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Emerging Trends of Conflict and Instability in Iraq

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November 2018

Questions

1. *What are the emerging trends/dynamics of conflict/instability in Iraq?*

2. *What is the risk of inter-community and inter-tribal conflict at sub-national levels as a threat to stability in Iraq?*

3. *What is the role of gender norms and masculinities in conflict in Iraq, and what are the opportunities for peacebuilding that arise therefrom?*

Contents

1. Overview

This rapid review synthesises literature from academic, policy and NGO sources on the emerging trends of conflict and instability at both the country and localised level in Iraq. The report utilises literature published after November 2017 in order to focus on the current dynamics – with the failed Kurdish referendum, government retaking control of the disputed territories, territorial defeat of the Islamic State (IS),[1] the rising influence of militias, and the protest movement in the south of Iraq. Additionally, this report examines the role of gender norms and masculinities in conflict in Iraq, however the literature is very limited in this regard and thus a slightly larger timescale is utilised (literature published since 2014). This review uses literature that was published up until September 2018 and therefore it is important to note that this is the middle of negotiations to form the government, which involves a number of political deals. The situation in Iraq is rapidly evolving and this review has demonstrated the current position, however this can change depending on the government that is formed and the policies they develop to deal with a range of issues highlighted in this report, ranging from Kirkuk to the protests in the south. Although it has become increasingly unlikely that the Prime Minister (PM), Haider al-Abadi, will remain in power, all possibilities of government formation are included in this report, as per the literature.[2]

Community tensions and potential intercommunal conflict in Iraq may emerge over competition for resources as environmental and agricultural degradation, decrease of water resources, and historic lack of investment in infrastructure take its toll. Interconnected, displacement and migration are also likely to create tensions between communities, as well as competition over land and livelihoods of returnees post-IS. In the disputed territories, particularly Kirkuk, the lack of security provides the opportunity for intercommunal tensions to escalate over ownership, whilst the continued presence of militias also provides an opportunity for conflict. In wider Iraq the current government formation process is creating instability, whilst the protest movement[3] has the potential to escalate, particularly as any new government will find it difficult to meet the protestors demands. The escalation of the protest movement has the potential to not only create conflict in the south – through the protestors and the government response – but also in the rest of the country as insecurity increases as a result.

Other key findings are as follows:

- The current government formation process has the potential to lead to conflict and instability, as there were no clear winners in the election in May 2018, competition has arisen between a number of parties, and any coalition will find it difficult to deliver on the electorate's demands.

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[1] Although referred to as the Islamic State in this report, this term only came into being after a caliphate was declared on June 29, 2014, and it was formerly known, and is often still referred to, as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It is also often referred to as Daesh, which is based on the Arabic acronym of its name and has negative connotations.

[2] In September 2018 Abadi was outmaneuvered in the formation of the largest coalition and he all but ceded the premiership.

[3] There are currently protests over a range of issues from corruption to the lack of services and water. For more information see Section 4.

- Tensions between current PM Abadi and former PM Maliki have the potential to lead to conflict once the government is formed no matter who forms the largest bloc, as Maliki is backed by large sections of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), which poses an issue whether in opposition or in power.

- The continued failure of the Iraqi government to decentralise governance to the provinces is likely to cause conflict and instability in the future if the new government does not rectify it. If Maliki's bloc forms the government, conflict may emerge if he follows the same negative policies towards granting autonomy as seen during his term between 2010-2014.

- If decentralisation does happen, conflict could emerge in provinces with minorities, as current laws would allow for decisions to be made by an absolute majority, which would marginalise minorities.

- The current protest movement originated in Basra and the instability created by it is of concern for Iraq, as Basra's oilfields and sea export terminal account for an estimated 95% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Further budget constraints could harm multiple post-IS programmes, which in turn would spread instability across the country.

- Connected to the protest movement and the potential for violence, many PMF fighters come from Basra and have returned home armed and with military training and experience. Additionally, a number of slums have formed in the city, creating a space for militias and criminal networks to grow. These factors have already led to violence and could further deteriorate as the protest movement continues.

- The worrying and violent rhetoric coming from some political elites, particularly within the Fatah Alliance, is of concern as the new government may decide to meet the protest with violence.

- The spread of protests and the movement of troops to the south, paired with violence and instability would provide IS with increased space to act in territories where they still maintain a presence.

- The continued existence of the PMF and lack of signs of demobilisation, its acting outside of the control of the PM, and it link to individual political parties is cause for concern for both conflict and instability in Iraq. Competition has already entered the political sphere and conflict has emerged with both local actors and the Iraqi army.

- The current government formation could either further institutionalise and legitimise the PMF, or lead to them acting as opposition, which would allow them to exert pressure on the new PM and could lead to conflict and potentially instability.

- The still unresolved nature of the boundaries and political control of the disputed territories is an issue that can lead to conflict once the new government is formed. This issue is particularly relevant in Kirkuk with its importance to the Kurds and recent re-establishing of control by the Iraqi government. Insecurity has increased a great deal in Kirkuk recently and this can easily escalate into conflict if instability increases in Iraq.

- In the Nineveh Plains, international actors are overly focusing their assistance on Yazidis and Christians, which creates inequalities amongst communities and this creates tensions between communities that may reinforce divisions and lead to conflict.

- With no new justice system being formed to deal with IS, a range of actors are carrying out their own justice against suspected IS members, which creates community tensions and will create lasting instability.

- The lack of attention to post-IS reconstruction and reconciliation creates instability and has the potential to lead to conflict, whilst also exacerbating intercommunal tensions.

- Due to the effects of climate change and the lack of water resources, diminished agricultural livelihoods increase the likelihood of local support for terrorist groups.

- The lack of governance capacity to address and respond to climate change and environmental degradation are likely to lead to increased violent conflict and displacement.

- The increased displacement and migration has the potential for conflict between host and displaced communities over renewable resources, scarce job opportunities and public services.

- Diminishing incomes, and food and water insecurity, put pressure on remaining scarce resources, risking increased tensions within and between communities.

- The insecurity, conflict and economic deprivation as a result of the 2003 invasion of Iraq have negatively affected women, their rights and gender equality in Iraq.

- The gender quota system introduced in 2005 has not lead to the meaningful participation of women in politics and instead women who try to affect change are often marginalised.

- High profile women in Iraq are often the target of abuse and violence, as they are seen to transgress the perceived moral codes and in the 2018 parliamentary elections a number of female candidates withdrew as a result.

- Conflict in Iraq has led to the increase in hyper-masculinity, which in turn has resulted in the rise of domestic violence and the use of violence by public authorities against women.

- In Iraq gender norms have led to a large percentage of women believing that physical domestic violence is justified under certain circumstances.

- IS used gender-based and sexual violence in its attempts to form a hegemonic state and sexual slavery and the abduction of women was used as a form of domination over minorities, as well as a source of income.

- The participation of women in conflict resolution, reconciliation, the prevention of violence, and the planning of relief needs, has been completely ignored.

- As a result of the political marginalisation of women, much of the political change comes from civil society and is based on bottom-up pressure and gradual change, as well as more localised activities.

- The restrictions placed on women as a result of displacement greatly hinder their participation in a number of domains and further cement conservative gender norms

- Women who are suspected of family links to IS face sexual violence and exploitation, as well as being denied aid.

- Public authority in Iraq is based on a patriarchal form of masculinity that is embedded in all parts of society, and state and non-state authorities connect sexual control and men's control over women and girls with the ethnosectarian hierarchy.

- Moral populism in Iraq is highly gendered and is based on conservative interpretations of Islam, which is reproduced and institutionalised by public authorities that use these gendered dimensions to reinforce their authority.

- The current context of displacement has opened up a space for gender norms to be renegotiated. Offering opportunities to strengthen gender norms that build trust and address gendered drivers that fuel community tensions.
- The post-IS setting also opens the opportunity to strengthen women's participation. For instance, during IS' reign, the interpretation of well-being was extended so that women protected their children from joining IS, kept families safe, and stressed the importance of education, thus taking on duties of protection that were typically the domain of men. This is a possible entry point to strengthen women's participation in the context of displacement as they seek employment and take part in household and community decision-making.

2. Conflict, Instability and Government Formation

In the May 2018 Parliamentary elections, the turn out was very low at 44.5%, and in the capital, Baghdad, it was as low as 33%. There was also no clear winner in the election, or a visible path towards the formation of a coalition. The split in the Dawa Party of Nouri al-Maliki (former Iraqi PM: 2006-2014) on the one side and Haider al-Abadi (current PM: 2014-) on the other created to competing groups battling it out to form the largest coalition. Moreover, there were accusations of fraud in the elections with many of the results contested, particularly in the Kurdish Region and in Kirkuk. Additionally, the two coalitions that won the most seats - Muqtada al-Sadr's Saairun Coalition and Hadi al-Ameri's Fateh Alliance did well because they were perceived to be outside of the main political system. The turnout and the results were partly down to the population's fatigue with conflict and endemic corruption and their loss of faith that any of these parties can tackle the issue. This therefore not only makes forming a government a difficult task, but once the government is formed it will be under immense pressure from the population to deliver services and tackle corruption, which could strain any coalition and lead to more protests and thus instability and violence. Moreover, due to the number of political parties that need to come together to form the largest bloc in the parliament there will inevitably be a number of competing and opposing political ideas involved and a number of sets of constituents that voted on different issues that need to be appeased (Mansour & van den Toorn, 2018). Again, which can lead to instability.

Table 1 below demonstrates the key winners in the election and Table 1 and Table 2 demonstrate the difficulty of forming a majority coalition and how many different political ideas must be incorporated in the coalition.

Table 1: Key Winners in 2018 Iraq Election

	Party	Leadership	Seats
	Saairun Coalition	Muqtada al-Sadr	54
	Fateh Coalition	Hadi al-Ameri	47
	Victory Alliance	Haider al-Abadi	42
	State of Law Coalition	Nouri al-Maliki	25
	KDP	Masoud Barzani	25
	National Coalition	Ayad Allawi	21
	National Wisdom Movement	Ammar al-Hakim	19
	PUK	Kosrat Rasul Ali	18
	Iraqi Decision Alliance	Osama al-Nujaifi	11

Source: Mansour & van den Toorn, 2018: 8

Table 2: Total Seats in Iraqi Parliament
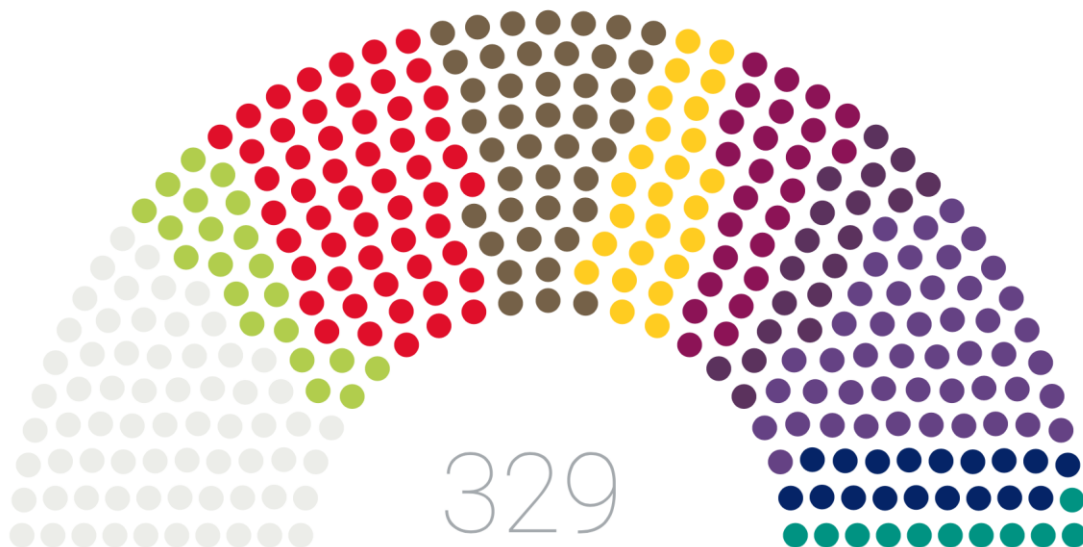
Source: Mansour & van den Toorn, 2018: 8

There have been growing tensions between Abadi and the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF),[4] with Abadi accusing leaders of the PMF of politicising both it success against IS and its current importance for security for political gain, which is connected to the competition to form the largest bloc in parliament. The PMF Committee announced the removal of the PMF from several areas, which includes Sunni areas formerly held by IS. The accusation from Abadi is that this is in order to get Sunni parties to join the parliamentary bloc of Maliki and Hadi al-Ameri (leader of the Fateh Coalition). Abadi claims that this is unconstitutional and only the Commander-in-Chief (Abadi) can decide where the PMF goes. This demonstrates that if Abadi does become PM for a second term conflict may emerge between him and the PMF, whose leaders may use the force for political gain. If Abadi does not become PM for a second term, the premiership will essentially have its own independent security force, which can also lead to conflict, as it did during Maliki's time (Hesse, Leathley, & Cafarella, 2018).

3. Decentralisation and Instability

Article 119 of the Iraqi constitution allows for the formation of new federal regions through a referendum in the province/s if requested by either one-third of the council members of each governorate intending to form a region, or by one-tenth of the voters in each of the governorates intending to form a region.[5] Whilst Law 21, which was passed in 2008 and revised in 2013,

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[4] The PMF, also known as the Hashd al-Shaabi, is an Iraqi state-sponsored umbrella organisation composed of a number of militias. Although predominantly Shiite, there are also Sunni, Christian, Shabak, Yazidi, Turkmen, etc. militias.

[5] https://iraqmission.us/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/iraqi_constitution.pdf

allows for the devolution of significant powers to the governorates (Culbertson & Robinson, 2017). However, decentralisation and further autonomy in Iraq has been constantly denied. Many governorates – including Anbar, Basra, Diyala, Kirkuk, Nineveh, and Salah al-Din – have talked of or attempted to gain more autonomy, as is their constitutional right, but have been denied by the government. The former PM Maliki, outright denied or blocked any thoughts of devolution of power. Many of the governorates that attempted to gain further autonomy during Maliki's premiership were taken over by IS, highlighting how the refusal to engage with decentralisation can lead to conflict (Isakhan & Mulherin, 2018; O'Driscoll, 2017). During PM Abadi's term (2014-present) the focus was on defeating IS and gaining back lost territory, thus although decentralisation was one of his early promises, this did not materialise. However, the issues surrounding decentralisation have not gone away and remains a significant challenge for the Iraqi central government, as governorates want the chance to develop and invest in their territory. Without a viable solution conflict could return, as argued by Isakhan and Mulherin (2018, p. 278):

> The future status of the regions freed from ISIS control and Kurdish claims over territories retaken by Iraqi forces in late 2017 certainly loom as significant challenges for Iraq's political elite and for the integrity of the state as a whole. The potential for further conflict, renewed calls for decentralization, and outright secession remains very real.

It is important to note that calls for decentralisation in Iraq are not for the ethnosectarian division of Iraq, but rather from territories that feel they have been ignored, particularly from a developmental perspective, or feel that the central government is failing to deliver on key economic and developmental goals. Basra is a good example of a governorate seeking autonomy based on these principles. Protests in Basra have turned violent and threats from Basra politicians that they would take control of oil fields and bypass Baghdad's control, means conflict, as witnessed with the Kurds in Kirkuk, is a possibility. This does not necessarily mean that Baghdad needs to grant a number of governorates a federal region status, but real discussions on decentralisation and addressing the issues within these governorates are needed (Isakhan & Mulherin, 2018). Of particular concern should be if Maliki's bloc forms the government, as conflict may emerge if he follows the same negative policies towards granting autonomy as seen during his term between 2010-2014.

There is also the argument that the current form of Law 21 would not be suitable for a number of governorates that include minorities, as it allows for most decisions to be made through absolute majority. Absolute majority, as defined in the 2013 Amendment of the law, means 50% + 1 vote. In the current political climate in Iraq, and particularly in provinces with many minorities, this would lead to minorities being marginalised in the local-level decision-making process. This in turn could lead to conflict, particularly as many of these minorities now have their own militias within the framework of the PMF (Culbertson & Robinson, 2017).

4. Protests, Instability and Conflict

Linked to a number of the issues discussed in this report is the protest movement in Iraq calling for political change. Protests have covered issues such as corruption, decentralisation, bad governance, lack of public services, non-payment of government salaries, lack of investment in infrastructure, etc. and have emerged across the country, with the most recent movement emerging in the summer of 2018. These protests are demand-driven, rather than ethnosectarian in nature. Despite PM Abadi forming a detailed reform plan to address the concerns of the protestors, few inroads have been made. Protests in Iraq have often been met with

disproportionate violence, particularly during Maliki's premiership, and protesters themselves have also turned violent (Yahya, 2017). Although protests have been a common summer occurrence in Iraq, the current protests in the south have escalated more than previous protests and serious instability is feared. Fifteen years on from the US-led invasion of Iraq, an accumulation of factors – including the effects of economic collapse, endemic corruption, severe environmental degradation, tribal and criminal violence, lack of investment in infrastructure, lack of employment opportunities, and poor governance and service provision – have led to the population losing faith in the traditional political system and its leaders. Many of these issues stem from years of neglect and will need a dismantling of the traditional patronage based political system and thus any new government will find it difficult to satisfy the demands of protestors. The dissatisfaction with the political system is clear in Basra, where only 14.4% of eligible voters voted in the 2018 parliamentary elections. This dissatisfaction paired with the scale of the problem and the significant long-term effort that will be needed to overcome the issues is a real concern for Iraq. It cannot afford long-term instability in Basra as Basra's oilfields and sea export terminal account for an estimated 95% of the country's GDP. Further budget constraints could harm multiple post-IS programmes, which in turn would spread instability across the country. It is also important to note that a large number of PMF fighters come from Basra and they have returned home armed and with military training and experience. Additionally, a number of rural people from the province and surrounding areas have moved into slums in the outskirts of the city due to land becoming infertile as a result of poor water supplies and salinity. Not only has this further strained the capacity to deliver services, but it has also led to an increased concentration of people with serious grievances against the government. Moreover, the slums have created a space and an opportunity of militias and criminal networks to grow. All of this has led to mounting insecurity and violence in Basra, which have led to a real fear that the protest movement may lead to significant insecurity and violence across the country (Schweitzer, 2018).

Additionally, there is a worrying rhetoric coming from some political elites, particularly within the Fateh Coalition, such as that the protests have been infiltrated by Saudi and Ba'athist elements. This is similar rhetoric to the Maliki era where protests were met by state violence and protest leaders were assassinated. Thus, if the Fateh and Maliki form the largest bloc, there is the real possibility that protests could be answered by state violence (Robin-D'Cruz, 2018).

The accumulation of issues and no clear path to solving them is of particular concern in the current protests. Moreover, the use of force against the protestors sets a dangerous sign for the future, as both the tribes and militias are heavily armed. A stable Iraq without conflict between the population and the state, as well as a culture of lawlessness, is important in preventing the resurgence of IS. Thus, the protests in the south are a concern for conflict in the country as a whole. Many argue that these protests are different from those of the past and are not likely to go away unless real change is seen. This is particularly important as IS still exists as an insurgency group and routinely carry out attacks in Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah ah-din, and Anbar. Although they have been defeated territorially, they have not been conquered and are waiting for the opportunity for resurgence. IS has returned to the operation level and tactics of 2013 and are terrorising rural areas, particularly at night. The spread of protests and the movement of troops to the south, paired with violence would provide IS with increased space to act within (Hamasaeed, 2018). Dodge (2018, p. 46) argues that 'if nationwide political anger and alienation cannot be channelled into a coherent political movement… local-level political violence perpetrated by militias organised around moral–populist rhetoric can be expected'.

5. Militias

The governance system in Iraq allows for ministries to become miniature fiefdoms with political parties taking control of them and utilising them for their own interests. As coalitions are formed after the election, the PM needs these parties on board to maintain the government, thus giving them a lot of power to push their own agenda. In this respect the militias that formed or reformed to fight against IS have never really been under the full control of the PM. Moreover, within the PMF many of the different groups form party militias. Due to these dynamics, as well as the popularity of the PMF following the defeat of IS, demobilising or integrating the PMF within the Iraqi army proves a difficult task. The divided and individualised nature of the PMF means that it is more likely to engage in violent conflict. For instance, there are a range of pre-existing conflicts across Iraq, particularly in Nineveh, and now the groups involved in these pre-existing conflicts control armed militias. The lack of governmental control over the PMF also means that there is a higher chance of them engaging in skirmishes with the Kurds in areas like Kirkuk, and there have already been threats of violence from individual militia members. At the wider level, the PMF forces have taken control of borders and gone to fight in Syria, despite the PM forbidding it (Mansour & 'Abd al-Jabbār, 2017; O'Driscoll & van Zoonen, 2017).

Mansour (2018a) argues that if the PMF-linked political parties manage to form the government in the current government-formation process then the militias gain further institutionalisation and will directly take part in state re-building. However, if Abadi or Muqtada al-Sadr (whose coalition won the most seats in the 2018 elections) manage to form the next government the PMF and its allies will act as opposition, which will allow them to exert pressure on the new PM (as they will have a significant number of seats and influence due to their role in security) and could also lead to conflict. Thus, the government that emerges will impact the behaviour of the PMF, as they will either be separate forces in opposition, private forces within the government, or (although extremely difficult) integrated within the government. On the other hand, due to the more recent actions of elements within the PMF, such as extortion, checkpoints, looting, etc. conflict may emerge as the local population rebels against their presence. Additionally, conflict has emerged between the PMF and the Iraqi army in areas they jointly retook from IS. For example, in western Mosul in February 2018 there were clashes between the army and the Kataeb Sayed al-Shuhada militia over a dispute at a checkpoint at the 'fourth bridge' over the Tigris, the Kataeb also ended up briefly detaining four of the regiment's troops. The International Crisis Group argues that 'If Hashd fighters are not effectively demobilised and integrated into formal security structures or given civilian jobs, the destructive pattern established under PM Maliki could easily continue' (International Crisis Group, 2018).

6. Disputed territories and Intercommunal Conflict

The disputed territories of Iraq are those areas that had their borders changed by the previous regime and now involve disputes over the ownership of these areas. They involve Kirkuk, Diyala, Nineveh, Salah al-Din and the provinces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Although there are mechanisms to deal with the issue of the disputed territories,[6] no government has
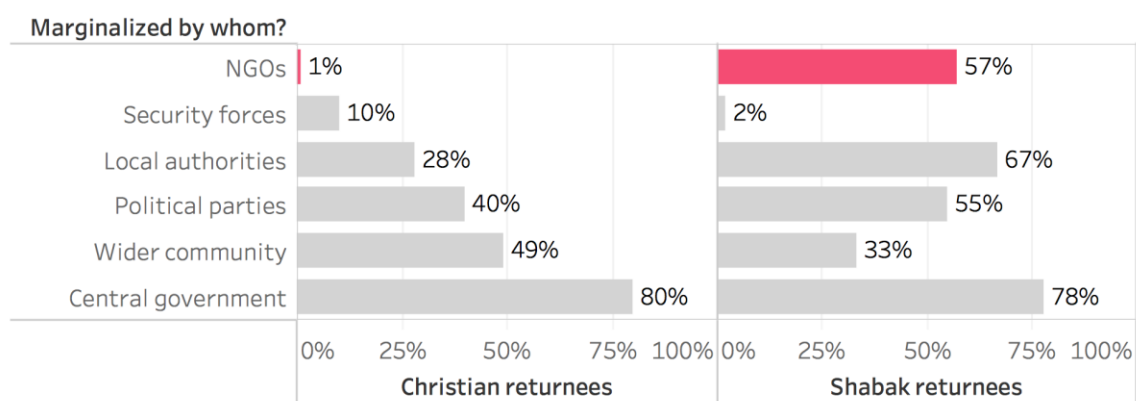
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[6] Article 58 of Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) called for the normalisation of the disputed territories of Iraq, followed by a census and then a referendum on the future constitutional status (in Kirkuk's case whether it would join the KRI or not), whilst Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution calls for the implementation of Article 58 of the TAL by the 31st December 2007.

implemented them, whilst countless deadlines have passed (O'Driscoll, 2018a). Competition between rival ethnosectarian nationalisms within the disputed territories for ownership and control has already led to conflict, and is likely to continue to do so, as the issue of control remains unresolved. For instance there have been skirmishes between rival militias in Sinjar over control of territory, and as there is a vast number of ethnosectarian-based militias within Nineveh, competition for territory can easily turn violent (Kaválek, 2017; O'Driscoll & van Zoonen, 2017). Additionally, competition between Kurds and Baghdad over ownership of Kirkuk has led to armed conflict between the Kurds on the one side and the Iraqi army and the PMF on the other. Although Baghdad has taken control of the area, the issue over ownership remains and the conflict has not been resolved and can therefore turn violent once again (O'Driscoll, 2018a). The competition over governance and the lack of cooperation between the Kurds and Baghdad has also led to a deterioration of the security in Kirkuk and has allowed remnants of IS to carry out attacks, which have increased immensely since October 2017 (Oxford Analytica, 2018).

Nineveh has witnessed massive destruction as a result of IS and the battle to regain the territory. International organisations are taking the lead in reconstruction of houses and businesses, as well as in providing support for returning families. However, it is argued that some of these organisations' actions are not conflict sensitive, particularly in the Nineveh Plains. Assistance tends to focus on Christians and Yazidis, whilst largely ignoring Shabaks and Arabs from the area. Whilst there is a strong focus on preventing Christians and Yazidis from migrating away from the area, this creates tensions between communities that may reinforce divisions and create conflict. Table 3 below demonstrates how Shabaks feel they are being marginalised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), whereas Christians do not (Social Inquiry, 2018).

Table 3: Perceptions of marginalisation by Christians and Shabaks in Nineveh Plains

Marginalized by whom?

|	Christian returnees	Shabak returnees
NGOs	1%	57%
Security forces	10%	2%
Local authorities	28%	67%
Political parties	40%	55%
Wider community	49%	33%
Central government	80%	78%

Source: Social Inquiry, 2018: 3

7. Post IS Intercommunal Conflict

Justice has emerged as an issue in post-IS Iraq as it has created both conflict and instability. The unique justice dynamics that IS has created means that justice needs to be addressed in a new and innovative way. However, Iraq still relies on old laws that are not suitable, whilst provincial councils have used their authority to carry out decrees that only act to further conflict and instability. For instance, the provincial councils of Babylon and Salah al-Din have ordered the homes of IS suspects demolished and their extended families deported from the province. Many tribes have also enacted irreversible decisions, such as the destruction of homes of suspected IS

supporters. Because of the multiple actors involved in punishing those suspected of IS membership, Sunnis are being heavily prosecuted and collective guilt is being asserted, as many locally still connect being Sunni with being IS. Moreover, this is creating displacement and preventing return, whilst at the same time perpetuating many of the issues that led to the rapid rise of IS. The role of the PMF in controlling check points and vetting those allowed to return further complicates the issue, especially as they are often involved in delivering punishment, often on very limited evidence of guilt. In a time when community reconciliation is needed to move beyond conflict and towards reconstruction, actions such as these inhibit the process. The post-IS reconstruction, or lack thereof, is also a factor that can create conflict and instability. Moreover, the lack of processes towards reconciliation in multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian areas such as Nineveh are failing to address cyclical violence in Iraq. Whilst continued competition for the territory between multiple actors creates instability, at the same time ignoring the local population's needs (O'Driscoll, 2018b; Parry, 2018).

The number of displaced people in Iraq and the continued return process (as demonstrated in Map 1 and Map 2) creates instability in Iraq. Returnees face difficulties in returning to their residences due to significant damage and/or lack of legal documentation for houses, and in some cases their houses are occupied. The enhanced competition for resources, land ownership and limited livelihoods in areas with poor security has the potential to lead to intercommunal conflict, particularly as more people return without significant investment in the process (IOM, 2018).

Map 1: Internally displaced people in Iraq

Source: https://bit.ly/2QuV2Lh
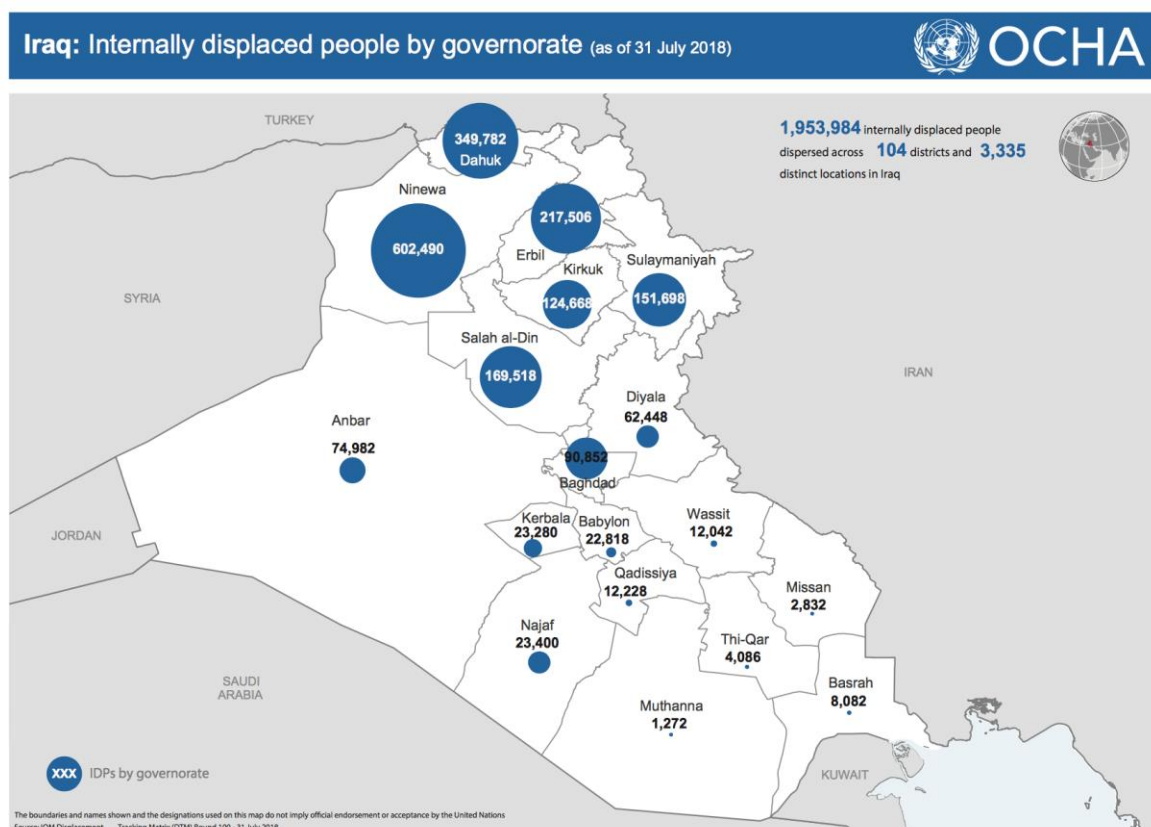
Map 2: Returnees in Iraq

Source: https://bit.ly/2QuV2Lh
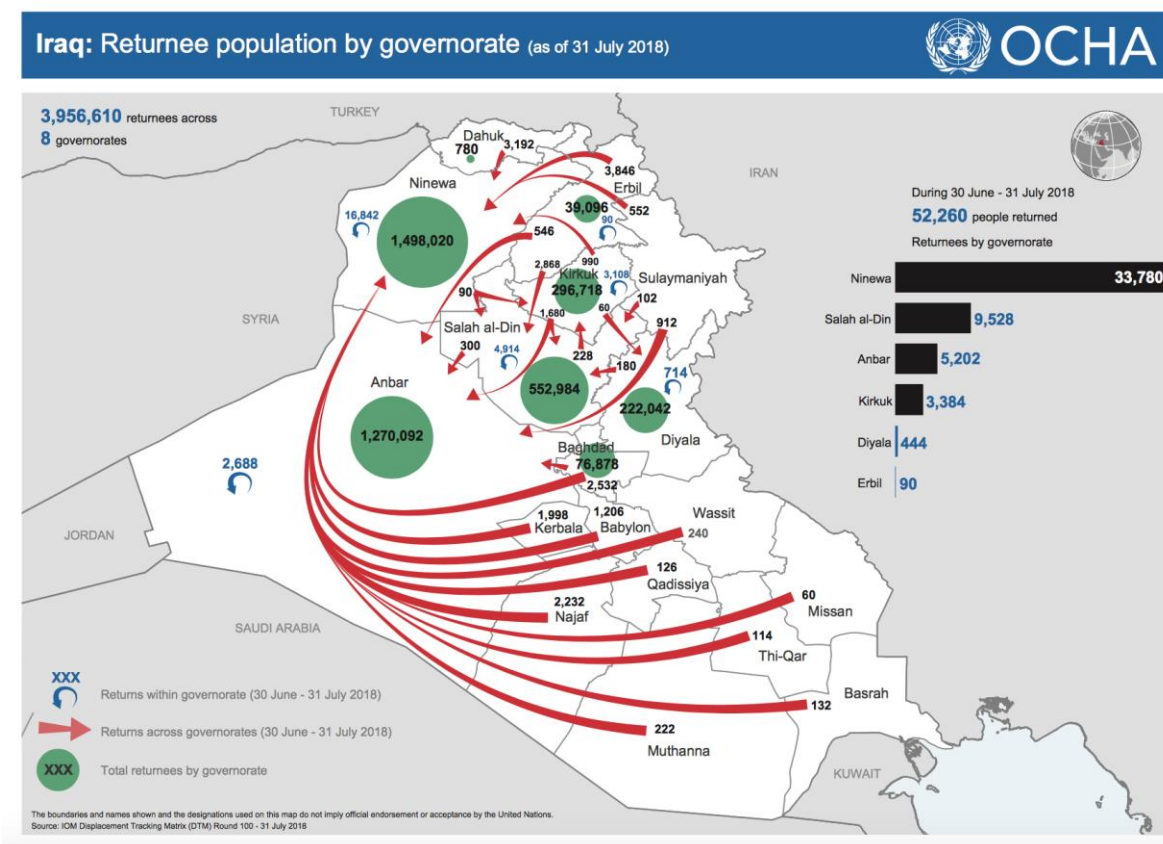
8. Climate-related Local and National Conflict

Climate change in Iraq has resulted in prolonged heat waves, erratic precipitation, higher than average temperatures and increased disaster intensity. The country also has the lowest level of water since 1931 and the flows of Iraqi rivers have decreased by 40%, which is also negatively impacting on food security. Poor water management has also led to high salinity of water, particularly in the south. The climate in Iraq is expected to get worse in the coming years putting further strain on water resources, agriculture and living conditions. By 2050 annual average rainfall is projected to decrease by 9%, whilst mean annual temperatures are expected to increase by 2 degrees Celsius. Additionally 92% of the total area of the country is at risk of desertification (Hassan, Born, & Nordqvist, 2018).

The Expert Working Group on Climate-related Security Risks has highlighted five main security risks in Iraq relating to climate:

Diminished agricultural livelihoods increase local support for terrorist groups: Water shortage and higher temperatures negatively impact agricultural output and farmers' ability to harvest crops. With one quarter of Iraq's population dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods, climate-related issues undermine livelihood security and threaten peace and stability in affected provinces. Yet investment in the agricultural sector remains poor despite it being the second

largest employment sector. Livelihood insecurity can provide an opportunity for terrorist recruitment, particularly in areas liberated from IS. IS has previously used water shortages and food shortages to target particular communities by gaining support in exchange for access to basic resources, livelihood security or other services not provided by the state. Therefore water management and agricultural investment are closely connected to stabilisation, security, and peace (Hassan et al., 2018).

Insufficient governance capacity to address and respond to climate change and environmental degradation: Corruption, poor governance, wars, UN sanctions and the legacy of the Saddam Hussein regime have weakened Iraq's economy and the state's capacity to mitigate the impacts of climate change and modernise water infrastructure and the agriculture sector. The battle against IS further deprioritised water security issues, which has worsened the state of the infrastructure. The Ministry of Water Resources has an ambitious 20-year plan to modernise Iraqi infrastructure, however it lacks the financial means and capacity to implement the project. Likewise, the Ministry of Agriculture receives one of the smallest allocations from Iraq's national budget, which is mainly spent on salaries and pensions, rather than infrastructure investment. Consequences such as violent conflict and displacement are becoming increasingly likely but have not been integrated into post-IS recovery plans (Hassan et al., 2018).

Increased dependence on water flows from neighbours and regional stability: Iraq's rivers flow in from its neighbours making it dependent on them for water. As climate change causes more erratic rainfall in the region, Iraq is becoming more dependent on regional stability to maintain its access to water. Dam projects in Iran and Turkey (Iraq receives 80% of its water from Turkey) are partly responsible for Iraq suffering its worst water shortage crisis for 80 years. Destabilisation in neighbouring countries – through either conflict or reduced rainfall – will further expose Iraq. To date there are no official agreements or frameworks in place for the sharing of water in the region and thus Iraq is vulnerable to any disagreements on economic, socio-political or other security issues, particularly with Turkey (Hassan et al., 2018).

Mass displacement and forced migration: The combination of neglected infrastructure, increased rainfall variability, and dam projects in neighbouring countries could increase the risk of displacement and forced migration along Iraq's populous rivers. Seven million people, across five provinces live along the banks of the River Tigris. The Ilisu Dam in Turkey still needs to become fully operational, but it is estimated that once it is it will reduce the water supply to Iraq by 60%. Increased temperatures, prolonged periods of drought and intensified dust and sand storms are likely to reduce agricultural production and have significant impacts on livestock production and communities' livelihoods. This would be likely to increase the risk of displacement and migration in search of better livelihood and resource conditions. The livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people would be affected, potentially causing displacement and forced urban migration. As a result, the potential for conflict between host and displaced communities over renewable resources, scarce job opportunities and public services might increase. This is particularly true in areas that lack sufficient institutional capacity to mitigate such risks (Hassan et al., 2018). According to UNOCHA (2018) approximately 630 families (3,780 people) have already been displaced in the south of Iraq, as low water levels and salinity have made it impossible for them to survive on agriculture.

Heightened communal tensions over access to food and water: Climate variability and change have strong implications for livelihoods and access to basic resources, such as food and water. This is especially the case for rural communities that are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods and marginalised communities. Diminishing incomes, and food and water insecurity,

put pressure on remaining scarce resources, risking increased tensions within and between communities. This is particularly the case in rural and marginalised communities where sufficient adaptation and mitigation policies have not been put in place. For example, in southern Iraq diminishing water resources have already led to demonstrations and local clashes over water rights (Hassan et al., 2018).

The water scarcity in Iraq is a serious issue, and along with the lack of electricity, employment, and endemic corruption is responsible for the protest movements in the south. There are fears that the water crisis in Iraq will drive conflict – through migration, localised conflict, and civil unrest. Both climate related issues and the historic lack of investment and maintenance of infrastructure are responsible for the current state of affairs that have made some form of conflict related to water inevitable. Protests have already turned violent and there have been a number of tribal disputes that have turned violent over water resources for agriculture (Luchtenberg, 2018).

9. Gender Norms

According to Dodge et al. (2018:18) the

> insecurity, conflict and economic deprivation that followed the invasion of 2003 have significantly affected women, their rights and the overall status of gender equality in Iraq. The impact of the intervention and its aftermath has been mostly negative for Iraqi women; they have become more exposed to violence and their socio-economic rights have deteriorated.

Prior to the 2003 invasion, economic sanctions led to the restriction of the role of women in education and the labour force and thus reinforced conservative gender roles, which have deteriorated further since 2003. Although a gender quota system in elections and parliament was introduced in 2005 this did not lead to the meaningful participation of women in politics. Instead women, and movements, that challenged the patriarchal hegemony were/are excluded (Dodge et al., 2018). Moreover, the 2018 parliamentary elections saw a number of female candidates withdraw as a result of online harassment, abuse, and threats, often of a sexualised nature (VAWG helpdesk, 2018). Whilst a number of professional women have been killed for transgressing perceived moral codes (Fraser & Bell, 2016).

The transformation since 2003 has put further limits on, and increased control of, women. Conservative gender norms in Iraq make it more likely for women to keep houses than to enter the labour market (Dodge et al., 2018). Moreover, the participation of women in conflict resolution, reconciliation, the prevention of violence, and the planning of relief needs, has been completely ignored. Women have also been marginalised in the formulation of a draft Anti-Domestic Violence law. As a result of the political marginalisation of women, much of the political change comes from civil society and is based on bottom-up pressure and gradual change, as well as more localised activities (VAWG helpdesk, 2018).

The internal conflicts that followed the 2003 invasion have led to a failure to provide security, which has greatly affected women. Dodge et al. (2018) argue that conflict in Iraq has led to the increase in hyper-masculinity, which in turn has resulted in the rise of domestic violence and the use of violence by public authorities against women. A further issue with gender norms in Iraq is that a large percentage of women believe physical domestic violence is justified under certain circumstances, as demonstrated in Table 4 (Fraser & Bell, 2016). Part of the issue is that Iraq has a long history of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in the process of statebuilding. The use of SGBV was also taken up by IS in its attempts to form a hegemonic state. For

instance, sexual slavery and the abduction of women was used as a form of domination over minorities, as well as a source of income. Additionally, this acted as a way of creating more children for the caliphate, who would be brought up under its doctrines. Forced and arranged marriages were also used to create bonds and loyalty amongst IS and thus IS' form of masculinity was used to underpin its attempted statebuilding practices (Ahram, 2018).

SGBV services are limited in Iraq and there is a stigma about seeking help and a fear from women of damaging their own reputation. Moreover, displacement from conflict also limits the services that women are able to access. As a result, women who seek help are more likely to report to their family. SGBV has been used against women as part of conflict in Iraq, particularly by IS, but also by the security forces. At the same time the gender norms and hyper-masculinity that exists in Iraq has led to an increase of homophobic attacks and many Islamic clerics have urged their followers to eradicate homosexuality from Iraq (Fraser & Bell, 2016).

Table 4: Violence against women and girls

Indicator:	2012 (%)	2006 (%)
Justification of physical domestic violence[5]:		
Overall % of women think it is justified that a husband beats his wife for at least one of the seven given reasons	58%	59%
Negligence of childcare	37%	43%
Demonstration of a kind of independence such as leaving the house without husband's knowledge	41%[6]	47%
Starting an argument with their husband	37%	36%
15-19	58%	57%
Kurdistan	Data not given	36.7%
Central / South region		62.7
Prevalence of FGM:	12 (15-49)	N/A
Women with no education	20	
Secondary or higher education	9	
Kurdistan region	44	
Central / Southern Iraq	1	
45-49	15	
15-19	8	
Practice should continue	8	
Practice should discontinue	84	
Prevalence of early marriage:		
Women 15-49 years married before their 15th birthday	5.7	5.4
Women 20-49 years married before their 18th birthday	24.2	22.6
Women 15-19 currently married	18.7	19 (10 in Kurdistan)

Source: Fraser & Bell, 2016:4

Conflict in Iraq, particularly concerning IS, has led to a significant number of internally displace people (IDPs) and displacement has more negative impacts for women than for men. There is an increase in domestic violence in displacement settings, women are more vulnerable to trafficking and prostitution, and there are more restrictions placed on them by their family and community. These restrictions greatly hinder women's participation in a number of domains and further cement conservative gender norms (Dodge et al., 2018). Additionally, in displacement settings, women who are suspected of family links to IS face sexual violence and exploitation. At the same

time, these women are often denied aid and if they manage to return home the situation is often worse, with evictions and multiple forms of abuse commonplace (VAWG helpdesk, 2018).

Dodge et al. (2018) argue that public authority in Iraq is based on a patriarchal form of masculinity that is embedded in all parts of society. As part of this state and non-state authorities connect sexual control and men's control over women and girls with the ethnosectarian hierarchy. Similarly moral populism in Iraq is highly gendered and is based on conservative interpretations of Islam. This is then reproduced and institutionalised by public authorities that use these gendered dimensions to reinforce their authority.

In 2017 Oxfam Iraq carried out a study on the role of gender and conflict in IS-affected communities in Iraq. The study was based on 629 household surveys, 24 Focus Group Discussions, and 32 Key Informant Interviews across Salah al-Din, Anbar, and Mosul. The study found that the prevailing gender norms of participants were based on a gendered difference and division of labour, with men seen as protectors and providers and women in charge of wellbeing and domestic activities. Under IS' rule a strict radicalised version of gender norms were imposed where women were separated in public and had strict rules based on their attire and daily practices. Due to the violent repercussions people followed IS' vision of gender norms, however have reverted back to their previous traditional gender norms since the territorial defeat of IS. Nonetheless, the current context of displacement has opened up a space for gender norms to be renegotiated. For instance, during IS' reign, the interpretation of well-being was extended so that women protected their children from joining IS, kept families safe, and stressed the importance of education, which had been dismantled by IS. As a result, there was a slight shift in gender norms and power dynamics, where women took on duties of protection that were typically the domain of men. Oxfam argues that this is a possible entry point to strengthen women's participation in the context of displacement as they seek employment and take part in household and community decision-making. These changing roles and the concern of access to livelihoods in the displacement setting, allows for a further negotiation in gender norms. Additionally, men have extended their understanding of their role as protectors to include being a good role model in order to mitigate future tensions within the community (Dietrich & Carter, 2017).

Oxfam argue that interventions should ensure equal access to humanitarian and recovery assistance for men and women and should also include shifts in gender norms. Additionally, interventions should address gender drivers that fuel conflict, whilst enhancing those gender drivers that contribute to building trust and strengthening community cohesion. Oxfam put forward a number of recommendations to achieve this (Dietrich & Carter, 2017).

To address gendered drivers that fuel community tensions:

- Diversify income generation opportunities to counter the idea of men as sole income providers.
- Contribute to gender shifts in unpaid care work by reducing the stigmatisation of men who carry out these duties.
- Enhance targeted interventions to reach vulnerable (single/unmarried) women increasing peer-support structures.

To enhance gendered drivers that build trust:

- Create safe spaces for women and girls to support their collective organising efforts.
- Seize opportunities to enhance women's meaningful participation at community level.

- Work with men and boys to promote alternative gender roles as positive role models.
- Create and reconstructed safe public spaces that enable gender mixed community work.
- Support local women's rights defenders and their organisations.
- Contribute to an inclusive, women-led and accountable Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

In an overview of the role of masculinities in conflict Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks (2017) demonstrate that analyses of men and boys as agents of violence focus on the notion of violent, militarised masculinities being hegemonic. Whereas, they argue that a more nuanced approach should be taken to understand the relationship and the complexity between masculinity and violence. Additionally, they argue that the understanding of masculinity in conflict needs to be broadened to include non-violent masculinities, as the current focus on violence only acts to reinforce the relationship between men and violence and does not offer space for alternative ways of being a man. Therefore, it is important that the study of masculinities in conflict does not only focus on hegemonic masculinities.

Myrttinen et al. (2017) also argue of the importance of studying and addressing 'thwarted masculinity'[7] which is important in the context of Iraq with its large number of displaced people. Within displacement it is difficult for men to take up 'traditional' masculine roles and act as provider and protector. Although this is an opportunity to change gender roles, as argued by Dietrich and Carter (2017) above, it can also lead to destructive behaviour of men, including domestic violence and criminal activity. Therefore, international actors need to also take this dynamic into account in their interventions through helping to reframe the understanding of masculinity and ensuring equality in their actions (Myrttinen et al., 2017).

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[7] Thwarted masculinities refers to 'masculinities of men who are bound by expectations of living up to dominant notions of masculinity in the face of realities which make it practically impossible to achieve these, leading to frustration and at times various forms of violence, against both others and oneself' (Myrttinen et al., 2017, p. 108).

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Key websites

- Al-Bayan Center: http://www.bayancenter.org/en/
- Conflict Research Programme: http://www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre/research/Conflict-Research-Programme
- IOM Iraq: http://iomiraq.net
- Social Inquiry: https://social-inquiry.org
- UNOCHA Iraq: https://www.unocha.org/iraq

Suggested citation

O'Driscoll, D. (2018). *Emerging Trends of Conflict and Instability in Iraq.* K4D Helpdesk. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

About this report