Syria & Iraq Country Report:
Children & Security

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

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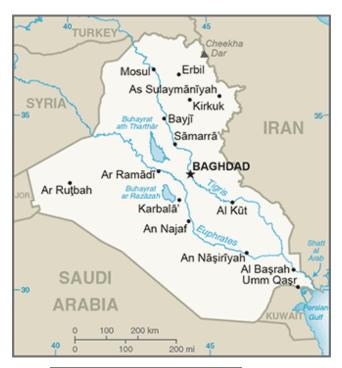info@childsoldiers.org

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Maps of Syria and Iraq[1]

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[1] Central Intelligence Agency, 'Syria' and 'Iraq', available https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/ accessed 30 January 2017.

Children in Syria and Iraq – Struggle Within Conflict

Children have been acutely affected by the violence of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Children are victim of widespread and systematic violations by government forces and armed groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The resulting humanitarian crisis is staggering, with an estimated 14.3 million children in need of humanitarian assistance in the two countries.[2]

The war in Syria has had a devastating impact on children who are exposed to unbearable levels of violence, causing ongoing, multiple and frequently untreated trauma.[3] The United Nations (UN) Children's Fund (UNICEF) notes that Syria is one of the most dangerous places to be a child.[4] Mortar shelling, barrel bombs, small arms fire, and sniper fire by both Government and opposition forces have disproportionately affected civilian populations, leading to the killing and maiming of children across the country.[5] Children are victims of brutal executions, sexual violence and abduction by parties to the conflict, including government forces in hostage-taking incidents.[6] Children also continue to live in besieged areas where humanitarian access has been denied. As many as 500,000 children are in need but beyond the reach of outside aid.[7]

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[2] UNICEF, '2017 Humanitarian Action for Children: Iraq' (1 January 2017), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2017_Iraq_HAC.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('UNICEF Iraq HAC'), p. 1; UNICEF, 'Humanitarian Action for Children 2017-2018: Syrian refugees and other affected populations in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey' (4 January 2017), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2017_Syrian-Refugees_HAC.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('UNICEF Syrian Refugees HAC'), p. 1.

[3] United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Doc. A/HRC/33/55 (11 August 2016) ('August 2016 COI Report'), para. 111.

[4] UNICEF, '2016 in review: UNICEF's impact in five of the most dangerous crises' (17 January 2017), available https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/index_94388.html?utm_source=unicef_news&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=rss_link accessed 23 January 2017 ('UNICEF 2016 in Review').

[5] United Nations Security Council, 'Children and Armed Conflict: report of the Secretary-General', UN Doc. S/2016/360 (20 April 2016) ('2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report'), paras. 148, 154-155; Human Rights Watch, '"He Didn't Have to Die": Indiscriminate Attacks by Opposition Groups in Syria' (22 March 2015), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/syria0315_ForUpload.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('HRW: He Didn't Have to Die'), p. 4.

[6] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, paras. 65, 161.

[7] See 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report. See also Price, Gohdes, and Ball, 'Updated Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic' (UNOCHA, August 2014), available http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/HRDAGUpdatedReportAug2014.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, 'Statement to the Security Council on Syria' (21 November 2016), available https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/ERC_USG_Stephen_OBrien_Statement_on_Syria_to_SecCo21NOV2016CAD.pdf accessed 23 January 2017.

Children are also impacted by increasing indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombings by the parties involved, including international forces.[8] In 2015, the UN confirmed that 591 children were killed and 555 injured.[9] The majority of these cases were attributed to government and international forces. Schools, hospitals, markets, mosques, and homes across Syria have also been destroyed by indiscriminate bombing or direct targeting.[10] For example, schools attacked in Idlib, Syria, led to the deaths of 22 children and six teachers in October 2016.[11] The use of chemical weapons against civilians by government forces and armed groups has also been alleged during the course of the conflict.[12] In 2016, the use of chemicals in an attack in Idlib in March 2015 was confirmed by the Joint Investigative Mechanism between the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN.

Children in Syria continue to be recruited and used in the armed conflict by armed groups as well as pro-government groups. Notably, ISIL's 'massive' recruitment and use of children continued throughout 2015 and remains a concern today.[13] Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon reported a significant increase in the number of children killed or maimed alongside armed groups and in combat.[14] Government forces also continue to detain children for their alleged association with armed groups and subject to them abuse and torture.[15] Some children have been killed in detention.

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[8] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 148; August 2016 COI Report, paras. 112-113.
[9] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 154.
[10] Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2017: Events of 2016' (2017) ('2017 Human Rights Watch Report'), p. 572; August 2016 COI Report, para. 22; 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 154; United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Doc. A/HRC/31/68 (11 February 2016), paras. 33, 42-45, 69, 70, 72-73, 77 ('February 2016 COI Report').
[11] UNICEF, 'Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake on deadly attacks on schools in Idlib, northwest Syria' (26 October 2016), available https://www.unicef.org/media/media_92967.html accessed 23 January 2017.
[12] See for e.g. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 'Statement from the OPCW Director-General on Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Uqayribat, Hama Governate, Syria' (13 December 2016), available https://www.opcw.org/news/article/statement-from-the-opcw-director-general-on-allegations-of-chemical-weapons-use-in-uqayribat-hama-governate-syria/ accessed 23 January 2017; Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 'Statement from the OPCW Director-General on Recent Allegations of Toxic Chemical Use in Aleppo' (7 September 2016), available https://www.opcw.org/news/article/statement-from-the-opcw-director-general-on-recent-allegations-of-toxic-chemical-use-in-aleppo/ accessed 23 January 2017.
[13] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 150.
[14] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, paras. 149-152, 155.
[15] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 153; Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2016: Events of 2015' (2016) ('2016 Human Rights Watch Report'), p. 46.

The conflict in Syria has caused the mass displacement of civilians. Children account for half of the 4.8 million refugees who reside outside of Syria[16] as well as the 6.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).[17] Many Syrian refugee children are not in school and refugee families are known to resort to coping practices which often lead to early marriage and child labour.[18] Nearly 98 per cent of children surveyed in refugee camps outside of Syria have shown significant declines in their psychosocial well-being, with parents reporting significant changes in behaviour and attitude and rising rates of self-harm.[19] Unaccompanied minors are also vulnerable to exploitation such as employment in low-paying and dangerous jobs.[20]

The impact on the health and well-being of children is equally staggering as the country's infrastructure has been severely degraded, with potentially negative implications for the long-term, healthy development of children.[21]

The intensification of military operations against ISIL in Iraq as of summer 2015 has also had a devastating impact on children and civilian infrastructure in Iraq. Like Syria, Iraq is one of the most dangerous places in the world for children, with one in five children (3.6 million) at serious risk of death, injury, sexual violence, abduction and recruitment into armed groups.[22] Escalating violence continues to force Iraqis to flee their homes. Since January 2014, more than 3.1 million people have been internally displaced, half of

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[16] UNHCR, 'Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal' (19 January 2017), available http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#_ga=1.246485569.417519784.1456077013 accessed 23 January 2017; UNICEF, 'Syria Crisis November 2016 Humanitarian Results: Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt', available https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_Syria__Crisis_Situation_Report_Nov_2016.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('Syria Crisis November 2016 Humanitarian Results'), p.1.

[17] UNHCR, 'Syria Emergency' (6 January 2017), available http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html accessed 23 January 2017.

[18] UNICEF Syrian Refugees HAC, p. 1.

[19] Child Protection Working Group, 'Syria Child Protection Assessment 2013', available https://www.crin.org/en/docs/SCPA-FULL_Report-LIGHT.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, p. 8.

[20] UNICEF Iraq HAC, p. 1.

[21] UNICEF, 'Under Siege: The Devastating Impact on Children of Three Years of Conflict in Syria' (March 2014), available https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Under_Siege_March_2014.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, ('Impact on Children of Three Years of Conflict in Syria'), pp. 7–8. See also February 2016 COI Report, paras. 119, 124.

[22] UNOCHA, '2017 Humanitarian Response Plan: Iraq' (16 December 2016), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reli efweb.int/files/resources/IRQ_Advance_Exec_Summary_HRP_2017_FINAL.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('2017 Iraq HRP'), p. 5.; UNICEF 2016 in Review.

whom are children.[23] Although grave violations committed against children increased threefold in the first six months of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015,[24] limited access due to the intensification of fighting has impeded monitoring and reporting, resulting in under-reporting.[25] Notwithstanding, reports of the use and recruitment of children in armed forces, killing and maiming, and sexual violence (particularly against members of the Yezidi community and other minority groups) are rampant, while schools and health facilities remain the object of attack.[26] More children are vulnerable than at any time during the recent conflict.

ISIL continues to recruit and use children in Iraq and reports of the recruitment and use of children by popular mobilisation forces falling under the Iraqi Government's responsibility are of ongoing concern.[27] Just as in Syria, children are being detained by government forces for their alleged association with armed groups.[28]

II.   SECURITY SITUATION

1. Context

Syria

Rising out of the 'Arab Spring,' the civil war in Syria began in mid-March 2011 with unarmed, peaceful demonstrations against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. However, unlike protests in Tunisia and Egypt, the situation in Syria quickly escalated as the demonstrators were met with violence and repression. In reaction to the heavy-handed Government response against pro-opposition areas, the protests were gradually militarised and eventually replaced by armed militant groups that sought to topple the Assad regime.

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[23] 2017 Iraq HRP, p. 4; UNHCR, 'Iraq Situation: UNHCR Flash Update' (26 December 2016), available http://relief web.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Iraq%20Flash%20Update%20-%2026DEC16.pdf   accessed 23 January 2017.
[24] UNICEF Iraq HAC, p. 5.
[25] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 58.
[26] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, paras. 59, 61-64.
[27] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, paras. 59, 67.
[28] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 60.

The breakdown of order has further allowed for the proliferation of extremist groups, several of which are now playing a central role in the conflict. In April 2013, ISIL began its operations in Syria, taking advantage of the power vacuum in the northeast of the country. The extremist group soon made significant territorial gains in the eastern and northern parts of Syria.

The standoff has since evolved into an increasingly intractable civil war, with a multitude of armed groups on interconnected and shifting frontlines and with considerable international involvement. The US has estimated that 40,000 foreign fighters from over 120 countries have gone to Syria since 2011.[29] Throughout the conflict, Syria and Russia have conducted aerial bombardments, using wide-area explosives, barrel bombs, cluster munitions, and flammable incendiary weapons.[30] Indiscriminate and deliberate attacks on civilians in areas held by the opposition have been the hallmark of Assad's military strategy in Syria.[31] International and regional players, including Iran, have also backed armed groups and factions through the provision of weapons, financing, training, and direct military assistance. Notably, the Assad regimes civilian toll is said to exceed that of ISIL, which also commits 'unspeakable atrocities'.[32]

While armed groups have succeeded in securing territorial gains in different areas, none appear capable of achieving a complete military victory.[33] Now in its sixth year, the conflict appears to have no end in sight and 'is marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life'.[34] There has been an increase in regional and international involvement and a resulting call for political solutions to the crisis. Following a ceasefire negotiated for the end of February 2016, there was a decrease in civilian casualties.[35] Hostilities, however, resumed. Another cessation of hostilities agreement followed in September 2016. However, this also broke down after an airstrike hit a UN aid convoy, killing at least 20 people.[36] As of 30 December 2016, a ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey between rebel groups and the Syrian

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[29] United States Department of State, 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2015: Special Briefing' (2 June 2016), available https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/06/258013.htm accessed 23 January 2017.

[30] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, pp. 12, 572.

[31] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 13.

[32] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 12.

[33] United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Doc. A/HRC/27/60 (13 August 2014) ('August 2014 COI Report'), para. 7.

[34] UNOCHA Syrian Arab Republic, 'About the Crisis', available http://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/syria-country-profile/about-crisis accessed 23 January 2017 ('UNOCHA Crisis').

[35] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 577.

[36] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 577.

Government was in place, with the promise of peace talks in 2017.[37] In the absence of a political solution, intense and widespread hostilities persist at the start of 2017.[38] Concerns also remain over the potential emergence of new extremist groups should ISIL be defeated militarily.[39]

Widespread and systematic violations of human rights and humanitarian law have come to characterise the armed conflict in Syria. The United Nations and human rights organisations have documented crimes against humanity, war crimes, other serious violations of international humanitarian law and gross violations of human rights. The UN Independent Commission of Inquiry remarked that 'unlawful killings, including deaths in detention and summary executions, remain a hallmark of a blood-soaked war'.[40] Acts committed by all sides include, among other things, widespread and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, murder, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture, rape and sexual violence, forced displacements, and the recruitment and use of children.[41] The death toll was estimated at 470,000 by 2015[42] with more than 117,000 people reportedly detained or disappeared, mostly as a result of the actions of Syrian Government forces, since 2011.[43] Torture and ill-treatment in detention is reported to be widespread.[44]

Besiegement continues to be used as a military tactic, with nearly one million people living under long-term siege in 16 areas. As a result, humanitarian agencies operating within Syria are hampered by insecurity, intimidation, limited operational capacity, and external political and organisational agendas. At the end of 2016, thousands of civilians trapped in besieged Eastern Aleppo were evacuated following a brokered truce. The humanitarian situation, however, continues to deteriorate within Syria and humanitarian aid continues

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[37] Al Jazeera, 'Russia, Turkey broker "nationwide" ceasefire deal' (30 December 2016), available http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/russia-turkey-broker-nationwide-ceasefire-deal-161229154943609.html accessed 23 January 2017.

[38] UNOCHA Crisis.

[39] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 13.

[40] August 2016 COI Report, para. 67.

[41] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 574; UNICEF, 'Half a million children live under siege in Syria' (27 November 2016), available https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/syria/media_93417.html accessed 23 January 2017. See August 2016 COI Report; 2016 Human Rights Watch Report, pp. 515–525; August 2014 COI Report.

[42] Syrian Center for Policy Research, 'Syria Confronting Fragmentation: Impact of Syrian Crisis Report' (11 February 2016), available http://scpr-syria.org/publications/confronting-fragmentation/ accessed 23 January 2017, p. 61.

[43] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 571.

[44] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 571.

to be blocked by Syrian Government forces, pro-Government forces, and armed opposition groups.[45] Humanitarian aid convoys and workers have also come under attack.[46]

The Syrian conflict has resulted in a refugee crisis which remains the largest and longest lasting humanitarian crisis since World War II.[47] Over 4.8 million people are now registered as refugees in neighbouring countries, including the Kurdistan region of Iraq.[48] As of December 2016, a further 6.3 million are believed to be internally displaced within Syria.[49] Half of the civilians displaced both within and outside Syria's borders are believed to be children.

Iraq

Iraq is similarly no stranger to conflict. Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, leading to the Iran-Iraq War, and Kuwait in 1990, leading to the First Gulf War. In March 2003, the United States (US) and a coalition of international allies invaded Iraq over the alleged threat of weapons of mass destruction and the then President Saddam Hussein's failure to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors. The invasion sparked a Sunni-based insurgency and precipitated a rise in Shiite militias, leading to armed clashes between Sunni and Shiite forces.

Since 2003, Iraq had represented fertile soil for armed groups linked to Al-Qaeda's ideology to grow and expand. Eventually, civil war and increasing Sunni resentment against Iraq's Shia-led governments created the social and political conditions for the armed group which is today known as ISIL. From June 2014, ISIL captured territory in Iraq, including the cities of Fallujah and Mosul, and advanced to the outskirts of Baghdad. Armed conflict ensued between ISIL and a coalition of forces which included: official Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) (including special forces and special anti-terrorism units); Kurdish Peshmerga; the so-called Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs), which are made up of Shia Muslims; Iranian supported Shia militias; Sunni Muslims who oppose ISIL; Christians; and Yazidi fighters. This coalition, supported by the

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[45] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 573; Syria Crisis November 2016 Humanitarian Results, p. 2.
[46] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 574.
[47] UNICEF Syrian Refugees HAC, p. 1.
[48] 3RP, 'Iraq Monthly Update – November 2016 Education' (November 2016), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IRQ3RPNOVEMBER2016EducationDashboard.pdf accessed 23 January 2017.
[49] UNHCR, 'Syria Emergency' (6 January 2017), available http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html accessed 23 January 2017.

international counter-ISIL coalition, made progress in retaking Iraqi territory from ISIL in 2016.[50] In June 2016, Iraqi Forces recaptured Fallujah.

The end of 2016 and beginning of 2017 saw the intensification of military operations in Mosul and a corresponding increase in displacements and humanitarian need. The coalition stepped up military operations in Mosul at the end of 2016, intensifying military operations as of 29 December 2016 and retaking significant territory in the eastern parts of Mosul.[51] As of January 2017, 135,500 people are currently displaced as a result of the conflict in Mosul city that began on 17 October 2016. According to a UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report, 'some 15,700 returnees and hundreds of thousands of highly vulnerable residents in newly accessible areas also require humanitarian assistance'.[52]

Although further military gains against ISIL are expected in the early part of 2017, 'measurable improvements in humanitarian conditions are likely to be registered only late in 2017. In many sectors, improvement is not expected until well into 2018'.[53] However, as of early January 2017, humanitarian agencies are preparing for a mass exodus or a siege in the western part of Mosul which could greatly impact the humanitarian situation. As of 12 January 2017, ISF have secured the district of Sumer and besieged the University of Mosul in the eastern part of Mosul.[54] Humanitarian access to ISIL-controlled areas of western Mosul city is not possible, and there are increasing humanitarian concerns for the wellbeing of civilians in these areas.[55]

By December 2016, over 3.1 million people were reported to be displaced across Iraq, nearly half of them children in need of protection and assistance.[56] IDPs are currently living in temporary settlements, as well

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[50] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2299 (2016)', UN Doc. S/2016/897 (25 October 2016), para. 14.

[51] UNOCHA, 'Iraq: Mosul Humanitarian Response Situation Report No. 15' (8 January 2017), available http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-mosul-humanitarian-response-situation-report-15-2-8-january-2017-enarku accessed 23 January 2017 ('2017 Iraq: Mosul HRS Report'), p. 1.

[52] 2017 Iraq: Mosul HRS Report, p. 1.

[53] 2017 Iraq HRP, p. 4.

[54] South Front, 'Military Situation in Iraqi City of Mosul on January 12, 2017' (12 January 2017), available https://southfront.org/military-situation-in-iraqi-city-of-mosul-on-january-12-2017-map-update/ accessed 23 January 2017.

[55] 2017 Iraq: Mosul HRS Report, p. 2.

[56] UNOCHA, 'Iraq', available http://www.unocha.org/iraq accessed 23 January 2017.

as other non-camp accommodation throughout Iraq.[57] NGOs have warned that over than 1 million Iraqi children living under ISIL have either been out of school, or forced to learn from an extremist curriculum reportedly aimed at turning children into fighters.[58] Summary executions, car bombs, assassinations, artillery shelling, and aerial bombardment killed and injured over 20,000 civilians in 2015.[59] The situation continued into 2016.

2. State, Non-State, and International Actors

a) Syria

Syrian Government Forces

Government forces consist principally of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), as well as its naval, air, and air defence forces. Prior to the outbreak of the crisis, the SAA's total force was estimated at 295,000 personnel. As a result of defections and casualties, it is currently thought to command a third of this total force.[60] Despite this significant drop in numbers, the paramilitary National Defence Force (formed in 2012) as well as a number of domestic forces (such as the notorious Shabbiha) and foreign militia groups have reinforced the SAA, including Lebanese-based Hizbullah. As of 30 September 2015, the Syrian regime has been officially backed by Russia from a military standpoint. Moscow's support has coincided with significant military gains.

The Syrian Armed Forces are alleged to have committed grave violations against children, specifically the detention of children, indiscriminate attacks against civilian populations, sexual violence against children, the destruction of schools, and attacks on medical facilities.[61] The UN Secretary-General has listed Syrian Government Forces, including National Defence Forces and the *shabbiha* militia, in its annex for the

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[57] UNHCR Operational Portal, 'CCCM Cluster Iraq' (5 December 2016), available https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/iraq_cccm#_ga=1.204666453.417519784.1456077013 accessed 23 January 2017.

[58] Negin Janati (Save the Children), 'More than 1 Million Children Living Under ISIL in Iraq Have Missed Out on Education' (6 November 2016), available http://www.savethechildren.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=8rKLIX MGIpI4E&b=9357115&ct=14928789&notoc=1 accessed 23 January 2017.

[59] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 12; 2016 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 319.

[60] Charles Lister, 'Dynamic Stalemate: Surveying Syria's Military Landscape' (Brookings, 19 May 2014), available https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Syria-Military-Landscape-English.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('Dynamic Stalemate'), p. 11.

[61] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, paras. 153-155.

recruitment and use of children.[62] Children are allegedly used by Government forces to man checkpoints.[63] The recruitment and use of children by pro-government forces, including but not limited to the Popular Committee, has also been documented.[64] Children between the ages of 6 and 13 have been used as messengers, spies, and guards, exposing them to subsequent retaliation and punishment.[65] Other reports suggest that pro-government groups have intimidated and seized males under the age of 18 at checkpoints and during raids in an attempt to force young people to join their ranks.[66]

The Syrian Government's brutal and often indiscriminate methods, which have frequently involved siege tactics, sustained bombardment of encircled towns and cities, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, and murder, have contributed to high civilian casualties and the considerable destruction of infrastructure.[67] In August 2013, substantive evidence emerged regarding the Syrian Government's use of chemical weapons against civilians in two separate attacks outside Damascus, killing an estimated 355 to 1,300 civilians.[68] In 2016, the OPCW and the UN concluded that Syrian government forces used chemicals in an attack in Idlib in March 2015.

Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham / Islamic State

First established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2004 in Iraq, ISIL was initially linked to al-Qaeda and known as al-Qaeda in Iraq. Following the death of al-Zarqawi in June 2006, the group merged with a number of other radical groups and rebranded itself as the Islamic State in Iraq. It became widely known for igniting a sectarian war with Iraq's Shiite community and for its use of particularly brutal tactics.

In 2011, ISIL helped found Jabhat al-Nusra, marking its first entry into the Syrian conflict. After a falling out between the two groups in April 2013, ISIL commenced its own operations in Syria, rebranding itself

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[62] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, Annex I.
[63] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 152.
[64] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 152.
[65] August 2014 COI Report, para. 85.
[66] United Nations Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Doc. S/2014/31 (27 January 2014), ('2014 SG Report on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic'), para. 16.
[67] United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Doc. A/HRC/28/69 (5 February 2015) ('February 2015 COI Report'), paras. 6–16; Dynamic Stalemate, p. 15.
[68] Human Rights Watch, 'Attacks on Ghouta' (10 September 2013), available https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/09/10/attacks-ghouta/analysis-alleged-use-chemical-weapons-syria accessed 23 ßJanuary 2017.

in the process as the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham.[69] On 29 June 2014, two weeks after capturing Mosul, Iraq's second city, ISIL declared the creation of a caliphate over the Muslim world and renamed itself as 'the Islamic State' in recognition of its global ambitions.[70]

ISIL continues to recruit fighters in Iraq and Syria, as well as internationally. It has been estimated that around 30,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight for ISIL and other extremist groups.[71] ISIL has actively promoted its brutality through publications, photographs, video footage, and social media, in an attempt to consolidate its authority, attract recruits, and threaten those that challenge its ideology.[72] Extremist groups in Libya, Egypt, and Nigeria, among others, have pledged their allegiance to ISIL leadership, although the latter appears to have little operational control over these groups.

In its areas of control, ISIL has systematically targeted voices of dissent and threatened, detained, tortured, or killed activists, journalists, and aid workers.[73] Women and girls have been largely confined to their houses and expelled from public life, while reports of sexual violence, rape, and enslavement for the purposes of sexual slavery are widespread.[74] Children have been executed for their alleged affiliation with other armed groups, and have been systematically recruited by ISIL fighters in areas they control. ISIL has also been found to have used sulphur mustard gas in an attack on areas held by armed opposition groups in August 2015.

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[69] Cole Bunzel, 'From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State'
 (Brookings, March 2015), available https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('From Paper State to Caliphate'), pp. 25–26.
[70] From Paper State to Caliphate, p. 31.
[71] Bibi van Ginkel, 'Prosecuting Foreign Terrorist Fighters: What Role for the Military?' (ICCT Policy Brief, May 2016), available https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ICCT-VanGinkel-Prosecuting-Foreign-Terrorist-Fighters-May2016-2.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, p.3.
[72] United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Rule of Terror: Living under ISIL in Syria', UN Doc. A/HRC/27/CRP.3 (19 November 2014) ('Rule of Terror'), paras. 2–3.
[73] United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Doc. A/HRC/31/CRP.1 (3 February 2016), para. 75.
[74] Rule of Terror, paras. 47–57; United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Iraq in the Light of Abuses Committed by the so-Called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Associated Groups', UN Doc. A/HRC/28/18 (13 March 2015), ('Human Rights Situation in Iraq') paras. 35–43.

ISIL is listed by the UN Secretary-General for its recruitment and use of children.[75] It has reportedly recruited and trained children as young as six and has extensively used young people in both support and combat roles, including suicide bombing missions.[76] It actively recruits in areas under its control, with members of the group entering schools and mosques to provide weapons and jihadist indoctrination training, often under the guise of education.[77] In interviews with former ISIL fighters, one report suggests that 'many' of the trainees in ISIL training camps are under the age of 18, although exact numbers are unknown.[78] The UN has verified several hundred cases of children recruited into armed conflict, and even more reports of children having been abducted.[79] Recruits are typically exposed to extreme violence and videos of beheadings, while those who resist are beaten or killed.[80] According to the UN Human Rights Council, the group has established a number of camps in both Syria and Iraq, indicating that ISIL is systematically recruiting children into its ranks in an effort to 'build a new generation of fighters'.[81] Children recruited by ISIL have been used in a variety of capacities, serving as fighters, human shields, suicide bombers, and guards at checkpoints and on patrol.[82] The United Nations reports that it has received credible reports of the creation of an ISIL youth wing called Fityan Al Islam in Iraq.[83] Girls in areas controlled by ISIL are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. In December 2014, ISIL publicly released guidelines on how to capture, forcibly hold, and sexually abuse female slaves.[84]

CASE STUDY – Children and ISIL

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[75] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 150, Annex I.
[76] UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq', UN Doc. S/2015/852 (9 November 2015) ('2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq Report'), para. 33; United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Doc. A/HRC/30/48 (13 August 2015), para. 75.
[77] Rule of Terror, para. 60.
[78] Human Rights Watch, "'Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die'" (Human Rights Watch, 2014), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Maybe%20We%20Live%20and%20Maybe%20We%20Die.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('HRW: Armed Groups Syria'), pp. 21–22.
[79] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, paras. 58-67, 148-163.
[80] Rule of Terror, para. 61.
[81] Human Rights Situation in Iraq, para. 46. See also UN Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat', UN Doc, S/2016/92 (29 January 2016), para. 10.
[82] Human Rights Situation in Iraq, para. 46; February 2015 COI Report, para. 70; United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July - 10 September 2014' (26 September 2014), available http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, ('Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq'), pp. 17–18.
[83] 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq Report, para. 34.
[84] United States Department of State, 'Trafficking in Persons Report' (June 2016) ('2016 TIP Report'), p. 357.

ISIL has been able to gain attention, following and support while spreading fear worldwide through its sophisticated use of digital content disseminated through social media networks. A key theme in its social media strategy is the use of children. In many ISIL videos, children are seen in training camps, dismantling weapons, running military style drills, and taking part in religious lessons.[85] Throughout these short videos, one child, who identifies himself as Abdullah, has been particularly prominent. In one film, he is seen executing an ISIL prisoner.[86] Abdullah has become the face of the Islamic State's campaign to train and indoctrinate children in an effort to create fighters for the future.[87] The massive recruitment and use of children by ISIL continued throughout 2016, with a total of 274 cases of recruitment and use of children verified and attributed to ISIL.[88]

Free Syrian Army (FSA)

From the beginning, the Syrian opposition movement has faced significant challenges of coordination and collective action, particularly with the proliferation of armed factions and extremist groups. The FSA, formed in summer 2011 in the early months of the resistance, is now more of an umbrella label incorporating various nationalist and secular groups.[89] In December 2012, these groups formed the Supreme Military Council (SMC) to serve as a central coordinating structure for more moderate armed groups. The SMC, however, has struggled to unite the various groups under its authority, which included more than 70 factions as of November 2014.[90] Competition among the various armed factions for external support and

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[85] Jessica Stern and JM Berger, '"Raising tomorrow's mujahideen': the horrific world of Isis's child soldiers' (The Guardian, 10 March 2015), available https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/10/horror-of-isis-child-soldiers-state-of-terror accessed 23 January 2017.

[86] Reid Standish, 'Kazakh Child Soldier Executes "Russian Spies" in Islamic State Video' (Foreign Policy, 13 January 2015), available http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/13/kazakh-child-soldier-executes-russian-spies-in-islamic-state-video/ accessed 23 January 2017.

[87] Kate Brannen, 'Children of the Caliphate' (Foreign Policy, 24 October 2014), available http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/24/children-of-the-caliphate/ accessed 23 January 2017.

[88] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 149. See also Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'Syrian Arab Republic', available https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries-caac/syria/ accessed 23 January 2017: 'The United Nations verified the existence of centres in rural Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr and rural Raqqah that provided military training to at least 124 boys between 10 and 15 years of age. Verification of the use of child foreign fighters increased significantly, with 18 cases of children as young as 7 years of age. The use of children as child executioners was reported and appeared in video footage'.

[89] Charles Lister and William McCants, 'The Syrian Civil War: Political and Military State of Play' (War on the Rocks, 18 February 2014), available http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2014/02/18-syrian-civil-war-lister-mccants accessed 23 January 2017, ('Political and Military State of Play').

[90] Anthony H. Cordesman, 'The Islamic State War: No Clear U.S. Strategy' (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 10 November 2014), available https://www.csis.org/analysis/islamic-state-war-no-clear-us-strategy accessed 23 January 2017.

weaponry has further fragmented the opposition.[91] The opposition movement has thus been characterised by shifting alliances and considerable infighting among its members, significantly hampering its overall military effectiveness. Gradually, as of late 2012, the FSA was squeezed between regime forces, Al-Nusra Front, numerous factions and formations that were fighting the Syrian Armed Forces on the ground, and (as of summer 2014) ISIL. These developments significantly weakened the moderate elements and less radical components of the opposition. Like the Syrian regime, opposition groups in Syria have been implicated in various violations against civilian populations in government-controlled areas, including indiscriminate shelling, the use of car bombs and improvised explosive devices, and the targeting of religious minorities.[92]

Among the more moderate opposition groups, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) has served as their main political body since November 2012. Composed largely of exiled political and religious leaders, it incorporates groups and figures from across the ideological spectrum and provides a direct link to the international community. Like its military counterpart, however, it too has witnessed considerable infighting over the objectives of the coalition and the future of Syria.

The UN Secretary-General lists the FSA as a party that recruits and uses children.[93] Groups affiliated with the FSA have used children in both combat and support roles, using high salaries for their child recruits as 'an incentive for children and their parents under difficult economic circumstances'.[94] Due to the fragmentation of the FSA, the recruitment and use of children has varied amongst the various factions. In this respect, a total of 62 cases of recruitment and use of children were verified and attributed to the FSA and affiliated groups (62).[95] International organisations have verified the recruitment and use of children as young as nine years old.[96] Recruitment is often facilitated by an older male relative or friend, and frequently occurs along clan- or village-based lines.[97] Groups affiliated with the FSA have also been among the most

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[91] Dynamic Stalemate, p. 5. See also Jeremy Binnie and Neil Gibson, 'US arms shipment to Syrian rebels detained' (IHS Jane's Defence Weekly, 8 April 2016), available http://www.janes.com/article/59374/us-arms-shipment-to-syrian-rebels-detailed accessed 23 January 2017.
[92] HRW: He Didn't Have to Die, pp. 2-3, 53.
[93] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para.151.
[94] United Nations Security Council, 'Children and Armed Conflict: report of the Secretary-General', UN Doc. S/2015/409* (5 June 2015) ('2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report'), para. 191.
[95] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 149.
[96] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 151.
[97] 2014 SG Report on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, para. 12.

active in recruiting among refugee populations in neighbouring countries.[98] In March 2014, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, a coalition of opposition groups which comprised the FSA, announced that it would begin training among its constituent members to eliminate the recruitment and use of children in conflict, and engaged with the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in this regard.[99]

Hizbullah

The Government forces in Syria have benefited from the military support of Lebanese-based Hizbullah,[100] which has long enjoyed the support of the Assad regime. Hizbullah first entered the Syrian conflict in mid-2012.[101] At first, the group mainly helped train and arm Shiite militias, in the process further flaming the sectarian nature of the conflict. In May 2013, the group became actively involved in the conflict when it led the regime offensive against the border town of Qusayr. Since then, Hizbullah has contributed to other theatres of operation, and has played a key role in training Syrian Government forces and militias in urban warfare. It is estimated to have deployed 3,500 to 7,000 fighters in Syria.[102] Hizbullah has been reported to recruit and use children in its efforts to assist the Syrian Government Forces.[103]

In 2016, Hizbullah reportedly sent forces to combat ISIL in Iraq.[104]

Kurdish Defense Groups of Syrian Kurdistan

The Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD), a Syrian Kurdish faction, first emerged in 2003 as a proxy of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistane, PKK), a left-wing political party and military organisation based in southeast Turkey and Iraq which has been fighting an armed struggle with Turkey since 1984. The PKK's main aims remain self-determination and equal rights for the Kurds in Turkey. With the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, the group expanded its

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[98] 2014 SG Report on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, para. 15.
[99] Human Rights Watch, 'Syria: Armed Groups Send Children into Battle' (22 June 2014), available https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/22/syria-armed-groups-send-children-battle accessed 23 January 2017.
[100] Also known as Hizbollah, Hezbollah.
[101] International Crisis Group, 'Lebanon's Hizbullah Turns Eastward to Syria' (27 May 2014), available https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/lebanon-s-hizbollah-turns-eastward-to-syria.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, p. 1.
[102] Dynamic Stalemate, p. 11.
[103] 2016 TIP Report, p. 357; 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 81.
[104] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 346.

presence. It filled the vacuum left by the gradual withdrawal of Syrian regime forces in spring-summer 2012 and assumed governing authority in Kurdish-populated areas across the north of the country. In what initially appeared to be a tacit tactical alliance with the Assad regime, the group has since avoided confrontation with regime forces and has instead seized further territory from opposition and jihadi groups.[105]

In September 2014, the town of Kobani (Ayn al-Arab), located immediately along the Syrian-Turkish border in the Aleppo governorate (Northern Syria), came under siege by ISIL forces. Since 2012, Kobani had been under control of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG/YPJ) militia. Despite the fact that the town's strategic significance was downplayed, many of the first US-led air strikes in Syria aimed to slow the ISIL advance towards the town. The US further directed weapons and supplies to PYD fighters within the town. Generating significant media attention, it was soon believed that an ISIL victory in Kobani would deal a 'symbolic blow' to the US-led coalition.[106] While Turkey initially refused to aid the Kurdish forces, given their ties to the PKK, it later allowed Iraqi Kurdish forces to cross its border en route to Kobani. In January 2015, ISIL withdrew from the town following sustained attacks by PYD forces and US-led air strikes.[107]

The YPG militia, the military wing of the PYD, have been reported to recruit and use boys and girls, some as young as 14 years old, within its ranks and for combat roles.[108] Community pressure and coercion are among the factors leading to children joining the YPG.[109] 2014 and 2015 saw some progress in the demobilisation of children associated with the YPG and the initiation of discipline proceedings against officers who recruited or used children or allowed recruitment to take place.[110] Concern also remains over the creation of a YPG 'non-combatant category' for 16 and 17 year olds.[111]

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[105] February 2016 COI Report, para. 30; International Crisis Group, 'Flight of Icarus? The PYD's Precarious Rise in Syria' (8 May 2014), available https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/flight-of-icarus-the-pyd-s-precarious-rise-in-syria.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, p. 8..

[106] Kate Brannen and Gopal Ratnam, 'The Administration Goes All in on Kobani' (Foreign Policy, 21 October 2014), available http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/21/the-administration-goes-all-in-on-kobani/ accessed 23 January 2017.

[107] The Guardian, 'Isis finally admits defeat in Kobani after air strikes force its fighters to retreat' (31 January 2015), available https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/31/isis-kobani-islamic-state-syria accessed 23 January 2017.

[108] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 576; 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 151; 2016 TIP Report, p. 358; 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para.193; HRW: Armed Groups Syria, p. 27.

[109] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 151; 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 193.

[110] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 576.

[111] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 576.

Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fatah al-Sham

Jabhat al-Nusra, rebranded as of July 2016 as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, was al-Qaeda's official affiliate in Syria, and had received considerable financial backing from al-Qaeda and private donors based abroad, mainly in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. It has since cut ties with al-Qaeda.[112] It was originally established in mid-2011 as part of the Iraqi-based Islamic State of Iraq (see below); divisions between the two, however, later led to their separation. Its main goal is to topple the Assad Regime and establish an Islamic Emirate in Syria. It has, at times, enjoyed popular support in territories under its control as a result of its provision of social services.[113] The group has been actively trying to expand its control in the northwest of Syria.[114] In January 2014, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham started targeting ISIL and – in coalition with Ahrar al-Sham and the Islamic Front – drove ISIL out of Raqqa.[115]

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham is listed by the UN Secretary-General for its recruitment and use of children[116] and has actively recruited children through schools and education programmes, targeting children as young as 14.[117] Children attend training camps alongside adults, and are then used in military operations.[118]

Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis

Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis was a Palestinian faction, loyal to Hamas, and based in the Yarmouk portion of Damascus. They fought ISIL during the Syrian civil war but were subsequently absorbed into the Syrian Government forces. In 2015, Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis was listed by the Secretary-General as a party credibly suspected of committing rape and other forms of sexual violence.[119]

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[112] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 575; Al Jazeera, 'Al Nusra leader Jolani announces split from al-Qaeda' (29 July 2016), available http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/al-nusra-leader-jolani-announces-split-al-qaeda-160728163725624.html accessed 23 January 2017.

[113] Political and Military State of Play.

[114] Yezid Sayigh, 'Ceasefire in Syria: Turkish Policy sets Syria on a new path' (BBC, 30 December 2016), available http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38473702 accessed 23 January 2017, ('BBC, Turkish Policy sets Syria on a new path').

[115] Anne Barnard and Rick Gladstone, 'Rebel Infighting Spreads to an Eastern Syrian City' (The New York Times, 6 January 2014), available https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/07/world/middleeast/rebel-infighting-expands-to-eastern-Syrian-city.html accessed 23 January 2017.

[116] See 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, Annex I.

[117] August 2016 COI Report, para. 117. See also HRW: Armed Groups Syria, p. 2.

[118] HRW: Armed Groups Syria, pp. 25–26.

[119] United Nations Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence', UN Doc. S/2016/361 (20 April 2016), ('2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence'), Annex.

b) Iraq

ISF

The ISF are composed of the military, intelligence, and law enforcement branches of the Iraqi Government. Following the withdrawal of the last active US combat brigades from Iraq in August 2010, a sizeable contingent of advisory troops, assistance brigades, and special operations forces remained to advise, train, and assist the ISF. Nonetheless, the latter was largely unprepared for the early departure of its American advisors at the end of 2011. Although the ISF had an estimated 271,000 active personnel at the time, it was still dependent on US support for a number of key functions.[120] Many of its units lacked effective support, command structures and logistical capabilities, and were not yet ready for independent operations. At the same time, the ISF was also divided along ethnic and sectarian lines, heavily politicised, and plagued by corruption. Consequently, the ISF was unable to prevent a steady increase in violence in Iraq through 2012 and 2013.[121]

The weakness of the ISF was further exposed following the ISIL surge through Iraq in the summer of 2014. The takeover of Mosul in June, for instance, resulted in significant ISF losses, including the destruction of one division, severe damage to three others, and the capture of both equipment and personnel.[122] While the ISF made significant gains at the end of 2016, this success was largely due to US-led air strikes in the area and the activity of Shiite militia and Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

Although there are no official reports of children being recruited and used by the ISF there are several reports of children being actively used by local militias and armed groups that actively support the ISF (see below).

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[120] International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'Chapter Seven: Middle East and North Africa', The Military Balance 112, no. 1 (2012): 308–309.
[121] Anthony H. Cordesman and Sam Khazai, 'Shaping Iraq's Security Forces' (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 12 June 2014), available https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/140612_Shaping_Iraq_Security_Forces.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, ('Shaping Iraq's Security Forces'), p. 6.
[122] International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'Middle East and North Africa' (2015), p. 305.

Peshmerga Forces of Iraqi Kurdistan

The Kurdish Peshmerga are the armed forces of Iraqi Kurdistan in northern Iraq. Once divided between the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, its brigades have been increasingly centralised in recent years under the single command of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Although Peshmerga forces participate in operations with the ISF, they remain independent of the latter. Its size is unknown, with estimates ranging anywhere from 70,000 to 190,000 personnel.[123] Peshmerga forces reportedly obtain most of its military equipment from Germany.[124]

The Peshmerga initially encountered significant losses against ISIL in the summer of 2014 when the extremist group approached the city of Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Peshmerga has since recovered with the support of US-led air strikes and training and equipment from coalition allies.[125] The UN has reported cases of children, boys and girls, being used by Peshmerga forces, however exact numbers have not been verified.[126]

Hashid al-Shaabi

Hashid al-Shabi is an umbrella organisation of Shiite militias fighting in Iraq. Many of these militias first emerged in the summer of 2014 in response to the collapse of ISF under ISIL pressure, and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's call for a 'popular mobilisation movement' to defend the Shia homeland[127] which led to the establishment of a Popular Mobilisation Commission on 17 December 2014.[128] Supported by Iran and under the guidance of Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders, these militias have led the majority of attacks against ISIL in the northwest of Iraq. Although significantly bolstering the military capabilities of the ISF and nominally answering to the Iraqi Government, they have operated with relative impunity.[129] Some reports suggest that these militias have, much like ISIL, flamed sectarian divisions through reprisals against Sunni Arabs, indiscriminate attacks against civilian populations, and the displacement of Sunni

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[123] Shaping Iraq's Security Forces, p. 53.

[124] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 346.

[125] United Nations Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 229', UN Doc. S/2016/897 (25 October 2016), para. 14.

[126] 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 72.

[127] Human Rights Situation in Iraq, para. 5.

[128] 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq Report, para. 12.

[129] Human Rights Situation in Iraq, para. 6; Kenneth M. Pollack, 'ISIS Is Losing in Iraq. But What Happens Next?' (The New York Times, 4 February 2015), available https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/04/opinion/isis-is-losing-in-iraq-but-what-happens-next.html accessed 23 January 2017 ('NYT: ISIS is Losing in Iraq').

populations.[130] While instrumental to the defence against ISIL, many fear that these militias are further entrenching sectarian divisions in Iraqi society.[131] Children as young as 10 years old, actively taking part in patrols and manning checkpoints alongside adult militia members.[132]

Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham / Islamic State

ISIL has committed horrific human rights abuses against children in Iraq. According to the UN, in 2015 approximately '1,297 children (685 girls, 612 boys) were abducted in 320 incidents, marking the highest number since 2008 and despite significant underreporting'.[133] In 2016, two incidences in Mosul lead to the reported abduction of more than 1000 children.[134] Due to the intensification of the conflict, numbers continue to be severely underreported, but children continue to be recruited by the Islamic State to be used as soldiers, sex slaves, and human shields. In some instances, 'they had been forced to donate blood for treating injured ISIL fighters'.[135] In Raqqa, ISIL is said to operate three child training camps.[136]

c) International

UN Mission in Iraq (UNAMI)

UNAMI is a political mission established by the Security Council in 2003.[137] UNAMI's mandate includes advancing inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation, assisting in the electoral process and in the planning for a national census, facilitating regional dialogue between Iraq and its neighbours, and promoting the protection of human rights and judicial and legal reform.

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[130] Human Rights Situation in Iraq, paras. 52–69; Human Rights Watch, 'After Liberation Came Destruction: Iraqi Militias and the Aftermath of Amerli' (18 March 2015), available https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/03/18/after-liberation-came-destruction/iraqi-militias-and-aftermath-amerli accessed 23 January 2017.

[131] International Crisis Group, 'Defeating the Iraqi State, One Victory at a Time' (26 March 2015), available https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/defeating-iraqi-state-one-victory-time accessed 23 January 2017; ISIS is Losing in Iraq.

[132] 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq Report, para. 35; 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 72.

[133] 2015 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 77.

[134] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 65.

[135] Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq p. 18. See also Children and Armed Conflict 2016, paras. 58, 61.

[136] 2016 TIP Report, p. 357.

[137] See UN Security Council, 'Resolution 1500 (2003)', UN Doc. S/RES/1500 (14 August 2003), and subsequent resolutions extending and expanding its mandate.

US

The US was initially supportive of the opposition movement and its attempts to oust the Assad regime. Along with its European allies, the US brought together a number of opposition-supporting countries under the umbrella of the 'Friends of Syria' group. While continuing to support moderate rebel groups, it pressured all sides to reach a political compromise in the belief that the conflict can only be solved through negotiations.[138]

In response to ISIL provocations, including the beheadings of two American journalists, the clear danger posed to the Yazidi people in northern Iraq, and the looming threat to Baghdad, the US and a coalition of allies began air strikes in Iraq in August 2014 and Syria in September 2014. In 2016, the US continued to lead a coalition of other states targeting ISIL in both Iraq and Syria.[139] Human Rights Watch reports that the US-led coalition, which includes Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, has carried out over 9,000 airstrikes on ISIL targets since late 2014.[140] The US has more than 5,000 troops stationed in Iraq and is involved in the operation to retake Mosul.[141]

Russia

From the beginning, Russia has been one of the Syrian regime's primary backers. It has provided the regime with both small arms and advanced weaponry, giving the SAA and other regime forces a significant advantage over the comparatively weaker opposition. In the UN Security Council, Russia (along with China) has blocked any consideration of an intervention on humanitarian grounds and has hampered efforts to impose sanctions against the Assad regime. In fact, Russia has used its veto-power in the Security Council to shield the Assad government's crimes in Syria.[142]

In September 2015, Russia intensified its involvement in coordinated airstrikes at the request of the Syrian Government.[143] Russia is alleged to have used both cluster munitions and incendiary weapons in attacks on

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[138] Dynamic Stalemate, p. 2.
[139] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 577.
[140] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 346.
[141] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 346.
[142] Julian Borger and Bastien Inzaurralde, 'Russian vetoes are putting UN Security Council's legitimacy at risk, says US' (The Guardian, 23 September 2015), available https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/23/russian-vetoes-putting-un-security-council-legitimacy-at-risk-says-us accessed 23 January 2017.
[143] February 2016 COI Report, para. 19.

opposition-controlled areas.[144] Airstrikes have targeted Jahbat al-Nusra and its allies, anti-government armed groups battling pro-government forces, and ISIL command centres, logistical assets and training camps.[145] As a result, Syrian Government forces made substantial advances during large offensive operations in Latakia and Aleppo, Homs and around Damascus.[146] Russia's continued support allowed the Assad regime to make further gains in 2016, with more expected in 2017.

Russia and Turkey are attributed with brokering a recent ceasefire between the Assad Regime and certain rebel groups.[147]

d) Regional Actors

Iran has remained Syria's principal ally in the region, and has provided the Assad regime with extensive financial and military assistance. In 2016, the Iranian government continued to provide the Assad Government with military assistance.[148] Personnel from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have further provided regime forces with training and advice in coordinating its military operations against the rebels.[149] Given its support of and influence over Hizbullah it is also likely that Iran encouraged the militia's entry into the war.[150] Furthermore, it has been reported that the IRGC has coerced Afghanis, including boys under 18, to fight in militias in Syria.[151] While not a member of the US-led coalition against ISIL, Iran has also been active in the fight against the extremist group in Iraq, by supporting local Shiite militias and sending troops, jets, and humanitarian aid to the country.[152]

Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are the most important regional backers of the opposition groups, yet their own rivalries and political incentives in the conflict have further undermined the prospects of cohesion on both the military and political fronts. Turkey and Qatar have generally supported the mainstream Islamist

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[144] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 500.
[145] February 2016 COI Report, para. 19.
[146] February 2016 COI Report, paras. 21-22.
[147] BBC, 'Syria Conflict: UN welcomes Russia-Turkey truce efforts' (31 December 2016), available http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38475830 accessed 23 January 2017 ('BBC, UN welcomes Russia-Turkey truce efforts').
[148] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 339.
[149] Dynamic Stalemate, p. 3.
[150] Political and Military State of Play.
[151] 2016 TIP Report, p. 66.
[152] Justine Drennan, 'Who Has Contributed What in the Coalition Against the Islamic State?' (Foreign Policy, 12 November 2014), available http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/12/who-has-contributed-what-in-the-coalition-against-the-islamic-state/ accessed 23 January 2017 ('Who Has Contributed What').

groups, while Saudi Arabia has supported the more nationalist and moderate rebel factions. All have backed the formation of overarching opposition structures, such as the SMC and SNC (see above), and have provided extensive funds and weaponry, diplomatic backing, and logistical support.[153]

Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as Bahrain, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, have also participated directly in the air strikes against ISIL. A number of other Arab states have further contributed military and humanitarian assistance.[154]

Turkey did not originally allow the US or its allies to launch air strikes from Turkish bases along the border. It also initially refused to help the Syrian Kurds besieged by ISIL in the border town of Kobani, given the association of the PYD with Kurdish separatist groups in Turkey. In July 2015, Turkey however, began airstrikes, mainly in northern Iraq against the PKK and allowed the US-led coalition to use Turkish air bases. Turkey has actively supported certain rebel groups in Syria, and has played an important role in mediating the most recent ceasefire in December 2016.[155] The Turkish airforce has also carried out airstrikes on PKK positions in northern Iraq and has sent ground troops into northern Iraq, attaching ISIL positions near Mosul.[156]

The European Union played a role in 2016, as the largest humanitarian donor for the Syrian crisis.[157]

III.   CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS

1. Recruitment and Use of Children

The use of children by different non-state actors is well documented in Syria, although the precise number of children who have served or are serving is unknown. In 2015, a total of 362 cases of recruitment and use of children was verified, the majority attributed to ISIL and its continued 'massive recruitment and use of

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[153] International Crisis Group, 'Anything but Politics: The State of Syria's Political Opposition' (17 October 2013), available https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/146%20Anything%20But%20Politics%20-%20The%20State%20of%20Syrias%20Political%20Opposition.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, p. 17; Dynamic Stalemate, p. 2.
[154] Who Has Contributed What.
[155] BBC, UN welcomes Russia-Turkey truce efforts; BBC, Turkish Policy sets Syria on a new path.
[156] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 346.
[157] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 281.

children'[158] The FSA and affiliated groups, the Liwa'al Tawhid, the popular committees, the Kurdish People's Protection Units, the Ahrar al-Sham, the Nusrah Front and the Army of Islam, also recruited children.[159] Of these cases, 56 per cent involved children under the age of 15.

Some groups recruit and then use children as combatants and for the purposes of logistics, handling ammunition, and manning checkpoints.[160] Other roles include cooks, informants, first responders, and porters.[161] Children in Syria have also been used as child executioners by ISIL and have been filmed doing so.[162] Not all children have been forcibly recruited. Most children associated with armed groups receive a monthly salary.[163] Financial incentives as well as ideology have been noted as influencing factors in the increase in recruitment and use of children in Syria. Notably, other children are joining out of a sense of familial or communal obligation, particularly among groups that are clan or village-based. Others have reportedly joined opposition groups after participating in political protests, being forced out of or expelled from school, being detained and tortured by regime forces, or following the death of their parents or relatives.[164]

In Iraq, the recruitment and use of children is also reported and of concern. In 2015, the UN verified the recruitment of 37 children – 19 attributed to ISIL, six to Kurdish Workers Party and 12 to groups under the umbrella of the popular mobilisation forces.[165] Another 174 cases were reported but unverified.[166] There are further reports that ISIL kidnapped some 1,000 children in Mosul for religious and military training.[167] Tribal militias are also playing a role in the recruitment and use of children. In August 2016, two tribal

[158] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, paras. 149-150.
[159] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 149.
[160] United Nations Security Council, 'Children and Armed Conflict: report of the Secretary-General', UN Doc. S/2014/339 (15 May 2014) ('2014 SG Report on Children and Armed Conflict'), para. 145.
[161] 2014 SG Report on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, para. 13.
[162] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 150. See also 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 575.
[163] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 149; HRW: Armed Groups Syria, p. 2.
[164] HRW: Armed Groups Syria, p. 13; United Nations Security Council, S/2014/31, 2014 SG Report on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, para. 12.
[165] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 59.
[166] Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'Iraq', available https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries-caac/iraq/ accessed 23 January 2017.
[167] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 341; 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 65.

militias reportedly recruited children from the Debaga camp as fighters for ISIL.[168] Children associated with ISIL are portrayed on social media, including as executioners.[169]

As of December 2015, at least 314 children (including 58 girls) remained in detention in Iraq on charges under the Anti-Terrorism Law (2005) for alleged association with armed groups.[170]

2. Trafficking and Child Labour

Both Syria and Iraq are source and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking.[171] Incidents of human trafficking continue to increase as the fighting does in the region.[172] ISIL continues to target women and girls for sexual violence and forced labour.[173] It continues to kidnap and hold captive thousands of women and girls from wide range of ethnic and religious groups, especially from the Yezidi community and sell them to Iraq and Syria where they are subjected to forced marriage, sexual slavery and rape.[174] In 2014, it abducted thousands of women and girls from the Yezidi and other minority groups in Iraq and sold them in Syria in human trafficking rings.[175] IDP's are particularly vulnerable to trafficking in hotels and brothels and into prostitution.[176]

Internally displaced and refugee children from Iraq and Syria are increasingly vulnerable in their host communities. Refugee families struggling to meet basic needs resort to negative coping strategies such as child labour. The problem is exacerbated by alack of access to formal jobs for parents and vocational opportunities for adolescents. Conflict and displacement has forced Iraqi and Syrian children to work in increasingly dangerous and exploitative conditions which adversely affects them and limits their right to education.[177] There are also reports of Iraqi families selling their children to other families to secure better

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[168] Human Rights Watch, 'Iraq: Militias Recruiting Children' (30 August 2016), available https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/30/iraq-militias-recruiting-children accessed 23 January 2017.
[169] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 59.
[170] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 60.
[171] 2016 TIP Report, pp. 207, 359.
[172] 2016 TIP Report, p. 359.
[173] 2016 TIP Report, p. 359.
[174] 2016 TIP Report, p. 207.
[175] 2016 TIP Report, p. 359.
[176] 2016 TIP Report, p. 207.
[177] See e.g. Terres Des Hommes, 'Because we struggle to survive«. Child Labour among Refugees of the *Syrian* Conflict: Child Labour Report 2016' (July 2016), available https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id= 11674 accessed 23 January 2017.

futures which puts these children are at risk of trafficking.[178] Children displaced within Syria continue to be subjected to forced labor, particularly by organized begging rings.[179]

Migrants from East Africa and Asia are forced, coerced, or deceived into traveling to Iraq to work as construction workers, security guards, cleaners, handymen, and domestic workers.[180] Reports are similar in Syria, with South Asian women fraudulently recruited to Syria as domestic servants or forced into prostitution.[181] Both the Iraqi and Syrian governments punish and deports victims of forced labor and sex trafficking, including children.[182]

3. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war, torture, and terrorism in both Syria and Iraq.[183]

In Syria, all parties to the conflict have allegedly perpetrated sexual violence against women, men, boys and girls.[184] Conflict-related sexual violence is, however, extremely difficult to document in Syria[185] and has been documented mostly in the context of house-searches and hostage-taking, in detention and at checkpoints by Syrian Government forces and in areas controlled by ISIL.[186] Syrian women and girls in ISIL-controlled areas are forced to marry its fighters, and are routinely subjected to sexual slavery. Yezidi women and children, and other minority groups, many of whom were captured in Iraq and taken to Syria, have been raped, tortured, murdered and sexually enslaved by ISIL.[187] Displaced populations are at particular risk of prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes.[188]

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[178] 2016 TIP Report, p. 207.
[179] 2016 TIP Report, p. 358.
[180] 2016 TIP Report, p. 207.
[181] 2016 TIP Report, p. 208.
[182] 2016 TIP Report, pp. 209, 358.
[183] 2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence, para. 68.
[184] 2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence, para. 68; February 2016 COI Report, para. 101. See also Offord Research Group, 'Stolen Futures: The Hidden Toll of Child Casualties in Syria' (24 November 2013), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Stolen-Futures.pdf accessed 23 January 2017; Human Rights Watch, 'Safe No More: Students and Schools under Attack in Syria' (6 June 2013), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Safe%20No%20More%20Students%20and%20Schools%20under%20Attack%20in%20Syria.pdf accessed 23 January 2017; Impact on Children of Three Years of Conflict in Syria.
[185] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 156.
[186] 2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence, para. 68.
[187] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 575; 2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence, para. 69.
[188] 2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence, para. 70.

In Mosul, Iraq, women and girls have been abducted, held in captivity, sold into sexual slavery and subjected to rape, torture and abuse.[189] Much of the violations are ethnically motivated. For instance, ISIL captured some 30 Assyrian Christian women and forced them into sexual slavery in Syria,[190] while Yezidi girls traded from Iraq were trafficked and used as sex slaves.[191] Many of the Yezidi women and girls who escaped ISIL and are displaced in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq do not have adequate access to mental health and psychosocial services.[192]

ISIL also continues to execute those suspected of homosexuality or sodomy in both Syria and Iraq.[193]

Child marriage is also an issue in both Syria and Iraq, with particular risk for adolescent girls in displacement settings.[194] In 2015, it was reported that the incidents of child marriages increased among Syrian refugees.[195] In Syria, it is estimated that 13 per cent of girls marry before the age of 18.[196] The situation is not different in Iraq, although it continues to be difficult to estimate the actual number of child marriages. It is believed that approximately one in five girls are married before the age of 18.[197] The driving forces towards child marriages are poverty, conflict, and strict religious and social traditions.[198] In Iraq, traditional practices, including child forced and "temporary" marriages and the exchange of family members to settle tribal disputes known, known as *fasliya,* also place women and girls at increased risk of trafficking within the country.[199]

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[189] UNOCHA, 'Iraq: Finding solace from sexual violence in Mosul' (9 December 2016), available http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/iraq-finding-solace-sexual-violence-mosul accessed 23 January 2017.

[190] 2016 TIP Report, p. 357.

[191] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 156; TIP 2016, p. 359.

[192] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 344.

[193] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, pp. 342, 575-576; 2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence, para. 69.

[194] 2016 SG Report on conflict-related sexual violence, para. 41. See also Save the Children, 'Too Young to Wed: The growing problem of child marriages among Syrian girls in Jordan', available http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/TOO_YOUNG_TO_WED_REPORT_0714.PDF accessed 23 January 2017 ('Too Young to Wed').

[195] 2016 TIP Report, p. 207; Too Young to Wed, p. 1.

[196] Girls Not Brides, 'Syrian Arab Republic', available http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/syrian-arab-republic/, accessed 23 January 2017 ('Girls Not Brides: Syrian Arab Republic').

[197] Girls Not Brides, 'Iraq', available http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/iraq/, accessed 23 January 2017 ('Girls Not Brides: Iraq').

[198] Girls Not Brides: Iraq. See also Girls Not Brides: Syrian Arab Republic.

[199] 2016 Tip Report, p. 207.

4. Education

Education in Syria has been under attack.[200] Schools have been destroyed and schools are being used for military use.[201] Following a series of attacks on schools in May 2015, Aleppo city closed schools and education institutions until the end of the school year.[202] Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 6,500 schools have been destroyed or partially damaged, and/or used as a shelter for IDPs, in total.[203] IN 2015, the United Nations verified 69 attacks on educational facilities and personnel, including teachers.[204] In 2015, 571 students and 419 teachers were reportedly killed.[205]

Iraqi schools are similarly under attack by armed groups and international airstrikes. In 2015, the UN documented 90 attacks on schools and education personnel.[206] The majority of cases were a result of ensuing fighting in Anbar province.[207] Other incidents involving the use of improvised explosive devices were reported in Baghdad and Diyala.[208]

In January and February 2016, Human Rights Watch interviewed 21 Sunni Muslim Arab women from the Hawija area of Iraq and 15 women and girls from the Yezidi minority ethnic group, all of whom had fled ISIL-controlled areas. They spoke of the restrictions imposed on their freedom of movement and access to healthcare and education.[209] Eleven of them were denied access to health care or education because of ISIL's discriminatory policies.[210] Teachers have also been reportedly tortured and killed for refusing to use the ISIL curriculum.[211]

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[200]See for e.g. Save the Children, 'Education under attack in Syria' (September 2015), available https://www.savethechildren.nl/Uploaded_files/Publicaties/educationunderattacksept2015.e79f64.pdf accessed 23 January 2017 ('Education Under Attack in Syria'), p. 3.

[201] Education Under Attack in Syria, p. 3.

[202] See e.g., Al Jazeera, 'Aleppo children killed in regime bombing of school' (3 May 2015), available http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/05/aleppo-children-killed-regime-bombing-school-150503134417396.html, accessed 23 January 2017.

[203] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 157.

[204] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 157.

[205] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 157.

[206] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 63.

[207] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 63.

[208] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 63.

[209] Human Rights Watch, 'Iraq: Women Suffer under ISIS' (5 April 2016), available https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/05/iraq-women-suffer-under-isis accessed 23 January 2017 ('HRW Women Under ISIS').

[210] HRW Women Under ISIS.

[211] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 63.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon and other countries similarly face challenges in accessing education. Inflexible requirements, language, and lack of legal status are cited as the greatest challenges for Syrian refugee children. Many parents of Syrian refugee children in Jordan, for instance, are denied the ability to work, making it harder for them to send their children to school and causing many children to engage in dangerous and exploitive income-generating activities.[212]

5. Access to Healthcare

Hospitals and healthcare workers have also come under attack in Syria and Iraq.

While the intensity of the bombing on hospitals in Syria has increased in recent years, hospitals were already being destroyed at an alarming rate in 2013. The World Health Organization reported in 2013 that 37 per cent of Syrian hospitals had been destroyed and a further 20 per cent severely damaged.[213] In Syria, 2015 saw an increase in attacks on medical facilities, with 122 attacks on 93 separate medical facilities.[214] In March 2016, Amnesty International issued a press release stating that Russian and Syrian Government forces appeared to be deliberately and systematically targeting hospitals and other medical facilities.[215] Healthcare facilities continued to be targeted in 2016. In September 2016, UNICEF reported that 96 children were killed and 223 injured when bombs hit two Aleppo hospitals.[216] Shelling of a maternity hospital was also reported on 3 May 2016 in a government-held district of Aleppo.[217]

In Iraq, the situation is also dire. The ongoing conflict has had impact on the national health system as infrastructure has been destroyed and looted. There is a lack of essential medicine, supplies and nutritional

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[212] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 58.

[213] Ruth Sherlock, 'Syria: more than half of hospitals destroyed or damaged' (The Telegraph, 16 September 2013), available http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10312092/Syria-more-than-half-of-hospitals-destroyed-or-damaged.html accessed 23 January 2017.

[214] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 159.

[215] Amnesty International, 'Syrian and Russian forces targeting hospitals as a strategy of war' (3 March 2016), available https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/03/syrian-and-russian-forces-targeting-hospitals-as-a-strategy-of-war/ accessed 23 January 2017.

[216] Kareem Shaheen and Julian Borger, 'Two Aleppo hospitals bombed out of service in "catastrophic" airstrikes' (The Guardian, 28 September 2016), available https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/28/aleppo-two-hospitals-bombed-out-of-service-syria-airstrikes accessed 23 January 2017.

[217] 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 576.

supplements.[218] Over eight million people are estimated to be in critical need of essential healthcare in 2016.[219] Hospitals are also under attack in Iraq. Aerial assaults and shelling repeatedly hit the hospitals and clinics throughout 2014.[220] For instance, in the first months of 2014, Iraqi Government forces repeatedly hit Fallujah General Hospital with mortar shells and other munitions.[221] In mid-2014, Médicins Sans Frontières was targeted in Tikrit;[222] and Shirqat hospital was bombed.[223] In 2015, 10 attacks on health facilities were reported in Iraq, with 70 per cent of attacks attributed to air strikes.[224] Further, 26 attacks on medical personnel were recorded, with 18 staff killed.[225] In December 2016, the US launched an airstrike on Mosul hospital, allegedly used by ISIL.[226]

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[218] World Health Organization, 'Humanitarian Health Action: Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016', available http://www.who.int/hac/crises/irq/appeal/en/ accessed 23 January 2017 ('2016 WHO Iraq'); UNOCHA, '2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq' (30 November 2015), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hno.pdf, accessed 23 January 2017 ('2016 Iraq HNO'), p. 20.

[219] 2016 WHO Iraq; 2016 Iraq HNO, p. 19.

[220] See Human Rights Watch, 'Safeguarding Health in Conflict: Attacks on Health Global Report' (May 2015), available https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/HHR%20Attacks%20on%20Hospitals%20brochure%200515%20LOWRES.pdf accessed 23 January 2017, p. 10.

[221] See e.g., Human Rights Watch, 'Iraq: Government Attacking Fallujah Hospital, Barrel Bombs Hit Residential Areas' (26 May 2014), available https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/27/iraq-Government-attacking-fallujah-hospital accessed 23 January 2017.

[222] Medecins Sans Frontieres, 'Iraq: Hospitals destroyed by air strikes leave Iraqis without healthcare' (24 July 2014), available http://www.msf.org/en/article/iraq-hospitals-destroyed-air-strikes-leave-iraqis-without-healthcare ('MSF Iraq') accessed 23 January 2017.

[223] MSF Iraq.

[224] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 64.

[225] 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report, para. 64.

[226] Spencer Ackerman, 'US launches airstrike on Mosul hospital used by Isis, military says' (The Guardian, 7 December 2016), available at https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/07/islamic-state-iraq-mosul-hospital-airstrike-us-military accessed 23 January 2017.

ANNEX I: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Cops
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
FSA	Free Syrian Army
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistane
PMUs	Popular Mobilization Units
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SMC	Supreme Military Council
SNC	Syrian National Coalition
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Mission in Iraq
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
YPG/YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel

ANNEX II: KEY FACTS[227]

Syria and Iraq in a Snapshot

	Syria	Iraq
Geography	**Climate:** hot and dry summers (June to August); mild and rainy winters (December to February) **Terrain:** primarily semi-arid and desert; narrow coastal plain; mountainous in the west **Border countries:** Iraq (599 km), Israel (83 km), Jordan (379 km), Lebanon (403 km), Turkey (899 km) **Coastline:** 193 km	**Climate:** hot and dry summers (June to August); mild to cool winters (December to February) **Terrain:** primarily desert and broad plains; mountainous along the borders of Iran and Turkey **Border countries:** Iran (1,599 km), Jordan (179 km), Kuwait (254 km), Saudi Arabia (811 km), Syria (605 km), Turkey (367 km) **Coastline:** 58 km
People	**Population:** 17,185,170 (July 2016 est.) **Median age:** 24.1 years **Languages:** Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, French, English **Ethnic groups:** Arab 90.3%; Kurdish, Armenian, or other 9.7% **Religions:** Muslim 87% (includes Alawi, Ismaili, and Shia 13%); Christian 10%; Druze 3%; Jewish (few remaining in Damascus and Aleppo)	**Population:** 38,146,025 (July 2016 est.) **Median age:** 19.9 years **Languages:** Arabic (official), Kurdish (official), Turkmen and Assyrian (official in areas where they constitute a majority), Armenian **Ethnic groups:** Arab 75%-80%; Kurdish 15%-20%; Turkoman, Assyrian, or other 5% **Religions:** Shia Muslim 60-65%; Sunni Muslim 32-37%; Christian 0.8%, Hundu, Buddhist, Jewish <1%, respectively.
Economy	**Capital:** Damascus **Major urban areas:** Aleppo 3.562 million; Damascus 2.566 million; Homs 1.641 million; Hamah 1.237 million; Lattakia 781,000 (2015) **GDP:** $24.6 billion (2014 est.) **GDP per capita:** $2,900 (2015 est.) **GDP by sector:** Agriculture 19.5%, Industry 19 %, Services: 61.5% (2016 est.)	**Capital:** Baghdad **Major urban areas:** Baghdad 6.643 million; Mosul 1.694 million; Erbil 1.166 million; Basra 1.019 million **GDP:** $156.3 billion (2015 est.) **GDP per capita:** $16,500 (2016 est.) **GDP by sector:** Agriculture 5.7%, Industry 45.1%, Services 49.3% (2016 est.)
Children and youth	**Population under age of 25:** 51.6% **Unemployment (ages 15-24):** 30.1% (2014) **Child labour (ages 5-14):** 4% (2006 est.) **Legal age of conscription:** 18	**Population under age of 25:** 58.95% (2016 est.) **Unemployment (ages 15-24):** 34.6% (2014) **Child labour (ages 5-14):** 11% (2006 est.) **Legal age of conscription:** 18

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[227] Central Intelligence Agency, 'Iraq', (12 January 2017), available https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html accessed 23 January 2017; Central Intelligence Agency, 'Syria', (12 January 2017), available https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html accessed 23 January 2017.

Relevant UN Security Council Resolutions

Cessation of Hostilities and Political solution – Resolutions 2336 (31 December 2016); 2268 (26 February 2016); 2254 (18 December 2015)

ISIL – Resolutions 2249 (20 November 2015); 2170 (15 August 2014); 2199 (12 February 2015)

Counter-terrorism –Resolutions 2253 (17 December 2015); 2178 (24 September 2014)

Humanitarian access– Resolutions 2332 (21 December 2016); 2258 (22 December 2015); 2139 (22 February 2014); 2165 (14 July 2014); 2191 (17 December 2014)

Evacuation monitors in Aleppo – Resolution 2328 (19 December 2016)

Establishment of Mechanism to determine responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria – Resolution 2235 (7 August 2015), extended by further resolutions

Destruction of chemical weapons – Resolutions 2118 (27 September 2013); 2209 (6 March 2015)

UN Assistance Mission for Iraq – Resolutions 1500 (14 August 2003); Renewed every year since, expanded under 1770 (10 August 2007), extended 2299 (25 July 2016)

UN Supervision Mission in Syria – Resolutions 2043 (21 April 2012) and 2059 (20 July 2012)

UN Disengagement Observer Force – Resolution 350 (31 May 1974), renewed every six-months.

Attacks against Medical Facilities, Personnel in Conflict Situations - Resolution 2286 (3 May 2016)

Syrian and Iraqi Child Protection Legislation

	Syria	Iraq
National	▪ Syrian Commission for Family Affairs (2003) ▪ National Child Protection Plan (2005) ▪ Legislative Decree No. 3 concerning the prohibition of human trafficking (2010) ▪ Law No. 11 of 2013 amending the Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949 concerning the Penal Code.	▪ 2005 Constitution of Iraq (includes provisions for the protection of the family, maternity and childhood) ▪ Combating Trafficking in Persons Act No. 28 (2012) ▪ Child Protection Act (under consideration) ▪ Child Welfare Authority Bill (under consideration) ▪ Bill on Protection against domestic violence (under consideration) ▪ Law No. 48 of 2013 on the accession of the Republic of Iraq to the Huge Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction
International	▪ Convention on the Rights of the Child (1993) ▪ Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2003) ▪ Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2003) ▪ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2004) ▪ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2009) ▪ International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 (1999) concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2003)	▪ Convention on the Rights of the Child (1994) ▪ Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2008) ▪ Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2008) ▪ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2011) ▪ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2009) ▪ International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 (1999) concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2001)

ANNEX III: TIMELINE OF NOTABLE EVENTS[228]

1990

<u>August</u>: An estimated 100,000 Iraqi troops invade Kuwait, beginning what would become known as the first Gulf War. An American-led military coalition, including Syria, forces Iraq to withdraw by February 1991.

1995

<u>April</u>: Beginning of the United Nations-mandated 'oil-for-food' programme, allowing the partial resumption of Iraqi oil exports in exchange for food and medicine.

1998

<u>December</u>: The US and United Kingdom launch 'Operation Desert Fox', a bombing campaign designed to destroy Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programmes.

2000

<u>June</u>: Syrian President Hafez al-Assad dies and is succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad.
<u>November</u>: New Syrian President Al-Assad orders the release of 600 political prisoners.

2001

<u>April</u>: The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood resumes political activity in Syria.
<u>May</u>: Pope John Paul II visits Syria.
<u>September</u>: Al-Assad orders the detention of politicians and other pro-reform activists, bringing an end to what some had called the 'Damascus spring'. Emergency rule is enacted through much of the following decade. The terrorist attacks of September 11 are carried out in New York and Washington.

2002

<u>May</u>: Amid worsening tensions with the US, Syria is accused of acquiring weapons of mass destruction
<u>November</u>: UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq. The US threatens serious consequences if Iraq is found to have breached its previous obligations.

2003

<u>March</u>: Beginning of the US-led war in Iraq. In May, American President George Bush proclaims victory in Iraq.

August: A suicide truck bomb destroys UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing 22 people including UN envoy Sérgio Vieira de Mello. A car bomb in Najaf kills 125 people including Shia leader Ayatollah Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim.

October: Israel carries out an air strike against Palestinian militants near Damascus. Syria accuses Israel of 'military aggression'.

December: Saddam Hussein is captured in Tikrit.

2004

March: An estimated 25 people are killed in clashes between Kurds, Arabs, and the police in north-eastern Syria.

May: The US imposes economic sanctions against Syria for supporting terrorism and allowing militants to enter Iraq.

2005

January: Eight million people vote in elections for a Transitional National Assembly in Iraq.

February: Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is killed in Beirut. Anti-Syrian protests spread across Lebanon, opposing Syria's political influence in the country.

April: Syria withdraws its forces from Lebanon.

May onwards: An escalation of violence in Iraq sees numerous car bombs, explosions and shootings across the country, particularly among civilian populations.

December: The first full-term Government and parliament since the US-led invasion is elected in Iraq.

2006

June: The leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, is killed in an air strike.

September: The US embassy in Damascus is attacked by four gunmen.

December: Saddam Hussein is executed for crimes against humanity.

2007

January: The US announces a new counter-insurgency strategy in response to the upsurge of sectarian violence in Iraq. An additional 30,000 American troops are deployed to Iraq in the following months.

September: Israel carries out air strikes against what it claims to be a covert nuclear facility in northern Syria. The United Nations nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, begins an investigation in Syria.

2008

September: An explosion outside Damascus kills 17. Islamist militants are blamed for the attack.

2009

January: Iraqi forces take over control of security in Baghdad.

March: Newly elected US President Barack Obama announces the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq by the end of August 2010. The first troops begin to pull-out by June, formally handing over security duties to Iraqi forces.

2010

March: Parliamentary elections are held in Iraq.
May: The US renews sanctions against Syria for its support of terrorist groups, including Hizbullah, and for seeking weapons of mass destruction.
August: The last US combat brigade leaves Iraq.

2011

March: Protests against the al-Assad regime begin in the cities of Damascus, Deraa and Banyas. Following the regime's heavy-handed response, protests quickly spread across much of the country.
May: SAA tanks enter the cities of Deraa, Banyas, Homs, and suburbs of Damascus.
June: SAA troops enter the city of Hama in response to widespread protests. By August, an estimated 200 civilians have been killed in the city.
October: Formation of the SNC, the first coalition of opposition forces. The SNC eventually becomes part of the SNC, formed in November 2012.
December: Arab League observers enter Syria. Bombings in Damascus kill at least 44 people. The Arab League suspends its observer mission in January as a result of worsening violence. In Iraq, the last American troops leave the country.

2012

January onwards: A number of bomb and gun attacks are carried out across Iraq, sparking fears of a new wave of sectarian violence. The attacks continue throughout the year.
February onwards: SAA forces bombard Homs and other cities. Over the year, the regime gradually escalates its attacks, employing attack helicopters, fixed-wing jet aircraft, and 'barrel bombs'.
July: A rebel offensive in Syria seizes control of the eastern half of Aleppo. Opposition groups also make gains in the south and east of the country.
December: Formation of the SMC, which has served as a central coordinating structure for the more moderate armed groups in Syria.

2013

March: Syrian warplanes bomb the city of Raqqa after it falls to opposition forces.
April: ISIL begins its first operations in Syria. By the end of 2013, the group has consolidated control over significant parts of the north and east of the country, including the city of al-Raqqa.
April-June: In Syria, a regime offensive between April and June secures central Damascus and regains control over key transportation routes towards Homs and Aleppo in the north and Tartous and Latakia in the west.
July: At least 500 prisoners, including senior al-Qaeda members, escape from the Taji and Abu Ghraib prisons in Iraq.

August: The al-Assad regime allegedly uses chemical weapons against civilians in the opposition-controlled Damascus suburbs of Eastern and Western Ghouta. An estimated 355 to 1,300 civilians are killed.

September: A series of bombings occur across the Iraqi Kurdistan capital of Erbil.

November: Formation of the Islamic Front, composed of seven Islamist groups.

2014

January: ISIL fighters in Iraq infiltrate and capture the city of Fallujah.

March: SAA and Hizbullah forces recapture the city of Yabroud on the Lebanese border.

May: Opposition forces evacuate the city of Homs, ending the regime's three-year siege on the city.

June: ISIL fighters capture the Iraqi cities of Mosul and Tikrit. On June 29th, ISIL declares the creation of a caliphate over the Muslim world and rebrands itself as 'the Islamic State'.

August: ISIL surrounds and threatens the annihilation of tens of thousands of Yazidis in the north of Iraq. The US and a coalition of allies begin targeted air strikes against ISIL in Iraq. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki resigns and is replaced by Haider al-Abadi.

September: The US and coalition allies begin targeted air strikes against ISIL and other extremist groups in Syria. Many of the first strikes centre on the ISIL stronghold of Raqqa and the Kurdish town of Kobani, besieged by ISIL forces.

2015

January: Kurdish forces push ISIL out of Kobani, ending four months of fighting.

March: Opposition offensives in Syria result in the capture of Idlib, the provincial capital of western Idlib province, and Nassib, on the Jordanian border.

April: Iraqi Government forces regain control of Tikrit from ISIL, ending a month-long siege of the city. In Syria, ISIL forces capture most of Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp on the outskirts of Damascus.

May: ISIL forces capture the Iraqi city of Ramadi. In Syria, they capture the strategic site of ancient Palmyra, and the last border crossing to Iraq. Jaish al-Fatah takes control of Idlib Province, putting pressure on Government's coastal stronghold of Latakia.

June: Fighting intensifies between ISIL forces and Kurdish fighters between Raqqa and the Turkish border.

August: Turkey joins coalition airstrikes against ISIL in Syria.

September: Russia carries out first airstrikes in Syria against ISIL and anti-Assad rebels.

October: Key regional and international actors meet in Vienna and agree to launch direct negotiations between the warring parties (excluding ISIL, al-Nusra, and other groups deemed to be terrorist organisations) in early 2016.

November: Talks resume in Vienna on 14 November under the International Syria Support Group, including the League of Arab States.

December: Opposition meets in Riyadh to establish negotiating principles with the Government of Syria. At the same time, the Democratic Syrian Assembly is created to represent the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The UK joins coalition air campaign against ISIL and Homs returns under Syrian Government control for the first time in four years. In Iraq, Government forces recapture Tamim district of Ramadi from ISIL.

2016

<u>January:</u> Syrian forces recapture Al-Bayarat in the northwestern countryside of Palmyra from ISIL. Syrian rebels declare full control of a number of villages in northeastern Allepo. Intra-Syrian peace talks commence.

<u>February:</u> Cessation of hostilities agreement reached and entered into force (excludes ISIL, al-Nusra, and other groups deemed to be terrorist organisations). In Iraq, Government troops expel last remaining Islamic State fighters from Ramadi area. Islamic State forces withdraw to Fallujah. Radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr leads mass demonstration in Baghdad in protest at Iraqi Government corruption and the slow rate of progress in delivering on promised reforms.

<u>March:</u> Iraqi army launches offensive to retake Mosul from Islamic State, but it soon leads to stalemate. Syrian Government forces retake Palmyra from Islamic State, with Russian air assistance.

<u>April:</u> Supporters of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr storm parliament building demanding a new Iraqi Government to fight corruption and end allocation of government posts along sectarian lines.

<u>May-June:</u> Army and Shia militias retake Falluja from Islamic State.

<u>August:</u> Turkish troops cross into Syria to help rebel groups push back so-called Islamic State militants and Kurdish-led rebels from a section of the two countries border.

<u>October:</u> Iraqi Government and allied forces begin operation to seize Mosul from Islamic State. Thousands of civilians flee.

<u>November:</u> Iraqi parliament recognises the Shia PMU militia as part of the armed forces with full legal status.

<u>December:</u> Syrian Government, with Russian help, manages to seize several Aleppo neighbourhoods from rebels. Russia and Turkey help broker a ceasefire deal between the Syrian Government and certain rebel groups. Fighting intensified in Mosul by Iraqi security forces who attempt to regain the city from ISIL.

2017

<u>January:</u> Peace talks to commence in Astana, Kazakhstan. Iraqi forces and ISIL battle over Mosul and humanitarian access is increased, reaching affected populations in eastern Mosul.

ANNEX IV: RECOMMENDED READING

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United Nations Security Council, 'Children and Armed Conflict: report of the Secretary-General', UN Doc. S/2015/409 (5 June 2015).

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UNOCHA, '2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq', (30 November 2015).

UNOCHA, '2017 Humanitarian Response Plan: Iraq', (16 December 2016).

War Child Holland, 'Syria: Child Rights Situation Analysis' (January 2014).