



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office (RSO) at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Iraq at Level 4, indicating travelers should not travel to the country.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The American Citizens' Services unit (ACS) cannot recommend a particular individual or location, and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

Please review OSAC's [Iraq-specific page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Since Iraq's declared victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in December 2017, there has been a sharp reduction in terror-related attacks against civilians and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) within population centers. However, ISIS remains a significant threat to civilians and the newly-formed government. Significant areas of northern and western Iraq still lay in ruins, and the ISF has shifted its focus to counter-terrorism and broader security operations to target these cells and networks.

Iraq continues to struggle with secure transportation, disruption in public services and local governance, and a decrease in international oil prices, coupled with widespread protests across the country in the summer and fall of 2018.

In the fall of 2018, as a result of security concerns and unrest in the city, operations at the U.S. Consulate in Basrah were suspended.

Crime Threats

There is serious risk from crime in Baghdad and Basrah. Crime and lawlessness remain a serious threat throughout the country. In Baghdad, organized crime, uncontrolled militia activity, and corruption remain formidable obstacles to free enterprise and business. The vast majority of international corporations under contract with or employed in Iraq must adhere to strict safety and security procedures when traveling in and around Baghdad. Contract security companies employing armored vehicles and protective security details (PSD) remain a standard security practice for companies and diplomatic missions alike within Baghdad, including travel within the International Zone (IZ). While these procedures mitigate the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (IED) and small-arms fire, it also provides the added benefit of significantly reducing potential criminal victimization.

Other Areas of Concern

U.S. citizens are at high risk for violence and kidnapping while in Iraq. The U.S. government considers the potential threat to diplomatic personnel in Iraq serious enough to require them to live and work under strict security guidelines. All U.S. government employees under the authority of the Chief of Mission follow strict security procedures when traveling outside U.S. facilities. Many U.S. and third-country nationals travel throughout Iraq for business. These movements often require security advisors and PSDs to operate under restricted conditions. The Department of State advises U.S. organizations in Iraq to use PSDs to mitigate risk to their employees. Detailed security information is available on the U.S. Embassy website.

In December of 2018, the newly-elected Prime Minister announced the opening of certain checkpoints protecting the IZ in Baghdad. This development caused significant concern among residents of the IZ and the official diplomatic community, as many house their diplomatic missions within the IZ. While it is too early to tell what long-term effects the opening will have, the resulting changes caused diplomatic facilities, including the U.S. Embassy, to reexamine existing security procedures and address potential vulnerabilities.

Despite the changes, the IZ remains a restricted-access area under the control of Iraqi authorities. With the opening of the checkpoint that had previously controlled access to the 14 July Bridge Highway, Iraqi citizens without IZ identification can now traverse the highway that runs north and south. However, travel off the north/south route still requires a special IZ identification badge, and authorities are still searching vehicles exiting the 14 July Bridge into the IZ. Although the IZ remains a higher-security area, individuals residing and traveling within the IZ should continue to exercise commonsense personal safety precautions including varying times and routes. The U.S. Embassy's Regional Security Office (RSO) believes that authorities may lift certain remaining restrictions governing travel through the IZ as soon as early 2019. Such changes will directly affect diplomatic missions, the private sector, and residences.

Given recent events in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, undertake all travel to areas near the ISF-Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) front lines with an abundance of caution. ISF and KRG security forces are in entrenched military positions along the dividing lines. While political negotiations to resolve outstanding issues between the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the KRG continue, the potential for sudden military clashes remains high.

Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, please review OSAC's Report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Roads are generally well constructed and roadway conditions are reasonably good. Urban roads are mostly asphalt, while rural roads are typically dirt and gravel. Flooding is common in the winter and may affect driving conditions, as many roads lack proper drainage systems.

Dense urban populations, compounded by vehicle security checkpoints, can cause significant traffic congestion. In addition to the numerous government security checkpoints throughout Baghdad, improvised checkpoints appear without notice and compound normal traffic patterns.

Public Transportation Conditions

Baghdad city transit vehicles are poorly maintained. City buses do not adhere to published schedules, and frequently change routes. Long-distance buses are available, but like city transit vehicles are in poor condition and often drive at unsafe speeds. High speeds and poorly maintained equipment are often the cause of accidents. The Iraqi rail infrastructure is largely inadequate.

Terrorism Threat

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is serious risk from terrorism in Baghdad and Basrah. Foreign and indigenous terrorist groups remain capable of conducting deadly attacks throughout the country and continue to threaten expatriate personnel and visitors.

According to the UN, ISIS has killed more than 3,000 civilians and injured more than 4,600 people since 2017. While Iraq declared victory over ISIS in December 2017, and ISIS capabilities have severely degraded, ISIS fighters have gone underground and formed cells that still pose a danger throughout Iraq. These cells will continue with their attempts to carry out high-profile attacks on ISF personnel, GOI installations, and other soft targets in major population centers.

Terror attacks throughout Iraq will continue; some groups may be waiting on the completion of government formation to decide what entities to target. These attacks will seek to undermine the government's capability to provide security for Iraqi civilians and private interests.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Anti-American/anti-Western sentiment continues throughout Iraq even after the partial formation of the new government. This sentiment is present in print, television, social media, and in a variety of other platforms controlled by militia groups and political entities. Additionally, should the overall political climate change, or should militia groups be pressured/influenced by malign regional actors, these groups could pose a considerable threat to American and other Western interests.

The threat of kidnapping, rocket and mortar attacks, use of improvised explosive devices, and small-arms fire against official and private U.S. interests remains high, and is subject to domestic, regional, and international developments. Iranian-backed militias such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), Kata'ib Hizballah (KH), and Muqtada al Sadr's nationalistic Peace Brigades Militia have previously targeted U.S. interests. There are reports of militia groups kidnapping locals, foreign workers, and members of international organizations, and demanding ransoms from either their families or their employers. A number of militia groups remain hostile to U.S. interests and continue to pose considerable threats either as organized groups or through independent action.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is serious risk from civil unrest in Baghdad and Basrah. Political violence (in the form of protests) were prevalent throughout Iraq in 2018, especially in Basrah, where protesters burned the vacant Iranian Consulate in September. Recent protests around Basrah have focused on the lack of water and electricity, as well as work conditions, wages, and political corruption. In Baghdad, weekly Friday protests at Tahrir Square are common, although the number of protesters

remains insignificant at this time; al-Sadr supporters organize many of the demonstrations. In 2016, protesters illegally pushed their way into the IZ and stormed the Parliament building. The Embassy strongly urges U.S. citizens to avoid protests and large gatherings, as Iraqi authorities have responded forcefully when violence occurs.

Civil unrest continues and can occur at any time. Religious and political rallies can attract thousands of participants if conditions are right. Most protests are peaceful and focus on internal political and/or economic factors. ISIS has also targeted political and religious marches and rallies in the recent past. Additionally, movement throughout the country can be restricted due to religious pilgrimages, which occur throughout the year, primarily to Shia holy sites.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Incidents of ethnic and sectarian violence remain frequent in Iraq. The majority of these events occur in mixed-sect neighborhoods.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Iraq's environment is harsh. Temperatures in Baghdad can fall below 32 degrees Fahrenheit (0 degrees Celsius) in the winter, and exceed 120F (49C) during the summer. Dust storms, which can reduce visibility and impede movement of aircraft, occur frequently during the spring. Heavy fog often lasting for hours is common during the winter. Earthquakes can occur; a 6.3 magnitude quake occurred near the Iraq-Iran border in December 2018, with tremors felt as far away as Baghdad.

Critical Infrastructure

The possible failure or breach of the Mosul Dam has been a cause for concern for the better part of the past decade; however, a long-term U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Iraqi joint project to provide better stability to the dam by the summer of 2019 is nearing completion.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings for political or monetary gain are common throughout Iraq; the threat posed by ISIS and militia groups to conduct such operations remains high. Criminal organizations continue to use kidnapping as a method to fund operations, as well as a bargaining method to demand concessions from the government. In Baghdad, the kidnapping threat comes almost exclusively from militia groups, who may use it as a method to undermine U.S. diplomatic, military, and economic objectives in Iraq, or from criminal groups targeting individuals perceived to be wealthy.

Police Response

ISF units in Baghdad have been successful, reducing criminal activity by 45% in 2018. ISF has the ability to respond to security incidents, terrorist attacks, and criminal activities but response times and capabilities of responding units vary considerably. Iraqi police, however, do not meet U.S. or western standards. ISF maintains a large presence in most major urban areas to limit potential terrorist, insurgent, and militia activity. There are many permanent, manned military checkpoints and security stations; temporary ones often appear without advance notice.

Visitors and expatriates should carry proper identification at all times to avoid harassment and delays at checkpoints.

Anyone operating in Iraq is subject to Iraqi law. Visitors and expatriates should avoid unauthorized photography. Photos of ISF personnel and checkpoints are strictly prohibited. Iraqi military personnel may confiscate equipment and temporarily detain individuals taking unauthorized photographs. For more information, please refer to OSAC's Report [Picture This: Do's and Don'ts for Photography](#).

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Visitors and expatriates should cooperate with instructions if approached by Iraqi security personnel. The U.S. Embassy is limited in the assistance it can provide in the event of police detention or harassment. If detained by Iraqi police or security forces, contact the Embassy as soon as possible or request police contact the Embassy on your behalf.

Crime Victim Assistance

Victims of crime should notify the U.S. Embassy by contacting American Citizen Services (ACS) via e-mail to BaghdadACS@state.gov or via phone at 0770-443-1286 (from Iraq) or 011-964-770-443-1286 (from the United States) or (301) 985-8841 ext.4888. For local first responders, please refer to the Embassy's [Emergency Assistance page](#).

Police/Security Agencies

Responsibility for routine policing functions falls under the Ministry of Interior. In recent years, the Iraqi Federal Police have transformed into a paramilitary security force used to combat ISIS, with less emphasis on law enforcement. With ISIS defeated on the battlefield, the Federal Police will likely focus predominately on law enforcement with a small elite unit within the Federal Office of Police (FEDPOL) charged with counter-terrorism responsibilities.

Medical Emergencies

Use Iraqi hospitals only as a contingency for urgent life or death emergencies. Most hospitals and emergency medical services do not meet U.S. standards. Local hospitals have substandard staffing and equipment, and may not carry basic medicines. Basic, modern medical care and medicines are not widely available in Iraq. Conflict has left some medical facilities non-operational and medical stocks and supplies severely depleted. The facilities in operation do not meet U.S. standards, and the majority lack medicines, equipment, and supplies. A limited number of companies facilitate medical evacuations. Blood banks exist in Iraq, though the blood supply may not be sufficient in the event of an emergency, and likely has not been tested under U.S. standards for infectious disease. In addition, many areas suffer rolling power outages, and generators are not always available.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

American Citizen Services (ACS) maintains a list of doctors and hospitals; request it by e-mailing BaghdadACS@state.gov. For security reasons, ACS does not post the names of organizations and individuals on its webpage.

Insurance Guidance

Serious illnesses/injuries often requires medical evacuation. Such “medevac” services are very expensive and are generally available only to travelers who either have travel insurance that covers medevac services or who are able to pay for the service in advance. The cost for medical evacuation may range from U.S. \$40,000 to \$200,000. Be aware U.S. Medicare and Medicaid do not apply overseas. U.S. citizens in Iraq should not expect any medical assistance from the U.S. Government.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Iraq](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Baghdad meets three times per year. Contact BaghdadOSAC@state.gov for information or to request to join the mailing list. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC’s [Middle East & North Africa Team](#) with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

The U.S. Embassy is located in the International Zone in Baghdad on the banks of the Tigris River.

U.S. Embassy – Baghdad
Al Kindi Street
Baghdad, Iraq

Embassy Contact Numbers

Switchboard: 0760-030-3000

Callers after regular business hours will receive recorded instructions in English and Arabic for further assistance.

Consular Affairs (American Citizen Services 24-Hour Emergency Line): 0770-443-1286 (from Iraq) or 011-964-770-443-1286 (from the U.S.) or BaghdadACS@state.gov.

RSO Embassy Operations Center (24 hrs.): 0760-030-2833 (from Iraq local cell/landline) or 001-301-985-8841 ext. 2833/3343 (from the U.S.)

Foreign Commercial Service Office: baghdad@trade.gov.

Please note that the Embassy does not accept any phone calls regarding visas or passport applications. For questions regarding visas and passports, the Embassy ONLY accepts inquiries by e-mail. Please use the appropriate Consular Section email addresses for all such inquiries: Tourist and Business Visas BaghdadNIV@state.gov; Immigrant Visas BaghdadIV@state.gov; Passports and Special Citizen Services BaghdadACS@state.gov.

Website: <https://iq.usembassy.gov/>

Nearby Posts

Consulate Erbil: <https://iq.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulates/erbil/>

Embassy Guidance

If you are going to reside in or visit Iraq, please take the time to tell the Embassy about your presence in the country. U.S. citizens traveling to Iraq should register with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to ensure they receive pertinent security updates and notices. If you enroll – and doing so strongly recommended – the Embassy will keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. Travel information before you go is available at the U.S. Department of State [Travelers Checklist page](#).

As noted previously, the Embassy recommends individuals living or traveling in Iraq use protective details to limit potential terrorist and criminal threats. Travelers should use all available security and life safety assets to minimize potential threats posed by terrorists and/or criminals, to include armored vehicles, back-up communications systems, personal protective equipment, and medical kits. Individuals should vary routes and times of travel, as well as locations and arrival times to avoid becoming predictable. Maintain a low profile. Avoid protests and large gatherings. U.S. citizens should not travel alone in Iraq.

Additional Resources

Iraq [Country Information](#) Sheet

Current [travel alerts](#) and [advisory](#)