

IRAQ

Attacks on education slowed during the 2017-2019 reporting period, as active conflict abated in Iraq. Explosive remnants of war constituted one of the main threats to schools, students, and teachers. Dozens of schools were used for military purposes, but the number declined towards the end of the reporting period.

Context

Active fighting slowed in Iraq between 2017 and 2019. While 2017 saw large, multinational military operations of Iraqi forces, Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs, also known as Popular Mobilization Units), and international forces fighting against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (“ISIL”) in Mosul and Tal Afar, by 2018, “ISIL” retained control only in some rural areas.⁹⁹⁷ Iraq’s Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the fight against “ISIL” won at the end of 2017.⁹⁹⁸ However, Iraq’s state, and particularly its security, remained fragmented. In addition to military support from Iran, Turkey, and an international coalition led by the US, Iraqi paramilitary groups were also empowered to fight against “ISIL.”

Between October and December 2019, anti-government protests took place in Baghdad and cities across the south of Iraq. The UN’s Special Envoy to Iraq reported that police used excessive and, in some cases, lethal force, against demonstrators, leading to the deaths of at least 400 and injuries of over 19,000 people by the end of December.⁹⁹⁹ From late October 2019, school and university students, as well as school teachers, participated in protests and strikes to support the demands of the demonstrators.¹⁰⁰⁰

At the end of 2019, approximately 1.4 million Iraqis remained displaced,¹⁰⁰¹ and the UN noted significant challenges, including continued insecurity, trauma, lack of social cohesion, lack of livelihoods, damaged or destroyed housing and civilian infrastructure, and the prevalence of unexploded ordnances.¹⁰⁰² Over four million people continued to be in need of humanitarian assistance,¹⁰⁰³ a significant decrease compared to the 6.7 million in need the previous year.¹⁰⁰⁴ Children in Iraq suffered the worst consequences of conflict. For example, Human Rights Watch reported that Iraqi and Kurdish Regional Government authorities arrested, tortured, and prosecuted children with perceived affiliations to “ISIL” throughout the reporting period.¹⁰⁰⁵

At the beginning of 2019, over half of the schools located in formerly conflict-affected Iraqi governorates required rehabilitation. Shortages of adequate learning facilities affected both access to and the quality of education, leading to double and triple shifting.¹⁰⁰⁶ For example, REACH found that, while most schools in Tal Afar, Nineveh governorate, (controlled by “ISIL” from 2014 to 2017) were functioning in September 2018, some were partially damaged, classrooms were overcrowded, and most schools did not have sufficient numbers of teachers. In areas of Tal Afar where schools were destroyed, students had to travel to other neighborhoods, sometimes at long distances, to learn.¹⁰⁰⁷

Attacks on education slowed in Iraq during the reporting period. In 2017, the majority of attacks were attacks on schools, including by airstrikes and mortars.¹⁰⁰⁸ In contrast, in 2018, explosives left in educational facilities constituted one of the biggest threats, and cases of attacks on education occurred only sporadically, including occasional targeted attacks on schools, students, teachers, and professors.

Attacks on schools

Over the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA collected over 160 reports of attacks on schools, although attacks declined during the reporting period. In 2018, one of the most pressing threats to schools were unexploded ordnances (UXO) and explosive remnants of war (ERW) that remained in schools following the fighting.¹⁰⁰⁹

In 2017, the UN verified 151 incidents of attacks on schools, many of which occurred in previous years.¹⁰¹⁰ These included two schools destroyed by airstrikes and eight schools struck by mortars, as well as five schools where explosives were discovered, and were believed to have been planted by “ISIL.”¹⁰¹¹ In 2016 and 2017, the UN verified that 21 schools, mostly in Kirkuk governorate, had been damaged by crossfire between “ISIL” and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF); these attacks were verified in 2018 when access to the affected areas was possible.¹⁰¹² Moreover, UN sources found UXOs or ERWs in two-thirds of these schools.¹⁰¹³ In June 2017, UN sources also verified that 24 schools were damaged in Nineveh governorate while the area was under “ISIL” control.¹⁰¹⁴

In 2018, the UN verified incidents that had occurred in 2016 and 2017, as described in the previous paragraph, but did not verify any new incidents. Information GCPEA collated from media sources indicated that attacks on schools became markedly less common in 2018, with occasional attacks on schools, apparently both targeted and collateral. Examples from various reporting sources included:

- On February 7, 2018, a reportedly female attacker wearing a body-borne explosive device hid in a school north of Baghdad. The belt reportedly detonated after security forces shot at her, killing her.¹⁰¹⁵
- *Iraq News Gazette* reported that, on March 25, 2018, two mortar shells struck near an educational institution in Khurana area, Baquba district, Diyala governorate. No casualties were reported.¹⁰¹⁶
- On March 31, 2018, *Al Ghad Press* reported that unidentified actors thwarted an attack by “ISIL” on a police checkpoint near a school in Abu Karmah, on the outskirts of Nahiyat Abi Saidah, Diyala governorate. The school was allegedly used as a polling station.¹⁰¹⁷
- On June 8, 2018, ACLED and the *Straits Times* reported that an unidentified shell allegedly targeted a school that was located near the Turkmen Front headquarters in Kirkuk.¹⁰¹⁸
- On October 16, 2018, unidentified shooters reportedly opened fire at a school, damaging the building, in Amara city, Maysan governorate.¹⁰¹⁹
- On November 4, 2018, local media reported that an explosive allegedly planted by “ISIL” on a civilian car detonated near a school in Shirqat city, Salah al-Din governorate, allegedly injuring at least two pupils.¹⁰²⁰

In addition, in at least five cases, ERW were found in schools.¹⁰²¹ In one case, teams funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DfID) found 13 explosives at a school in Fallujah, which “ISIL” had previously controlled.¹⁰²²

In 2019, the UN verified one incident of attack on a school.¹⁰²³ GCPEA did not identify any media reports of attacks on schools during the year.

Attacks on students, teachers, and other educational personnel

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected reports documenting at least 12 attacks on school students, teachers, and other personnel. This form of attack occurred sporadically throughout this period. In 2017, GCPEA collected reports of at least six cases in which teachers and other educational personnel were killed or abducted.¹⁰²⁴

In 2018, GCPEA collected reports of six attacks on students, teachers and other educational personnel, by non-state armed actors, including five by unidentified perpetrators and one by Iraqi Kurdish police and security forces.¹⁰²⁵ These included:

- According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Iraqi Kurdish forces reportedly detained and were responsible for injuring several teachers protesting against delays in salary payments and salary cuts, in Akre, Dohuk, and Erbil, between March 25 and March 28, 2018.¹⁰²⁶
- On April 12, 2018, a teacher at a school in Nahiyat Kanan, Diyala governorate, was killed when an explosive allegedly planted in his car by “ISIL” detonated.¹⁰²⁷
- On November 22, 2018, four school students were killed, and several others injured, when the truck taking them to school in al-Shoura subdistrict, near Mosul city, Nineveh governorate, was attacked. The children were between the ages of 12 and 17 and were secondary school students. The details of the attack were verified by the UN.¹⁰²⁸
- In December 2018, a Ministry of Education employee was injured by members of an armed group who opened fire on him in Muqadiyah district, Diyala governorate.¹⁰²⁹

In November 2019, GCPEA also identified one threat against school personnel. *Al Jazeera* reported that the army threatened to detain school administrators who continued to keep schools closed during the wave of anti-government protests that was taking place.¹⁰³⁰

Military use of schools and universities

Information verified by the UN indicated that armed forces and armed groups used dozens of schools to store weapons and explosives, as firing positions, or as military bases or training centers, in 2017 and 2018.

UN sources verified that 79 schools in Kirkuk governorate had been used for military purposes between 2015 and 2017; most of these cases were attributed to “ISIL.” Similarly, UN sources verified that six schools had been used by “ISIL” as military positions in Mosul, until the city was re-taken in 2017. Local police used one school and PMF used two other schools as bases after re-taking control of Mosul.¹⁰³¹

Cases of military use of schools appeared to decline in frequency during the reporting period. In 2017, the UN verified 21 cases in which schools were used for military purposes in Nineveh, Kirkuk, and Erbil governorates; “ISIL” was responsible for over half of these cases.¹⁰³² In 2018, GCPEA received reports of four incidents of military use of schools across the country by ISF, PMF, or non-state armed groups.¹⁰³³ For example, a school in Nineveh governorate was used for military purposes for an unspecified period of time between January 17, 2018 and April 17, 2018.¹⁰³⁴ The UN also noted that before and during elections in Iraq in 2018, members of ISF were temporarily present in schools, as security to the Independent High Electoral Commission, in Nineveh, Salah al-Din, and Diyala governorates.¹⁰³⁵

In 2019, military use of schools continued to take place, though at a less frequent rate than in previous years. The UN verified four incidents of military use of schools;¹⁰³⁶ for example, the UN verified one incident of military use of a high school in Salah al-Din governorate by a group affiliated with PMF while the group vacated the site.¹⁰³⁷ In January and February 2019, CDF found that two schools in the al-Makrama area of Najaf district and governorate were used to store explosive weapons; the perpetrator was unknown.¹⁰³⁸ In July 2019, Human Rights Watch reported that state security forces used a school in the Hamman al-Alil camp for displaced people in Nineveh governorate, to screen residents.¹⁰³⁹

GCPEA also received anecdotal evidence that as IDP camps closed and consolidated, authorities reportedly used several schools to screen residents; however, security forces reportedly vacated schools after humanitarian actors intervened.¹⁰⁴⁰

Attacks on higher education

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA identified at least seven reported incidents of attacks on higher education. Reported attacks slowed significantly during the reporting period.

In 2017, two reported cases of attacks on higher education facilities and two reports of attacks on higher education faculty were reported in UN and media sources.¹⁰⁴¹ In one incident identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*, an explosive device left in Mosul University, Nineveh governorate, detonated on April 6, 2017, while a group of students was cleaning in the building, according to UNAMI and OHCHR. The blast killed one student and wounded four.¹⁰⁴² GCPEA did not identify any cases of attack on higher education facilities, students, or personnel in 2018.

In 2019, GCPEA collected three accounts of attacks on higher education students. In October 2019, *France24* and the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative reported that the Higher Education Minister urged university students not to engage in anti-government protests that had erupted in cities across southern Iraq.¹⁰⁴³ While most demonstrations involving students took place off campus, in some instances, students also began protests in or around universities.¹⁰⁴⁴ In two reported cases, police used excessive force against student demonstrators on university campuses, and in one other reported incident during the year, students were arrested:

- On April 1, 2019, students from Sulaymaniyah University staged a protest to demand that the university disburse student grants that had not been released in over three years. Police reportedly arrested three students near the main gate of the university and confiscated students’ tents.¹⁰⁴⁵
- On October 28, 2019, riot police allegedly used sound bombs to disperse student protesters at Tigris University in Baghdad, according to local media sources.¹⁰⁴⁶
- Also, on October 28, 2019, police reportedly used sound bombs to disperse student protesters at al-Farahidi University in Baghdad, according to local media sources.¹⁰⁴⁷

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