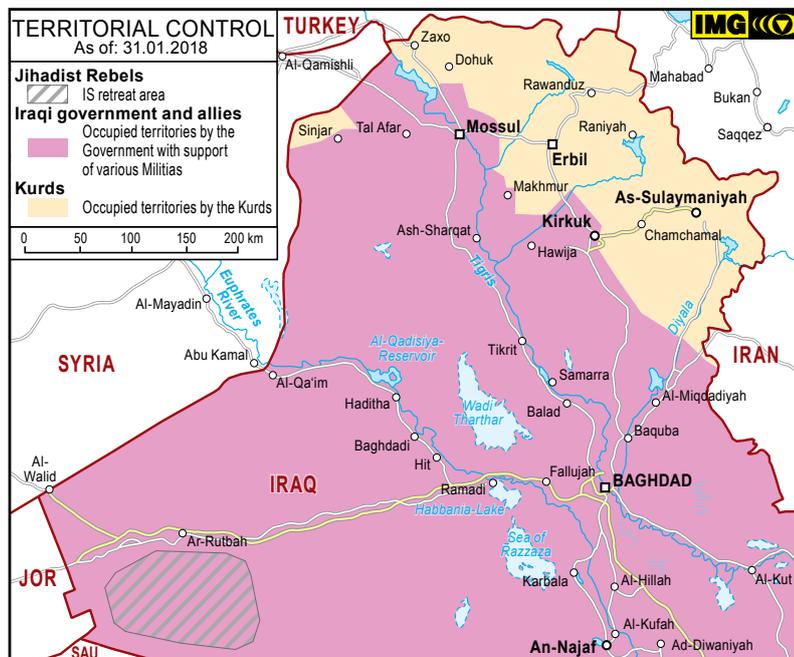


After the collapse of ISIS as a territorial actor in Iraq in mid-December 2017, the handling of the Shiite-dominated Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) changed. Grand Ayatollah Sistani had asked the PMF to lay down their arms and go under state control. This call was attended by the largest militias within the PMF and they announced their joint participation in the parliamentary elections on 12th May. Since the confirmation of the election by the Supreme Court in Baghdad, the country's leaders are negotiating strategic alliances. In mid-January, Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi announced that his Da'wa party would not participate in the upcoming elections, while Abadi and his rival, Deputy Prime

Minister Maliki, will each attend a separate list. The Sunni parliamentarians tried to postpone the election in order to not be marginalized by the dominant Shiite factions in the elections.

In addition to the election preparations, Baghdad is looking to enhance its relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which was dealt a blow in the aftermath of the Kurdish independence referendum. The sanctions imposed by Baghdad were gradually lifted as a result of Kurdish protests and Turkish negotiations.

Despite election mood in the country, the fight against the last terrorist cells of the ISIS remains a dominant topic.



## MAP ANALYSIS

After the decline of ISIS as a territorial player, the risk of attacks remain high in all regions of Iraq especially in Baghdad and the regions rich of resources. Due to terror cells hidden in the deserts the Iraqi security forces, border guard and PMF launched two-wide offensives near to Ar-Rutba in the south west of Iraq and in Kirkuk respectively to eliminate the remaining ISIS fighters.

## FORECAST

After the fall of the IS caliphate, the danger of an attack through fighters, who submerged in the desert, remains very large. For ISIS, the following months of electoral campaigning provide new opportunities for terrorist attacks. The aim of ISIS is to intimidate the population, to cause low ballot turnout and to exacerbate denominational tensions. In addition to the elections, Baghdad will have to try to absorb the administrative default of the Kurdish regional government and impose economic sanctions, and ultimately to normalize the relations with the Kurds.

*The periodically published Fact Sheet compiles and analyzes significant developments pertaining to the Iraq conflict while providing maps and an outlook of possible future events.*

## INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

22.01, 29.01.: Simultaneously with the offensive in Afrin, the Turkish Air Force bombed several positions of the PKK in northern Iraq. According to Turkish sources, it was a response to a PKK-suspected offensive on Turkish military bases in the border area.

21.01.: The Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu acted, as part of his visit to Baghdad, as a mediator between Baghdad and Erbil, with the aim to reduce the tensions which resulted from the Kurdish independence referendum and to alleviate imposed sanctions.

10.01.: EU Foreign Minister Mogherini announced a new EU strategy for Iraq, which provides intensive support for developing infrastructure, economic growth, rule of law and education.

11.01.: In the context of the successful repression of ISIS from Iraq, US Ambassador Silliman announced the partial withdrawal of US troops. To combat ISIS, 5,000 US soldiers were stationed in Iraq, according to the Pentagon.

13.01.: The Iranian ambassador in Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, announced a withdrawal of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which provided military advisers in Iraq, but military cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, the Police and the Shiite-dominated Popular Mobility Forces (PMF) will continue to exist. Masjedi stated that the PMF were a guarantee for the security of Iraq and must be preserved.

08.01, 22.01.: Baghdad has signed new gas supply contracts with the US company Orion, oil contracts with the British BP for Kirkuk as well as boosted economic cooperation with neighboring Kuwait, particularly in the export of natural gas.

18.01.: According to reports, the competitor of ISIS, al-Qaeda, tried to recruit ISIS fighters after the decline of the caliphate. Recruitment campaigns have been taking place since summer 2017, mainly in Algeria, Syria and Yemen.

## MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

10.12.: In mid-December, Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi announced victory over ISIS. The statement followed the Friday sermon of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who called on the PMFs to lay down their arms and submit to state forces.

09.01.: Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi underscored the legality of the PMF. In response to international pressure, PM al-Abadi pointed out that the PMF are part of the national security forces.

15.01.: In mid-January, a suicide attack on a market was carried out by ISIS in the heart of Baghdad, which claimed 26 lives and injured 95 more.

24.01.: The security forces launched two offensives against the remaining ISIS fighters in Ninevah and al-Anbar provinces to eliminate weapons depots and terrorist lairs to relax the security situation in the country.

12.01.: The territorial claims which are made by different actors due to the wealth of resources led to a tense situation, which is accelerated by IS. After the dismissal of the Kurdish governor in Kirkuk and the withdrawal of the Kurdish forces from Kirkuk, a vacuum of power is filled by ISIS. Following the liberation of Hawija, ISIS fighters submerged in Kirkuk and Baghdad from where they conduct attacks to reconquer the oil rich province.

## DOMESTIC POLITICS

20.12.: Missing salaries since September last year led to riots and property damage of the party headquarters of the governing Kurdish KDP and PUK by civil servants. These reactions were caused by the sanctions imposed by the central government in Baghdad and which led to a dramatic deterioration of the Kurdish economy. At the end of January 2018, the two governments reached a settlement due to abrogate the sanctions in steps.

28.11.: An increasingly growing contingent of leaders of the PMF leadership have resigned from the militias to participate in the elections of May 12th

16.01.: After a congress of the Shi'ite Da'wa party, which Prime Minister Abadi and his rival Vice President Maliki belong to, there was no agreement reached on who should be the party's top candidate so they announced to participate in different lists in the upcoming elections.

13.01.: The political alliances around Prime Minister Abadi and Vice President Maliki drifted apart even further, as both of them tried to ally with new political actors in order to get more votes in the elections.

22.01.: The Federal Supreme Court of Iraq testified the election date on 12th of May after an attempt of the Sunni members of parliament to delay the election for one year to have a chance to rebuild the three destroyed Sunni provinces and to enable a larger number of Sunnis their right to vote.

## HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

08.01.: The health care system in the regions occupied by ISIS has totally collapsed which increases the risk of spreading epidemic diseases. The absence of medication and skilled workers led to increasing cases of Leishmaniasis. The central government in Baghdad claims that there are spreading diseases in entire Iraq and the phenomenon is not restricted to Sunni provinces.

08.01.: The central government in Baghdad gave children in compulsory school age of the Dom minority, an ethnic minority in Iraq, the chance to receive school education. The minority has long been suppressed, but the central government has decided to give all children, regardless of their background, the right to education.

22.01.: The Iraqi judiciary issued a death sentence for a German captured in the Battle of Mosul. Many European ISIS fighters are still waiting for their verdict, but they all face the death penalty for being part of a terrorist organization.



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