

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

MRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: IRQ34879
Country: Iraq
Date: 27 May 2009

Keywords: Iraq – Iraqi Kurdistan – Security environment in Iraqi Kurdistan – Security environment in Iraq – Christians in Ainkawa

Questions

- 1. Please advise whether Iraqi Kurdistan is a relatively peaceful area of Iraq?**
- 2. In making the decision, the delegate found that Iraq was extremely dangerous with a very high risk of terrorist attacks. Is this true of the whole of Iraq or can these comments be restricted to certain regions?**
- 3. Please advise whether the town of Ainkawa in the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government area of northern Iraq is predominantly Christian?**

RESPONSE

- 1. . Please advise whether Iraqi Kurdistan is a relatively peaceful area of Iraq?**

Iraqi Kurdistan has been described in a 2006 report on Iraq's economy as the only region in Iraq that "rated stable overall and across governance, security and the economy" (UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Iraq*, January, Chapter 2, p. 16 – Attachment 1).

A 2009 report by Amnesty International on human rights in Iraqi Kurdistan indicates that the region is generally stable, and since 2003, has experienced increasing prosperity and made progress in the protection of human rights:

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, unlike the rest of the country, has generally been stable since the 2003 US-led invasion. It has witnessed growing prosperity and an expansion of civil society, including the establishment of numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the promotion and protection of human rights. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has made progress in the field of human rights. In mid-2008 it released hundreds of political detainees, many of whom had been held for years without charge or trial. It has improved Iraqi legislation; the Press Law of September 2008, for example, expanded freedom of expression, and amendments to the Personal Status Law passed in October 2008 strengthened women's rights. The authorities have also established several bodies to monitor and prevent violence against women, including specialized police directorates and shelters. Platforms have been established to foster dialogue between the authorities, particularly the Ministry of Human Rights, and civil society organizations on human rights concerns, including violence against women.

However, the report also indicates that despite these achievements, serious human rights abuses in the region are still prevalent. The report outlines “a wide range of human rights violations committed in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in recent years,” including “arbitrary and prolonged detention without charge or trial, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment, the death penalty, unfair trials, discrimination and violence against women, and attacks on freedom of expression;” and argues that the government must take urgent action to address these concerns (Amnesty International 2009, *Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, April, Chapter 1 – Attachment 2).

The 2009 US Department of State report on human rights practices indicates that although terrorist attacks and sectarian violence were not as widespread in the Kurdistan region as in the rest of Iraq, “there were reports of KRG security forces using excessive lethal force” and the region was vulnerable to attacks by Turkish and Iranian military forces:

In Erbil [of which Ainkawa is a suburb], Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk, the three provinces comprising the majority of the area under the jurisdiction of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), there were significantly fewer reports of sectarian violence than elsewhere in the country.

...During the year, terrorist attacks in the KRG were infrequent. On March 10, a car bomb killed two and injured dozens in the Sulaymaniyah city center. On March 20, 10 AQI-linked terrorists were arrested for involvement in the attack, including an alleged leader, Riyadh Jasim Nouri. Four terrorists, including Riyadh Jasim Nouri, were convicted and sentenced to death. There were no further developments at year's end.

Since February Turkish ground forces entered KRG territory in northern Iraq targeting the terrorist group Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), leading to dozens of PKK casualties. On several occasions, Turkish and Iranian air forces bombed PKK sites. Beginning in March Iranian forces shelled areas in northern Iraq, which it claimed had been infiltrated by members of the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), an Iranian Kurdish separatist rebel group. Bombings in March and April led to forced displacement of 130 families fleeing the attacks. In December, the Pishdar District Mayor stated the district, with the assistance of UNHCR, is expected to build a new IDP camp for those fleeing the bombing in their villages. There were weekly reports of Turkish bombings throughout the year (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Iraq*, February, Section 1(a) – Attachment 3).

A report to Congress produced by the US Department of Defense in March 2009 also indicates that although the Kurdistan region “remains the safest and most stable region of Iraq... isolated acts of terrorism occasionally occur,” similarly highlighting attacks on Kurdish terrorist groups by Turkey and Iran:

The relatively homogenous Kurdish population and the presence of the Kurdish security forces mitigate the threat of AQI or other terrorist attacks in the North and reduce ethnic tensions that plague other cities in Iraq. Turkey and Iran continue to attack Kurdish terrorist groups along their borders with the KRG. These attacks have been conducted against sparsely populated areas in the mountains and have not led to significant numbers of refugees or collateral damage (US Department of Defense 2009, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, March, p. 28

http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf - Accessed 22 May 2009 – Attachment 4).

The UK Home Office report similarly describes the security situation in the Kurdistan region, highlighting in particular a 2008 Amnesty International report which states:

The largely autonomous Kurdistan region in the north, which is under the control of the KRG, has been more stable than the rest of Iraq and there have been fewer acts of violence. The region is the most prosperous in Iraq and the KRG has signed a number of investment contracts with foreign companies, including for oil exploration. Despite the relative stability and prosperity, the Kurdistan region remains vulnerable to pressure and even military intervention from neighbouring countries.

The intervention from neighbouring countries mentioned above is described in more detail in the UK Home Office report, which indicates that both Turkish and Iranian military action on Kurdistan border villages occurred between 2007 and 2008. Despite these attacks on border areas, the report indicates that security in the overall region has been relatively stable, however “possible spill-over of violence from other parts of the country and the presence of militant groups in the area all threaten to destabilize the region”:

9.78 Throughout the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008 there were numerous BBC reports of Turkish military activity, both air and ground, against PKK fighter positions along the mountainous area bordering Turkey and Iraq. (BBC News, 16 November-26 December 2007)...(BBC News, 26 March-29 July 2008)...On 16 December 2007 BBC News reported that a woman had been killed during air strikes in Iraq...The strikes were intended to flush out PKK rebels using bases inside Iraq to launch attacks against Turkey. (BBC News, 18 Dec 2007)

...9.79 The UNSC report of 14 January 2008 also stated that: “... [there was a] more stable security situation prevailing in Arbil [also written as Erbil]... However, the areas bordering Turkey have been subject to increased political and military tensions since Turkey launched air strikes on Iraqi territory in December in retaliation for PKK cross-border attacks. In addition, the areas bordering the Islamic Republic of Iran have continued to be subjected to artillery shelling from the Iranian side.”

9.80 UNHCR’s August 2007 paper reported “The overall security situation in the three Northern Governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Dahuk, while less precarious than the situation in Central and Southern Iraq, remains tense and unpredictable. Disputes over the status of ‘arabized’ areas, possible spill-over of violence from other parts of the country and the presence of militant groups in the area all threaten to destabilize the region.”

9.81 The Report of the UN Secretary General of 15 October 2007, noted that “The security situation within the Kurdistan region remains relatively stable. As a result, United Nations staff members are able to deploy in order to meet and interact with their Iraqi counterparts on a regular basis. The Inter-Agency Assessment Mission carried out a security assessment from 13 to 20 July and made a number of recommendations, many of which are already in place.

- 9.82 The Finnish Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to Iraq's three northern governorates between 23 October and 3 November 2007, noted "The mission found the security situation to be quite stable in the main cities and roads of the three northern governorates. Members of various armed forces such as the border guards, police, Asayish, gendarmerie, army etc. were seen guarding all government institutions, important streets, public monuments, events etc. ... The local population was said to provide information for authorities concerning security issues."
- ...9.84 The IRC report, published 28 May 2008, stated that "Recently, Kurdistan- the safe haven for many Iraqis became involved in armed conflict. Both the Iranian and Turkish military bombarded the border villages with artillery shells for weeks. Thousands of villagers migrated inland for fear of their lives thus compounding the displacement problem in Iraq. The latest incident took place on 25 April 2008 in Erbil, where there was bombardment of the border villages in Sida area (UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Iraq*, January, Chapter 9, pp. 51-53 – Attachment 1).

A more extensive assessment of the complex issues surrounding the conflict between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan is provided in a November 2008 report by the International Crisis Group (International Crisis Group 2008, 'Turkey and Iraqi Kurds: Conflict or Cooperation?', ICG website, 13 November http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/iraq_iran_gulf/81_turkey_and_iraqi_kurds_conflict_or_cooperation.pdf - Accessed 14 November 2008 – Attachment 5).

Terrorism

The US Department of State report on terrorism for 2008 highlights a terrorist organisation named *Ansar Al-Islam* which was established in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2001, and has been described in the report as "one of the largest Sunni terrorist groups in Iraq" which operates primarily in the Northern areas and has "claimed responsibility for many high profile attacks":

ANSAR AL-ISLAM

a.k.a. Ansar al-Sunna; Ansar al-Sunna Army; Devotees of Islam; Followers of Islam in Kurdistan; Helpers of Islam; Jaish Ansar al-Sunna; Jund al-Islam; Kurdish Taliban; Kurdistan Supporters of Islam; Partisans of Islam; Soldiers of God; Soldiers of Islam; Supporters of Islam in Kurdistan

Description: Ansar al-Islam (AI) is a Salafi terrorist group whose goals include expelling the U.S.-led Coalition from Iraq and establishing an independent Iraqi state based on Sharia law. AI was established in 2001 in Iraqi Kurdistan with the merger of two Kurdish extremist factions that traced their roots to the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan. In a probable effort to appeal to the broader Sunni jihad and expand its support base, AI changed its name to Ansar al-Sunna in 2003, in a bid to unite Iraq-based extremists under the new name. In December 2007, it changed its name back to Ansar al-Islam. AI has ties to the al-Qa'ida (AQ) central leadership and to al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI). Although AI did not join the AQI-dominated "Islamic State of Iraq", relations between AI and AQI have greatly improved and efforts to merge the groups are ongoing. Some members of AI trained in AQ camps in Afghanistan, and the group provided safe haven to affiliated terrorists before Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Since OIF, AI has become the second-most prominent group engaged in anti-

Coalition attacks in Iraq behind AQI and has maintained a strong propaganda campaign.

Activities: AI continued to conduct attacks against a wide range of targets including Coalition Forces, the Iraqi government and security forces, and Kurdish and Shia figures. AI has claimed responsibility for many high profile attacks in 2007, including the execution-style killing of nearly two dozen Yazidi civilians in Mosul in reprisal for the stoning death of a Muslim convert in April, the car-bombing of a police convoy in Kirkuk in July, the suicide bombing of Kurdistan Democratic Party offices in Khursbat in October, and numerous kidnappings, executions, and assassinations (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Terrorism for 2008*, April, Chapter 6, p. 288 - Attachment 6).

Foreign investment

A previous research response dated 12 September 2008 highlights a number of articles which describe foreign investment in Iraqi Kurdistan. Some of these have been included as follows:

- An article published in *The Economist* in 2007 outlines Iraqi Kurdistan's desire to attract foreign investment, however indicates that although the region has experienced stability and minimal bomb attacks compared with the rest of the country, the negative image of Iraq as a whole has discouraged Western investors:

You would be hard pushed to find an area keener on attracting foreign investors than Iraqi Kurdistan. The region is almost entirely dependent on imports, as the authorities search for ways to rebuild an economic base that was all but destroyed during the Anfal campaign of Saddam Hussein in the late 1980s.

...[The recent emergence of stability the region] has allowed the KRG to project itself as a "gateway to Iraq", aiming to draw in foreign companies seeking to take advantage of the reconstruction opportunities in "Arab Iraq", but which are deterred by the lack of security throughout much of the rest of the country. However, even this is proving a challenge. Despite there having been only two bomb attacks in Kurdistan since the fall of Saddam in 2003, the region's image continues to suffer from the headline-grabbing horrors witnessed daily in other parts of the country, and Western officials and businessmen still often prefer to hire private security firms to ferry them around. Such attitudes exasperate some in the KRG--as well as the general public -- and it is easy to sympathise with their frustration. At least in the cities, the Peshmerga maintain a reassuring, albeit somewhat pervasive, presence, and the locals are friendly, and, as such, Westerners are often seen walking unaccompanied.

The government has sought to supersede security concerns by passing one of the most foreigner-friendly investment laws in the entire Middle East. Under the investment law of 2006, foreigners not only enjoy some of the advantages on offer in various other Arab states -- such as a ten-year tax holiday, and free repatriation of capital -- they can also purchase land (for only a "symbolic" fee), which will be theirs for perpetuity. The law has been widely praised by both local and foreign businesses in the area, and, according to the head of the Board of Investment, Herish Muhamad, as of March some 17 firms had

already registered ('Iraq economy: Kurdish promise' 2007, The Intelligence Summit blog, source: The Economist, 16 April <http://intelligence-summit.blogspot.com/2007/04/iraq-economy-kurdish-promise.html> – Accessed 10 September 2008- Attachment 7).

- A 2008 article outlining foreign investment in Iraqi Kurdistan similarly indicates that violence in other parts of Iraq has hindered the prospects for significant investment as “outsiders...fail to notice that Kurdistan has...largely been spared the bloodshed in Iraq.” Fighting near the Turkish border between Kurdish rebels and Turkish forces is also highlighted as an impediment to foreign investment:

Iraqi Kurdistan has been primed for a wave of foreign investment for years, but officials say the grand goals of a relatively peaceful northern enclave are frustrated by violence plaguing the rest of Iraq.

Kurdish officials dream big, speaking of bringing Europeans to ski the region's snow-capped peaks, building modern schools and hospitals and rejuvenating thirsty wheat fields.

In Erbil, the Kurdish capital some 310 km (190 miles) north of Baghdad, the streets buzz with activity. Several upmarket hotels and housing projects are going up on the outskirts of town. Direct flights arrive from Europe and westerners are a common sight in the city centre's booked hotels.

“We have many things: oil, iron, phosphate,” said Baqi Salaye, a Kurdish businessman sipping sweet tea in an elegant, gold-trimmed reception room in Erbil's chamber of commerce.

Yet Salaye, who dabbles in aviation, tourism and other business, echoes widely felt frustration when he bemoans the muddled perceptions of outsiders, who often fail to notice that Kurdistan has been largely been [sic] spared the bloodshed in Iraq.

“If something happens in Mosul, they say ‘northern Iraq.’ If it happened in Diyala, they say ‘northern Iraq,’” lamented Karim Sinjari, Kurdish state interior minister, referring to northern areas that fall outside the Kurds' autonomous region.

...Since a new investment law was issued in 2006, promising investors a 10-year exemption from non-customs taxes, Kurdistan has licensed over 100 investment projects, said Nawroz Muhammad Amin, a senior official at the region's Investment Board.

Another red flag is the fighting between Kurdish PKK rebels in the mountainous area near Kurdistan's northern edge and Turkish forces on the other side of the border.

...The U.S. State Department, in its most recent advisory, strongly warns U.S. citizens against traveling to Iraq, ticking off a litany of threats: rocket attacks, kidnappers, thugs -- and the PKK, which Washington considers a terrorist group.

But Sinjari hopes a change in such policies, at least for Kurdistan, would encourage business travelers and tourists ('Iraqi Kurdistan still a tough sell to investors' 2008, Iraq Updates website, source: Reuters, 1 September http://www.iraqupdates.com/p_articles.php/article/35873 – Accessed 9 September 2008 – Attachment 8).

- A 2008 article from the *Middle East Times* indicates that “[t]here are more than 100 private investments projects in Iraq Kurdistan totaling more than \$16 billion...in a range of sectors including tourism, commercial developments and agriculture.” The article highlights a “construction boom” in Erbil (the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan), including “the development of the Grand Rotana and Le Royale hotels [and] a \$4.5 billion housing project.” In addition, Newroz Amin from the Kurdistan Investment Authority is cited as describing the 2006 “regional investment law [which] exempts investment projects in the region from non-custom taxes and duties for 10 years” as “an “incentive for investment” not prevalent elsewhere in Iraq [and] one of the “many factors for success” in Iraqi Kurdistan” ('Kurdistan in midst of construction boom' 2008, Kurdistan Regional Government website, source: Middle East Times, 11 June <http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?lngnr=12&smap=02010200&rnr=73&nr=24774> – Accessed 9 September 2008 – Attachment 9; MRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IRQ33638*, 12 September - Attachment 10).

2. In making the decision, the delegate found that Iraq was extremely dangerous with a very high risk of terrorist attacks. Is this true of the whole of Iraq or can these comments be restricted to certain regions?

The sources consulted indicate that terrorist attacks and acts of violence occur in most regions of Iraq, although some regions are more unstable than others. The following reports highlight Baghdad, Salah al Din, Ninewa, Diyala, Basrah and Kirkuk as dangerous regions compared with other areas, particularly in contrast to Iraqi Kurdistan, which has been described as “the safest and most stable region of Iraq” (US Department of Defense 2009, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, March, p. 28 http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf - Accessed 22 May 2009 – Attachment 4).

The 2009 US Department of State report on human rights practices states that “[i]n Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk, the three provinces comprising the majority of the area under the jurisdiction of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), there were significantly fewer reports of sectarian violence than elsewhere in the country.” Describing the situation for the rest of Iraq, the report outlines a number of terrorist attacks and acts of violence, most of which appear to have occurred in Baghdad; however, it is emphasised that “[i]nsurgent and terrorist bombings, executions, and killings were a regular occurrence throughout all regions and sectors of society”. The following excerpt identifies such incidents, with the affected region highlighted:

Since the second half of 2007 and during the year, the general security situation in the country substantially improved. Violence has decreased to the lowest level since 2004, although attacks on military, police, and civilians continued...Successful ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] operations contributed to decreasing violence by establishing government control of areas previously dominated by Shia special groups and other extremists.

...During the year, the Ministries of Interior (MOI) and Defense (MOD) increased the numbers of trained security forces. At the end of the year there were over 590,000 trained security forces, an increase from 430,000 in November 2007. The strengthened ISF led successful operations, often jointly with the MNF-I, against **insurgents and terrorists in Basrah, Maysan, Baghdad, Diyala, Ninewa, Qadisiyah, and Wasit Provinces.**

... Insurgent and extremist violence, coupled with weak government performance in upholding the rule of law, resulted in widespread and severe human rights abuses. Although their influence and ability to attack was significantly weakened since 2007, terrorist groups such as AQI and other extremist elements continued to launch attacks against Shia and Sunnis, fueling sectarian tensions and undermining the government's ability to maintain law and order...Amidst attacks, **Shia armed groups fought each other and against government forces for control of the nine provinces in the South, especially in Basrah.**

... **In Baghdad there were 92 persons killed in September, 86 in October, 82 in November, and 56 in December.**

...On March 6, **two bombings in Baghdad killed 70 civilians** and wounded hundreds. On August 24, a suicide bomber targeted a group of Sunni sheikhs known for cooperating with Coalition Forces (CF) who were celebrating a release of a family member from prison, killing at least 25 and wounding 29. On November 10, a **roadside IED [Improvised Explosive Device] followed by a suicide bomber mingling in the crowd destroyed a minibus carrying school girls in Baghdad, resulting in 28 deaths.**

...Incidents of terrorist attacks by female suicide bombers increased. On February 1, **two female suicide bombers blew themselves up in pet markets in Baghdad,** killing an estimated 100 civilians. On July 28, a **female suicide bomber detonated her explosives in the middle of a public demonstration on the elections law in Kirkuk,** killing 10 and wounding 40. The police then fired into the crowd to clear the crowd, causing 20 more deaths and 60 additional injuries. The UNAMI human rights report recorded **13 attacks by female suicide bombers between January and June in Baghdad, Diyala, and Karbala,** which left 140 dead and 307 wounded.

During the year insurgents, terrorists, and extremist group members beat, dismembered, beheaded, and electrically drilled and shocked their victims. On May 19, **police found three unknown bodies in Kirkuk.** According to the police, two of the victims were exposed to torture including burning with acid and gunshot wounds. The third body was beheaded. On July 27, Police found four unidentified bodies in Mosul. The bodies had been subjected to torture and chemical burns. On July 23, the Iraqi NGO Constitutional Rights and Freedoms Observer reported that there had been a total of 1,538 unidentified bodies recovered between January and July, many bearing signs of torture. According to the NGO, the number of bodies found rose in the spring but has dropped since mid-year. **Most of the bodies were found in Diyala and Baghdad.**

...**On June 22, a female suicide bomber killed seven and injured 10 police officers...in central Baquba, in Diyala Province.**

Terrorists also targeted political institutions and leaders, religious institutions, and minorities. On March 17, **a female suicide bomber killed 39 Shia worshippers near a mosque in Karbala.** On April 29, Dhia Jodi Jaber, a director general at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA), was killed by a roadside bomb outside his house. On July 28, **three suicide bombers and a roadside bomb struck Shia pilgrims taking part in a religious procession in Baghdad,** killing 24 and wounding 72. On August 23, senior Ministry of Culture official Kamel Shiaa was **shot dead in Baghdad.** On October 9, Saleh al-Ugaili, a Sadrist parliamentarian, was killed along with two others in his convoy by a **roadside bomb in Baghdad.**

...On August 5, the convoy of senior SOI leader Sheik Ibrahim Karbouli came under attack resulting in his death along with six of his guards in an **ambush south of Baghdad.**

There also were **reports throughout the South that Shia militias and special groups increased their attacks** seeking to intimidate government officials and influence government actions. On April 2, a **roadside bomb exploded in Basrah,** targeting Ministry of Defense (MOD) spokesman Major General Mohammed al-Askari and Basrah security chief Lieutenant General Mohan al-Firaji. One person was injured in this attack, which occurred a week after military operations began in Basrah.

...In 2007, **Shia militias and criminal gangs terrorized civilians in Basrah** through a campaign of killings, intimidation, kidnappings, rape, and other abuses. There also were **a series of killings and attempted killings by sniper fire of police and political figures in Basrah.** Iraqi military operations in Basrah launched in March have reduced Shia militia and criminal gang attacks.

...On July 23, a **bomb exploded in Kirkuk,** killing 23 and wounding 98 persons who were demonstrating against the provincial elections law. On December 11, at the end of a four-day Islamic holiday, a **bomb exploded in a popular restaurant in Kirkuk,** killing 100 and wounding 50. On December 22, ISF arrested a group of terrorists who confessed to the explosion (Researcher's own emphases) (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Iraq*, February, Introduction & Section 1(a) – Attachment 3).

The US Department of Defense report cited previously assesses the security of Iraq by region, specifically outlining the security environment in Baghdad, Western Iraq, Northern/Central Iraq, Eastern Iraq (Diyala), Southern Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. The report describes the overall security situation in Iraq as slowly improving with declining levels of violence and a decreased number of insurgent-initiated attacks, claiming that “[s]ecurity gains in Baghdad are allowing residents to enjoy an improved sense of personal freedom.” For example, the report indicates that all 18 provinces of Iraq have experienced either a constant or decreasing number of daily attacks. In particular, the provinces of Baghdad, Diyala, Ninewa, and Salah al Din, in which approximately half of the population live, are identified as accounting for 78 percent of all attacks in previous years. However, more recently, attacks in Baghdad have decreased by 37 percent, and attacks in Ninewa, Diyala, Tamim, and Salah al Din have decreased by 50 percent.

However, it is also emphasised that despite these positive achievements, security “remain[s] fragile in some places, most notably in Ninewa and Diyala Provinces, as well as in some parts of Baghdad.” For example, it is argued that “[a]lthough trending down in the last few months, violence in northern and central Iraq remains an issue, particularly in Ninewa, where AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq] remains focused on retaining an urban foothold and is actively targeting the ISF [Iraqi Security Forces], local government leaders, and Coalition forces.” In addition, “[i]n disputed areas adjacent to the KRG [Kurdistan Regional Government area] in Ninewa, Diyala, and Tamim Provinces, tensions have increased between Kurdish Peshmerga and the ISF” (US Department of Defense 2009, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, March, pp. 19-22, 25-28

http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf - Accessed 22 May 2009 – Attachment 4).

Similarly, the UK Home Office Report cited earlier outlines the security situation in Iraq overall and by region, describing “continued improvements in security across Iraq during the past three months” and a decline in “both the frequency of violent incidents and casualty figures.” However, despite improvements in security and a decrease in violent incidents, “attacks still occur daily, particularly in Baghdad.”

In reference to Central and Western Iraq, it is reported that “the security situation was violent with serious human rights violations;” and that “[t]he overall situation remains volatile and unpredictable.” In particular, Baghdad has been described as “the most violent area in Iraq, despite positive trends seen, such as more shops being open and people in the streets and markets,” with the civilian population often the target of “daily roadside bombings, car bombs, suicide attacks, small arms fire and mortar attacks.” In addition, it is reported that “[a]lthough there has been a big drop-off in violence, attacks still happen every day across Baghdad - just at a lower rate than before.”

Baghdad

...9.24 On 11 May 2008, IRIN News reported that the situation in Sadr city, Baghdad had deteriorated over the previous few weeks, although a truce between Shia militiamen loyal to Moqtada al-Sadr and US-backed government forces was announced on 11 May 2008. [18ci]

“The fighting in [Sadr City] Baghdad continued during the rest of April and into May [2008], resulting in at least 1,000 deaths, and more than 2,000 wounded. ... it was an Iranian-brokered cease fire, signed on May 11th, that seemed to end the most serious major violence, although smaller-scale operations continued particularly around the walled off southern section of Sadr City.... most JAM forces obeyed the cease fire.” (CSIS, 28 May 2008) [63i] (p17)

9.25 The UNSC paper of 6 November 2008 mentioned that five major vehicle and suicide bombings occurred against Shia mosques and markets during the Eid al Fitr period at the end of Ramadan. [38r] (p13) The IOM’s paper, published 1 November 2008, reported on the security situation in Baghdad, stating that:

“Tensions escalated in Baghdad during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Insurgents launched attacks in the streets crowded with Ramadan shoppers, in one case killing 34 and injuring 52 in the Al Karada neighbourhood of Baghdad. Some areas experienced a series of assassinations, such as Baghdad al-Jadida which saw twelve men killed by small-arms fire. MNF-I responded by increasing its presence in the area, with a spate of detentions and checkpoints ... However, despite increased patrolling efforts, there were several episodes of violence targeting Baghdad returnees in the past month ... In Dora neighbourhood six families were killed one month after returning. This area has seen a notable increase in violence against returnees.” [111] (p5)

In addition, Salah al Din, Ninewa, and Diyala are identified as “serious problem areas;” with a local journalist describing Mosul [in Ninawa Province] as “the worse [sic] place in the whole of Iraq;” and “[t]he Diyala governorate...noted by the UNHCR’s December 2007 paper as being “the most violent area in the country outside Baghdad”.”

Diyala

- 9.32 The Diyala governorate was noted by the UNHCR’s December 2007 paper as being “the most violent area in the country outside Baghdad” and the stronghold of AQI. A high civilian death toll and widespread displacement resulted from frequent attacks on civilians and the MNF-I/ISF. Daily attacks on the MNF-I/ISF, government officials, politicians, tribal members, contractors, translators and civilians also arose. Sectarian killings continued in mixed areas and members of the former Ba’ath Party and security services continued to be targeted. [40] (p34-36)
- ...9.35 The IOM report of November 2008, recorded that “Although recently the security situation has briefly settled down in Diyala, numerous cases of violence have been reported during the past month, including spillover of continued tensions in Khanaqin district. Explosions, arrests, assassinations, militia attacks, and suicide bombings continued to occur in significant numbers. The situation is particularly tense in disputed areas along the border with Kurdistan.”

...Salah-Al-Din

- 9.37 The UNHCR December 2007 report stated that “Levels of violence in the Salah-Al-Din governorate were reported to have decreased to a certain extent, although AQI presence remained strong in some areas, particularly around Samarra, Tarmiyah, Dhuluiya and Baiji.” [40] (p34-36) Daily attacks on the MNF-I/ISF, government officials, politicians, tribal members, contractors, translators and civilians also occurred. Sectarian killings continued in mixed areas and members of the former Ba’ath Party and security services continued to be targeted. [40] (p34-36)
- ...9.38 On 10 February 2008, Al Jazeera News reported that 33 people had been killed by a car bomb in a market in Balad, Salah al-Din. [84e]

- 9.39 A security assessment of Salah al-Din by the IOM, published 1 November 2008, noted that “Security continues to stabilize in Salah al-Din, with increasing responsibility turned over to the Iraqi Security Forces. Limited attacks, suicide bombings, and murders still occur. In Samarra each quarter has been separated with concrete walls restricting movement between quarters, as well as into and out of the town.” [111] (p18)

A 2007 ICRC report is quoted as stating that “[m]ost provinces south-east of Baghdad were relatively calm compared with central Iraq.” For specific regions in Southern Iraq, it is reported that “[s]ecurity fluctuates in Basrah, with periods of stability followed by attacks;” while in Kerbala, “security remains calm but tense.” The report also indicates that security remains stable in Najaf, Qadissiya and Wassit. In Northern Iraq, however, the security environment is identified as more volatile, with a 2008 Brookings Institute report quoted as stating that “the security situation in Kirkuk Governorate has deteriorated over the last two years and today remains highly unstable” (UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Iraq*, January, Chapter 9, pp. 38-51 – Attachment 1).

3. Please advise whether the town of Ainkawa in the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government area of northern Iraq is predominantly Christian?

Ainkawa, also written as Enkawa and Ankawa, is a suburb of Erbil, the capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan. Ainkawa has been described as “Iraq’s largest Christian city,” with “20,000 Christian residents who comprise the overwhelming majority (97%) [of the population in Ainkawa] - the largest Christian community in...Iraq” (Hoffman, H. 2007, ‘World Security Network reporting from Enkawa/Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, April 25, 2007’, World Security Network website, 25 April <http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showNewsletter.asp?id=324> – Accessed 8 September 2008 – Attachment 11).

The UK Home Office report cited earlier identifies Ainkawa as a Christian town located “near the city of Erbil” which, along with the other two Northern Governorates of Iraqi Kurdistan- Sulaymaniyah and Dahuk- generally respects the rights of Christians. As such, “a significant number of [Christians] have sought refuge in the region, in particular in the Governorate of Dahuk...and the Christian town of Ainkawa” (UK Home Office 2009, *Country of origin information report: Iraq*, January, Chapter 22, p. 135 –Attachment 1).

A number of other sources also describe Ainkawa as a “Christian town” (Mackinnon, M. 2007, ‘Assyrians: An Ancient Community Under Siege in Iraq’, Christians Of Iraq website, 12 March <http://www.christiansofiraq.com/underseigemar137.html> - Accessed 21 May 2009 – Attachment 12; Dagher, S. 2008, ‘Iraqi Christians cling to last, waning refuges’, The Christian Science Monitor website, 6 March <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0306/p01s05-wogn.html> - Accessed 21 May 2009 – Attachment 13; Besheer, M. 2006, ‘Iraqi Christians Flee Fighting’, Voice of America News website, 18 July <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-07/2006-07-18-voa45.cfm?CFID=201907653&CFTOKEN=53292211&jsessionid=8430f51905253da542745631f47234a365f1> – Accessed 21 May 2009 – Attachment 14).

Additionally, the US Department of State religious freedom report for 2008 outlines the presence of Christians in Iraq more generally, indicating that “between 30 and 40 percent [of the country's Christian population] live in the north, with the largest Christian communities there located in and around Mosul, Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk” (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Iraq*, September, Section I – Attachment 15).

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