

Report

**Iraq: Security situation and internally  
displaced people in Kirkuk province -  
May/June 2015**



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## **SUMMARY**

The security situation in this province is marked by ongoing warfare across large parts of its southern half, in contrast to a calmer situation in the northern parts. The provincial capital Kirkuk experiences continuous security incidents under otherwise normal conditions. The population is a mix of Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen – both Sunni and Shiite – and Christian Assyrians. All sides of the conflict – government forces, Shiite militias, Kurdish Peshmerga and ISIL – are reported to abuse civilians. The extent to which civilians are exposed depends on where they live and which parties to the conflict operate there. Government protection and public services appear to be highly variable and at places weak or even absent.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Kirkuk province is characterised by a heterogeneous population, a strategic location, large oil deposits and a long history of conflict. Since 2003, the central government and Kurdish autonomous government have both claimed most of the northern half, which has since been under *de facto* Kurdish control. Ethnically, there is a main distinction between the Kurdish north and the Arab south. Turkmen and Christian Assyrians are also represented.

Since last summer, the Islamist armed group ISIL (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) has tried to take control of the Arab-dominated southern part of the province, and has also made advances towards the Kurdish-controlled areas. The status now is a relatively stable Kurdish-controlled area in the north, including the provincial capital Kirkuk, and an Arab-populated southern half, which last year was the scene of warfare with ISIL, Shiite militias, the Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmerga forces as the main players. In addition, the U.S.-led coalition forces bombarded ISIL's positions in the province. The situation in the province is still uncertain.

This report is largely based on open internet sources and partly on information Landinfo has obtained from sources in Iraq. It is difficult for independent observers to gain access to many areas where the conflict is ongoing. Much of the information that comes out is ultimately derived from local residents and from parties to the conflict. The information may have passed through several hands and may be difficult to verify. Many media reports may contain errors and inaccurate representations. Last but not least, there is a "battle for the truth" and a battle to lay claim to what it is all about. Consequently, access to reliable sources may be limited.

Figure 1: Map of Kirkuk province with districts



Source: Wikimedia Commons 2014 (Note: Aldbs=Dibis).

## 2. THE SECURITY SITUATION

The security situation in the province is characterised by ongoing hostilities in large parts of the southern half, a calmer situation in the northern half and continuing security incidents in an otherwise normal situation in the provincial capital Kirkuk. An international source who follows the security situation daily and who wants to remain anonymous has generally characterised the security situation in Kirkuk as extremely unstable in their reports since July 2014 (e-mails 2014-2015).

Kirkuk has long been a conflict-ridden province. After 2003, the conflicts have particularly been linked to the unresolved issues between the central government and the Kurdish autonomous government over political control of the province. From 2007, there has also been an increasing amount of religious violence.

Between 2008 and 2013, the generally improved security situation in Iraq brought about a significant reduction in violence in Kirkuk. Yet the violence did not disappear completely. Violent incidents, particularly affecting government officials, police, minorities and random civilians, took place on a daily basis. In 2013, there was another sharp escalation of violence after the Iraqi army's massacre of demonstrators in the Sunni Muslim Arab city of Hawija in April. The central government's handling of the demonstrators gave ISIL and other armed groups a strong foothold in the province's Arab population, and the army massacre set off a spiral of violence that ISIL in particular has capitalised on. In 2013, ISIL launched numerous attacks against the army and police. The Kurds increased the number of Peshmerga soldiers in the positions around Kirkuk city, and in August 2013, it was decided to dig a trench around the city as a defensive measure.

ISIL's major offensive in Northern Iraq in the summer of 2014 chased the army south to Baghdad and in its place, Kurdish Peshmerga pushed their way in and filled the vacuum in Kirkuk. In June, the Peshmerga declared they had taken full control of Kirkuk city and large surrounding areas, including areas near Hawija and Dibis (Hawramy 2014). A large number of Arabs live in these areas (Knights 2015).

However in August 2014, ISIL advanced further and took over much of the territory that the Peshmerga had recently secured. ISIL took cities and villages in the south (Daquq district with Daquq city and various villages, including Yankaya and Rashad), in the southwest (Hawija and villages including Rashad and Atshana), in the west (villages including Zab and Riyadh) and northwest of Kirkuk city (parts of Dibis district, near Kirkuk city) (Hawramy 2014).

Over the autumn, a counteroffensive was launched by the Peshmerga, the Shiite militias and the Iraqi army and air force, with U.S. air support. ISIL started a major offensive against Kirkuk city from the south and west (via Maryam Bek, Khalid, Tal al-Ward) in January 2015. They pushed so far that in January they were able to conduct offensive operations right in the centre of the provincial capital, but were beaten back before they were able to consolidate (Malas 2015).

The Peshmerga started a full counteroffensive in March with the purpose of pressing ISIL entirely out of the province (Middle East Eye 2015). Militiamen from the Turkmen Shiite militia units and an Iran-supported Shiite militia also participated. This is according to a well-informed source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation and who wants to remain anonymous (e-mail 1 June 2015). The March offensive now seems to have abated. In late May/early June, there were

repeated airstrikes against ISIL positions in the Riyadh/Rashad area in the Hawija district, without these being followed up by an offensive from the Peshmerga. According to the same source, the airstrikes could indicate that ISIL has become stronger in the area (e-mail 4 June 2015).

## **2.1 HOT SPOTS**

### **2.1.1 Hawija district**

In spring 2015, there was intense fighting throughout Hawija district between ISIL on one side and a combination of Peshmerga, army forces, Shiite militias and the U.S. Air Force on the other side. The outcome of this fighting is not yet certain.

#### **2.1.1.1 Hawija city (district capital)**

The district capital Hawija city is mainly populated by Arab Sunni Muslims and came under ISIL's control last June. The city has important strategic significance for ISIL as it connects operating areas in Anbar province and the oil city of Baiji in the neighbouring province Salahaddin (Banco 2015). In March, ISIL strengthened its positions and transferred fighters to Hawija (Rudaw 2015a; Banco 2015).

In the course of April, the size of the army increased and the U.S. Air Force pressed ISIL with airstrikes and ground operations (source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation, e-mail 24 April 2015; Sarhan 2015). However this has not led to any changes.

#### **2.1.1.2 Villages in Hawija district**

In addition to the district capital Hawija, ISIL also took surrounding villages last June, including Rashad, Zab, Riyad, Abassi and Multaqa (Berwani 2014). The area is still under ISIL's control.

### **2.1.2 Daquq district**

Fighting between the Peshmerga and ISIL over villages in Daquq district has been ongoing since the summer of 2014 and is still continuing. In May 2015, the Peshmerga, the army and Shiite militias tried to drive ISIL out of the villages taken by the group last year.

### **2.1.3 Kirkuk city**

Kirkuk has close communication ties with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and the cities there via highways, which move large volumes of people and goods. One effect of this is that Kirkuk has become the most important gateway for ISIL to infiltrate KRI and conduct operations and establish cells there (Knights 2015). According to a source who reports daily from Iraq (e-mail 4 June), the ISIL team who tried to blow up the U.S. Consulate in Erbil last April arrived by car from Kirkuk, bringing operators and materials.

Kirkuk is now under Kurdish control, both physically and politically (BBC 2014). At the same time, the Kurds' control is just as unresolved vis-a-vis the central government as before. The government contests the Kurds' control, but does not have the means to assert its supremacy. Since last autumn, both parties have prioritised repelling ISIL's advances. The Kurds were most recently challenged by ISIL this winter, when the group launched attacks right into the middle of the city, for a while



creating a precarious situation (OCHA 2015d; diplomatic source in Amman, e-mail March 2015; Tomlinson 2015).

There are many reports about security incidents in the city. People are regularly arrested on suspicion of either planning terrorist acts or infiltrating police, military forces and militias (source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation, e-mail 1 June 2015; Rudaw 2015c). Otherwise, Kirkuk province seems to have a lower level of violence than the four worst provinces: Baghdad, Anbar, Salahaddin and Ninewa (IBC 2015b).

Iraq Body Count (IBC 2015a) lists the following types of security incidents in which people have died in the period January-April 2015:

- Homemade bombs (14)
- Shootings (7)
- Dead bodies found (7)
- Police officers killed in firefights (6)

IBC places police with civilian casualties in general. Attacks in which soldiers are killed are not included. Nor are attacks in which buildings are destroyed, but no lives are lost.

## **2.2 RELATIVELY STABLE PLACES**

### **2.2.1 Dibis district, villages**

Dibis district has been less affected than Hawija and Daquq. However, areas near Kirkuk city have been affected due to their proximity to the provincial capital. The village Kharabaroot and other villages in the same area northwest of Kirkuk are strategically important for ISIL to be able to attack Kirkuk. ISIL took several villages during its offensive last summer and the Peshmerga took some of them back in November 2014 (Shalaw 2015). However, Dibis district does not stand out as unstable compared with Hawija and Daquq.

### **2.2.2 The areas east and north of Kirkuk city**

These areas now seem to be under stable Kurdish control and do not seem to be challenged by either ISIL, the army or Shiite militias.

## **2.3 WHO HAS CONTROL WHERE?**

A map from the International Crisis Group<sup>1</sup> shows the borders of the Peshmerga-controlled areas as of April 2015 (ICG 2015a, p. 32). The front line runs approximately midway between Kirkuk and Hawija and touches Daquq.

A power sharing agreement is believed to have been reached between the Peshmerga and the Shiite militias after a victory over ISIL, in which the so-called PMU units would get to control cities and villages with predominantly Turkmen and Arab populations in large areas south of Kirkuk as long as they did not have any presence

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<sup>1</sup> See the map here (p. 32):

[http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/158-arming-iraq-s-kurds-fighting-is-inviting-conflict.pdf) [downloaded 18 June 2015]

or interference in Kirkuk city. PMU (Popular Mobilisation Units, Arabic: *Hashd al-Shabi*) is a term for Shiite militias who have been set up since last summer through general mobilisation. The agreement was supposedly met with resistance from the Turkmen in the province (al-Taei 2015).

### 2.3.1 Peshmerga

- Daquq city and nearby villages

It is still unclear who has control over Daquq city (ISW 2015a).

When ISIL attacked last August, the Kurds, who had forces there at the time, pushed northwards. When the Kurdish counteroffensive began this March, the Peshmerga relatively quickly took the villages of Mala Abdulla, Tal al-Ward and other ISIL strongholds south of Kirkuk (Rudaw 2015b) and then other parts of Daquq district including villages west of the district capital. For example, the villages of Al-Wehda, Saad and Khalid near the highway between Kirkuk and Baghdad, as well as Jadida Ashair and Jadida Abadian, were taken by Peshmerga forces, according to a source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation (e-mails 21 March and 4 April 2015). The Peshmerga then started another offensive in April to take back the rest of the district.

ISIL counterattacked a few days later and attacked Peshmerga forces in the villages Aziziya, al-Atshana and al-Murra southwest in Daquq district. They then attacked in the Taza subdistrict and the village Ban Shakh, but were driven back from all places, according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW 2015c).

After their recapture, the Kurds immediately began building a fortified border area in the area near the villages Atshana, Aziziya and upper and lower Bashnakh in the vicinity of Daquq. The line will possibly be extended to Kirkuk. In late April, the villages Awzeria, Shakh and Twella west of Daquq were taken over by the Peshmerga and their forces were able to advance further. The fortified border now runs west of Daquq city. It is speculated that the purpose of this is to create a permanent buffer zone between the Kurdish-controlled parts of Kirkuk province and the other areas where ISIL still has control, but where the government army will probably win a victory over ISIL. When finished, the line will consist of embankments, moats and firing positions for tanks and armoured vehicles over an open stretch of five kilometres with clear views (source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation, e-mail 24 April 2015).

When clearing firing zones, the Peshmerga destroyed several villages, demolished houses and power lines and filled wells. The zone will be converted into an uninhabitable no man's land where the intention is for former residents not to return. According to the source who reports daily from Iraq (e-mail 24 April 2015), former residents of the area include a number of Sunni Muslim Arab families of former bodyguards of Saddam Hussein.

In other parts of Daquq district, the situation on the battlefield has not stabilised. The areas south of the Daquq–Hawija line are subject to fighting between the Peshmerga, Shiite militias and ISIL. Based on what has been reported, it now seems that ISIL is conducting a successful defensive and seems to be able to hold territory where neither the Peshmerga forces, the army nor the Shiite militias have been able to break through.

The Shiite militias in Daquq are reported to number about 6,000 men and their operations are not coordinated with the Peshmerga forces (source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation, e-mail March 2015).

- Kirkuk city

Kirkuk is Kurdish-controlled (ISW 2015a). The provincial capital was completely taken over by the Peshmerga in June 2014, when the army fled (Filkins 2014) and has been held since then. In April 2015, Peshmerga forces with U.S. air support drove ISIL so far out of Kirkuk that the Kurds were able to establish a buffer zone of multiple square kilometres around the city (source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation, e-mail 19 April 2015).

- The areas east and north of Kirkuk city

These areas now seem to be under stable Kurdish control and do not seem to be challenged by either ISIL, the army or Shiite militias (IGC 2015, see map p. 32).

### **2.3.2 Army/Shiite militias**

The areas south of the front line (cf. ICG's map, as mentioned in section 2.3) are the scene of much fighting where control alternates between the warring parties in some places and is held by one of the parties in others. In these areas, the army and the Shiite militias are deployed in large numbers and have control in places where there is an Arab and Turkmen population.

Shiite militias were reportedly at the very city limits in Kirkuk in February. Their watchtowers and the Badr militia's flag were said to have been clearly visible from the city (Rosenfeld 2015). The fact that the Kurds were later able to put a defensive ring around the entire city suggests that the Shiite militias have pulled back somewhat.

In the spring of 2015, the pressure on ISIL increased. Among other things, Turkmen PMU units were reportedly deployed for operations in March and April aimed at taking back Turkmen villages, including Basheer south of Kirkuk. The Turkmen PMU units reportedly laid the city under siege (source who reports daily from Iraq, e-mail 21 March 2015). These units are now fighting alongside Shiite militias operating on the government's side.

According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW 2015f), a few hundred Turkmen have formed their own PMU unit that cooperates with the Peshmerga. The soldiers are reportedly recruited from Amerli and Tuz Khurmatu in Salahaddin province and sent out to Taza, Daquq and Basheer villages south of Kirkuk city. The Turkmen PMU units serve under Kirkuk's local security authorities and cooperate with the Peshmerga, according to ISW (2015b).

### **2.3.3 ISIL**

The district capital Hawija and the surrounding areas are under ISIL's control (ISW 2015a), though ISIL is constantly being challenged.

ISIL's operating area in Kirkuk makes a loop from the neighbouring province of Salahaddin northwest of Hawija, and then southwest to Daquq. ISIL dominates here, but is constantly challenged. From the same area, ISIL is directly connected to its operating area in Diyala, Salahaddin and Ninewa. From Hawija and further northeast

to Kirkuk, the area crosses into what is called an attack zone for ISIL in ISW's map of ISIS' areas in Iraq and Syria (2015e). This zone is used to direct attacks against Kirkuk city, among other places.

In the Hawija area, ISIL makes great efforts to hold a large number of villages. There has been persistent reporting of fighting over the following villages (ISW 2015e):

- Riyad
- Rashad
- Abbasi
- Taza
- Basheer
- Ashtana
- Aziziya

Although great efforts have been made to take control of these locations from ISIL, this has not succeeded so far. As previously mentioned, Rashad and Riyadh are still held by ISIL.

### **3. CONFLICT-RELATED VIOLENCE**

#### **3.1 LEVEL OF VIOLENCE IN FIGURES**

According to UNAMI<sup>2</sup> (2015), 14 people were killed in conflict-related violence in Kirkuk province in February, 30 in April and 16 in May.

For Kirkuk city, which is under Kurdish control, Iraq Body Count (IBC 2015a) reported the following number of people killed in the period January-April 2015:

- January: 13 killed – shooting, IEDs (homemade bombs), police officers in shootout
- February: 4 killed – shooting, bodies found, police officers in shootout
- March: 15 killed – shooting, IEDs, bodies found
- April: 6 killed – shooting, IEDs, IEDs at a funeral procession

#### **3.2 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE?**

##### **3.2.1 The army and Shiite militias**

It is reported that the Shiite militias widely conduct attacks against the civilian population in places where they suspect them of having given active or passive

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<sup>2</sup> UNAMI's monthly reports on the number of civilians killed, does not include complete information by province. They only report the number of people killed in the most conflict-ridden provinces. For Kirkuk, the number killed has been reported for January, April and May.

support to ISIL (HRW 2015a). The militias are said to have chased away local residents and made raids (p. 1). Many of those who were displaced from villages in Kirkuk said that the militias had methodically destroyed private homes in dozens of villages, both as revenge and as part of plans to change the population demographics.

In Yengija village in Daquq district, for example, Human Rights Watch (HRW 2015a) saw buildings that had clearly been blown up from the inside. Residents in the villages told HRW that a militia that occupied the village had blown up many houses in the weeks after ISIL was driven out (p. 31). A Shiite Muslim Turkman in Yengija was beaten by people from the Shiite militia Saray Khorasan because they believed him to be a member of ISIL, as he had lived among Sunni Muslims in the village. He had to prove that he could say a prayer from Shiite liturgy before they let him go (p. 33-34).

### **3.2.2 Kurdish Peshmerga**

In a report from February 2015, Human Rights Watch (HRW 2015b) refers to investigations they conducted in places where Peshmerga had retaken control after ISIL had been driven out. HRW primarily reports from four districts in the *de facto* Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) controlled area in Erbil and Ninewa. There, they recorded testimonies of widespread looting and pillaging of Arabs and Christian Assyrians, banned from returning, and of Arabs being isolated in specific zones that they cannot leave. HRW (2015b) describes this conduct as "collective punishment of entire Arab communities."

Even though HRW (2015b) does not report from Kirkuk province, we cannot rule out the possibility that the Peshmerga forces display similar behaviour there too. In all parts of the disputed areas, people are faced with the same problem: warfare with ISIL over the territory where Arabs and other non-Kurds are staying. These are areas that KRG wants to connect to KRI.

However, HRW (2015b) mentions a case from last September where they saw Kurdish Asayish officials physically forcing Arab families away from checkpoints on roads leading into Kirkuk city.

Other sources also report attacks against Arabs by Peshmerga or Kurdish security forces. CTV News (2015) reports that the Peshmerga mistreated ISIL prisoners in Kirkuk, while Mohammed Shalaw (2015) writes in Juan Cole's blog *Informed Comment* that the Peshmerga prevent non-Kurds in Dibis district from returning home. A source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation reported in April (e-mail, 4 April 2015) that Peshmerga forces had prevented both civilians and local police from returning to the al-Multaqa area in Hawija because it bordered an area held by ISIL.

### **3.2.3 ISIL and affiliated groups**

There are reports of numerous human rights violations in areas where ISIL either has or has had control. Women and minorities are reported to be the primary victims. Civilian men are massacred when ISIL encounter resistance in the population. Sadistic demonstrations of power take place, e.g. when Kurdish prisoners were paraded in iron cages on trucks through Hawija before being burnt alive (Saul 2015). In Hawija, ISIL hung several headless corpses from the ceiling of the permanent checkpoint at the entrance to the city (Saul 2015).

ISIL demands up to 1 million dinars (about NOK 6,700) from people who previously worked for the authorities and who want to sign a "declaration of regret" to avoid being killed. This is reported from Hawija and the villages Zab, Riyadh, Abbasi and Rashad (source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation, e-mails 2014). In these villages, ISIL also reportedly blew up a large number of private homes before they retreated (source who reports daily from Iraq, e-mail 28 March 2015).

## **4. POPULATION COMPOSITION**

The majority of the population consists of Arabs and Kurds. Then, there are the Turkmen, Christians and other small minorities. How large a percentage these groups constitute is a very politicised issue and it is difficult to establish exact percentages. It can be assumed that the Arabs are slightly in the majority, but that they and the Kurds are otherwise fairly equally divided, and that the Turkmen constitute perhaps a fifth of the population.

The total number of inhabitants in the province, according to figures from the Central Statistical Organization in Iraq, is 1,290,027 (COSIT 2007).

A calculation made by the UN Joint Analysis Unit for Iraq, JAPU (2015), estimates the number of inhabitants in the districts to be as follows:

- Kirkuk: 572,080 (63%)
- Hawija: 215,193 (25%)
- Daquq: 75,279 (8%)
- Dibis: 39,467 (4.4%)

The U.S. Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, SIGIR (2011), estimated the following distribution of ethnic and religious groups in 2011:

- Kurds: 40%
- Sunni Muslims: 20%
- Shiite Muslims: 15%
- Other ethnic and religious groups (including Turkmen): 25%

Here we assume that by Shiites and Sunni SIGIR means Arabs, representing a total of 35%. We believe this to be a low estimate in light of the large influx of Arabs and the relocation of Kurds conducted by the authorities over many decades in the 1900s.

### **4.1 ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND THEIR CORE AREAS**

The main ethnic groups in the province are Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs and Assyrians. Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs are all divided between Shiite and Sunni Islam. Most Kurds and Arabs are Sunni Muslims. Assyrians are Christians. There are no certain figures for the distribution. The issue of population composition is extremely politicised, and the Iraqi government has not conducted a statistically reliable census

since 1987. The figures from 1987 are long outdated due to major demographic changes. However the Central Statistical Organization in Iraq, COSIT, has calculated estimates of population growth.

Kirkuk province is geographically located between the Kurds' core areas in the north and east, and the Arabs' core areas in the south and west (Ignatius 2015). All four ethnic groups share the same areas of residence, but each group has its own core area.

- Arabs

Sunni Arabs dominate in the southern half of the province, including in Hawija city and in the villages in Hawija district. They are also well represented in Kirkuk city. Sunni Arabs essentially constitute the original Arab tribes in the province (Anderson & Stansfield 2009, p. 81).

The Shiite Muslim Arabs in the province arrived recently. They began coming as migrant workers after oil operations began about 90 years ago and later as a result of centrally administrated "Arabisation" campaigns. The Shiite Arabs are now in the villages in the southern part of the province, up to Kirkuk. The majority currently consist of so-called *wafideen*, i.e. those who were transferred there by the Saddam regime (Anderson & Stansfield 2009, p. 81).

Dibis district north of Hawija has a mixed Arab and Kurdish population (Ekurd 2014), most of which are Sunni (Filkins 2014).

- Kurds

The Kurds dominate in the north and east, as well as in Kirkuk city (Anderson & Stansfield 2009, p. 59).

- Turkmen

Turkmen dominate in Altun Kupri (MRG 2014) and in various other villages spread across the province, including in Basheer in Daquq district. They are also well represented in Kirkuk city (Anderson & Stansfield 2009, p. 59).

- Assyrians

The Christian Assyrians mainly live in Kirkuk city and constitute a minority there. Their number is said to have dropped significantly since 2003. A priest that the Christian Science Monitor (Soguel 2014) spoke with in Kirkuk, said there could be no more than about 300 worshippers in the city.

The Assyrians reportedly started moving to Kirkuk when the oil industry began in the 1920s (Assyrians of Kirkuk 2015).

## 4.2 HOW DOES THE CONFLICT AFFECT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS GROUPS?

Kirkuk is a province of major strategic importance, where hegemony is contested. Large deposits of vital economic resources (oil and gas), protracted warfare and an ethnic/religious patchwork of split loyalties, set the stage for a great deal of insecurity between the different population groups.

Relations between Kurds and Arabs have long been strained. A report (Borri 2015) from the weapons bazaar in Kirkuk illustrates this. Although open weapons sales are not formally allowed, "everyone" still trades in weapons for self-defence in the

unofficial weapons market. Yet the market is not open to everyone, because the Kurdish sellers do not sell to Arabs in the city. Arabs, they believe, have kinship ties to clans in Mosul and Hawija, which are far too closely tied to ISIL for their relatives in Kirkuk to be trusted. But if you are a Kurd, you can buy a weapon.

Mistrust is expressed in other ways too. A notice on the Kurdish website Rudaw (Najib 2014) about the high number of births among Arabs in Hawija clearly indicates strong Kurdish suspicion that the high birth rate is a deliberate attempt by the Arab population to keep the city purely Arab. As an example, a man with two wives who has increased the city's Arab population by 17 sons and 9 daughters is described in fairly condescending terms.

Turkmen and Kurds have lived together in the province for many generations, but relations between them have always been characterised by mutual mistrust. While the Kurds are said to regard the Turkmen as a potential projection of Turkish interests in the area, the Turkmen see themselves as the original inhabitants of the province, who have been gradually supplanted by both Arab and Kurdish migrant workers and settlers (Anderson & Stansfield 2009, p. 81). There is also dissatisfaction among the Turkmen about what they see as Kurdish dominance and disregard of Turkmen in the province's political leadership (Soguel 2014).

This mutual mistrust was expressed last summer when the army fled and the Turkmen in Kirkuk city wanted to form their own militia. However the militia was not primarily intended to defend Turkmen against ISIL, but against Kurds tightening their grip on the city. The project was consequently strongly opposed by the Kurdish authorities, according to al-Jazeera (Russel 2014). Outside the provincial capital, Turkmen joined the government-supported PMU in many places and were deployed to recapture Turkmen villages from ISIL (Knights 2015).

The Kurds thus do not appear to want anyone arming themselves other than Kirkuk's Kurdish inhabitants, or, as the freelance journalist Jesse Rosenfeld (2015) points out, they do not even want the presence of the Iraqi army or Shiite militias in the city. Rosenfeld characterises Kirkuk in 2015 as "incredibly segregated and increasingly polarised." The mistrust between the Kurds and the Turkmen seems to have increased.

Michael Knights at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (2015) points out that the fact that the Shiite militias have liberated Turkmen cities south of Kirkuk could set the Turkmen against the Kurds even more. According to Knights, the PMU militia advanced right up to the suburbs south of the provincial capital. There, they established major training camps where they armed local volunteer Turkmen and Arab Shiite Muslims. The size of the militia forces are reported to be increasing, and challenging the Kurds' control even more. For example, in February the leader of the Badr militia, Hadi al-Amiri, visited the province's Kurdish governor at the head of an ostentatiously large double-column of 50 vehicles. Ten days later, Qais al-Khazali, leader of one of the other Shiite militias, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), threatened that AAH's forces would enter Kirkuk if Shiite militias there (which are mostly Turkmen) asked for their assistance, according to Knights (2015).

We do not find much information about the Christians in the province, but in Kirkuk city it is reported that they keep a low profile due to the general security situation there. They still celebrate the Christian holidays, but many avoid going to what little there is of public holiday celebrations. Both Christmas and Easter were celebrated



last year, but many just celebrated quietly at home. The stores have stopped selling Christmas ornaments, which were sold for Christmas in years past (Kirkuk Now 2014 & 2013).

## **5. VULNERABLE GROUPS**

Each ethnic group can be said to be vulnerable to conflict-related violence in their own way and in different contexts. Much of it depends on where and under what circumstances the conflict-related violence is playing out.

### **5.1 TURKMEN**

Turkmen came under dramatic pressure when ISIL invaded parts of the province last summer. Particularly for the Shiite Muslim Turkmen, ISIL was a threat to their existence and many fled. In Kirkuk, Turkmen, as previously described, have a somewhat problematic relationship to the Kurds, but we have not seen reports from independent sources of systematic attacks against them by the Kurds. Such conduct would probably have triggered countermeasures from the large Shiite militias. Apart from the dramatic circumstances mentioned above, we have no indications that the Turkmen are vulnerable in a general sense.

### **5.2 ARABS IN KURDISH AREAS**

Sunni Arabs in Kirkuk city probably fear revenge for ISIL attacks from Kurds, Turkmen and Shiite Arabs in the city. As described elsewhere, there is much to indicate that they are suspected of being actively or passively complicit in ISIL attacks. There are reports that the Kurds in many places have made it difficult for those who want to return or resume a normal life in places they fled from due to such hostilities.

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG 2015a, p. 23), Kurdish forces do not want to obligate themselves to allow people to return or offer public services before local Arab leaders agree to give them power to reinforce Kurdish sovereignty.

In some places, Arabs have been the target of individual retaliation by Kurds or Turkmen (Rosenfeld 2015).

### **5.3 SUNNI MUSLIM ARABS OUTSIDE KURDISH-CONTROLLED AREAS**

Much of the same kind of pressure against local Arabs is probably being used in areas conquered by Shiite militias, where both Shiite militias and Kurdish forces try to assert dominance (ICG 2015a, p. 23). Where ISIL dominates, it is well known that they react with harsh reprisals against anyone suspected of opposing them, actively or passively.

### **5.4 CHRISTIAN ASSYRIANS**

The Christians seem to have been placed under protection where the Kurds have control. At the same time, ISIL constitutes a threat to the existence of the Christians (Soguel 2014). During ISIL's offensive last summer, several hundred Christians fled from Kirkuk, according to Newsweek (2014). As a political/symbolic response to

this, the province's Kurdish governor declared Christmas Day 25 December a public holiday last year throughout the province, according to the Vatican news agency Fides (2014). It was also decided it would be a holiday for all school children.

## **5.5 WOMEN**

OCHA (2014b, p. ii, 10, 18) reports that ISIL treats women "particularly harshly" in the areas they control and they particularly emphasise the extensive use of rape and other sexual violence. In areas where there are ongoing military operations, women – and children – are the most vulnerable members of the civilian population, and OCHA (2014b) mentions multiple examples of women being killed in airstrikes in the districts of Hawija and Daquq. OCHA also mentions examples from the village Basheer, where female civilians have been killed by ISIL artillery fire.

## **5.6 POLICE OFFICERS IN KIRKUK**

The police have been a target for armed groups operating in Kirkuk over the years. In 2007, more than 800 were reportedly killed in service (Nelson 2008). Family members have not been spared either (Arun 2014). The police force is meant to proportionately represent the different population groups in the city. In accordance with an agreement between KRG and the central government from 2007, the police are primarily responsible for security within the city limits (Warden 2008). The army is responsible for the area outside the cities.

# **6. CRIME AND GOVERNMENT PROTECTION**

## **6.1 CRIME**

Landinfo has not found systematic crime statistics for Kirkuk. Figures from Iraq Body Count (IBC 2015a) show highly irregular reporting on crimes such as murder, robbery, kidnapping and discoveries of dead bodies with fatal injuries. It is not clear if the figures contain cases that relate more to terrorism than ordinary crime. IBC collects its data partly from figures provided by hospitals, morgues, NGOs and official sources, and partly from surveys of media reports of deadly violence and discoveries of dead bodies (IBC n.d.).

The widespread lack of state authority in large parts of the province over the last year has probably created fertile ground for the spread of crime. However, it is difficult to estimate the extent of crime and government intervention against it.

## **6.2 GOVERNMENT PROTECTION**

In KRG-controlled areas, the Kurdish authorities have had more stable working conditions than the central government has had in the other parts of the province. In an assessment of the government protection in the province, a distinction should be made between the Kurdish-controlled areas, the parts of the province that are outside Kurdish control and the areas where Shiite militias, the army and ISIL fight for control.

### **6.2.1 Areas outside Kurdish control**

In these areas, we assume that the government protection over the last year has been extremely deficient. This is because the areas have largely either been ISIL-dominated or an arena for ongoing hostilities.

Based on what is being reported about the conduct of the army and the Shiite militias, it seems they are just as likely to deprive inhabitants of protection as provide it. In a February 2015 report that refers to Diyala province, Human Rights Watch (HRW 2015c) states that the authorities there are responding to those they deem terrorists with arbitrary arrests and executions. The army has also been engaged in western Kirkuk, where the population is Arab and Sunni. Similar abuses are reported in another report from HRW (2015a) on this part of Kirkuk.

Prime Minister al-Abadi's comments on information about massacres committed by Shiite militias, has not created confidence that the government will remain neutral in relation to the civilian population's attitudes to ISIL (Landinfo 2015, p. 20).

It also seems doubtful that Prime Minister Abadi will have enough power to bring the Shiite militias under control following a future victory over ISIL. The government army has fewer and fewer resources while the militias' resources are increasing. The ministries responsible for defence and security are in the hands of Abadi's political rivals and in reality play a role in the militias' logistical backbone (ICG 2015b). Therefore, the International Crisis Group (ICG 2015b) believes that the balance is swinging further in the Shiite militias' favour and it is they who have the most power to determine what will happen during and after their military operations. Under such conditions, there is reason to expect that the state authorities will be weaker than the local militia leaders.

### **6.2.2 Kurdish-controlled areas**

We must assume that widespread corruption, both in KRG's and the central government's administration, contribute to weakening the authorities' protection of the citizens in the disputed areas. Corruption is very widespread here, both in the police and also to some degree in the judicial system. This is according to a report on the level of corruption in Iraq published by U4 (2013), a resource centre for anti-corruption at Chr. Michelsen Institute. Although the report is two years old, we have no reason to assume that the picture presented there has changed significantly.

In the Kurdish-controlled areas, the police's loyalty has long been divided between the Kurdish regional and Iraqi central government. KRG and the central government are both trying to exercise authority in the police and in the administration in general. The U.S. Department of State noted in 2013 (U.S. Department of State 2013) that the poorly defined administrative boundaries between KRI and the rest of the country cause confusion about both the police's and the courts' jurisdiction.

The turbulent situation that arose in many places last year in connection with the fighting with ISIL reportedly fanned the Turkmen's mistrust of the Kurdish structures of power. Al-Jazeera (Russel 2014) refers to Turkmen sources in Kirkuk who state that the Kurdish Peshmerga grossly favoured the local Kurds when they recaptured terrain, cities and buildings from ISIL last year.

In our assessment, the degree to which non-Kurds are covered by the same government protection as Kurds is uncertain.

## **7. DAILY LIFE**

How daily life is affected largely depends on where you are. In the areas most exposed to conflict, displaced inhabitants and blown up houses are part of daily life. Other places seem to have more normal conditions in terms of supplies, communications and services that function to a certain extent, even if security is poor. We will look at some indicators that have been reported.

### **7.1 PUBLIC SERVICES**

It seems to be highly variable how public services function around the province. In the areas that have been under stable Kurdish control, we assume that public services have functioned normally. This is to say that they work, but are also heavily neglected because neither the central government nor KRG has found it worthwhile to invest more than a minimum of public funding due to the areas' unresolved status. The Iraqi central government makes a similar claim on the areas. At the administrative level, this has led to an unclear distribution of power, which complicates the exercise of authority politically, practically and in terms of budget (see Knights 2010, p. 20). In the places that have been taken over by ISIL, no public services have been provided at all (ICG 2015a, p. 24).

The UN Joint Analysis Unit for Iraq, JAPU (2015), reports that the provincial government considers the large oil industry to have a negative impact on the population. Among other things, the industry draws so much of the available power supply capacity that the power network only manages to deliver nine hours' power a day to households. The water supply is also unreliable throughout the province.

### **7.2 PURCHASING POWER**

OCHA (2015c) reports that high food prices and reduced purchasing power form the framework for the inhabitants' financial capabilities. The World Food Programme (WFP 2015b) states that particularly in the parts of the province affected by the conflict, flour and bread prices have risen sharply in the past year due to constant interruptions in road transport. Among other things, this has held back the distribution of the monthly food rations (PDF) all Iraqis get. This March, the price of wheat flour in Kirkuk was twice the rate in Baghdad.

### **7.3 DEVELOPMENT**

According to JAPU's (2015) assessment, the province's overall performance on humanitarian and development indicators is good, though this is relative to the rest of the country. At the same time, major local variations are highlighted. Daquq district, which is now also the site of much fighting, is designated as the least developed district. Reportedly, the quality of education and infrastructure is low and poverty is widespread. As much as 15 % of boys aged 6-14 years have some form of employment rather than attending regular schooling.

In Kirkuk district, the prevalence of chronic diseases is high (JAPU 2015).

## **7.4 INFRASTRUCTURE**

War and sabotage affect the transport network. Among other things, several bridges have been blown up (source who reports daily from Iraq on the security situation, e-mail 21 March 2015).

The highway between Kirkuk and Baghdad was closed in March, April and May due to military operations, but was opened to car traffic in late May (OCHA 2015a, p. 2). Even though this has promoted people's freedom of movement, bus traffic and the transport of goods by truck is still hampered.

## **8. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE**

### **8.1 NUMBER**

As of 1 September 2014, there were 21,599 internally displaced families in Kirkuk. 85% of these had arrived during the previous three months, which shows how uneasy the situation was both in Kirkuk and in neighbouring provinces. Eighty-four per cent of the internally displaced people (IDPs) were from Salahaddin, while people displaced within the province constituted 9% of the IDPs. Sixty-five per cent of all IDPs in the province are staying in Kirkuk district (IOM Iraq 2014).

According to IOM, there were a total of 370,986 IDPs in Kirkuk as of May 2015. Most of them (143,004) come from Salahaddin. The rest are originally from Anbar (106,788), Kirkuk (60,462), Ninewa (32,658), Diyala (26,082), Baghdad (1,512) and Babylon (480). Kirkuk province is hosting 12% of the IDPs in Iraq. Sixteen per cent of the IDPs in Kirkuk come from other parts of the province (IOM Iraq 2015c, p. 3-5).

People who have fled from Kirkuk province have mainly gone to Baghdad (3,726), Qadissiya (2,760), Thi-Qar (1,266), Wassit (816), Missan (816), Basrah (792) and Najaf (432). In total, 71,568 IDPs are originally from Kirkuk. This constitutes 2% of the total number of IDPs in Iraq (IOM Iraq 2015c, p. 5).

The provincial borders were reportedly closed to everyone who did not have an ID card from Kirkuk for a period in September 2014. This has limited the influx of IDPs. In December 2014, IDPs living in the Laylan refugee camp outside Kirkuk city had problems getting into the city because the authorities required that they hand over their ID cards at the checkpoint. A solution was arranged with a separate ID card for those living in the camp, and a list of names was delivered to the checkpoint so that travellers could keep their ID cards, which they often need to get access to necessary services (IOM Iraq 2014; OCHA 2014a).

### **8.2 HOUSING**

IOM's overview from September 2014 (p. 3) shows that most IDPs share housing with relatives or acquaintances, a total of 38%, while 16% rent housing, and 15% live in abandoned/public buildings and unfinished buildings. As some areas of Kirkuk were inaccessible for security reasons, it was not explained what type of housing 29% of the internally displaced people had.

As of May 2015, the majority of the refugees live in informal settlements (212,376). As many as 52,590 people have unknown housing arrangements and 45,660 live in what is categorised as "other." A total of 35,316 share housing with relatives or acquaintances, 12,066 live in camps, and 11,934 people rent shelters (IOM 2015c, p. 9).

In Kirkuk, lack of privacy and poor security in housing arrangements is a major concern. In April 2015, 70% reported that the lodgings they had were inadequate and 29% that they were non-existent. The lack of capacity and implementation resources has delayed the construction of a new and necessary refugee camp. There is also a pending application for distribution of 100 tents (OCHA 2015b). As of April 2015, there were two refugee camps in Kirkuk, both in Daquq, with about 13,700 residents. A third camp is under construction, which is planned to house about 10,000 people (CCCM Cluster Iraq 2015, p. 4).

### **8.3 AID PROGRAMMES**

In February 2015, IOM delivered 550 tents to internally displaced families in Multaqh and Yachay at the request of the governor. The families were driven from their homes because of fighting between ISIL and the security forces. The families reported having lost everything they owned. These same families were also given core emergency kits (blankets, stoves, cooking utensils) (IOM Iraq 2015a). In March 2015, 410 families in Yayawa and Tuzkhormatu<sup>3</sup> were given tents from UNHCR (UNHCR 2015). In April 2015, 600 tents were distributed to newly arrived IDPs and those who returned to Kirkuk (IOM Iraq 2015b).

The conflict has negatively impacted food security in Kirkuk, where one out of ten households only has access to barely enough food or too little food, while 8.2% of the households are at the threshold of having enough food, and 20.4% have too little food. More than 20% of the inhabitants in Kirkuk limit their portions or purchase cheaper/poorer food (WFP 2015b).

The food prices in Kirkuk have increased due to the ongoing conflict and food deliveries are negatively affected by closed supply routes and checkpoints. In March, the price of a basket of food was 25-30% higher in Kirkuk than in Baghdad. In April, the prices dropped slightly and Kirkuk had an average of 16% higher food prices than Baghdad. From February to April, purchasing power increased slightly, from 20 to 22 food baskets for a day's wages (WFP 2015a; WFP 2015b; WFP 2015c).

In Kirkuk city, where the majority of the IDPs live (221,000 people as of April 2015), there are concerns about sanitation conditions. Most people live in unsafe and overcrowded settlements where access to water and sanitation is poor. A total of 97% say that they do not have access to water or that they do not have access to enough clean water to cover their daily needs. Most fetch water from public pipes. Water sources are located far away from where people live and they often have problems with safe storage of water. The lack of latrines is also a major problem, as 93% report that there are not enough latrines where they live (CARE 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR expressly writes "Tuzkhormatu in Kirkuk province." It is not clear to us whether this is a confusion with the name Taza or whether there is a village in Kirkuk with the same name as one in Salahaddin.

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