



# How to Cope with Iraq's Summer Brushfire

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**Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°61**

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**What's new?** Popular protests, spawned by anger at the state's inability to deliver essential services, have spread throughout southern Iraq and reached the capital, Baghdad. They are an annual occurrence but this year they are larger and more intense.

**Why does it matter?** If the unrest is forcibly put down and citizens' legitimate demands again go unmet, it is bound to recur before too long, but with still greater ferocity and, possibly, violence, threatening the post-2003 order and the ruling elites sustaining it.

**What should be done?** Institutional reforms are long overdue. Once it is seated, the new government should, with the help of parliament and the explicit backing of senior religious leaders, strengthen the judiciary and independent oversight agencies, which can ensure greater transparency and accountability, and thus curb corruption – Iraq's public enemy number one.

## I. Overview

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Yet again this summer, residents of southern Iraq have taken to the streets to protest the government's inability to provide clean water, a steady power supply or reliable employment. The protests started in Basra, which though it is home to most of the country's oil fields suffers from persistent state neglect. Like a brushfire, the unrest spread to cities across the south, sometimes burning itself out or being extinguished by security forces, only to be rekindled in other locales, and eventually reaching Baghdad, where it smoulders today. The protests' annual recurrence and present intensity suggest that the status quo – repeated, unfulfilled promises of reform by a politically bankrupt ruling elite – is shaky at best. If the state sticks to its firefighting approach, it is likely at best to ignite further rounds of protests; at worst, it risks being usurped by a new strongman. There is a much better third way forward: the new government, once it is seated, with the help of parliament and the full backing of the most senior religious authorities, should re-empower the judiciary and other independent oversight agencies to stamp out corruption – Iraq's most dangerous foe.

Iraq has seen periodic popular protest since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, especially during the searing summer heat, when electricity consumption far exceeds available supply. The demonstrations accentuate growing estrangement

from a governing elite that has failed for fifteen years to protect basic living standards for ordinary Iraqis. This time around, the protests have been fiercer, doing considerable property damage, as well as more widespread. The government has responded by cutting off the internet and other telecommunications to prevent protest coordination, and by deploying special forces to the south, which in some places fired on demonstrators, killing fifteen and wounding hundreds.

The protests came at a crossroads in Iraq's post-2003 journey. Fresh from retaking the territory held by the Islamic State (ISIS), the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi appeared conscious of the need to prevent the group from rebounding politically by embarking on the difficult process of building a more representative state. He tried to assert the state's monopoly on the use of force and declined to marshal the state apparatus in support of his candidacy in the 12 May general elections, as his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki, had done four years ago.

That process soon hit a bump in the road, however. The 12 May balloting saw the lowest turnout since January 2005, date of Iraq's first free elections, as well as several claims of fraud (now being addressed through a partial recount). In Basra, the turnout is calculated to have been less than 20 per cent. The non-voting public clearly knew the score: when negotiations to form a new government started soon after the elections, they featured the same horse trading among politicians that has disaffected the citizenry since 2003.

Many Iraqis have concluded that change will not come through elections or (non-functioning) institutions. The protests broke out against this background, as the parliament elected in 2014 ended its term, leaving Iraq in the hands of a caretaker government no more capable of serving citizens than its predecessors. The protests should therefore be regarded as a serious warning that the brushfire risks turning into a wildfire and engulfing the state.

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## II. A Spreading Brushfire

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The protests began in Basra on 8 July, near the West Qurna and Zubayr oil fields outside town, escalating when police fired on demonstrators at West Qurna.<sup>1</sup> That the largest city in Iraq's south – and some of its largest oil fields – again became the epicentre of unrest is no coincidence. Many Basrawis see international oil companies and their own leaders as getting rich off their province's oil, while little of that wealth trickles down to benefit them. By threatening oil production and trade, they are pressing the government to slice them a bigger piece of the pie through better service delivery and job creation. One typical protest banner read: "2,500,000 barrels per day; \$70 per barrel; 2,500,000 x 70 = 0. Sorry, Pythagoras: we're in Basra".<sup>2</sup>

The unprecedented scope and intensity of this year's unrest underline the population's deep alienation from the political system. For the first time, protesters targeted the full spectrum of the (mainly Shiite) ruling elites, from former exiles backed by either the U.S. or Iran to those who survived Saddam's regime and have developed

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<sup>1</sup> "Iraqi police open fire on protesters near southern oilfields", Reuters, 8 July 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Facebook page of Babylon FM, 16 July 2018, at [www.facebook.com/BabylonFM/posts/1743546949099322](http://www.facebook.com/BabylonFM/posts/1743546949099322).

strong nationalist orientations. They marched on and, at times, occupied or torched government buildings and political party offices without apparent distinction. In Basra, protesters demonstrated in front of the provincial council building and set on fire the headquarters of the Badr Organisation, a political party with ties to Iran.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, they attacked offices of Daawa, Hikma, Fadhila, Kataeb Hizbollah and other parties, all of which have their electoral strongholds in the country's centre and south. In Najaf, they stormed the airport, briefly occupying it and halting air traffic.<sup>4</sup> In Karbala, they set ablaze the offices of Asaeb Ahl al-Haq, another party with close links to Iran. In Amara, they torched both the district government headquarters and the district director's residence.<sup>5</sup>

In some southern cities, such as Hilla, the protesters even attacked the offices of the Sadr movement. The Sadrists had risen to prominence in 2003-2004 with their nationalist fervour and pitched battles with U.S. troops – as well as their rhetorical broadsides against parties, like Badr and Daawa, that were members of the U.S.-sponsored post-2003 governments.<sup>6</sup> In the years since the 2011 U.S. troop withdrawal, the Sadrists have participated in and even led demonstrations similar to this summer's. This time, the movement's leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, refrained from encouraging his supporters to join the protests, his electoral alliance having finished first in the May polls and joined efforts to form a coalition government with the very same parties he had previously denounced for their corruption. Yet in a nod to the strength of popular sentiment, on 19 July, he called on the political parties to delay government formation in order to address the protesters' demands.<sup>7</sup>

As in years past, demonstrators also denounced Iran. To many Iraqis, Iran's role in supporting Iraq's ruling elites makes Tehran an antagonist of their struggle for change. This summer's protests erupted after Iran cut off its electricity supply to Iraq, prompting Iraqis to suggest that Iran was seeking to instigate unrest. There are conflicting explanations of what triggered the move – Iraq's non-payment of electricity bills or Iran's need to cope with spiking domestic demand, its own protests amid scorching heat and/or the weight of reimposed U.S. sanctions.<sup>8</sup> But there is no evidence that Iran's motive was sinister.

More important, the heavily Shiite protesters did not spare their religious authorities from reprimand. Few actually blamed the Shiite clerical establishment for the country's ills, but many expressed their disappointment in the ayatollahs' early passivity as the disturbances spread and the state ratcheted up repression. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the Shiites' foremost religious authority, came in for particu-

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<sup>3</sup> "Protesters burn Badr militia's buildings in the Tawisa area of central Basra in southern Iraq", *Al-Mustaqbal* (Arabic), 14 July 2018.

<sup>4</sup> "Widespread unrest erupts in southern Iraq amid acute shortages of water, electricity", *Washington Post*, 14 July 2018.

<sup>5</sup> "Amara: Fires at district headquarters and district director's house, 23 hurt", *Iraq News* (Arabic), 25 July 2018.

<sup>6</sup> For background on the Sadrists, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°8, *Iraq's Shiites Under Occupation*, 9 September 2003, pp. 16-20.

<sup>7</sup> Muqtada al-Sadr's Twitter feed, 19 July 2018, at [https://twitter.com/Mu\\_AlSadr/status/101991074553821696](https://twitter.com/Mu_AlSadr/status/101991074553821696).

<sup>8</sup> Both arguments were reported by Iran's state-owned English-language satellite channel, Press TV, on 17 July 2018.

lar censure when he failed to condemn the government's crackdown in his Friday sermon (delivered by his representative) in Karbala on 20 July.<sup>9</sup> Overt criticism of Sistani is unusual. But it has been less rare since 2015, when he issued a call for reform that Baghdad's political class ignored.<sup>10</sup> Many Iraqis perceive the ayatollah's vaunted political influence as much diminished. Regardless, on 27 July Sistani's representative read aloud a sharply worded prepared text that was highly critical of the political class and strongly supportive of the protesters and their demands. The text called for immediate reforms.<sup>11</sup>

With Sadr on the sidelines, the protests have largely been leaderless. They appear sporadic (though persistent) and mostly spontaneous; if they are organised, it is by local notables, such as tribal leaders, clerics, schoolteachers or engineers, operating at the neighbourhood level through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Many of the major civil society organisations, which have their headquarters in Baghdad, have not been involved in guiding the demonstrations, though they have publicised them on social media. The capital was initially quiet, with only occasional small protests in solidarity with demonstrators in the south. A primary reason may be that the Sadrist, who formed the bulk of Baghdad marchers in the past, stayed home, depriving the protests of critical mass. The protest movement remains active in the capital, however, and will likely continue to mount periodic Friday protests throughout the year.

The government responded to the protests with a heavier hand than in the past, while offering the usual promises of reform. On 15 July, Abadi dispatched several "emergency response" police divisions as well as Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) battalions to the south to protect government infrastructure and political party offices.<sup>12</sup> The deployment of the CTS, which made its mark in the fight against ISIS, fanned the flames; to the protesters, it implied that the government looks at them as enemies or even terrorists.<sup>13</sup> Police shot at protesters in various southern cities, killing fifteen (as of 21 July) and leaving hundreds wounded.<sup>14</sup> Armed groups linked to Shiite Islamist political parties, the paramilitary Hashd al-Shaabi, also attacked protesters,

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<sup>9</sup> "Sistani representative avoids talking about protests in Friday sermon", *Sawt al-Iraq* (Arabic), 21 July 2018. One protester hoisted a poster stating: "It is said that a man forbade the game of Clash of Clans [a reference to Sistani's office prohibiting his followers from playing a video game]. We are still waiting for him to forbid the harming of unarmed protesters". Reported on Twitter feed of Thair al-Ghanimi, 22 July 2018, at <https://twitter.com/thairalghanimi/status/1021014090343436288>.

<sup>10</sup> "Iraq cleric pushes anti-corruption fight as protests flare", *Sawt al-Iraq*, 21 July 2018. One protester hoisted a poster stating: "It is said that a man forbade the game of Clash of Clans [a reference to Sistani's office prohibiting his followers from playing a video game]. We are still waiting for him to forbid the harming of unarmed protesters". Reported on Twitter feed of Thair al-Ghanimi, 22 July 2018, at <https://twitter.com/thairalghanimi/status/1021014090343436288>.

<sup>11</sup> Sistani called for the speedy formation of a government and said the next prime minister should "wage a relentless war on corrupt officials and their protectors" and, among other measures, give anti-corruption mechanisms greater authority. He added that if the government, parliament or judiciary obstruct these efforts in any way, "the only option people will have will be to develop their peaceful protests to impose their will on those in charge, supported by all the forces of good in the country". Text reproduced by NRT TV, 27 July 2018.

<sup>12</sup> "Iraqi protesters storm local government building amid anger over graft", Reuters, 14 July 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Crisis Group phone interview, Iraqi protester, July 2018.

<sup>14</sup> "Iraq protests record a new death", *Shafaq* (Arabic), 21 July 2018; "Iraq: Security forces deliberately attack peaceful protesters while internet is disabled", Amnesty International, 19 July 2018.

to defend their political order.<sup>15</sup> In Baghdad, where protesters have been gathering around Tahrir Square on and off for several years, police for the first time used water cannons to disperse them on 20 July.<sup>16</sup>

To help suppress the protests, the government took the unprecedented step of shutting down internet and other telecommunications on 12 July; service has remained intermittent since then.<sup>17</sup> This measure affected several industries, such as banks and airlines, and reportedly could be costing the country \$50 million per day.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, both the federal and local governments issued promises that they would make personnel changes, improve service delivery and carry out reforms to accommodate the protesters' demands. For instance, Abadi announced he would spend some 3.5 trillion Iraqi dinars (almost \$3 billion) on electricity, water and health projects in Basra, and inject 800 billion dinars (\$675 million) into the housing fund, enabling it to make 25,000 housing loans and, in the process, generate jobs.<sup>19</sup> The oil minister announced he would create 10,000 more public sector jobs in the hydrocarbon industry.<sup>20</sup>

The government's harsh overall response appears to reflect its own sense of insecurity and awareness of its credibility deficit, if not outright lack of legitimacy.<sup>21</sup> Arguably, the repression and seemingly empty reform promises will merely stoke the fires, perhaps turning this year's unrest into something more consequential than in the past.

### III. Whither the Fire?

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The gradual intensification of the protests over the years and the ruling elites' long-standing inability to reform a political system from which they profit suggests the status quo has become increasingly fragile. Ordinary Iraqis are no longer protesting against individual politicians but against the post-2003 political order as a whole – excoriating the quota system (*muhasasa*) that has defined this order.

That order – more a disorder – has many shortcomings. Chief among them is the absence of strong and autonomous institutions. The judiciary and independent oversight agencies – among them, the integrity commission that monitors corruption and the electoral commission that is supposed to organise and oversee free and fair elec-

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<sup>15</sup> Crisis Group phone interview, Iraqi protester, July 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Video images in tweet by Saadoun Mohsen Dhamad, @SDamad, journalist, 8:35pm, 20 July 2018, at <https://twitter.com/SDamad/status/1020512684884865025>.

<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International, media release, 20 July 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Tweet by Hisham Alhashimi, @hushamalhashimi, researcher, 12:48am, 22 July 2018, at <https://twitter.com/hushamalhashimi/status/1020938590174564352>; and OilPrice.com, 20 July 2018, at <https://oilprice.com/Geopolitics/International/Iraq-Orders-Internet-Blackout-To-Quell-Protests.html>.

<sup>19</sup> "Three killed as joblessness protests in Iraq heat up", *The Independent*, 17 July 2018; tweet by the prime minister's media office, @IraqPMO, 2:18pm, 22 July 2018, at <https://twitter.com/IraqPMO/status/1020961318692708353>.

<sup>20</sup> "Oil Ministry announces provision of 10,000 new jobs for the sons of Basra", *Al-Sumaria*, 12 July 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Many Iraqis have started comparing Abadi to Maliki, who as prime minister similarly suppressed protests (though particularly those of Sunni Arabs) in 2013.

tions – are beholden to the very political leaders they are tasked with holding to account. The political process that in theory ensures a regular alternation of power increasingly lacks credibility, judging from the low participation rate in the May elections; while the faces at the top may change, the class from which they are drawn – viewed by many as largely corrupt – does not. That class perpetuates itself through the quota system, which, by allocating positions to political parties based on ethno-sectarian identity, favours partisan loyalty over merit, and thus feeds corrupt practices at the expense of ordinary citizens.<sup>22</sup>

It is unclear what will happen next. Three plausible scenarios present themselves. The first, most obvious, one is that the elites plod along the same path with only occasional detours to appease the restless, pre-empt organised opposition and douse fires when they break out – as they almost certainly will. Under this scenario, the leadership would continue to switch around personnel and inject cash into the system at various times, mainly to buy off critical constituencies, while banking on the security forces and paramilitary groups to keep it in power if a serious and sustained popular challenge arose. Some argue that the state's frailty and the diffusion of power will encourage intra-elite consensus and cooperation for the sake of self-preservation, akin to power-sharing agreements in Lebanon. While that course may preserve stability in the short run, over time the absence of real change is likely to foment escalating protests.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as others have argued, the state's perpetual weakness makes it vulnerable to a cycle of internal conflict, which has been both Sunni-Shiite and Shiite-Shiite in character, outside meddling, and possibly even collapse.<sup>24</sup> Since 2003, Iraq has muddled through but with bone-jarring shocks to the system, delivered by violent insurgency and external intervention.

The first scenario may lead to a second, less probable but certainly more dangerous one: the possible takeover of the state by an aspiring strongman seeking to quash the unrest while vowing to fix the country outside democratic procedures. To some extent, the precedent would lie in Nouri al-Maliki's efforts at centralising power (2006-2014), when he took direct control of security and other state institutions and tried to eliminate political opposition. It is unlikely, but conceivable, that segments of the security forces and/or armed groups could back such a leader in either a silent or overt takeover to end popular challenges to the failing state cycle. Escalating violence against peaceful protesters, especially in Baghdad, could trigger such an eventuality. Some quarters of Iraqi society may indeed wish for a return to strongman

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<sup>22</sup> A former Iraqi ambassador to the U.S., Rend al-Rahim, tweeted a comment that expresses an increasingly shared sentiment: "I recommend that all current/former PMs, ministers, deputies and governors step aside, be barred from office for two CoR [Council of Representatives] terms. Since they failed the nation for 15 years (not to mention plundered it), this is the least they should do". Tweet by Rend al-Rahim, @rendrf, 9:16am, 20 July 2018, at <https://twitter.com/rendrf/status/1020341793362272256>.

<sup>23</sup> An upsurge in regionalism could also be a consequence. In a possible sign of things to come, the head of Basra provincial council, Walid Kitan, chaired an extraordinary council session that voted to submit a request to the Council of Representatives to turn Basra from a governorate into a region, an act that would give it far greater autonomy from the central government. Tweet by Ghanem al-Abed, @GH3ABID, political commentator, 7:06am, 22 July 2018, <https://twitter.com/GH3ABID/status/1021033864188264450>. The council is unlikely to endorse such a move.

<sup>24</sup> See Renad Mansour, "Iraq after the Fall of ISIS: The Struggle for the State", Chatham House, July 2017.

rule. Iraqi youth, the largest segment of the population, increasingly express nostalgia for leadership akin to the pre-2003 Baathist model.<sup>25</sup> But the dangers would be great: many Iraqis fear that a coup would precipitate another civil war rather than restore calm.<sup>26</sup>

There is a third way forward – not as likely as the first scenario, because it requires political actors to work with active and positive intent rather than remain on the default setting, but not implausible, and indeed the better way. The first and most important step would be to de-escalate the violence and tensions between security forces and protesters: to put out the fires, but carefully, lest they reignite and spread with increased ferocity. In the past, protests have been largely non-violent, and although some individuals may use the occasion to incite violence, the government should issue clear orders to security forces not to shoot at protesters or undertake politically motivated arrests – and to grant any detainees due process. That would mean ending the reported intimidation of detained protesters, such as with their release on condition they refrain from protesting.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, Prime Minister Abadi, even in his caretaker capacity, should take urgent steps to centralise the command of the security forces technically under his control; to the extent possible, he should rein in the paramilitary groups in the south. The latter have taken the law into their own hands, though formally they remain under the authority of the prime minister's office, through which they receive their funding. The government should seek to ensure that no armed group uses violence or illegally detains protesters who enjoy the internationally protected rights of peaceful assembly and free expression.

At the national level, the winners of the May parliamentary elections should not delay negotiations to form a new government. The country desperately needs a fully empowered government, and many of the Iraqis who voted, and arguably many of those who did not, want to see the old government gone. The onus is on Muqtada al-Sadr to lead efforts to form a governing coalition that will institute far-reaching reform. It is up to the populist cleric to prove to his base and all Iraqis that he is serious about systemic change.

In the long term, the new parliament, which represents 65 per cent fresh blood, should seek to get rid of the *muhāsasa* quota system, de-emphasising personalities and instead building institutions – the absence or non-functioning of which sit at the core of the grievances that perennially give rise to popular protests. The incoming government, working with the new parliament, should re-staff (beyond identity-based considerations) institutions that can serve as checks on the elite, and in particular strengthen the mandates and autonomy of the judiciary and the various independent oversight agencies.

To succeed, the government will need the explicit backing of the senior Shiite religious leadership, which continues to command enormous respect and hold great moral authority over the Iraqi population, not just Shiites. Although Ayatollah Sistani is the leading exponent of the quietist school in Shiism that opposes a direct

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<sup>25</sup> Marsin Alshamary, "Authoritarian nostalgia among Iraqi youth: Roots and repercussions", *War on the Rocks*, 25 July 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, April 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group phone interviews, civil society activists, Baghdad, July 2018.

clerical role in politics, he has made significant political interventions to protect and improve the post-2003 order: calling for free elections to a constituent assembly; calling up volunteers to defend the country against ISIS in June 2014; and, a month later, demanding in a letter that Maliki step down after ISIS overran one third of Iraq.

In response to the current protests, and in addition to the speech he distributed on 27 July, Sistani should publicly urge the new parliament and government to rebuild national institutions in order to make the political system more transparent and more accountable. Iraqi leaders would have difficulty ignoring or contravening a call from Sistani, especially if delivered in the form of a fatwa, or religious edict. Even a fatwa might be insufficient to get them to do what is right – there are plenty of examples where politicians paid little more than lip service to Sistani's rulings – but without it, nothing will happen, and the country could face one of the two perilous scenarios described above.

For their part, international stakeholders should stop worrying about which Iraqi personalities hold what posts and move toward supporting institutions able to hold the Iraqi political class to account – or see their considerable investment in rebuilding post-2003 institutions go up in smoke.<sup>28</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

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Drastic change is overdue, judging from the frequent recurrence of popular protests. But it must be managed. Iraq's most important assets are institutions staffed by capable technocrats who know how to deliver basic services – when they are not thwarted by those in national and local government who are corrupt, incompetent or both. Among these institutions, those designed to monitor state agents' compliance with the rule of law arguably are the most critical. These have been severely corroded, however, along with everything else, in the fifteen years since April 2003.

If the Iraqi system is to recover now that ISIS has been defeated, the political elites will need to take a number of urgent fire prevention measures. The greatest current threat to the state is corruption, which has spread throughout the body politic, sapping institutions and blocking opportunities. What young Iraqi would want to grow up in such an environment? It is little surprise that so many seek to leave. And it is just as unsurprising that so many people, young and old of all social strata, take to the streets in the hope that, if nothing else can, agitation will bring the change they so desperately desire.

The political elites have a chance to put the country on a safer course, away from the fires that could engulf it. They need to seize the opportunity of a refreshed parliament and – hopefully soon – a new government to rebuild institutions and effect thorough reforms, in sum, to generate new hope for a people who have known only war, sanctions, invasions, insurgencies and the near-total breakdown of society. At present, the people have taken the initiative, and the elites should follow their cues.

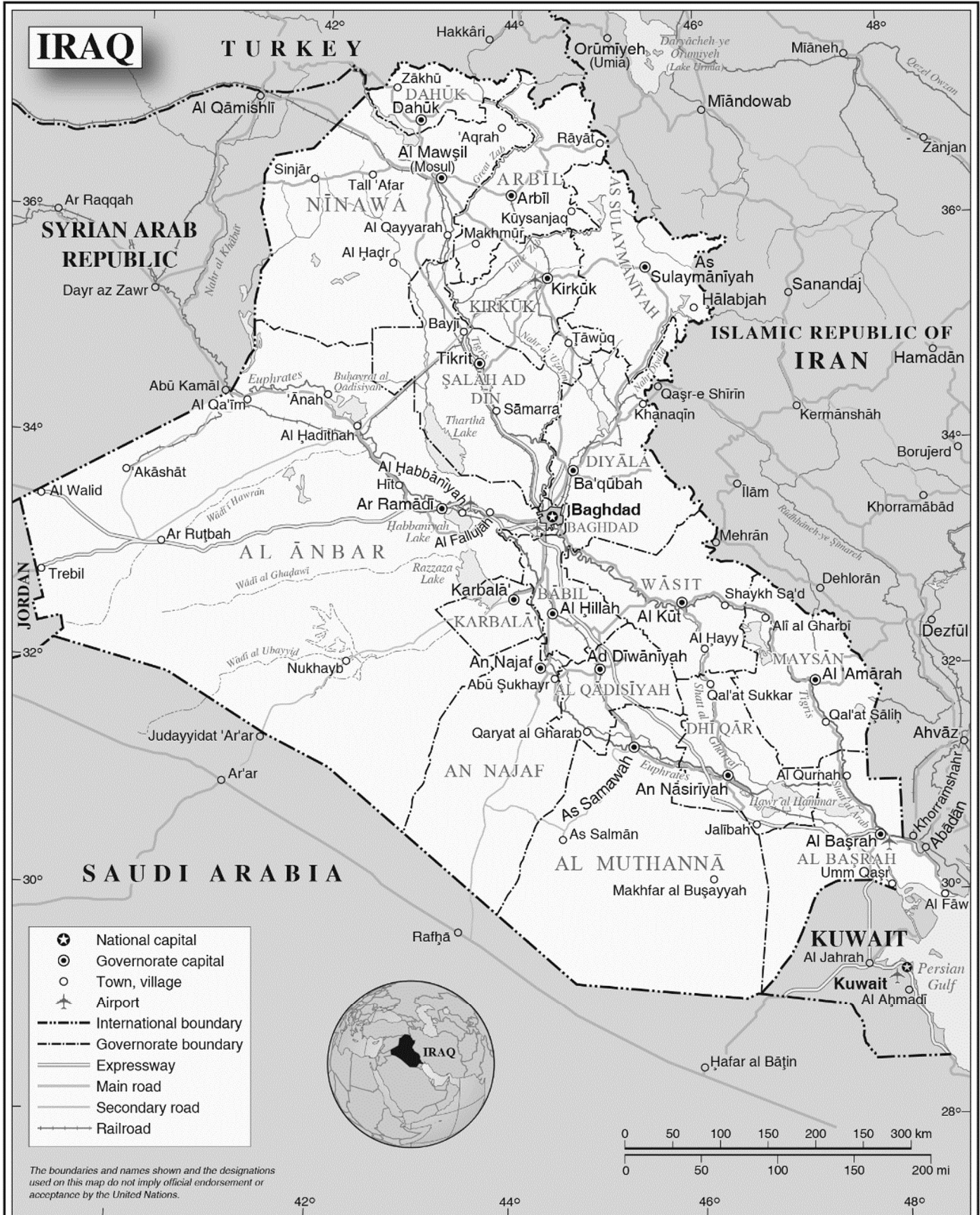
**Baghdad/Brussels, 31 July 2018**

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<sup>28</sup> See Renad Mansour, "Iraq's Western allies need to support institutions, not individuals", Chatham House, 10 April 2018.



Appendix A: Map of Iraq



## Appendix B: Reports and Briefings on the Middle East and North Africa since 2015

### Special Reports

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

*Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

### Israel/Palestine

*The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade*, Middle East Report N°159, 30 June 2015 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*No Exit? Gaza & Israel Between Wars*, Middle East Report N°162, 26 August 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*How to Preserve the Fragile Calm at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade*, Middle East Briefing N°48, 7 April 2016 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

*Israel/Palestine: Parameters for a Two-State Settlement*, Middle East Report N°172, 28 November 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Israel, Hizbollah and Iran: Preventing Another War in Syria*, Middle East Report N°182, 8 February 2018 (also available in Arabic).

*Averting War in Gaza*, Middle East Briefing N°60, 20 July 2018 (also available in Arabic).

### Iraq/Syria/Lebanon

*Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict*, Middle East Report N°158, 12 May 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*Lebanon's Self-Defeating Survival Strategies*, Middle East Report N°160, 20 July 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*New Approach in Southern Syria*, Middle East Report N°163, 2 September 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*Arsal in the Crosshairs: The Predicament of a Small Lebanese Border Town*, Middle East Briefing N°46, 23 February 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Russia's Choice in Syria*, Middle East Briefing N°47, 29 March 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Steps Toward Stabilising Syria's Northern Border*, Middle East Briefing N°49, 8 April 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000"*, Middle East Report N°169, 8 August 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Hizbollah's Syria Conundrum*, Middle East Report N°175, 14 March 2017 (also available in Arabic and Farsi).

*Fighting ISIS: The Road to and beyond Raqqa*, Middle East Briefing N°53, 28 April 2017 (also available in Arabic).

*The PKK's Fateful Choice in Northern Syria*, Middle East Report N°176, 4 May 2017 (also available in Arabic).

*Oil and Borders: How to Fix Iraq's Kurdish Crisis*, Middle East Briefing N°55, 17 October 2017 (also available in Arabic).

*Averting Disaster in Syria's Idlib Province*, Middle East Briefing N°56, 9 February 2018 (also available in Arabic).

*Winning the Post-ISIS Battle for Iraq in Sinjar*, Middle East Report N°183, 20 February 2018 (also available in Arabic).

*Saudi Arabia: Back to Baghdad*, Middle East Report N°186, 22 May 2018 (also available in Arabic).

*Keeping the Calm in Southern Syria*, Middle East Report N°187, 21 June 2018 (also available in Arabic).

### North Africa

*Libya: Getting Geneva Right*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°157, 26 February 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°161, 23 July 2015 (also available in French).

*Algeria and Its Neighbours*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°164, 12 October 2015 (also available in French and Arabic).

*The Prize: Fighting for Libya's Energy Wealth*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°165, 3 December 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*Tunisia: Transitional Justice and the Fight Against Corruption*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°168, 3 May 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy*, Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°50, 22 June 2016 (also available in French and Arabic).

*The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°170, 4 November 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Algeria's South: Trouble's Bellwether*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°171, 21 November 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Blocked Transition: Corruption and Regionalism in Tunisia*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°177, 10 May 2017 (only available in French and Arabic).

*How the Islamic State Rose, Fell and Could Rise Again in the Maghreb*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°178, 24 July 2017 (also available in Arabic and French).

*How Libya's Fezzan Became Europe's New Border*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°179, 31 July 2017 (also available in Arabic).

*Stemming Tunisia's Authoritarian Drift*, Middle East and North Africa Report N°180, 11 January 2018 (also available in French and Arabic).

*Libya's Unhealthy Focus on Personalities*, Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°57, 8 May 2018.

*Making the Best of France's Libya Summit*, Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°58, 28 May 2018 (also available in French).

#### **Iran/Yemen/Gulf**

*Yemen at War*, Middle East Briefing N°45, 27 March 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*Iran After the Nuclear Deal*, Middle East Report N°166, 15 December 2015 (also available in Arabic).

*Yemen: Is Peace Possible?*, Middle East Report N°167, 9 February 2016 (also available in Arabic).

*Turkey and Iran: Bitter Friends, Bosom Rivals*, Middle East Briefing N°51, 13 December 2016 (also available in Farsi).

*Implementing the Iran Nuclear Deal: A Status Report*, Middle East Report N°173, 16 January 2017 (also available in Farsi).

*Yemen's al-Qaeda: Expanding the Base*, Middle East Report N°174, 2 February 2017 (also available in Arabic).

*Instruments of Pain (I): Conflict and Famine in Yemen*, Middle East Briefing N°52, 13 April 2017 (also available in Arabic).

*Discord in Yemen's North Could Be a Chance for Peace*, Middle East Briefing N°54, 11 October 2017 (also available in Arabic).

*The Iran Nuclear Deal at Two: A Status Report*, Middle East Report N°181, 16 January 2018 (also available in Arabic and Farsi).

*Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East*, Middle East Report N°184, 13 April 2018 (also available in Arabic).

*How Europe Can Save the Iran Nuclear Deal*, Middle East Report N°185, 2 May 2018 (also available in Persian and Arabic).

*Yemen: Averting a Destructive Battle for Hodeida*, Middle East Briefing N°59, 11 June 2018.



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**Regional Offices and Field Representation**

Crisis Group also operates out of over 25 locations in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America.

**See [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org) for details**

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