7.2.3 The 'Mapping Militants Project' (MMP), a programme of the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) with research carried out and published at Stanford University (SU) 'traces the evolution of militant organizations and the interactions that develop among them over time'<sup>33</sup>. A profile of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) last updated in July 2018 stated:

'Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) is an Iranian-funded Shiite militant and political organization that split off from the Mahdi Army in 2006 under the leadership of Qais al-Khazali. The group is funded by Iran and promotes Iran's interests in Iraq. It primarily targeted U.S. troops prior to the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 after which point AAH rebranded itself as a political organization. Since the rise of the Islamic State (IS) in late 2013, the AAH has been fought alongside the Iraq government against IS. In 2017 it became a member of the Fatah coalition in the Iraqi government and won 14 seats in the Iraqi Parliament.'<sup>34</sup>

- 7.2.4 In an undated profile of AAH citing various sources, the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) stated:

'Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) is an Iranian-backed Shiite militia and political party operating primarily in Iraq, as well as in Syria and Lebanon...Formed in 2006 by Qais al-Khazali, AAH has between 7,000 and 10,000 members and is one of the most powerful Shiite militias in Iraq. Until the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, AAH launched more than 6,000 attacks on American and Iraqi forces, including highly sophisticated operations and 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.

'AAH broke away from the Mahdi Army, the militia run by influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, in 2006...AAH is one of three prominent Iraqi Shiite militias funded and trained by Iran's external military wing, the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). AAH overtly displays its loyalty to Iran's leaders, including the current supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and his predecessor, the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. In Iraq, and reportedly in Syria as well, the group operates under the command of Iran's Quds Force. Following the January 3, 2020, assassination of Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani in Iraq, AAH joined with other Iranian-sponsored Iraqi militias in vowing revenge on the United States.'<sup>35</sup>

- 7.2.5 The same source further stated:

'Following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, 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, noting that Khazali had "committed no crime under Iraqi law" and was therefore "welcome to play a role in public life."... The group formed a political bloc, al-

<sup>33</sup> CISAC / SU, '[About the Mapping Militants Project](#)', nd

<sup>34</sup> CISAC / SU, '[Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq](#)', (Executive Summary), last updated July 2018

<sup>35</sup> CEP, '[Asaib Ahl al-Haq](#)', (Executive Summary) nd

Sadiqun (the Honest Ones), and ran under al-Maliki's State of Law bloc in the April 2014 Iraqi national elections, winning one seat.

'AAH is one of the leading militias in Iraq's anti-ISIS volunteer forces, Haashid Shaabi (also known as the Popular Mobilization Forces/Units or PMF/PMU). Despite reports of sectarian atrocities and war crimes, AAH and other PMF militias - including the Badr Organization and the U.S. designated Kata'ib Hezbollah - were formally recognized by Iraqi Parliament in November 2016. In January 2018, AAH, Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), and the Badr Organization joined with other PMF units to form the Fatah Alliance political party in preparation for Iraq's May 2018 elections. The alliance won 47 parliamentary seats in the election, though the parliament soon after initiated a manual recount. In June, Fatah formed a coalition agreement with Muqtada al-Sadr's Sairoon Alliance, which won the Iraq elections. Following a country-wide recount, AAH was awarded 15 seats in the parliament. This new coalition places Fatah - and by extension AAH - in a position to influence the new Iraq government. Under the newly formed government, AAH member Abdul-Amir Hamdani was given the position of minister of culture.'<sup>36</sup>

- 7.2.6 In November 2018 the joint report by the DIS and Landinfo stated that 'Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous)...split from the Mehdi Army in 2006 and consists of approx. 10,000 members. The group is very active both in politics and at the operational level, as it, according to the source [an anonymous Iraqi analyst], is much feared for its targeting of civilians.'<sup>37</sup>

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### Badr Organization

- 7.2.7 The Badr Organization profile published by CISAC and SU for the Mapping Militants Project, last updated in March 2019, stated:

'The Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development, formerly known as the Badr Brigade, is a Shiite militant organization that operates in Iraq and Syria. The Badr Organization advocates for the creation of a separate Shiite region in Southern Iraq and is closely allied with Iran, receiving funding and support from the nation. The Badr Organization was founded as the militia wing of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), a Shiite political party formerly known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI). In 2012, the Badr Organization broke away from the ISCI to maintain ties with Iran after the ISCI attempted to disassociate from the nation.'<sup>38</sup>

- 7.2.8 In an undated profile of the Badr Organization citing various sources, the CEP stated:

'The Badr Organization 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...Formed in 1983 under the name "the Badr Brigades," the group originally served as the military wing of the

<sup>36</sup> CEP, '[Asaib Ahl al-Haq](#)', (Executive Summary) nd

<sup>37</sup> DIS / Landinfo, '[Security Situation and the Situation for IDPS...](#)', (p44), 5 November 2018

<sup>38</sup> CISAC / SU, '[The Badr Organization...](#)', (Overview), last updated March 2019



Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an Iraqi Shiite political party aimed at bringing Iran's Islamic Revolution to Iraq. During the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, SCIRI's Badr Brigades fought alongside Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) against the Iraqi military. From 1983 to 2003, the Badr Brigades continued to operate out of Iran, carrying out intermediary attacks in southern Iraq.

'In 2003, the Badr Brigades returned to Iraq to take advantage of the political vacuum there following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. That year, the group formally rebranded, changing its name to "the Badr Organization of Reconstruction and Development" and publicly pledging to abstain from violent attacks. From 2004 to 2006, however, the Badr Organization launched a brutal sectarian war on Iraq's Sunni population. During this period, Badr leader Hadi al-Amiri personally stands accused of ordering attacks on up to 2,000 Sunnis.

'As ISIS gained control over large swaths of territory in 2013 and 2014, the Badr Organization overtly mobilized, recruited, and fought ISIS alongside other Shiite militias and the Iraqi army.

'Today, the Badr Organization is the most powerful militia within the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an alliance of predominantly Shiite militia groups in Iraq that often fights alongside the Iraqi army... As of early 2017, the Badr Organization claims to command between 10,000 and 50,000 militants. Washington Institute for Near East Policy fellow Michael Knights assessed Badr's strength to be between 18,000 and 22,000 fighters as of August 2019. As ISIS lost traction in Iraq, Reuters described the Badr Organization's role in Iraq as "ascendant."<sup>39</sup>

#### 7.2.9 The same source further stated:

'The Badr Organization constitutes an active political force in Iraq in addition to operating as a militia. From 2011 to 2014, Badr leader Hadi al-Amiri served as Iraq's transportation minister. From October 2014 to July 2016, another Badr member, Mohammed Ghabban, served as Iraq's interior minister. As of late 2016, the Badr Organization held 22 seats in Iraq's parliament... The Badr Organization currently leads the second largest political bloc in the Iraqi parliament.'

'...The Badr Organization emerged during Iraq's civil war. The group is implicated in the torture and murder of thousands of Sunni Muslims. The Badr Organization has directly attacked American forces in Iraq, and U.S. officials have warned that the group would resume its attacks on U.S. interests after the military defeat of ISIS in Iraq.'<sup>40</sup>

#### 7.2.10 The November 2018 report published by the DIS and Landinfo stated that the 'Badr Organisation was formed in Iran in the 1980s. The former head of Badr Brigade has become Minister of the Interior and thereby the organisation controls the local and federal police.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> CEP, '[Badr Organization](#)', (Executive Summary), nd

<sup>40</sup> CEP, '[Badr Organization](#)', (Executive Summary), nd

<sup>41</sup> DIS / Landinfo, '[Security Situation and the Situation for IDPS...](#)', (p45), 5 November 2018

## The Peace Brigades (Mehdi Army – also known as Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM))

- 7.2.11 The profile published by CISAC and SU for the Mapping Militants Project, last updated in May 2019 stated:

‘The Mahdi Army, also known as the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), is a Shiite militia led by Muqtada al-Sadr. The group was founded in 2003, and it was considered one of the most dangerous groups in Iraq until early 2008. In March 2008, the Iraqi Security Forces and coalition troops launched a major offensive against the Mahdi Army in Basra, which significantly undermined its capacity. After signing a ceasefire agreement with the coalition forces in 2008, Sadr reoriented the Mahdi Army to focus on social services provision for the Shiite community. In 2010, Sadr again redirected the focus of many members of the Mahdi army, this time to the upcoming parliamentary elections, before stepping out of the public eye in 2013. Then, in June 2014, he reemerged to revive the Mahdi Army in order to join the fight against the Islamic State and changed its name to the Peace Brigades. The Peace Brigades have been active in politics in recent years under the guidance of Sadr; Sadr’s coalition won the most seats in the 2018 Iraqi primary elections.’<sup>42</sup>

- 7.2.12 The November 2018 report published by the DIS and Landinfo stated that ‘The Peace Brigades, [were] formerly known as the Mehdi Army. This group was formed in 2003 and had at a time up to 60,000 members, but the present size is now approx. 30,000 members among whom [sic] many are deployed to the Shia shrine in Samarra.’<sup>43</sup>

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## Kata’ib Hezbollah

- 7.2.13 The Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH) profile published by CISAC and SU for the Mapping Militants Project, last updated in May 2019 stated:

‘Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH), also known as the Hezbollah Brigades, is a Shiite Iraqi insurgent group that was founded in 2007. The group is led by Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and receives large amounts of training, logistical support, and weapons from the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). From 2008-2011, KH directed the majority of its attacks against U.S.-Coalition forces in Iraq and was designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. on July 2, 2009. Following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, KH sent large numbers of its fighters to Syria to fight alongside Hezbollah and the Assad government. KH has also deployed its troops in Iraq to fight the Islamic State (IS) and is a member of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an umbrella group of Shiite militant groups fighting IS in Iraq.’<sup>44</sup>

- 7.2.14 In an undated profile of Kata’ib Hezbollah citing various sources, the CEP stated:

‘Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH) is an Iranian-sponsored, anti-American Shiite militia operating in Iraq with ancillary operations throughout Syria. During the U.S.-led war in Iraq that began in 2003, KH earned a reputation for planting

<sup>42</sup> CISAC / SU, ‘[Mahdi Army](#)’, (Overview), last updated May 2019

<sup>43</sup> DIS / Landinfo, ‘[Security Situation and the Situation for IDPS...](#)’, (p44), 5 November 2018

<sup>44</sup> CISAC / SU, ‘[Kata’ib Hezbollah](#)’, (Overview), last updated May 2019

deadly roadside bombs and using improvised rocket-assisted mortars (IRAMs) to attack U.S. and coalition forces...The group's deceased leader, Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim—also known by his alias Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes—was the alleged mastermind behind the U.S. and French embassy bombings in Kuwait in 1983 and the assassination attempt on Kuwait's emir in 1985.

'...KH's Ibrahim was killed in a January 3, 2020, U.S. drone strike in Iraq. The strike also [killed] Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). KH joined with other Iran-backed Iraqi militias in calling for revenge against the United States. KH security official Abu Ali al-Askari called for renewed suicide attacks. Askari also threatened to cut off the flow of oil from Iraq and attack U.S. military bases in Iraq if the United States follows through on a threat by U.S. President Donald Trump to impose sanctions on the country.

'...KH is 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. KH has maintained a presence along the Iraqi-Syrian border since Iranian-backed Syrian and Iraqi militias captured the border town of al-Qaim from ISIS in November 2017.'<sup>45</sup>

- 7.2.15 The November 2018 report published by the DIS and Landinfo stated that 'Khata'ib Hezbollah, the Hezbollah Brigades is also a very active militia that is supported by Iran with, among other things, special military training. It consists of 3-5,000 members. It operates in secret ways in Diyala and in Southern Iraq, including Basra.'<sup>46</sup>

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### 7.3 Sunni militias

- 7.3.1 The EASO report looking at the security situation in Iraq published in March 2019 and citing various sources stated:

'Many of the areas seized by ISIL were predominantly Sunni areas. Efforts were therefore undertaken by the Iraqi government to mobilise members of the Sunni population - primarily tribal actors - to join in the fight against ISIL. The biggest recruitment undertaking in this regard was a US-sponsored initiative, which came to be known as the Tribal Mobilization Force (TMF). In December 2015 Prime Minister Abadi took the decision to integrate 40,000 Sunni fighters in the PMU. The majority are believed to be in Anbar and Ninewa, whilst others exist in Salah al-Din and other liberated areas. Given their local knowledge and past success in defeating Islamic extremists (as part of the sahra movement) these forces have come to play an important role in recapturing ISIL-controlled areas, and continue to do so after ISIL's territorial defeat. Many of the tribal mobilisation units were tribally affiliated and work independently, or are incorporated within some Shia-led formations, like the Abbas Combat Division and the Ali al-Akbar Brigades.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> CEP, '[Kata'ib Hezbollah](#)', (Executive Summary), nd

<sup>46</sup> DIS / Landinfo, '[Security Situation and the Situation for IDPS...](#)', (p45), 5 November 2018

<sup>47</sup> EASO, '[Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)', (p26), March 2019

## 7.4 Minority militias

- 7.4.1 The EASO report looking at the security situation in Iraq published in March 2019 and citing various sources stated:

‘A number of minority militias...developed in the fight against ISIL. These militias include locally recruited fighters in areas previously seized or threatened by ISIL that joined the fighting in the wake of ISIL’s territorial control. The Shia Turkmen Forces are comparatively smaller in numbers than the Sunni militias. They have however had a considerable impact on the security dynamics, mainly in Salah al-Din and Kirkuk. The Shia Turkmen Forces are initially recruited by the larger PMU-forces, such as the Badr Brigade. This has also contributed to extending the PMU’s influence in the areas of their control. This is the case in southern parts of Kirkuk and the Tuz district in Salah al-Din.’<sup>48</sup>

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Section 8 updated: 21 December 2020

## 8. Shia militia human rights violations

- 8.1.1 The EASO report entitled ‘Actors of Protection’ published in November 2018 stated that:

‘Human rights organisations claim that PMU paramilitaries have been involved in widespread mass kidnapping, extortion, murder, torture, and destruction of property... However, these abuses have gone unpunished by the judiciary and occurred with impunity. PMUs abused prisoners and detainees and targeted Sunnis in particular. DIS noted in its 2018 report that PMUs have the upper hand in ISIL-liberated and disputed territories and “can commit violations without consequences”.’<sup>49</sup>

- 8.1.2 The DIS and Landinfo report published in November 2018 stated:

‘The PMUs are primarily targeting persons, who are suspected of being affiliated with ISIS or family members to those. These are most often Sunni Arab young men, but, in general, other Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkmen also suffer from a form of collective abuses, killings, discriminations etc. The PMU are often reacting in retaliation for ISIS-incidents. One source said that the PMUs have the capacity to target whom they want. They have very good intelligence capabilities that reach out to most of the Iraqi society. The PMUs can target political or economic opponents, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.’<sup>50</sup>

- 8.1.3 In September 2018 Human Rights Watch published a report which focused on the forced disappearances of 78 men and boys, of which 70 were Sunni Arabs. For more information see the full report entitled [“Life Without a Father is Meaningless” – Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances in Iraq 2014-2017](#).

- 8.1.4 In March 2019 EASO published a report, citing various sources, entitled ‘Targeting of Individuals’ which stated:

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<sup>48</sup> EASO, [‘Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Security Situation’](#), (p26), March 2019

<sup>49</sup> EASO, [‘Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Actors of Protection’](#), (p46), November 2018

<sup>50</sup> DIS / Landinfo, [‘Security Situation and the Situation for IDPS...’](#), (p23), 5 November 2018

‘According to a May 2018 report published by Harvard University, Iranian “proxy” PMUs (Kata’ib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), and the Badr Organization) are more sectarian and prone to sectarian abuses, while PMUs that are loyal to Ayatollah Sistani are reportedly “generally considered more moderate” and “less prone” to abuses on sectarian grounds...PMU leaders have acknowledged that abuses occur, but they state that in their view these are acts committed by individuals and do not constitute a policy.’<sup>51</sup>

8.1.5 The EASO report looking at the security situation in Iraq published in March 2019 stated that PMUs ‘...have been involved in a range of human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, killings, and physical abuses against civilians in ISIL-controlled areas in the past context of the conflict, as reported by UNAMI. In the past during the height of the ISIL period, they have been accused of involvement in abuses and killings of civilians and Sunnis, in the context of anti-ISIL operations.’<sup>52</sup>

8.1.6 The same source further stated:

‘Abuses and enforced disappearances at checkpoints have been carried by members of the PMU and government forces. The senior researcher from Human Rights Watch explained that based on its reporting, enforced disappearances and abuses at checkpoints were extremely high in 2015, lower in 2016, 2017 when there were high periods of operations against ISIL, and has gone down since then; she noted that the PMU are not controlling some of the “worst” checkpoints any longer (such as al Razzaza in Anbar), but also that there are less checkpoints than in the period of operations against ISIL. She remarked that most disappearances happened in the context of people fleeing ISIL and as operations dropped this is not happening so widely, fewer names are being added to the security databases and the numbers of arrests may have gone down as many of those wanted have been caught. However, there are continuing arbitrary arrests – many based on allegations from the local community. HRW gave the view that there is a general suspicion toward Sunni Arabs that still remains as an inherent risk when going through PMU checkpoints. For example, she gave the view that travelling from Baghdad to Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk, there is a very high risk for Sunni Arabs crossing PMU checkpoints... The same source explained that Sunni Arabs are more likely to encounter problems at checkpoints located in smaller areas, or in Anbar or Hawija, for example, compared to Baghdad where one can be less noticed.

‘...Much of the risk to a person depends on which forces in control in the area. She gave the example that in areas where the group in control is linked to AAH intelligence, Sunnis would be “much worse off”. She gave the view that those at higher risk are those whose name is on a wanted list, who originate from an area that was perceived as supportive of ISIL...of [sic], if they are travelling without civil documentation. She stated that arrests are

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<sup>51</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Report Iraq: Targeting of Individuals](#)’, (p20), March 2019

<sup>52</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)’, (p25), March 2019



still occurring but authorities will not provide information about the extent to which it is happening.<sup>53</sup>

8.1.7 The USSD report on Human Rights practices covering events in 2019 published in March 2020 stated that ‘Human rights organizations reported that Iran-aligned PMF militia groups engaged in killing, kidnapping, and extortion throughout the country, particularly in ethnically and religiously mixed governorates. Unlawful killings by unidentified gunmen and politically motivated violence frequently occurred throughout the country.’<sup>54</sup>

8.1.8 The same source further stated:

‘Multiple international NGOs reported that PMF units and Peshmerga prevented civilians, including Sunni Arabs and ethnic and religious minorities, from returning to their homes after government forces ousted ISIS. For example, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that local armed groups barred returns to certain areas of Baiji, Salah al-Din Governorate... There were reports some PMF groups harassed or threatened civilians fleeing conflict zones or returning to liberated areas and targeted civilians with threats, intimidation, physical violence, abduction, destruction or confiscation of property, and killing.’<sup>55</sup>

8.1.9 The USSD annual report on religious freedom published in June 2020 stated that ‘According to international human rights organizations, some Shia militias, including some under the PMF umbrella, continued to commit physical abuses and were again implicated in several attacks on Sunni civilians, allegedly to avenge ISIS crimes against Shia.’<sup>56</sup>

8.1.10 The same source further stated that:

‘In June [2019] MP Raad al-Dahlaki, a Sunni from Diyala Province, warned of forced displacement of Sunnis in Diyala. Al-Dahlaki stated government-affiliated Shia militia groups intimidated the Sunni population in the province, resulting in a systematic demographic change along the border with Iran. There were reports that gunmen attacked the village of Abu Al-Khanzir in the province, killing three members of the same family and prompting a wave of displacement from the village.

‘...According to multiple sources, many alleged Sunni ISIS sympathizers or their families whom government forces and militia groups had expelled in 2018 from their homes in several provinces had not returned home by year’s end. Some of these IDPs said PMF groups, including Saraya al-Khorasani and Kata’ib Hezbollah, continued to block their return.’<sup>57</sup>

8.1.11 The USSD report on human rights practices in Iraq in 2019 further stated:

‘Many suspected members of ISIS, and individuals close to them, were among those subject to forced disappearance. Amnesty International and HRW issued reports documenting the disappearance of 643 Sunni Muslim

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<sup>53</sup> EASO, ‘[Country of Origin Information Report Iraq: Security Situation](#)’, (pp57-58), March 2019

<sup>54</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq](#)’, (Section 1), March 2020

<sup>55</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq](#)’, (Section 2), March 2020

<sup>56</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq](#)’, (Section 2), 10 June 2020

<sup>57</sup> USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq](#)’, (Section 2), 10 June 2020

males from Fallujah and Saqlawiyah and further mass disappearances of Sunni males at Razzaza. These incidents were largely attributed to Kataib Hezbollah, which maintained an illegal detention facility with at least 1,700 prisoners in Jurf al-Sakhar, south of Baghdad. The government took no action to free these detainees or investigate human rights abuses related to their captivity.<sup>58</sup>

8.1.12 A report published in May 2019 by Mena Rights Group stated:

‘Al Razaza Checkpoint in Iraq’s Al Anbar Province is known to families and activists from the region as the “crossing of death”. During the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Hezbollah Brigades arrested and disappeared hundreds of men passing through the checkpoint while fleeing to safer areas.

‘Among those disappeared, MENA Rights Group and Al Wissam Humanitarian Assembly documented the cases of 192 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) arrested at the checkpoint on October 26, 2014 while fleeing violence in Jurf Al Sakhr. All 192 individuals – some of whom were minors are the time of their arrest – remain disappeared to date.

‘...The Hezbollah Brigades are part of the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) – an umbrella organisation composed of various militias that supported the Iraqi armed forces during the fight against ISIL.’<sup>59</sup>

8.1.13 The same source further stated ‘Far from being an isolated incident, the total number of individuals disappeared from the checkpoint is much higher, with some estimates stating that as many as 1,200 civilians went missing from the checkpoint in one year.’<sup>60</sup>

8.1.14 In December 2019 The Independent published a report entitled ‘Mass grave containing remains of 643 civilians discovered in Iraq’ which stated:

‘A mass grave containing the remains of 643 civilians has reportedly been discovered near a former ISIS battleground in Iraq – with those inside believed to have been members of a Sunni tribe reportedly targeted by Iraqi militias.

‘Saudi news outlet Al Arabiya said official sources had confirmed the bodies, found along the side of a road 5km north of Fallujah, belonged to the al-Muhamdah tribe – a group who had disappeared in 2016 and hadn’t been seen since.

‘The territory is believed to have been under the control of Iraqi soldiers under the banner of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Shaabi...

‘The militias were among many to be involved in the driving out of ISIS from the country – and were key to the battle of Fallujah where they fought alongside Iraqi state forces to free the city from the terror group’s militants in 2016.

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<sup>58</sup> USSD, [‘2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq’](#), (Section 1), March 2020

<sup>59</sup> MENA Rights Group, [‘192 internally displaced persons disappeared...’](#), 10 May 2019

<sup>60</sup> MENA Rights Group, [‘192 internally displaced persons disappeared...’](#), 10 May 2019

‘However shortly after the liberation of the territory, Amnesty International said at least 643 men and boys had disappeared from the region in a series of abductions by men who identified as part of the PMU.

‘They organisation said the civilians were held at a location they described as the “yellow house”, where they were tortured and held without food or water. Survivors said they were beaten around the head and body, while being accused of belonging to ISIS.

‘One survivor told the NGO: “They didn’t give us anything to drink for the first day; on the second they brought a small bottle for 10 people. They took about 300 of us to the truck; it was dirty and smelled repulsive.

8.1.15 “I think it was used to transport farm animals before us. They handcuffed us two by two. One man died right there, I think from thirst and suffocation... Others were taken out and then I could hear gunshots. Later I could also smell burning.”<sup>61</sup>

8.1.16 The DFAT report published in August 2020 stated:

‘Human rights observers report authorities and Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) systematically carry out enforced disappearances, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism operations. Those disappeared are overwhelmingly Sunni males, including children as young as nine...

‘There have been consistent reports government forces from a range of agencies and PMF groups regularly abuse and torture individuals – particularly Sunni Arabs – during arrest, pre-trial detention and after conviction...’<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Independent, [‘Mass grave containing remains of 643 civilians discovered...’](#), 15 December 2019

<sup>62</sup> DFAT, [‘Country Information Report Iraq’](#), (p53), 17 August 2020



# Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Background to conflicts and sectarian divide.
- Sunni Arabs
  - Numbers
  - Locations
- State treatment
- Popular Mobilisation Forces/Units
  - Militias
  - Abuses

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# Version control

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **8 January 2021**

## Changes from last version of this note

Updated COI and caselaw.

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