IRAQ

Attacks on education persisted in Iraq during the 2020-2021 reporting period in the context of decreased armed conflict but increased protest repression. Attacks on schools involving explosive weapons continued and military use of schools increased, compared to the last reporting period. Police also used excessive force during education-related protests.

Context

Although hostilities subsided compared to previous years, low-level fighting continued in 2020 and 2021 between the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant ("ISIL") and the Iraqi armed forces, supported by the US-led international coalition.[845] The Turkish military also carried out air and ground strikes targeting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) (PKK), a non-state armed group active in parts of northern Iraq.[846] In addition, anti-government and anti-corruption protests continued in Baghdad and the Kurdistan region while the parliament approved a new prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, in May 2020.[847] The country held parliamentary elections in October 2021 but had yet to form a new government by the end of the year.[848]

Conflict continued during this reporting period. The International Crisis Group reported that "ISIL" engaged Iraqi forces in Salah al-Din governorate in May 2020, killing ten individuals.[849] "ISIL" claimed responsibility for two bombings in Baghdad in January and July 2021, which killed over 60 and injured at least 160 people in total, according to the UN and media outlets.[850] US and Iraqi forces carried out air and ground operations against "ISIL" during the reporting period.[851] Turkish forces and the PKK also engaged in fighting in northern Iraq, with notable escalations in June 2020, and May and June 2021.[852]

Protests over corruption, public service delivery, low wages, and a growing wealth gap took place in 2020 and 2021 in Baghdad, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and other areas, according to Human Rights Watch and international media.[853] In some cities, civil servants and teachers joined the protests to demand payment of delayed wages.[854] In Sulaymaniyah governorate, the marches grew violent in December 2020, when protesters set fire to government buildings and security forces used teargas and live bullets; six protesters and one security officer were killed in the clashes, with twelve others wounded, as reported by *CNN*.[855]

The UN reported that at the end of 2021, over 1.18 million people remained displaced in Iraq, following conflict in previous years.[856] Iraqi security agencies denied many of the still displaced families, including women and children, the security clearances necessary for the renewal of identity cards and other essential civil documents, due to perceived "ISIL" affiliations, meaning they could not access social services, medical care, or education.[857] *Reuters* reported that many children born in "ISIL"-controlled territories lacked birth certificates, making enrolling them in school impossible.[858] By the end of 2021, the UN reported that 2.5 million people needed humanitarian assistance in Iraq, of which 1.1 million were children.[859]

The government closed schools in late February 2020 to limit the spread of Covid-19, affecting approximately ten million students, many of whom were unable to access remote learning due to power outages and lack of internet connectivity or access to computers.[860] According to the UN, many schools in Iraq were closed for approximately 62 weeks between 2020 and 2021.[861]

Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at 11 eleven reports of attacks on schools. This number is consistent with *Education under Attack 2020,* when reported attacks also occurred sporadically in 2018 and 2019.[862] During both reporting periods, many of the incidents involved improvised explosive devices (IEDs) installed in or near schools. During elections in both 2018 and 2021, schools used as polling centers were reportedly attacked, to disrupt elections or to target the police guarding the polling center.

In 2020, GCPEA collected approximately five reported incidents of attacks on schools, most involving explosive weapons.[863] For example:

- Local media outlet *Al-Sharq* reported that on January 8, 2020, in al-Atshanah area, Nineveh governorate, an explosive device planted in Qutaiba bin Muslim school exploded. According to the news report, seven students were injured in the blast.[864]

- On May 12, 2020, two IEDs were reportedly detonated near Balen Primary School in Kirkuk city, Kirkuk governorate, according to a local media outlet.[865]

- On October 11, 2020, an unidentified armed group reportedly detonated two sound bombs in the Aisha School for Girls in the Al-Baladiyat area, east of Baghdad; no injuries were reported.[866]

- On December 20, 2020, a grenade was found near a school in Baghdad. According to local media outlet *Shafaq News*, an anti-explosives force removed the explosive device and no injuries occurred.[867]

In 2021, the UN verified one attack on a school.[868] Separately, GCPEA identified approximately six reported attacks on schools from media reports. Many of these attacks reportedly occurred while schools were used as polling centers.[869] For example:

- Local media outlet *Shafaq News* reported that on February 2, 2021, an assailant on a motorcycle shot and injured a police officer guarding a school in Kirkuk city, Kirkuk governorate.[870]

- *Shafaq News* reported that on October 9, 2021, four mortar shells struck near the Tigris School in Zanqar village, Kirkuk governorate, while the school was being used as a polling center. No casualties were reported.[871]

- On October 10, 2021, election day, the police reportedly clashed with members of a tribal mobilization force outside Al-Yaqoubi School, used as a polling center, in Qarah Tabah district, Diyala governate. According to media reports, the mobilization force supported a candidate in the elections.[872]

- That same day, also in Diyala governorate, armed assailants attacked Al-Muhtadi Billah School in Al-Saadiya district, while it was being used as a polling center. *Shafaq News* reported that one soldier guarding the school was killed, and another was injured.[873]

Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel

In the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected at least 14 reported incidents of attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel. This number represents a slight increase compared to the last reporting period, when GCPEA identified one and six reported attacks in 2019 and 2018 respectively.[874] In 2020 and 2021, attacks on students, teachers, and staff occurred in both the contexts of conflict violence and protest repression.

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least ten reported attacks on students and education staff, including the repression of several teachers' protests over unpaid salaries.[875] For example:

- On February 2, 2020, teachers reportedly protested in Saraa square, Sulaymaniyah city, Sulaymaniyah governorate, over several months' unpaid salaries. According to local media outlet *Rudaw*, police used teargas to disperse protesters from the area.[876]

- Amnesty International and local media reported that on May 16, 2020, local police and members of the Kurdish security forces, known as Asayish, arrested a teacher without a warrant for using social media to organize protests in Duhok city, Duhok governorate. A long-time education activist and teacher for more than 25 years, the educator had recently been involved in protests against late payments of teachers' salaries.[877]

- On September 26, 2020, an unidentified non-state armed group reportedly shot and killed a school security guard in al-Qahtaniya town, Sinjar district, Nineveh governorate.[878]

- Local and international media outlets reported that on December 3, 2020, police used teargas and arrested approximately 20 teachers during a protest over delayed payments of teachers' salaries in Sulaymaniyah city, Sulaymaniyah governorate.[879]

In 2021, GCPEA collected approximately four reported attacks on school students and staff. For example:

- On January 15, 2021, unidentified assailants reportedly threw a grenade into the yard of a teacher's house in Nasriya city, Thiqar governorate. According to local media outlets including *Al-Nasiriyah*, Explosive Control Di-

rectorate officers diffused the grenade.[880]

- Local media outlet *Rudaw* reported that on March 18, 2021, grade 12 students protested the recent reduction of the study period for exams and other education-related grievances in Sulaymaniya city, Sulaymaniyah governorate, including by throwing stones and attempting to break into the Education Directorate building. To disperse the protesters, security forces reportedly fired live ammunition into the air and struck students with the butts of their weapons, injuring one.[881]

- On May 31, 2021, unidentified armed assailants shot and killed a teacher in the Balour area of Al-Muqdadiya district, Diyala governorate, as reported by local media outlet *Shafaq News*.[882]

- On October 27, 2021, local news outlet *NRT* reported that police arrested students at a protest organized against the results of university placement examinations in Soran city, Erbil governorate.[883]

Military use of schools and universities

Between 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified over 33 incidents of military use. This is an increase compared to past years; *Education under Attack 2020*, which covered 2017 to 2019, reported 21 instances of military use in 2017 and approximately four incidents in both 2018 and 2019.[884]

In 2020, the UN verified 27 cases of military use perpetrated by the Iraqi police and army, as well as the Peshmerga, the Kurdish branch of the armed forces.[885] Separately, GCPEA identified one report of military use from a news outlet in 2020:

- Local media outlet *Sotaliraq* reported that around October 4, 2020, the PKK occupied a primary school in Sinjar town, Ninewa governorate, for use as a military headquarters, while community members asked the armed group members to leave.[886]

In 2021, the UN verified the military use of 33 schools.[887] Separately, GCPEA identified one case of military use that year:

- In 2021, the Iraqi police continued to use a kindergarten for military purposes in Diyala governorate, which officers had already occupied for approximately four years.[888]

Attacks on higher education

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA received approximately ten reports of attacks on higher education students and personnel. In comparison, GCPEA received three and zero reports of attacks on higher education in 2019 and 2018 respectively.[889]

In 2020, GCPEA collected approximately eight reports of attacks on higher education students and personnel, several of which were targeted killings of university personnel and scholars while others were instances of protest repression.[890] For instance:

- On January 12, 2020, security forces arrested students during a sit-in at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, according to Scholars at Risk and media outlet *Al-Fanar* in Baghdad. Some students were reportedly injured. The students reportedly gathered to protest the government's recent decision to resume university classes, which the students viewed as an effort to curtail their participation in marches against corruption and high unemployment.[891]

- On December 15, 2020, unknown assailants reportedly detonated an explosive device near the house of the president of the University of Maysan in Amarah city, Maysan governorate, causing damage to the house. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research referred to the attack as one of several in a campaign against academics, as reported by Scholars at Risk and local media outlets.[892]

- On December 16, 2020, unidentified assailants reportedly shot and killed a professor at Al-Manara University College in Amarah city, Maysan governorate. According to Scholars at Risk and media outlet *Al Jazeera*, the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights released a statement referring to the incident and a "series of assassinations" targeting academics in the country.[893]

In 2021, GCPEA collected two reports of attacks on higher education:

- On April 4, 2021, security forces reportedly used excessive force when dispersing a student protest over the quality of conditions and services at the Shawkat Sheikh Yazid dormitory in Erbil city, Erbil governorate. According to local media outlet *NRT*, the students blocked the Erbil-Kirkuk road during their protest.[894]

- For several days in late November 2021, security forces fired teargas and rubber bullets and deployed water cannons against students demonstrating at the University of Sulaymaniyah and on main roads in Sulaymaniyah city, Sulaymaniyah governate, injuring at least one student, as reported by *Al Jazeera* and other media outlets.[895] According to *AFP*, police fired warning shots in the air near protesters, on November 23, 2021.[896] The students were reportedly protesting the reduction in financial resources provided in past years by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Demonstrators threw rocks and teargas canisters, and set fires in the city, according to media reports.[897]

[845] Sam Heller, "When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard," International Crisis Group commentary, May 13, 2020. "Non-international armed conflicts in Iraq," Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts.

[846] Bethan McKernan, "Turkey launches major attack on Kurdish militants in Iraq," *The Guardian*, June 17, 2020. "International armed conflict in Iraq," Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts.

[847] Alissa J. Rubin, "Iraq Chooses New Prime Minister, an Ex-Intelligence Chief Backed by U.S.," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2020.

[848] Shawn Yuan, "Iraq announces final results of October parliament election" *Al Jazeera,* November 30, 2021.

[849] Sam Heller, "When Measuring ISIS's "Resurgence", Use the Right Standard," International Crisis Group commentary, May 13, 2020.

[850] "ISIL takes responsibility for deadly Baghdad suicide bombings," *Al Jazeera*, January 22, 2021. "Security Council Press Statement on Terrorist Attack in Baghdad," United Nations press release, SC/14421, January 22, 2021. Mohammed Tawfeeq and Aqeel Najm, "ISIS claims responsibility for Iraq suicide attack that left dozens dead," *CNN,* July 20, 2021. "Security Council Press Statement on 19 July Terrorist Attack in Iraq," United Nations press release, SC/14584, July 21, 2021.

[851] Ghassan Adnan and Jared Malsin, "Top Islamic State Leader in Iraq Killed in U.S.-Iraqi Strike," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 29, 2021. Garrett Nada, "The U.S. and the Aftermath of ISIS," Wilson Center article, December 17, 2020.

[852] Bethan McKernan, "Turkey launches major attack on Kurdish militants in Iraq," June 17, 2020. "Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Visual Explainer," International Crisis Group, 2021.

[853] "Iraq: Authorities Violently Remove Protesters," Human Rights Watch news release, January 31, 2020. Louisa Loveluck and Mustafa Salim "Protests flare in Iraq's Kurdish north, adding new front in national crisis," *Washington Post,* December 12, 2020. "Iraqis protest over power, water cuts amid heat wave," *Reuters*, July 2, 2021. "Protests against Iraq election results turn violent," *Al Jazeera,* November 5, 2021.

[854] Dilan Sirwan, "Teachers protest in Sulaimani over unpaid salaries," *Rudaw,* February 12, 2020.

[855] Muwafaq Mohammed, Mohammed Tawfeeq, and Aqeel Najim, "Seven dead in protests as Covid-19 hits Iraqi government worker salaries," *CNN*, December 8, 2020. "UNAMI condemns violence in Sulaymaniyah Governorate, urges KR authorities to safeguard freedom of assembly and expression," United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq statement, December 8, 2020.

[856] "Displacement Tracking Matrix: Iraq," International Organization for Migration, December 31, 2021. "Humanitarian Action for Children: Iraq," UNICEF appeal, 2022.

[857] UNHCR, "Iraq: IDPs - Civil & Identity Documentation (Jan-Dec 2020)," December 2020. IOM Iraq, *Managing Return in Anbar: Community Responses to the Return of IDPs with Perceived Affiliation* (Iraq: IOM, 2020). ICG, *Exiles in Their Own Country: Dealing with Displacement in Post-ISIS Iraq* (Brussels, International Crisis Group: October 2020).

[858] Charlotte Bruneau, "Excluded, abandoned: Children born under Islamic State era still paying heavy price," *Reuters*, December 10, 2020.

[859] UN, "Humanitarian Action for Children 2022 - Iraq," December 9, 2021.

[860] OCHA, "IRAQ: COVID-19," Situation Report No. 1, February 27, 2020, p. 1. Human Rights Watch, World Report 2021 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021), Iraq chapter. UNICEF, "Iraq 2020 Displacement Crisis Humanitarian Situation Report," 2021. Hezha Barzani, "An "illiterate generation"—one of Iraq's untold pandemic stories," Atlantic Council*,* July 26, 2021.

[861] UNESCO, "Education: From disruption to recovery," 2021. Abdulrahman Zeyad, "After a year, Iraq students back in school as pandemic slows," *AP News,* November 1, 2021.

[862] GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York, GCPEA: 2020), pp. 156-157.

[863] A full list of references can be found on GCPEA's website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

[864] *National Iraqi News Agency*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ24847. "A senior Iraqi army officer was wounded and one of his bodyguards was killed in an explosion south of Kirkuk," *Al Sharq*, January 8, 2020.

[865] *Basnews*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ24402. "Two Bomb Blasts Hit Kirkuk," *Basnews*, May 12, 2020.

[866] *Baghdad Post*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ27297. "iMMAP - IHF Humanitarian Access Response Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News (08 - 14 OCT 2020)," Iraq Humanitarian Fund and iMMAP, October 14, 2020.

867 *Shafaaq News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ28558. "Thwarted bomb explosions in three Iraqi provinces," *Shafaq News*, December 12, 2020.

868 Information shared by a UN respondent via email on April 20, 2022.

869 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA's website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

870 *Basnews*; *Al Sumaria TV*; *Shafaaq News*; *National Iraqi News Agency*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ29237. "Police forces kill a person who attacked the protection of an election center in Kirkuk ," *Shafaq News*, February 2, 2021. "iMMAP - IHF Humanitarian Access Response Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News (28 January - 03 February)," Iraq Humanitarian Fund and iMMAP, February 3, 2021.

871 *Shafaaq News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ34369. "Mortar shells target an election center in Kirkuk," *Shafaq News* Agency, October 9, 2021.

872 *Shafaaq News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ32501. "Members of the tribal mobilization forces attack police officers in Diyala," *Shafaq News Agency*, October 10, 2021.

873 *Shafaaq News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ34334. "An attack on an electoral center kills a soldier in Diyala," *Shafaq News Agency*, October 10, 2021.

874 GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York, GCPEA: 2020), pp. 157-158.

875 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA's website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

876 Dilan Sirwan, "Teachers protest in Sulaimani over unpaid salaries," *Rudaw*, February 12, 2020.

877 "Police Arrests Teacher and Protest Organizer," Amnesty International urgent action, May 26, 2020. "KDP security forces arrest activist Badal Barwari and his son in Duhok," *Ekurd Daily*, August 18, 2020.

878 "iMMAP - IHF Humanitarian Access Response Weekly Explosive Incidents Flash News (24 - 30 Sep 2020)," Iraq Humanitarian Fund and iMMAP, September 30, 2020.

879 R*udaw; Al Mirbad; Al Maloomah; Al Ahad TV; Baghdad Today; GardaWorld; Liveuamap; BBC News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ28243. Fahad Shabbir, "Police Fire Tear Gas At Protesting Teachers in Eastern Iraq - Reports," *Urdu Point*, December 3, 2020.

880 *Al Mirbad*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ28964. "The fact that the home of one of the activists was targeted in Nasiriya," *Al-Nasiriyah News*, January 15, 2021.

881 *Rudaw*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ30047. Dilan Sirwan, "Sulaimani security forces use live ammunition to disperse protesting school students: witnesses," *Rudaw*, March 18, 2021.

882 *Ayn Al Iraq News,* as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ31574. "A teacher was killed in an armed attack in Diyal," *Shafaq News Agency*, May 31, 2021.

883 *NRT News,* as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ34585. "STUDENTS PROTEST REDUCED SEATS AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, EXPENSES THAT WILL PUT HIGHER EDUCATION OUT OF REACH" *NRT TV,* October 27, 2021. "SORAN POLICE ARREST STUDENTS FOR PROTESTING, EQUIPMENT SEIZED FROM NRT REPORTER" *NRT TV,* October 27, 2021.

884 GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York, GCPEA: 2020), p. 158.

885 UN General Assembly and Security Council, "Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General," A/75/873–S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, para. 68.

886 *Sotaliraq*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ27156. "PKK seizes a school in Shangal and turns it into a military headquarters ", *SotalIraq*, October 4, 2020.

887 Information shared by a UN respondent via email on April 20, 2022.

888 Information received from an international NGO respondent via email on November 13, 2021.

889 GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York, GCPEA: 2020), p. 158.

890 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA's website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

891 Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Various Institutions, January 12, 2020. Gilgamesh Nabeel, "Iraqi Government Pressures Protesting Students to Return to the Classroom," *Al-Fanar Media*, January 24, 2020.

892 *Baghdad Post; National Iraqi News Agency,* as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ28571. "No injuries. A bombing targets the house of the president of 'Maysan' University!," *Kitabat*, December 16, 2020. Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, University of Misan, December 15, 2020.

893 "Iraq: 'Series of assassinations' feared after professor killed," *Al Jazeera*, December 17, 2020. Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Al-Manara University College, December 16, 2020.

894 *NRT News,* as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRQ30357. "ERBIL DORMITORY STUDENTS BLOCK ERBIL-KIRKUK ROAD OVER LACK OF SERVICES," *NRT TV*, April 5, 2021.

895 Shawn Yuan and Dana Taib Menmy, "KRG pledges to reinstate student financial support after protests," *Al Jazeera*, November 24, 2021. "Iraq: Renewed Student Protests in Sulaymaniyah," *Almayadeen,* November 24, 2021. "Thousands of students protest in Iraq's Kurdistan region," *The Cradle,* November 23, 2021.

896 AFP, "Iraq Kurdish police fire warning shots as students protest," *France 24*, November 23, 2021.

897 Shawn Yuan and Dana Taib Menmy, "KRG pledges to reinstate student financial support after protests," *Al Jazeera,* November 24, 2021. "Thousands of students protest in Iraq's Kurdistan region," *The Cradle*, November 23, 2021.