Topical Note
Irak: Security and internally displaced people in Salahaddin province, March 2015

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SUMMARY

Intense and extended military confrontations across the province have characterized the security situation since June 2014. The civilian population is exposed to terror and abuse from all parties to the conflict. Civilians have fled in large numbers, and daily life is severely disturbed. There is a great need for humanitarian assistance, for instance to IDPs, but access is prevented in many places.

The military offensive that the government announced in March in order to retake the province from ISIL, has so far not come to an end.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Salahaddin province is sparsely populated. The population centres are mostly along the highway between Baghdad and Mosul, while the surrounding countryside is farmland or desert. The province is one of the least urban in the country, with only 46 % of inhabitants living in urban areas. The population is just under 1.2 million, about 4 % of the country's total population (JAPU 2015). The agricultural areas get their water from the Tigris, which also follows the highway in places and which the cities are located near.

The violence spread from Ninewa to Salahaddin and began to escalate sharply in June 2014 after ISIL conquered Mosul and launched their offensive southwards. Since then, the security situation has worsened significantly.

Significant parts of the province came under ISIL's control. Other parts have remained under the government's/Shiite militia's control, while still other are uncertain (IOM 2015c, p. 3). On 1 March, the government launched a major offensive from the south in an effort to take back control of the entire province. ISIL's areas of control have been reduced over the course of the offensive.

Because of its location, Salahaddin is a strategically important province. Full control over Salahaddin would give ISIL the ability to connect their area in Ninewa with two other provinces, Diyala and Kirkuk (al-Jazeera 2014a), and thus also with the rest of Northern/Central Iraq. The government would also get a similar strategic advantage by taking back the province.

Figure 1. Map of Salahaddin with districts

Source: Chaldean at Wikipedia 2007

It is difficult for independent observers to get into many of the areas where there is ongoing conflict. Much of the information which comes out ultimately derives from local residents and from parties in the conflict. The information may have passed through several hands and may be difficult to verify. Many media reports may turn out to contain errors and inaccurate

representations. Last but not least, there is a "battle for the truth" and a battle between "narratives" about what it is all about. We must thus assume that access to reliable sources is limited.

2. THE SECURITY SITUATION

The offensive which ISIL conducted southwards through Salahaddin towards the outskirts of Baghdad last summer lost momentum during the autumn. However, this does not mean that the fighting has declined in intensity. In many places, the intense fighting over cities and roads continued throughout the autumn and while the army gradually took better control over the villages, ISIL launched their offensive outside the cities themselves. In the winter, they attacked the cities from the outside while simultaneously trying to gain ground in the sparsely populated areas around and between these cities.

Over the first half of February 2015, a fresh ISIL offensive in rural areas led to double the number of attacks throughout the province, with particular intensity south of Tikrit. In other areas, such as Baiji and the large oil refinery there, there were reports of "an extremely unstable" security situation, according to ISW (2015b).

On 1 March, the government announced that it had launched a major offensive with air and land forces northwards towards Tikrit in order to recapture Salahaddin. Parts of the offensive was sait to have been conducted outside the main roads in order to prevent ISIL from exploiting open terrain.

A major portion of the forces participating in the government's offensive consist of Shiite militias.

Since a majority of residents in the province live in rural areas, many of these may be hard hit by the offensive. The offensive may quickly change the picture of who has control where. No final outcome of the offensive has yet taken place.

2.1   THE DEVELOPMENT SINCE THE SUMMER OF 2014

What has characterised the situation since June 2014 is an extensive and intense fighting between the army/Shiite militias and ISIL over control of most of hte province's territory. In the east, ISIL, Kurdish Peshmerga and the army/Shiite militias have fought over the district of Tuz. The civilian population is exposed to terror and abuse from all sides of the conflict and civilians have fled in large numbers.

The Shiite militias supported by Iran have reportedly taken an increasingly leading role in the government's fight against ISIL. With an estimated 100,000 - 120,000 armed fighters, the Shiite militias quickly bypassed the army as the most suitable fighting force in the field. The army's manpower   dwindled to about 48,000 men after they were chased out of Mosul last summer, accordingly Sly (2015).

As key points in the development since last summer, we would like to highlight:

- ISIL takes the Tuz district, the oil city of Baiji and the province's second biggest city, Tikrit, in the summer of 2014.

- The Shiite militias Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) and the Badr organisation, as well as Kurdish Peshmerga press ISIL out of Tuz later in the summer.

- The autumn of 2014, the government army and Shiite militias take up the fight against ISIL over Tikrit and Baiji.

- ISIL tries repeatedly to take Samarra and Balad, but does not succeed.

- The government secures Balad through the end of the year and ISIL's attacks there mostly cease.

- The government keeps control of Samarra, but is constantly attacked by ISIL inside and outside the city.

- The Sunni Muslim tribes organise themselves and enter tactical alliances with various parties.

- Peshmerga and Shiite militias have cooperation problems in Tuz.

- In March 2015, the government launches a major offensive from Samarra and northwards to take back control of the province.

The conflict-related violence spills out over the entire province.

A good portion of the hostilities happen in open terrain. Not only in cities, but also in sparsely populated areas, ISIL has invested a lot in and often taken control over relatively unknown villages for shorter or longer periods. For example, two villages south of Tikrit, Dijala and Mikishifa, were taken by ISIL in February, according to a situation update from the U.S. security firm Triple Canopy (2015a, p. 4) working in Iraq.

The important cities Baiji (oil refinery) and Tikrit (traffic point) have changed hands in whole or in part many times. The provincial capital of Samarra has always been held by government forces, but there have been many attacks and confrontations in the city since last summer and last autumn (OCHA 2014, p. 2; Iraqnews 2014). Amongst other things, ISIL has directed several attacks against the al-Askari mosque, an important Shiite shrine (Lewis 2014). On New Year 2015, ISIL began to focus strongly on Samarra, amongst other places, and tripled their bomb and car bomb attacks against the army, police and particularly the Shiite militias, according to Triple Canopy (2015b, p. 2).

In 2014, there was intense fighting for many months over control of Baiji, which has one of the country's largest oil refineries. In November 2014, the refinery was recaptured by the government, but control of the city is still considered uncertain (ISW 2015c). According to IOM (2015c, p. 3), Alam just east of Tikrit has been exposed to the fighting for many months, while the centre of Tikrit itself has been all but emptied of inhabitants due to the fighting.

The district of Tuz, which is in the east and extends into areas which the Kurdish government (KRG) lays claim to, control has gone back and forth between government forces, Kurdish Peshmerga and ISIL since the summer of 2014 (al-Shafaq 2014). Particularly well-known was the Turkmen village Amerli, which ISIL besieged for many weeks, but where the Badr militia and Kurdish Peshmerga broke the siege and took control in early autumn.

The Tuz district, with its mixed Kurdish, Turkmen and Arabic population, was taken back from ISIL by Peshmerga and the Shiite militia Badr organisation on 9 October last year. After this, conflict has arisen between these two over further control. This has led to skirmishes and other types of confrontations. In this situation, the district has been without any functioning state authority for a long time. The central government in Baghdad has not exercised any authority there at all, according to Wing (2014).

In the Balad district furthest to the south, ISIL has repeatedly tried to take control since last summer, but this has been fought off by the army and Shiite militias.

So far none of the warring parties seem to have had enough strength to win any decisive military victory in areas north of Baghdad. It remains to be seen whether the government's offensive in Salahaddin will break this pattern.

2.2 THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE IN 2014

As stated in the previous section, the level of violence in Salahaddin increased significantly in 2014. According to IBC (2015), 2,550 civilians were killed in Salahaddin in 2014, which is more than double the previous year.

According to UNAMI's figures for February (2015), 39 were killed and 54 wounded in conflict-related violence in Salahaddin in the month of February. By comparison, Baghdad had 329 killed in February, the highest figure in the country. With its population of over 7 million, Baghdad has about 4.7 killed per 1,000 inhabitants, while Salahaddin has 3.2 killed per 1,000 inhabitants (population 1.2 million). Relatively speaking, the level of violence in Salahaddin is not far from the level in Baghdad.

In the same overview, UNAMI emphasises that they have also received reports, which they have not been able to verify, that a large number of people may have died of secondary causes from the violence. This may have happened after they fled their homes and as a result were exposed to harsh weather conditions and lack of water, food, medicines and health services. UNAMI points out that for these reasons, the figures stated of those killed and wounded are an "absolute minimum."

2.2 "HOT SPOTS"?

By "hot spot", we mean a finite place or area which is characterised by particularly intense conflict.

The areas between Baiji and Samarra are at the front of the conflict which is now spilling out over all of Northern Iraq. The situation has been in a state of flux and this is reinforced by the new government offensive.

In the centre of the province are two strategically important cities which are still being fought over (ISW 2015c):

- Baiji. Here the fighting is primarily over control of the oil refinery and access roads to this. For the time being, the government forces seem to have an advantage over ISIL. The intensity in the fighting has gone up and down (New York Times 2015).

- The traffic point Tikrit, where the highway from Baghdad splits into three and continues to Mosul, Tuz and Kirkuk. Before the government offensive in March, the army was reinforced with an increasing number of Shiite militia forces (ISW 2015a).

Tikrit and Baiji are of major strategic significance due to resources, location and administrative importance.

In addition to these cities, we would like to highlight the Tuz district in the east of the province. The conflict situation here differs from the rest of the province due to the district's ethnic composition of Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs. Even if the conflict there is less intense than last summer and autumn, this district must also be considered a "hot spot", both due to the conflict between Peshmerga and Shiite militias and because further control over the area still seems unpredictable. There have been reports of several armed confrontations between Peshmerga and Shiite militias (Wing 2014).

Even if the government were successful in recapturing the entire province, this would hardly immediately change the uncertain situation in Tuz. It has persisted since the Kurdish Peshmerga took *de facto* control there in 2003.

WHO HAS CONTROL WHERE?

Here we briefly list the most important places where the various players have control. Places and areas which are designated as unresolved are in most cases subject to ongoing fighting. The overview is based on an ISW map[1] (2015c) dated 12 March unless otherwise mentioned.

Government forces and Shiite militias:

- Samarra (provincial capital)

- Balad and Dhuluiya. The areas where these cities are located (south of Samarra) were subjected to extensive fighting last autumn between ISIL and government forces. Towards the end of 2014, ISIL was finally driven out completely.

- The areas from Samarra and south to Baghdad must now primarily be under government control.

- The government has gained further control in the first few weeks of March northward up to the city of Alam, midway between Tikrit and Baiji, but as of mid-March has not managed to take full control of either Baiji or Tikrit themselves.

Peshmerga and Shiite militias:

- Villages and cities in the Tuz district. Here the Kurdish villages are reportedly under Kurdish control and the Turkmen villages, such as Suleiman Beg and Amerli, under the Shiite militias' control. The Turkmen here are Shiite Muslims (Wing 2014).

ISIL:

- Sharqat district, all the way north

- Sparsely populated areas from Tuz and southward, with the highest degree of control between Tuz and Samarra.

Areas and places still being fought over:

- Baiji
- Tikrit

2.5 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE?

2.5.1 Government forces

The government forces have been deployed to defend the parts of the province which ISIL has not taken and recapture areas ISIL has taken. The army also has a role in asserting Baghdad's sovereignty over the Tuz district over KRG and its Peshmerga forces, but so far it seems to have entrusted this to the Shiite militias. There is a general perception that the government forces have weak morale and capacity to achieve the mission without significant support from Shiite militias, Peshmerga, Iraqi and the U.S. Air Force, as well as U.S. and Iranian military advisors. The police – both the civilian *Iraqi Police* (IP) and the anti-terrorism police *Federal Police* (FP) –support the army in many places (ISW 2015a).

Some Sunni Muslim tribes also participate with a greater number of fighters on the government side (ISW 2015a).

2.5.2 Shiite militias

Various Shiite militias have been deployed as support for government forces. They are not integrated into the army's command structure, but operate under various, irregular leadershipstructures. The leadership and who is responsible for who is extemely vague. Some seem to be connected to the Iranian government, others are connected to Iraqi political parties, which may also be partially integrated into the army in terms of personnel. There is a general perception that these militias primarily operate under their own respective leaderships and secondarily under the Iraqi government. They are also more effective than the army in terms of both numbers and strength and in terms of military force, according to an article in the online newspaper al-Monitor (Mamouri 2015).

The Shiite militias most often mentioned in connection with operations in Salahaddin are these:

- **The Badr organisation:** Went along with the Kurdish Peshmerga into the Tuz district in September and October (Wing 2014). Participated in the government's offensive against Tikrit in the spring of 2015 (Kenner 2015).

- **Popular Mobilisation Units – PMU:** Have been built up since the summer of 2014 with a large influx of volunteers. Operate throughout the province wherever the army is (ISW 2015a). PMU are reportedly trained and armed by Iran. There are strong suspicions that the militia primarily follows orders from the military leadership in Iran and not from the Iraqi government (The Guardian 2015).

- **Asaib al Haq**: Moved into the Amerli area in the Tuz district along with the army in the autumn of 2014 (Roggio 2014). Participated in the government's offensive against Tikrit in the spring of 2015 (Kenner 2015).

- **Kataib Hezbollah:** Moved into the Amerli area in the Tuz district along with the army in the summer of 2014 (Coles 2014).

2.5.3 Peshmerga forces subject to KRG

The Kurdish Peshmerga forces are subject to the Kurdish government forces (KRG). They operate partially as units directly subject to KRG's Peshmerga ministry (i.e. the Ministry of Defence) and partially as units formally integrated into ISF, but with unofficial loyalty to KRG.

The Peshmerga forces operate in areas with large Kurdish populations and are tasked with ensuring that KRG has actual control there (Al-Jazeera 2014b).

2.5.4 ISIL

This is currently the dominant Sunni Muslim armed group. ISIL is said to have the support of more local groups with long experience in the area, such as JRTN and the 1920 brigades. ISIL appears to be a mixture of terrorist organisation and army and over these elements, it has a rudimentary state structure ("caliphate").

According to World Bulletin (2014), ISIL uses light and heavy offensive weapons, including tanks and field guns, and also attacks with suicide bombers, something in which ISIL is said to be almost alone. Their main defensive weapons are snipers, bombs and mines which are triggered when someone steps on them or comes near wires or other types of triggers. As stated below, in addition to brutal social control, they perform massacres on both civilians and defeated opponents.

According to the blog Informed Comment (Mohammed 2014), the following additional Sunni groups operate in the areas where ISIL is active or has control:

- JRTN

- The Mujahedin army

- Ansar al-Sunna

- The military councils of the tribes

These groups joined and supported ISIL during ISIL's summer offensive, but later refused to follow the ISIL leader al-Baghdadi's call to swear allegiance to him. However, some former Ba'th people reportedly have leading positions in ISIL. They are believed to have enough common interests with ISIL that so far they have let go of ideological differences (Barrett 2015, p. 20).

2.6 LEVEL OF CRIME AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOVERNMENT PROTECTION

We found little information on the extent of crime and opportunities for government protection in available sources. No systematic crime statistics were found. With the relatively high intensity of the ongoing hostilities, the widespread retaliation between Sunnis and Shiites, widespread mistrust between the local population and central government and in some places the absence of state government[2], there is reason to believe that there is plenty of room for crime and that the conditions for effective government protection are insufficient.

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[2] The local governments in Iraq (except KRG) are administratively directly subject to the central government.

An example from the neighbouring province of Diyala, which Human Rights Watch (HRW 2015) refers to, is probably also relevant to Salahaddin. It has to do with a mother whose son had been abducted and who reported the matter to the local police. However, the police told her that they could not do anything about the abduction.

Joel Wing (2014), who is behind the Iraq blog *Musings on Iraq*, refers to the situation in Tuz and points out that since there is no functioning state government in place in Tuz, the district has in reality become lawless. In practice, it is then up to the various armed groups to settle amongst themselves who has the last word in the area.

3. POPULATION COMPOSITION

3.1 ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND THEIR CORE AREAS

Salahaddin province has just under 1.2 million inhabitants. Of these, 96 % are Sunni Muslims and 3 % are Shiite Muslims. The province also has 1 % Kurds, presumably divided between Shiite and Sunni Muslims (SIGIR 2011), and a small group of Turkmen.

The Sunni Muslim Arab core areas can be said to lie between Samarra and the district of Tuz in the east. The areas south of Samarra are divided between the Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab population. For example, the city of Balad is predominantly Shiite (BBC 2013), while the neighbouring city of Dhuluiya and other towns in the area are predominantly Sunni (Ditz 2014).

The Tuz district is the core area for Kurds and Turkmen (MRGI 2014), many Arabs also live here.

Two major cities, Tikrit and Baiji, have a predominantly Sunni Arab population (Sadah 2013). Tikrit is the city Saddam Hussein and his Sunni Muslim clan come from.

Samarra is a predominantly Sunni Arab city, but has an element of Shiite Muslim Arabs (Amnesty 2014, p. 10). Samarra also has some very important Shiite shrines, particularly the famous al-Askariya mosque (BBC 2015).

3.2 HOW DOES THE CONFLICT AFFECT THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS GROUPS?

The ongoing conflict seems to have a strong impact on the relationships between the various population groups. The population in many places comes under pressure from groups which alternate having control. In places where the control remains uncertain for a long time, the population can easily get caught in the crossfire between the warring parties. For example, The Guardian (Graham-Harrison 2015) reports that rising sectarian conflict and hostilities are expected in line with the arrival of large numbers of Shiite Muslim volunteer PMU members in Tikrit and Peshmerga-controlled areas in Tuz Khormatu.

Some of the reason for the fear of increased violence is ascribed to assumption that the Badr organisation is trying to ally with the Shiite Muslim Turkmen in Tuz and take control over their areas. This challenges the Kurds' desire to connect the district to KRG (Wing 2014).

Amongst the province's Sunni Muslim population, confidence in the central government seems to be almost absent. This is reinforced not only by the Shiite militias' behaviour, but also by some of these militias' extremely uncertain loyalty to the country's government.

In order to increase the Sunni Muslim's confidence in the government, Prime Minister Abadi announced in September 2014 that a separate "national guard" would be created within the government army, manned by personnel from the Sunni Muslim tribes (Mansour 2014). This guard will be created in accordance with a special law which was adopted, but the way the law itself came about is likely to reinforce the existing mistrust.

As stated in a report from ISW (Martin, al-Dulimi, Kagan & Adnan 2015), one of the leaders of the large Shiite militia PMU, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, helped draft the law. PMU is accused of attrocities against Sunni Muslims and Abu al-Muhandis is considered to have very close ties to the leader of the ranian Revolutionary Guard, Qassem Suleimani. Abu al-Muhandis is also listed as a terrorist by the U.S. Treasury (Martin, al-Dulimi, Kagan & Adnan 2015).

There are, or were, in exceptional cases a certain confidence in the government amongst the Sunni Muslim tribes south of Samarra. For example, it was noticed that when Sunni Muslim Dhuluiya was besieged by ISIL on three sides last autumn, the city got both militia help and supplies from the closely situated Shiite Muslim Balad (Salan & Bayoumi 2014). However, after ISIL was turned back from Balad by joint Sunni/Shiite efforts, Shiite militias have chased away or denied Sunni Muslim families who had fled from the surrounding Sunni-dominated villages from coming back, just to purge Balad's surrounding area of potential future support points for a new thrust from ISIL (AP 2015). The confidence the Sunni Muslim tribes in the area still had in the government must have been fairly thin after this.

4.   VULNERABLE GROUPS

The use of violence in Salahaddin seems to be dominated by military operations, with significant elements of more targetted violence against various groups of civilians. The local population generally seems to be very vulnerable in many places, whether it is ISIL or the government side which has control. In the following, we will describe which groups the sources mention as vulnerable to conflict-related violence and the ways in which these groups are affected.

According to UNAMI (2015), "all Iraqis are target groups for ISIL." This statement we understand as meaning that any Iraqis who oppose or fail to submit to ISIL or belong to the "wrong" faiths are potential targets. Otherwise, we can highlight the following groups as being mentioned by the sources:

4.1   LOCAL POPULATION SUSPECTED OF COOPERATING WITH THE ENEMY

Who is the enemy at any given time depends on who controls the territory at any given time (Wing 2014). In this way, the entire population may be terrorised by whoever has taken control of the place (UNAMI 2015). If the population belongs to a different religious denomination that those in power, it can put them in a vulnerable position. If they belong to the same denomination as those in power in the place, they can still be punished for not having opposed the previous rules or because they are assumed to have collaborated with them. Arbitrary and heavy-handed treatment of the population has in some cases forced a mass exodus (Triple Canopy 2015a).

Such retaliation and punishment has been reported throughout the province.

When ISIL took control in the Tuz district last summer, they set fire to the houses of local Shiite Muslims in towns with mixed Shiite and Sunni Muslim population. When ISIL was pressed out again later in the summer, Shiite militias did the same to the houses of the Sunni Muslim inhabitants.

OCHA (2014, p. 7) reports that ISIL kidnapped two brothers in Tuz last summer and punished them for "collaborating" with the army. One was beheaded and the other was never seen again.

Both IOM (2015, p. 3) and OCHA (2014, p. 6) report that ISIL performs mass executions. Amongst other things, residents from Sharqat found 40 bodies in a ditch in an uninhabited area last July. Al-Jazeera (2014b) reports that ISIL rigs private houses with explosives and triggers them when they can no longer hold on to a place and executes civilians for sectarian reasons (Wing 2014). Sectarian purges have occurred in several places, there are reports of this from the Tuz district, amongst other places (Wing 2014).

When ISIL is driven out, there is fear of the Shiite militias. The fear would be strong amongst people that the militias will take vengeance on Sunni Muslim civilians who remain in areas ISIL has controlled. According to an article in the Washington Post (Margon 2014), the Shiite militias consider any family who remained in their home after ISIL had taken over as "collaborators." The houses of such families and even entire Sunni Muslim villages where such families lived were then plundered, burned or destroyed by Shiite militias who came in after ISIL was driven out. Shiite militiamen have gone from village to village in the Tuz district on such revenge missions, according to the article. Employees of HRW announced in October 2014 that they had observed Shiite militias setting fire to private homes in Amerli in the Tuz district as recently as last December (HRW 2015).

Reuters (Coles 2015) announced that the remaining inhabitants in Tikrit fear the Shiite militias more than they fear ISIL.

The Shiite militias' desire for revenge is said to have been particularly kindled by the massacre which ISIL and local Sunni tribes committed against Shiite Muslim prisoners in the old U.S. airbase Camp Speicher outside Tikrit last summer (The Guardian 2014). Many hundreds, possibly as many as 1,700, soldiers were gunned down at the base while the whole thing was filmed and posted on the Internet (Bassem 2014). Prime Minister al-Abadi has warned against this and urged the Shiite militias to spare civilian lives and property, but there are many who have strong doubts as to whether this appeal will have any impact (The Guardian 2015).

In a number of news reports, for example, one from the news service Middle East Eye (Alabbasi 2015), it was reported that Shiite militias use similar methods to ISIL in places they have taken from ISIL, i.e. beheadings, torture and summary executions with subsequent videos on the Internet. Middle East Eye does not specify any place for the atrocities, but Human Rights Watch (2015) documents damages done as revenge actions in around 30 Arab villages in the area around Amerli last year.

In some places, all Sunni Muslims must have fled their homes as a result of the Shiite militias' conduct (Hawramy 2014). Several sources report, for example, on burning of private homes, including Joel Wing (2014).

Last year, Amnesty International (2014, p. 10) reported that over 170 young Sunni Muslim men have been abducted in and around Samarra since the beginning of June 2014. None of them have been seen alive since, but several dozen of them have been found killed.

From Balad district, there are reports that the army and Shiite militias in many place have displaced or prevent the Sunni Muslim population from returning to their homes.

4.2 THE VARIOUS POPULATION GROUPS IN THE TUZ DISTRICT

Turkmen in the Tuz district were persecuted when ISIL conquered their villages last summer. The reason for the persecution was that they are Shiite Muslims. When the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi Shiite militias recaptured these places in October, the Turkmen were caught between these two groups. Turkmen organisations reportedly criticised the Kurdish autonomous government, which commands the Peshmerga forces, for having failed to protect the Turkmen and for instead having wanted them away from the area (MRGI 2014).

The Kurdish population in Tuz has for their part been having problems with the Shiite militias which have moved into the district to support the Peshmerga.

The Arabs in Tuz have long lived under *de facto* Kurdish supremacy, even though the district is formally under the central government. In the even more fluctuating situation which has developed since the summer of 2014, they have come under further pressure. After ISIL was driven out last October, there have been reports that Kurdish Peshmerga forced Arabs out of their villages in the areas Peshmerga has recaptured. According to Reuters (Coles 2014), 127 Arab villages were included in this.

4.3 SUNNI MUSLIM TRIBES

There are many examples of local tribes which have been caught between ISIL and the government forces. Even though these tribes on the one hand want ISIL out, on the other hand they do not want the Shiite-dominated government army and its supporters, the Shiite militias, to get in. Many of the tribes primarily want to defend themselves and their territories, but also see that they are too weak (ABC News 2014).

There are reports of kidnapping and abduction of tribal combatants (IOM 2015c, p. 3). In particular it is armed groups, both Shiite and Sunni, who are behind these actions (ISW 2015d). For example, in late February ISIL abducted around a hundred tribal combatants in Tikrit who they suspected were at risk of preparing to strike against ISIL (source in Baghdad who follows the situation daily and who we find very reliable, e-mail February 2015). In addition, OCHA has reported (2014, p. 8) that ISIL abducted a tribal leader in the far north of the Sharqat district last August and that ISIL killed 12 tribal combatants and the tribe's leader and his son in the Baiji area last July.

Many of the local tribes – almost all of which are Sunni Muslim – try as hard as they can to promote their interests as a tribe over groups who try to control their areas. In order to achieve this, their leaders try to create room for maneuvering via negotiations with both ISIL and the army. Some tribes have established their own militias for defence of the territory and buildings and their own organisations. Amongst others, it was reported that it had been established a joint "military council" for tribes in Salahaddin, Anbar and Ninewa (Heras 2014).

This council, which calls itself the Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries, reportedly organises 75,000 armed tribal combatants. The leadership consists of former Sahwa[3] leaders and Ba'th army officers from the tribes in question. A line of command

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[3] *Sahwa* – Arab term for Sunni, tribal-based militias which in the early 2000s were established to fight al-Qaida in Sunni Muslim areas in Iraq.

leads the fighters' daily operations and the council works based on a political programme of non-sectarianism and Arab nationalism. Former Ba'th officers and JRTN members are said to be represented in the leadership.

According to the Middle East analyst Nicolas J. Heras[4], the military council in some places has gone in and administered areas which ISIL has conquered. As we see it, this illustrates how the local tribes can maneuver with regard to "the facts on the ground" and thereby try to acquire a certain amount of autonomous control in their own areas.

4.4 JOURNALISTS

Journalists are a vulnerable group throughout Iraq and they have also been affected in Salahaddin. For example, in Samarra, two journalists were shot by snipers in late February. This was reported by a source in Baghdad who follows the situation daily and who we consider reliable (e-mail 2015).

4.5 POLICE

Police are targets of frequent attacks from armed groups. They are particularly vulnerable during service missions, such as manning checkpoints (BBC 2015). There have also been reports about executions of police officers (Triple Canopy 2015a). However, it is difficult in the current situation to distinguish between police officers in civilian missions and police officers in military missions. Civilian police (Iraqi Police), as previously mentioned, also coordinate efforts with the army. According to OCHA (2014, p. 7) the remains of 18 police officers were found by the roadside south of Tikrit last July.

In the villages of Dijala and Mikishifa south of Tikrit, ISIL killed 14 police officers on 12 February and an unknown number of inhabitants fled to the safer area al-Ashiq north of Samarra (Triple Canopy 2015a, p. 3).

4.6 WOMEN

OCHA (2014, p. 10, 16, 18, 21) report that ISIL treats women "especially harshly" in the areas they control and that women in general are particularly vulnerable in the conflict areas in general. Amongst many examples which OCHA mentions is a Kurdish woman who was shot by unknown armed people in the Tuz district and an incident where an anti-terrorism team from the army arrested patients at a gynocological clinic with excessive use of force.

4.7 ARE MINORITY MEMBERS SAFE IN AREAS WHERE THEY CONSTITUTE A MAJORITY?

The security and government protection in Salahaddin are very poor, in Landinfo's opinion. We therefore assume that minority members who live in areas where their group is a majority will likely still be subject to conflict-related violence.

The minorities are vulnerable and not always able to defend themselves. For example, Turkmen have organised militias in some places, including in Tuz Khormatu, but according to an article from The Washington Institute (Knights 2014), this militia was too weak to resist ISIL when they moved in there.

The Kurds in Tuz are better off because they have protection from the Peshmerga forces. The Sunni Muslim Arabs in the province are, as stated above, in no

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way safe from their own government, even though they constitute the vast majority of the province's population.

5.   DAILY LIFE

Extensive searching of open sources has provided very little information about daily life in Salahaddin. The UN food organisation, the *Food and Agriculture Organization* (FAO 2014), already warned in June 2014 that the grain reserves, including in Salahaddin, were in danger of being depleted and that the amount of food distributed through the public distribution system was in sharp decline. This will affect the poorest, who are the most dependent on this system. With prolonged conflict, FAO expected a further limitation on food supply via the public. Since agriculture accounts for a major part of the province's economy, it causes serious consequences for the population when agriculture is affected by the hostilities.

We also assume that the intensity which the conflict has had in 2014 and 2015 has strongly influenced daily life, particularly in the cities, but also in rural areas where the war is being fought. According to reports, a city such as Tikrit is affected by full stoppage of all supplies. The Guardian (Graham-Harison 2015) reports that Iraqi forces led by Shiite militias and supported by Sunni Muslim tribal combatants are now fighting through a Tikrit with streets and houses full of mines, bombs and tripwires. ISIL have reportedly set out 180,000 explosive traps, which make the city difficult to enter. According to a person The Guardian spoke with who is said to know Tikrit well, it is no longer possible to live in the city because there is nowhere to buy food. The inhabitants who have not left Tikrit are said to live in small pockets of the city.

The newspaper also reports that some who have fled from their homes want to go back to their destroyed homes when the fighting is over and set up a tent in front of the ruin (Graham-Harrison 2015).

Since the entire province is implicated in conflict and hostilities, probably many places will be affected similarly, although to varying degrees. However, we did not find more descriptions of individual locations.

6.   INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

6.1   NUMBER

Salahaddin is characterised as a "push" rather than a "pull" province with regards to internal displacement (IOM 2014, p. 2), i.e. a province where more move from or within, rather than to. While all internally displaced people who arrived in the province before June 2014 were from Anbar (about 3,732 people, IOM 2015b, p. 2), after June 2014 all newly arriving displaced people have come from other parts of the province. This flight pattern still prevails (IOM 2015b, p. 1).

According to IOM (2015a, p. 6), the total was 72,612 internally displaced people in Salahaddin as of February 2015. An entire 67,620 of these were originally from Salahaddin. The other displaced people primarily come from Anbar (4,002 people) and Baghdad (696 people) (IOM 2015a, p. 6).

In early March, OCHA (2015a) reported that an estimated 4,000 families have recently fled to the Samarra district[5] from the Dour district, Tikrit and other places in Salahaddin after the recent weeks of fighting between ISF and ISIL. These families are not included in the referenced figures from IOM.

According to IOM's figures from February (2015a, p. 4), a total of 321,840 displaced people in Iraq are originally from Salahaddin. This constitutes about 13 % of the total number of internally displaced people in the country. The majority of the displaced people have fled north to Kirkuk, Erbil and Sulaymanyah, but a significant number of individuals have also fled within the province (as of February, 67,620 people) (IOM 2015b, p. 1).

6.2 HOUSING

The most common types of shelter for internally displaced people in Salahaddin are rented housing, lodging with relatives/friends, and abandoned/unfinished buildings and schools. As of February 2015, 34,212 people (44.6 %) lived in rented housing, while 15,888 (20.7 %) lived with host families, 11,888 (15.5 %) in abandoned/unfinished buildings and 6,990 (6.1 %) in school buildings (IOM 2015a, p. 8).

As of the beginning of March 2015, there were no permanent camps in Salah al-Din (CCCM Cluster Iraq 2015). However, OCHA (2015a) reports that the government has plans to establish two camps for internally displaced people in the Samarra district in order to handle the new influx of refugees there. Many of the newly arrived internally displaced people in Samarra have reportedly taken shelter in public buildings, mosques and unfinished buildings (OCHA 2015a).

6.3 NEEDS AND AID SCHEMES

As a host province for internally displaced people, Salahaddin is characterised by increasingly difficult access to service, particularly in areas controlled by armed opposition groups. Many public services have been closed (IOM 2015b, p. 4). Armed clashes prevent humanitarian aid from getting in (UNHCR 2014, p. 5) and limit the inhabitants' access to medical treatment. Four of the largest hospitals in Salahaddin are closed (IOM 2015b, p. 4).

In January, IOM (2015b, p. 4) reported that the primary needs for the internally displaced people in Salahaddin were food, other relief items (*Non Food Items*) and health services. In September 2014, the same source (IOM 2014, p. 3) pointed out that the internally displaced people had emergency needs for food and drinking water, as well as core emergency supplies such as fuel. At the time, access to electricity was a top priority for 56 % of the internally displaced people IOM had spoken to. This must be seen in the context of the province reportedly experiencing frequent power outages (IOM 2014, p. 3).

OCHA reports increasing humanitarian needs in the Samarra district after the large influx of new internally displaced people there in recent weeks. Amongst other things, UNICEF, UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), IOM and the World Health Organisation (WHO) were involved in delivering various forms of supplies and services to the area, while NGOs participate in registration of new refugees and distribution of food and equipment to

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[5] This is in addition to the estimated 15,000 families who have been displaced to Samarra since the crisis started in January 2014 (OCHA 2015).

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families (OCHA 2015b & c). According to OCHA (2015a & c), ICRC, the Iraqi Red Crescent, Danish Refugee Assistance (DRC) and some local volunteer organisations also contribute to the relief efforts.

As mentioned above, there are plans to build two camps for internally displaced people in the province and on 5 March, OCHA (2015c) announced that 1,000 tents had arrived in Samarra from the government in Baghdad. After what was reported, UNHCR also have agreed to provide up to 1,500 tents to the two new camps, according to OCHA (2015a).

6.4 RESTRICTIONS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE'S ACCESS

We found no information that there are formal restrictions in effect on internally displaced people's access to Salahaddin.

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