



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Iraq - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Monday 21 & Tuesday 22 November 2016

Information on ISIS including: recent attacks, strongholds, locations of common/known targets, state response

Reuters in November 2016 states:

“The Iraqi military estimates around 5,000 Islamic State fighters are in Mosul. A 100,000-strong coalition of Iraqi government forces, Kurdish fighters and Shi'ite paramilitary units is surrounding the city. Mosul's capture would be a major step towards dismantling the caliphate, and Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, believed to have withdrawn to a remote area near the Syrian border, has told his fighters to stay and fight to the end” (Reuters (22 November 2016) *U.S. strike destroys bridge, restricts Islamic State in Mosul: official*).

A document issued in November 2016 by the *Agence France Presse* points out that:

“There was a relative lull Monday in the fighting in eastern Mosul, the last major bastion of the Islamic State group in the country. Since launching a broad offensive to retake Mosul on October 17, Iraqi forces have already retaken several eastern neighbourhoods despite fierce resistance from the jihadists” (Agence France Presse (21 November 2016) *Status of main fronts in conflicts in Iraq and Syria*).

Reuters in November 2016 points out that:

“Iraqi Shi'ite militias were massing troops on Monday to cut remaining supply routes to Mosul, Islamic State's last major stronghold in Iraq, closing in on the road that links the Syrian and Iraqi parts of its self-declared caliphate” (Reuters (21 November 2016) *Iraq Shi'ite paramilitaries close to cutting Mosul supply route*).

The *Associated Press* in November 2016 notes:

“Mosul was captured by IS in the summer of 2014 as part of a blitz that placed nearly a third of Iraq under the group's control. Iraqi troops, federal police and allied Shiite and Sunni militias have over the past year pushed IS militants from most of the vast Sunni province of Anbar, west of Baghdad, and areas to the north and east of the Iraqi capital” (Associated Press (21 November 2016) *Iraqi troops search for suicide car bombs in eastern Mosul*).

The *New York Times* in November 2016 states:

“The Islamic State has used chemical weapons, including chlorine and sulfur mustard agents, at least 52 times on the battlefield in Syria and Iraq since it swept to power in 2014, according to a new independent analysis. More than one-third of those chemical attacks have come in and around Mosul, the Islamic State stronghold in northern Iraq, according to the assessment by the IHS Conflict Monitor, a London-based intelligence collection and analysis service” (New York Times (21 November 2016) *ISIS Used Chemical Arms at Least 52 Times in Syria and Iraq, Report Says*).

A report issued in November 2016 by *Human Rights Watch* states:

“– A mass grave discovered near Mosul by Iraqi Security Forces on November 7, 2016, most likely contains the bodies of at least 300 former local police officers executed by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS” (Human Rights Watch (16 November 2016) *Iraq: Hundreds of Police in ISIS Mass Grave*).

This report also states that:

“Since the Mosul operation began, Human Rights Watch has documented ISIS forcibly evacuating civilians under their control with its fighters, apparently to use them as “human shields,” and executions of former Iraqi security forces. ISIS has also carried out at least three chemical attacks on civilians south of Mosul” (ibid).

A report released in November 2016 by *Amnesty International* states that:

Yesterday's multiple suicide attacks in Iraq demonstrate yet again the contempt of the armed group calling itself the Islamic State (IS) for sparing civilians, and raise further fears for the safety of civilians still trapped in territories under IS-control, as battles to oust the group from Mosul and surrounding areas rage on” (Amnesty International (15 November 2016) *Iraq: Deadly suicide attacks claim civilian lives*).

This document also states:

“Since the launch of the military operations by Iraqi and Kurdish forces, with the support of the US-led international coalition, on 17 October to retake Mosul, IS has carried out several bombings that have deliberately targeted civilians or that were indiscriminate. On 6 November, over 20 people were killed in two suicide attacks in the Salah al-Din governorate, also claimed by IS. IS fighters have also used suicide attacks and other indiscriminate bombings to thwart the Iraqi forces' advance towards Mosul” (ibid).

In November 2016 a paper issued by the *UNHCR* points out that:

“Since 2015, and with support from a broad international...coalition, the ISF and associated forces have made significant gains in retaking territory from ISIS in Al-Anbar, Babel, Diyala, Erbil, Ninewa, and Salah Al-Din Governorates...(UNHCR (14 November 2016) *UNHCR Position on Returns to Iraq*, pp,1-2).

This report also notes that:

“Parts of northern and central Iraq remain under de facto control of ISIS, which is reported to continue to commit grave and widespread human rights abuses against the population in these areas...During military operations, civilians are used by ISIS as “human shields”; they are also at great risk from crossfire, snipers and bombardments...” (ibid p.2).

A document issued in November 2016 by the *United Nations News Service* points out that:

“Just over the past few days, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has received reports that:

ISIL appears to be continuing to carry out killings based on decisions of its self-appointed 'courts'. On Tuesday, ISIL reportedly shot and killed 40 civilians in Mosul city after accusing them of 'treason and collaboration' with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The victims were dressed in orange clothes marked in red with the words: 'traitors and agents of the ISF.' Their bodies were then hung on electrical poles in several areas in Mosul city.

Also on Wednesday, ISIL deployed what it calls the "sons of the caliphate" in the alleys of the old town of Mosul, wearing explosive belts. We are concerned that these may be teenagers and young boys. ISIL also posted a video on Wednesday showing four children, believed to be between 10 and 14 years old, shooting to death four people for spying for the ISF and the Peshmerga. The video shows the victims falling into the river nearby.

Since 27 October, ISIL has been relocating abducted women, including Yezidi women, into Mosul city and into Tel Afar town. Some of these women were reportedly "distributed" to ISIL fighters while others have been told they will be used to accompany ISIL convoys.

Last Monday, 7 November, the ISF reportedly found in Shura sub-district of Mosul an underground prison containing 961 people, all of them Sunni, and many of them former ISF officers or members of the Iraqi Islamic Party. People in the prison – which reportedly had cages measuring 1 metre by 0.5 metres – bore signs of torture and malnutrition.

Also last Monday, ISIL announced through loudspeakers mounted on vehicles in Mosul that it would execute any members fleeing from the battlefield. ISIL also reportedly announced that, on 6 November it had beheaded seven of its militants for deserting the battlefield in the Kokjali area of eastern Mosul" (United Nations News Service (11 November 2016) *Iraq: Citing 'numbing' extent of suffering caused by ISIL, UN rights chief urges focus on victims' rights*).

A report issued in November 2016 by *Human Rights Watch* notes:

"In areas around Mosul, the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, is forcibly evacuating civilians under their control with its fighters, apparently to use them as human shields. There are also grave concerns that ISIS is rounding up hundreds of men and executing those formerly linked to the security forces" (Human Rights Watch (4 November 2016) *Iraq: Feared ISIS Use of 'Human Shields,' Executions*).

BBC News in November 2016 states that:

"Iraqi forces have entered the outskirts of Mosul in an attempt to seize back control from so-called Islamic State group - more than two years after militants overran the city and went on to capture much of northern and western Iraq. A coalition of about 50,000 Iraqi security personnel, Kurdish fighters, Sunni Arab tribesmen and Shia paramilitary forces are involved in the assault on the jihadists' last major stronghold in the country...By 1 November, Iraqi and Kurdish forces had reached the eastern outskirts of Mosul, but were said to be facing fierce resistance from the 3,000-5,000 IS fighters believed to be holed up in the city. The recapture of Mosul would be seen as a major boost for the Iraqi government - although IS still controls much of northern and western Iraq - as well as central and eastern Syria. A report by IHS Conflict Monitor in October 2016 said the jihadists had lost about 16% of the territory they held at the beginning of the year, and that overall they had lost just over a quarter of the territory they controlled in January 2015" (BBC News (2 November 2016) *Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps*).

A report issued by the *United Nations Security Council* in October 2016 points out that:

“The Iraqi security forces, the Peshmerga, the popular mobilization forces and local fighters, with support from the international counter-ISIL coalition, made further progress in retaking Iraqi territory from ISIL, with military successes in Anbar governorate and along the central axis of Iraq towards the city of Mosul. Between 23 and 25 August, the Iraqi security forces launched a major operation to recapture Qayyarah, south of Mosul, which was consolidated on 10 September. The Iraqi authorities announced on 20 September concentrated efforts to regain control of Sharqat, Salah al-Din governorate, which were successfully completed two days later. That progress notwithstanding, ISIL continues to operate in pockets in the surrounding areas, from northern Tikrit to Qayyarah, including the outskirts of Sharqat and Bayji...The security situation remained unstable throughout Iraq during the reporting period. ISIL continued to encounter consistent losses of resources and territory. In response, it increased the number of terrorist attacks. A total of 44 vehicle bombs and suicide vest attacks targeted the Iraqi security forces, killing 346 security personnel and wounding 249 others. ISIL continued to target civilians on a daily basis, with an average of more than five incidents per day across Iraq. In Baghdad governorate alone, there were a reported 297 incidents involving explosive devices, killing 427 civilians and wounding 1,658 others” (United Nations Security Council (25 October 2016) *Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2299 (2016) (October 2016)*).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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