

IRIS Annual Report

2015-16

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ
SULAIMANI

IRIS



Institute of
Regional and
International Studies

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ABOUT IRIS

The [Institute of Regional and International Studies](#) (IRIS) is an independent research center based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Through multidisciplinary research, strategic partnerships, a fellowship program, and open dialogue events among experts and influential public leaders, IRIS examines the most complex issues facing the KRI, Iraq and the Middle East.

IRIS is housed at the [American University of Iraq, Sulaimani](#) (AUIS), Iraq's only independent, not-for-profit, American-style institution of higher learning. IRIS's location offers academics, journalists and institutions access to areas of interest and a safe space in an otherwise unstable region, making it an attractive, unique meeting place.

The Institute's main focus areas include but are not limited to: energy and the economy; governance; the IDP and refugee crisis; minority issues; disputed territories (DIBs); post-ISIS Iraq; and gender.

OUR TEAM

Christine VAN DEN TOORN

Director

Christine van den Toorn has over ten years of academic and professional experience in the Middle East, seven of which have been spent in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). She has conducted fieldwork all over the KRI, with a particular focus on disputed territories in Ninewa, Diyala and Salahddin, and has published articles and reports in leading publications like Foreign Policy, War on the Rocks, Iraq Oil Report, Inside Iraqi Politics, Daily Beast and Niqash as well as delivered talks on her research. Christine Van den Toorn is a member of the Atlantic Council Task Force on the Future of Iraq. She has also conducted baseline reports and social impact assessments for international oil companies operating in the KRI and disputed territories, working with teams of student researchers from AUIS. She served in the United States Peace Corps in Morocco and holds an MA in Middle East History from the University of Virginia, and taught the subject at AUIS for 4 years. Christine Van den Toorn speaks Arabic, which she studied at Middlebury College, Georgetown University, the University of Damascus in Syria and the French Institute for Near East Studies in Damascus. For a list of her publications, please click [here](#).

Sarah MATHIEU-COMTOIS

Coordinator

Sarah Mathieu-Comtois joined IRIS has been based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq since August 2014, working on research and in the non-profit sector on issues of water resources management. She joined IRIS in March 2016. Prior to moving to Iraq, she worked in research, policy, and government relations in Canada, on the topics of environmental policy, food security, resource extraction, and international trade and finance. Over the course of her graduate studies, her interest for the Middle East also led her to Jerusalem, where she studied resources and conflict. Mathieu-Comtois speaks fluent English and French. She holds a MA in Political Science from the University of Toronto and an undergraduate degree (Hons.) from McGill University.

Bahra SALEH

Project and Research Officer

Bahra Lokman Saleh joined IRIS in September 2016, prior to which she worked as a Program Assistant on a study of ISIS-induced forced displacement and durable solutions, at the International Organization for Migration, Iraq (IOM). She holds a MA in international relations from Lund University and an undergraduate degree in International Studies from the AUIS. She focused her graduate work on foreign policy official development assistance (ODA), which led her to conduct internship at the Foreign Policy Department of the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) in Ankara, Turkey. Saleh speaks native Kurdish, fluent English, advanced Arabic and basic Turkish.

Through its affiliation with the University, IRIS also draws from a pool of highly qualified student **interns and research assistants** with unique access to their respective areas of origin. The student-body is comprised of Iraqi-Kurds and Iraqi-Arabs from across the KRI, disputed territories, Baghdad and the Iraqi provinces. In addition to their diverse geographic backgrounds, students have research experience and varying subject matter expertise on topics including Kurdish and Iraqi politics, social and religious issues, and security. All our students speak, read and write English and Arabic or Kurdish, and are fluent in all three in some cases.

The [Sulaimani Forum](#) is IRIS's signature annual event. Over the course of two days, scholars, experts, and policymakers from the region and the world convene to discuss the world's most pressing regional issues, current trends and points of conflict. It creates an annual opportunity to bring together the main stakeholders in regional affairs for intellectual, political and strategic debates of great relevance in today's world.

Fourth Annual Sulaimani Forum, 2016

The Fourth Annual Sulaimani Forum, titled “**Upheaval and Transformation in the Middle East: Confronting ISIS and Beyond**,” convened on the 28th anniversary of the Halabja massacre in 1988 and on the centennial of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. The past century has been one of transformation and tumult, as citizens of the region have struggled to establish economic, political and judicial systems in their respective countries. In recent years, these struggles have come to a head both peacefully and violently with the Arab Spring and the onslaught of ISIS, forcing states to consider, more seriously than ever, how to chart a path forward. Prominent scholars, government officials, political leaders, and journalists from around the world came together at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani to discuss the war against ISIS, regional dynamics, the economic crisis and challenges for reform, extremism in the region, and the possibilities of breakups and alliances emerging from the turmoil and disorder. The Forum's full proceedings are available [here](#).

Participants included high-level officials from the central government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Prime Minister of the KRG HE **Nechirvan Barzani** gave the inaugural address, while the Foreign Affairs Minister of Iraq **Ibrahim Al-Jaafari** delivered the keynote speech. The National Security Advisor to the Iraqi Government Faleh Fayadh, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL **Brett McGurk**, Peshmerga Commander **Jaafar Mustafa**, and the Governor of Ninewa **Noefel Humadi Sultan** spoke on the first panel, focusing on different forces involved in the military operations against ISIS. The Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly **Yousif Mohammed Sadiq**, the Iraqi Minister of Higher Education **Hussein Al-Shahrestani**, leader of the Muthahidoun Alliance **Osama Al-Nujaifi**, and Special Representative to the Secretary General for Iraq at UNAMI **Jan Kubis** participated on the second panel and examined the political, economic, and security challenges facing Iraq. **Saleh Muslim**, the co-chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), **Hemin Hawrami**, Head of Kurdistan Democratic Party foreign relations office, **Salman Al-Jumaili**, the Iraqi Minister of Planning, along with **Hasan Turan**, an Iraqi MP, and **Ambassador Crocker**, former US Ambassador to Iraq looked at the “Clear, Hold, Build” as principle components of defeating ISIS in Iraq and Syria on the third panel. The Former Secretary General of the Arab League **Amre Moussa**, the KRG President's Chief of Staff **Fuad Hussein** spoke about regional dynamics on the fourth panel. **Qubad Talabani**, the KRG Deputy Prime Minister, **Adil Abdul Mahdi**, the Iraqi Minister of Oil, **Ali Alaq**, the Governor of Iraq's Central Bank, and US Ambassador to Iraq **Stuart Jones** participated in the fifth panel on the economic crisis and the challenges of reform. **Ranj Talabani**, the head of Zanyari (Intelligence Services), presented on a panel discussing the extremist narrative in militarized societies. Leading journalists, analysts and thinkers were also major contributors to the discussion both on the panels and in the audience. **Thomas L. Friedman**, well known New York Times columnist and author, was in the audience on his second trip back to

Sulaimani since delivering the commencement speech at the third AUIS graduation ceremony in May 2014. **Jane Arraf** of Al Jazeera, Liz Sly of the Washington Post, and **Cengiz Çandar** were amongst the leading journalists covering current affairs in the Middle East who participated in, and attended the forum. **Taher Barake**, the presenter of Political Memoirs at Al Arabiya took part in the Forum by moderating a panel on Iraq's future prospects.

Analysts from various think tanks and study centers were also present, most notably, **Mina Al-Oraibi**, a Yale World Fellow; **Kenneth Pollack**, Senior Fellow at Brookings Institution; **Sir John Jenkins**, Executive Director of IISS Middle East and former British diplomat who served as Ambassador to several countries, including Syria and Saudi Arabia; **Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin**, President of the Middle East Institute in Washington; **Laith Kubba**, Senior Director for Middle East & North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy; Joseph Bahout, visiting Fellow at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and **Amberin Zaman**, Fellow at the Wilson Center. They took part in discussions on efforts to rebuild and ways to combat sectarian divisions in the midst of proxy wars. World Bank's Iraq Director **Sibel Kulaksiz**, the Google think tank Jigsaw Director Yasmin Green, Hudson Fellow Institute **Nibras Kazimi**, and Senior Fellow at Woodrow Wilson Center **Robin Wright** contributed to the panel discussions on extremism and turmoil in the region.



Ranj Abdullah
www.facebook.com/Ranjphoto?ref=hl

The [IRIS Iraq Report](#) (IIR) offers on-the-ground reporting and analysis on Iraq's most pressing issues. It is aimed at providing decision-makers and experts with solid research and analysis of Iraq policy. The report is unique because it is produced in Iraq, and is based on in-country fieldwork as well as open source research. It is the brainchild of senior IRIS fellow Ahmed Ali (2015-16) and IRIS Director [Christine van den Toorn](#), both of whom have years of experience researching and writing on Iraq and the KRI.

The Last Piece of the Puzzle: Achieving Lasting Stability in post-ISIS Jalawla

By IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn

This IIR, titled "[The Last Piece of the Puzzle: Achieving Lasting Stability in post-ISIS Jalawla](#)," is the product of two research trips to Jalawla made by IRIS Director, Christine van den Toorn, since it was liberated from ISIS. There was significant progress from the first trip in Spring 2015 to the second just last month, April 2016: the town was secured and half the population has returned, much because of "bottom-up" approach involving a local political deal between rival forces and the efforts of local actors.

The restoration of stability in liberated areas is bound to become a priority for policymakers in Iraq, as well as for international actors active in the country. This report makes the case that Jalawla, a sub-district of Khanaqin in Diyala province, may provide some important answers for how to handle these challenges of securing and in the future.

Inside Iraq's Cash Economy: Fully Reserved Banking in a Monetary Dystopia

By IRIS Non-Resident Fellow Dr. Mark DeWeaver

This installment of the IIR addresses issues pertaining to Iraq's cash economy – fully reserved banking, the money transfer company system, and the role of the Central Bank of Iraq – and explores implications for policy-making. In "[Inside Iraq's Cash Economy: Fully Reserved Banking in Monetary Dystopia](#)," Dr. DeWeaver also sheds light on the considerations that have dictated a shift towards a cash economy, such as high uncertainty and weakness of financial regulation and institutions, as the only available private wealth protection mechanism. In this sense, Dr. DeWeaver, through an insightful analysis of "Iraq's monetary dystopia," paints a novel, positive portrait of an often suspiciously perceived cash economy. This report is based on fieldwork conducted in the KRI, with the support of IRIS and AUIS student research assistants.

Kurdistan's Great Recession: From Boom to Bust in the Rentier Economy

By IRIS Non-Resident Fellow Dr. Mark DeWeaver

Not long ago, the future looked bright for the KRI. Long an oasis of peace in an otherwise unstable region, by 2013 the three Kurdish provinces of Erbil, Sulaimani, and Dohuk had become the most prosperous part of the country. Not only were they developing their own oil and gas resources but they were also diversifying into non-oil sectors such as cement, tourism, and real estate. In the major cities consumers were flush with cash—business was booming at shopping malls, car dealerships, gold shops, hotels, and restaurants. Iraq's tallest apartment and office buildings were under construction. The region's dream of becoming the "next Dubai" seemed to be fast becoming a reality.

Today the KRI's multi-year economic boom has turned to bust. Last year's 50% drop in oil prices, the occupation of neighboring provinces by Islamic State (IS) militants, and the suspension of fiscal transfers from Baghdad to the KRG have resulted in a government-budget crisis of epic proportions. State-sector salaries have gone unpaid for months at a time, KRG-controlled banks have no cash to fund depositors' withdrawals, arrears to construction contractors are piling up, and billions of dollars in payments due to foreign oil companies have not been made.

"[Kurdistan's Great Recession: From Boom to Bust in the Rentier Economy](#)" explores and aims at filling in some of the gaps in previous coverage of the KRI by providing a comprehensive account of the region's current economic downturn. It is based on several weeks of fieldwork he conducted this October and November with the support of five AUIS student research assistants. Prior to publishing the report, Dr. DeWeaver shared his findings with a carefully selected group of experts and industry leaders during a lively roundtable discussion held at AUIS October 22, 2015.

Five Takeaways from the Sinjar Operation

By Ahmed Ali, Senior IRIS Fellow 2015-16

On November 13th, various Iraqi and non-Iraqi Kurdish and Iraqi Ezidi forces cleared the town of Sinjar, *Shingal* in Kurdish, of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Sinjar is located in western Ninewa province on the Syrian border, a predominantly Iraqi Ezidi town that fell to ISIS in August 2014. Upon taking control of the town, ISIS committed acts of genocide against the Iraqi Ezidis by executing civilians and enslaving thousands of women. ISIS's actions have destroyed the social fabric among Sinjar's different populations and thus present difficult challenges for the future. For the U.S., the fall of Sinjar triggered its decision to launch an air campaign against ISIS. "[Five Takeaways from the Sinjar Operation](#)" analyzes the key features highlighted in the liberation of Sinjar, and identifies lessons for similar military operations.

Turkish Boots on the Ground

By IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn and Ahmed Ali, Senior IRIS Fellow 2015-16

This report, titled "[Turkish Boots on the Ground](#)," looks into the political controversy surrounding recent Turkish military deployments in northern Iraq. Iraq's Shi'a majority now views Turkey as a sectarian actor. Turkey may have chosen to deploy its military assets to counter the growing influence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), to bolster its regional standing in the face of the growing Russian role in the Middle East, and to support its political allies in Iraq. Turkey's military deployment is intended as part of the posturing for a post-ISIS Mosul as well. Turkey will have to work closely with the Iraqi government and the KRG in order to position itself as an accepted player in Iraq.

Challenges and Opportunities in post-ISIS Territories: The Case of Rabia

By IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn and Ahmed Ali, Senior IRIS Fellow 2015-16

One success story in the war against ISIS happened in October 2014, when Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga cooperated with the Iraqi Shammar tribe to clear ISIS from the predominantly Sunni Arab border town of Rabia in northern Iraq's Ninewa province. This military alliance was essential to defeating ISIS and denying it control of contiguous terrain between Iraq and Syria. It is a positive example of former rivals setting aside their differences in order to neutralize ISIS. The security gains in Rabia were complemented by the return of the large majority of the local population who fled when ISIS attacked.

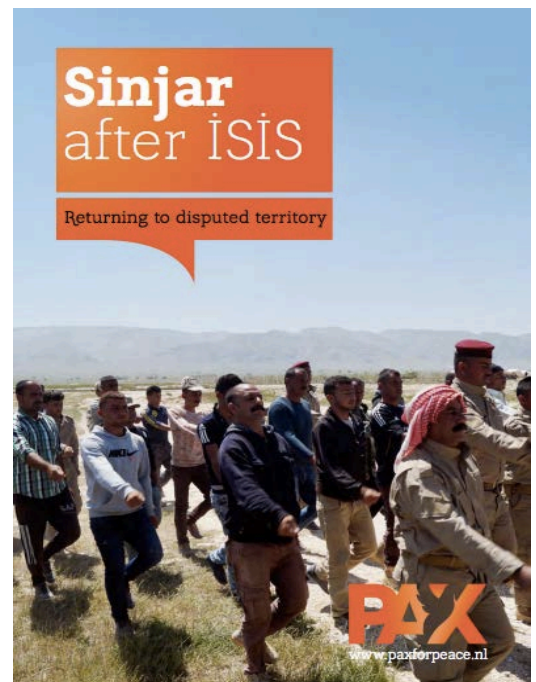
However, the road ahead is more difficult than the one behind. The current Iraqi Kurdish-Iraqi Sunni Arab alliance is in jeopardy for a multitude of reasons. Strategically, local and national stakeholders cannot define the final status of Rabia as part of either federal Iraq or Iraqi Kurdistan. On the ground, dormant ethnic tensions, intra-tribal power struggles, mistrust, territorial disputes, and lack of reconstruction in the area will challenge the pact.

["Challenges and Opportunities in post-ISIS Territories: The case of Rabia"](#) thus stresses how success in Rabia is crucial in order to inspire similar military alliances in other predominantly Sunni parts of Iraq like Mosul, Anbar and Salahaddin. Furthermore, it will prevent ISIS from regaining a presence on the Iraqi-Syrian border. Therefore, Baghdad, Erbil, local tribes, and the United States have an imperative interest in achieving a positive outcome in Rabia.

Returning to Disputed Territory: Social Cohesion, Governance, Security and the Role of Women in Contested Areas in Iraq

This report, authored by IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn and IRIS Coordinator Sarah Mathieu-Comtois, is the result of field research conducted by van den Toorn and researcher Wladimir van Wilgenburg. It was contracted and published by the Dutch NGO PAX, and can be accessed [here](#).

Stabilization of post-ISIS territories is potentially one of the largest and most complex issues facing Iraq and its Kurdistan Region today. Research into preventing future conflict in such territories that are disputed between the federal government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) reveals that a variety of factors must be taken into account and addressed. If these factors are not addressed, it is likely that people will not go back. Furthermore, if and when people do go back, a return to status quo will mean instability, and will prevent the reconstruction of Sinjar and other disputed territories (DIBs). This report explores all of those elements, and formulates recommendations accordingly to prevent such instability and conflict. The ultimate aim of this study was to identify ways of improving the long-term response to the Iraq crisis and ensure the rights of civilians by influencing relevant decision-makers to firstly prioritize and exhaust all means to address underlying grievances of the conflict in Iraq and, secondly, fully support an effective and appropriately designed approach to stabilization that is conflict-sensitive and recognizes the risk of renewed conflict post-ISIS. In this sense, it outlines recommendations to address issues of identity and citizenship; justice and reconciliation; security; administration; political settlement; and reconstruction.



Displacement in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Impact, Response and Options

This publication is the summary of a workshop hosted jointly with Chatham House, at AUIS, on May 16- 18, 2016. It can be accessed [here](#).

The workshop touched upon social, economic, and political issues associated with displacement in the KRI. The sensitive question of return was also addressed. It was found that while the international response to the displacement crisis in the KRI is faced with the familiar challenge of applying international standards to individuals who fall under national jurisdiction, the situation is further complicated at all levels in the case of the KRI by the ambiguity of the relationship between the Kurdish authorities and the government in Baghdad. This lack of coordination has deep repercussions, it was argued, on the lives of both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and members of host communities.

The workshop summary highlights key discussion points and presents policy options for a more adequate response from national and regional authorities, as well as humanitarian workers.

Escaping the Rentier Model: Reforms in Iraq and the KRI

This report, authored by AUIS faculty members Dr. Bilal Wahab, and Dr. Djene Bajalan under the aegis of IRIS, can be accessed [here](#).

The Center for Development and Natural Resources' (CDNR) conference entitled: "Escaping the Rentier Model: Reforms in Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)" brought to the fore the extent of the economic crisis facing Iraq and Kurdistan region. The basic cause of this crisis is relatively simple to discern. On the one hand, global oil prices have fallen by over 50 percent since mid- 2014. This constitutes a major blow to the Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) treasuries as oil rents account for over 90 percent of state income. On the other hand, pressures on the Iraqi treasury have increased greatly due to the costs associated with prosecuting the war against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), demographic pressures from internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, and a bloated public sector. In short, both Iraq and the KRG are incapable of balancing their budgets. As James Parks mentioned at the conference, for example, the KRG's fall in revenue is estimated at 37 percent of Gross national product (GNP) between 2013 and 2014.

To put this in perspective, the shock to the Greek and Turkish economies of 1999 to 2003 and 2010 to 2018 respectively were 8.5 percent of their GNP. Hence in the space of one year, the loss of revenue faced by the KRG is more than three times the magnitude of that faced by Turkey over four years and Greece over eight. Although some of these economic pressures are clearly exogenous, many are self-inflicted or have been exacerbated by Iraqi and Kurdish socio-political dynamics. The inability of state institutions to anticipate and hence mitigate the current financial tsunami only serves to aggravate the crisis. Today people suffer due to lax policies and the uncontrolled spending of the past decade. To address this, the Iraqi federal and Kurdish regional governments need a combination of both short-term solutions to deal with the immediate fall in revenue and longer term structural reforms in order to prepare for the next boom and bust cycle. This report, based on a policy conference that convened a variety of experts and practitioners, offers recommendations as to what form those solutions might take.



Qubad Talabany, Deputy Prime Minister of the KRG, Rebaz Hamlan, KRG Minister of Finance and the Economy, and Mathias Mitman, United States Council General to Kurdistan, delivered the keynote addresses. Panelists Dr. Thamir Al-Ghadhban, Energy Advisor to the Iraqi Prime Minister, Dr. Sherko Jawdat, Chair of Kurdistan Parliament's Oil and Gas Committee, Dr. Qaiwan Siwaily, Managing Director, Iraq International Oil Services, Kurdistan International Bank and Ms. Christie Milner, Senior Economic Officer, U.S. Consulate, Erbil discussed Oil and Gas Policy and Industry. Dr. Abdulbasit Turki Saeed, Professor of Economics, Former Governor of Iraq's Central Bank and Chairman of the Federal Board of the Supreme Audits, Adil Karim, Iraqi Deputy Minister of Industry, and Dr. James Whitaker, Deputy Office Director, USAID, Iraq were featured on the second panel, tackling the issue of the economy and the private sector. Finally, during the third and last panel, Khalid Chawashli, Chairman of KRG Board of Supreme Audit, Dr. Sabah Khoshnaw, Assistant Professor of Public Finance, Salahaddin University, Dr. Mohammed Rauf, Professor of Economics, University of Sulaimani, and James Parks, Financial Advisor to KRG discussed public finance management.

Strangers in Strange Lands: An Assessment of Arab Refugees and IDPs in Non-Arab Host Communities in Iraq and Turkey

This publication is the result of a joint research project between IRIS and SREO Research with all project funding covered by SREO. It can be accessed [here](#).

This report appraises and compares the living conditions and access to services of Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs in non-Arab host communities. The research compares the situation of these refugees and IDPs with regard to food security, livelihoods, access to clean water and services like education and health, and migration issues. In Turkey, urban Syrian refugees residing in Antakya, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa were surveyed. In northern Iraq, the cities of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah were included in the geographic coverage. The six locations chosen for this sample form a semi-circular belt across southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq. The research findings indicate that households are normally able to access clean water in all of the six locations in Turkey and Iraq, with the exception of the city of Sulaymaniyah in Iraq. At large, Syrian refugees in Turkey are more likely to have access to clean water than refugees and IDPs living in Iraq. With regard to access to food, most respondents reported that their households are able to consume three meals per day. However, the quality and nutrition levels of the meals are unclear, as these issues were not included in the research scope, and further research is needed into this issue.

Work opportunities are scarce in all locations; however, it appears there are slightly more work opportunities for Syrian refugees in Turkey than for refugees and IDPs in northern Iraq. Similarly, access to free healthcare is higher in Turkey than in Iraq, though it is also common for Syrian refugees to be charged money by health facilities for services that are supposed to be free of cost, indicating a gap between theoretical entitlements for Syrian refugees and the services they can access in practice.

As in the case for health services, access to education is greater in Turkey than in Iraq, and findings show that the cities of Antakya and Gaziantep are two locations where access to education is highest. In terms of safety in host communities, the majority of the respondents in southern Turkey stated that they feel safe. In northern Iraq, however, the results between the three locations were mixed, in Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah specifically. In Erbil, most respondents stated that they have no security concerns. Regarding a possible return to their home communities, Syrian refugees in Turkey and IDPs in Iraq are not optimistic about returning in the near future.



IRIS staff and fellows periodically participated to public debates through the **publication of news media and policy analysis pieces and interviews**, based on their research. Below is a sampling of these from the 2015-2016 academic year.

- VAN DEN TOORN, Christine. "[What Happens to Mosul after ISIS?](#)," interview on IRAQ MATTERS, EPIC (06/20/2016)
- VAN DEN TOORN, Christine. "[The Wars After the War for Sinjar: How Washington can avert a new civil war.](#)" *War on the Rocks* (06/20/2016)
- WATERS, Timothy William. "[Yezidis vs. ISIS at the ICC.](#)" *Foreign Affairs* (03/29/2016)
- VAN DEN TOORN, Christine. "[High Noon in Iraq's Wild West.](#)" *Foreign Policy* (02/22/2016)
- VAN DEN TOORN, Christine and HUSSEIN, Mohammed. "[Rivalries trump resettlement in liberated territory.](#)" *Iraq Oil Report* (02/17/2016)
- VAN DEN TOORN, Christine. "[Multiple dead in Kurd-Hashid fight in Tuz.](#)" *Iraq Oil Report* (11/13/2015)
- VAN DEN TOORN, Christine, OSGOOD, Patrick, and TAHIR, Rawaz. "[Splits over Sinjar strategy leave town in IS control.](#)" *Iraq Oil Report* (11/08/2015)
- VAN DEN TOORN, Christine and ALKADIRI, Raad. "[Kurdistan's Missed Chance for Reform.](#)" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (09/15/2015)

IRIS staff also **participated in academic and policy conferences**, offering insight based on their research.

Threats to Religious and Ethnic Minorities under the Islamic State

IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn was a panelist at this conference, hosted by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University and the United States Department of State as part of the center's Religious Freedom Project.

Education for Entrepreneurship: Creating Opportunities in Fragile Settings and Preparing Students for Private Sector Jobs in Kurdistan and Iraq

IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn delivered this talk hoested by the Macro Economics Fiscal Management (MFM) and Education (EDU) Global Practice at the World Bank.

The New World of Kurdish Politics

IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn was a panelist at this expert seminar held in the context of the ESCR-funded 'Understanding and Managing Intra-State Territorial Contestation: Iraq's Disputed Territories in Comparative Perspective' research initiative. The seminar was hosted at Exeter University.

Task Force on the Future of Iraq

IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn and former IRIS fellow Ahmed Ali were chosen to be part of the Atlantic Council Task Force on the Future of Iraq. The first meeting was held at the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.

Iraq's Disputed Territories: Actors, Interests, and Engagements

IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn spoke at this symposium at Exeter University, in the context of the "Understanding and Managing Intra-State Territorial Contestation: Iraq's Disputed Territories in Comparative Perspective" research initiative.

US Foreign Policy, Selective Engagement, and Stabilization

On September 27, 2016, Dr. Denise Natali, Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), delivered a lecture on ongoing narrative changes among the American the foreign policy establishment, the different challenges faced by US foreign policy in Iraq, as well as stabilization expectations and strategies for a post-ISIS Iraq.

Specializing on the Middle East, trans-border Kurdish issue, regional energy security, and post-conflict stabilization, Natali dedicated the bulk of her talk to the conceptualization of past, current, and future US foreign policy towards Iraq and the region.

The KRG-Iran Pipeline: Political theater or game-changer?

On August 15, 2016, IRIS fellow Cameron Bell delivered a lecture on his ongoing research on the KRG-Iran pipeline agreement. His research, grounded in political science theories, focuses on ideology, interest, and institutions that act as potential vectors of success or failure of this agreement. His talk highlighted the gaps in knowledge and, thereby, the questions that remain unanswered.

The pipeline would move 250,000 barrels per day (bpd). Beyond this, however, very few details are publicly available at the time being, and conflicting information is circulating. It is still unclear, for example, what the starting point –either Kirkuk or Koya –and end point of the pipeline –either refineries in Tehran or Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf –would be. This type of detail can drastically shift the stakes at play.

Another issue being debated in the possibility of building a second pipeline as part of this deal, from Kho Mor to Khanaquin, effectively shoring up disputed territories (DIBs) by proactively connecting them to grid. In other words, linking Kahnaquin to the KRG through an energy route would change facts on the ground and alter the Erbil-Baghdad power balance with regards to regarding DIBs claims. A podcast of the talk can be accessed [here](#).

Labor Market and Rebel Recruitment in the Syrian Civil War

On August 10, 2016, Vera Mironova, PhD candidate at the University of Maryland, Research Fellow in International Security at Harvard's Belfer Center, and IRIS Fellow, gave a guest lecture presenting her ongoing research on the labor market for rebel recruitment in the Syrian civil war.

She presented her data on ground troops fighters, which is part of the broader "Voices of Syria" project. She started by explaining her methodology and research design, based on labor markets theory and behavioural economics, as well as the main conclusions to be drawn from the research thus far. Mironova's research does not include Daesh. The goals of the group –the creation of a Caliphate and the imposition of Sunni Islam –are very different from those of other rebel groups in Syria. In this sense, they compete on a different labor market.



After ISIS: Politics, Deal-Making, and the Struggle for Iraq's Future

The Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center and American University of Iraq, Sulaimani hosted the event “After ISIS: Politics, Deal Making and the Struggle for Iraq's Future,” with Mina Al-Oraibi, Senior Fellow at the Institute of State Effectiveness; Akeel Abbas, Professor at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani; Christine van den Toorn, Director of the Institute of Regional and International Studies at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani; and Bilal Wahab, Professor of International Studies and Director of the Center for Development and Natural Resources at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani. Henri J. Barkey, Director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center, moderated the event.

As the Islamic State (ISIS) is rolled back and defeated in Iraq and Syria, the fight for Iraq's political future will begin. On both a local and national level, a new political deal between the country's parties and communities will be necessary to keep the country together. Liberated territories will need to be secured by forces acceptable to locals, populations will need to return, and towns must be rebuilt. In addition, intra-Kurdish politics and Baghdad-Erbil relations will need a new framework—whether the Kurds decide to stay or go. Underlying these dynamics is the poor state of the post-oil price decline economy of the Kurdish region. The full recording can be accessed [here](#).

Understanding and Managing Intra-State Territorial Contestation: Iraq's Disputed Territories in Comparative Perspective

On May 24th and 25th, 2016, the University of Exeter and IRIS hosted a research workshop at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) on the question of Iraq's disputed territories (DIBs). Over a dozen officials and experts from the DIBs as well as from Erbil and Baghdad were in attendance for focus group discussions on the current context in the areas, some of them liberated over the past year from ISIS. They included representatives from Diyala (Jalawla, Saadiya, Khanaqin), Salahaddin (Tuz Khormatu, Sleiman Beg, and the Salahaddin Provincial Council), Ninewa (Sinjar and the Provincial Council), Sulaimani, Baghdad, Erbil, and Kirkuk.

This exercise research was part of a major project on Iraq's disputed territories funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and jointly led by both the University of Exeter and the University of Birmingham. More information on this initiative can be found [here](#).

Displacement in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Impact, Response and Options

In May 2016, IRIS collaborated with Chatham House for a workshop on the IDP crisis in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). This meeting sought to understand the social, economic and political impacts of the displacement crisis in the KRI. It assessed the effectiveness of the response at the local, national and international levels, in mitigating these impacts before exploring options for how the response could be improved. The meeting convened representatives of local communities and civil society impacted by the crisis, alongside international NGOs and multilateral organizations, policy analysts and leading international experts to bring comparative experience and share lessons from other displacement crises. A report on the findings of this workshop was published [here](#).



Seminar on Private Sector Economic Development in the KRG

In May 2016, Dr. Frank R. Gunter, Professor of Economics at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, visited AUIS and gave a guest lecture titled: "Private Sector Economic Development in the KRG." Professor Gunter is the author of *The Political Economy of Iraq: Restoring Balance in a Post-Conflict Society* (2013), which was selected by *Choice* magazine as an "outstanding academic title" of the year. The Arabic version, translated by Mohaned al Hamdi Ph.D., was published in Iraq in 2015 and quickly became the best selling business or economics book in the country.

A Discussion with Sayyid Jawad Al-Khoei

In April 2016, IRIS and AUIS hosted a roundtable discussion with Sayyid Jawad Al-Khoei, Secretary General of the Al Khoei Institute in Najaf, about the current role of Najaf, the Marjayia in Iraq and the Middle East region. As a vocal champion of interfaith dialogue and the UNESCO Chair for the Development of Interreligious Dialogue Studies in the Islamic World at the University of Kufa, Sayyid Jawad had an open and honest exchange with AUIS students, faculty members and religious leaders.

Atlantic Council Task Force on the Future of Iraq

Along the sidelines of the Sulaimani Forum, in March 2016, IRIS hosted the Atlantic Council Task Force on the Future of Iraq for meetings with officials from the Kurdistan Region and its disputed territories. The Task Force is chaired by Ryan Crocker, former US Ambassador to Iraq, and is made up of 25 leading Iraqi experts, including IRIS Director Christine van den Toorn and former IRIS fellow Ahmed Ali. The Task Force will the interviews and research conducted in Sulaimani as well as in Baghdad, Washington and Berlin to compose their recommendations for the next US administration. More information on the Task Force can be found [here](#).

Ezidis Beyond ISIS: Genocide, Gender & Return

On February 11 2016, IRIS and AUIS's Center for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) hosted a conference on the future of the Ezidi community of Iraq, titled "Ezidis Beyond ISIS: Genocide, Gender & Return." The event brought together Ezidi survivors of ISIS atrocities, agencies working to document these atrocities, practitioners providing services to survivors, academics working in the field, and relevant international experts to create an in depth understanding of - and generate action on - one of 21st century's worst crimes against humanity in the four following areas: documentation and the genocide case; trauma and recovery; reconstruction; and finally, reconciliation and return.

Ms. Monique Villa, CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation and founder of TrustLaw and TrustWomen, delivered the keynote address.

A summary of the panel discussions can be found [here](#).





Escaping the Rentier Model: A Conference of Reforms in Iraq and Kurdistan Region

On January 21, 2016, the Center for Development and Natural Resources (CDNR), under the aegis of IRIS, hosted a conference on economic reforms in Iraq and the KRI. The event convened representatives from Baghdad and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), experts and policy makers and diplomats and business leaders. Comprised of three panels, the CDNR conference covered challenges facing the oil and gas sector,

ways to diversify the economy, as well as public finance management. A full report can be accessed [here](#).

The conference opened with introductory remarks from Dr. Bilal Wahab, founding director of CDNR, and a short welcome address by Dr. Esther Mulnix, interim president of AUIS. Dr. Amanj Raheem, chief of staff of the KRG Council of Ministers spoke on behalf of the KRG Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani and delivered his keynote speech. Further opening remarks were also made by Mr. Rebaz Hamlan, KRG finance minister, and Matthias Mitman, U.S. Consul General in Erbil.

The opening panel focused on the oil and gas sector in the country. Moderated by Dr. Bilal Wahab, the participants focused their comments on the implications of the falling oil prices on the economy and the reforms required for the oil and gas revenue management.

Moderated by AUIS MBA alumnus, Dr. Bayad Jamal Ali, the second panel focused on the economic policies of the country. Participants discussed diversification and reducing dependence on oil rent. Speakers also discussed ways to enable a free market environment and providing healthy space to the private sector for it to play a greater role in improving the economy and employment, and bringing more transparency to the system.

The concluding panel focused on recommendations for facing the burgeoning economic challenges facing Iraq and the KRI. The discussion focused on reforming institutions and policies to develop a stable long-term policy while managing the current crisis. Some discussion also focused on the future of Baghdad-KRG financial relations. Aras Mohammad, finance expert and public accountant, chaired the panel.

Economic Recession in the KRI

On October 22 2015, IRIS hosted a roundtable discussion on the economic crisis in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) led by non-resident IRIS Fellow, Dr. Mark DeWeaver. Indicators of the crisis, as well as potential mitigating measures, were discussed and debated amongst participants.

Representatives of leading companies from the local economy, including oil & gas, capital management and trading, insurance, construction, medical services, and agriculture participated in the roundtable discussion. AUIS students and graduates working in the private sector were also in attendance. More information on roundtable attendance and discussions can be found [here](#); a full report on the economic crisis in the KRI was published [here](#).

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

IRIS and AUIS seek to bring top academics, analysts and research practitioners in relevant fields with a focus on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq KRI, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. IRIS Fellows are thus graduate students, academics, experts, journalists, or practitioners who are visiting the KRI in order to conduct research or implement projects in fields that are pertinent to IRIS's thematic and geographic focuses.

Below is a list of 2015-2016 IRIS fellows detailing their field of research and sector of activity.

Mark DeWeaver

Dr. Mark DeWeaver is an emerging-markets fund manager, independent economist, and author. He joined IRIS as a non-resident fellow in September 2015. His research focuses on interactions between Iraq's public and private sectors, the impact of changes in oil prices and the security situation on the Iraqi economy, and economic conditions in the Kurdistan region. His publications include the book *Animal Spirits with Chinese Characteristics: Investment Booms and Busts in the World's Emerging Economic Giant* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), op-eds for major media outlets including the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Financial Times*, and contributions to the *Journal of Socio-Economics and Economics Bulletin*.



Ahmed Ali

Ahmed Ali was an IRIS research fellow from August 2015 until August 2016. During his stay, Ali produced analytical reports covering the most notable events taking place in Iraq at the time. He was in fact the co-founder of the IRIS Iraq Report (IIR).

Before joining IRIS, Ali was the Director of the Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor and Visiting Senior Fellow at the Washington-based Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC). He has been researching Iraqi affairs for almost a decade and he is an expert in Iraq's military and political affairs. He has written extensively on ISIS, Iraq's military forces, Iraqi Shi'a armed groups, Iraqi tribes, and Iraqi politics. Ali has taught and lectured in several American universities and institutions, such as the U.S. State Department's Foreign Service Institute, the Naval Postgraduate School programs, the American University in Washington, Georgetown University, National Defense University, the U.S. Army War College, and Tufts University. Ali also served as a Senior Iraq Research Analyst and Iraq Team Lead at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). Ali has written for leading American publications including the *New York Times* and *Foreign Policy Magazine*. He is a regular media commentator and has appeared on CNN, NPR, MSNBC, BBC, Channel 4 News, C-Span, Al-Hurra television, Voice of America, Al-Jazeera, Sky News Arabia, Radio Free Iraq, and Al-Arabiya.

Cameron Bell

Cameron Bell conducted his IRIS summer fellowship on a potential KRG Iranian pipeline deal in July and August, 2016 . Bell was an associate for four years to the CIO of leading Arab builder Consolidated Contractors Company, S.A.L., where he specialized in systems analysis . His team developed best practices in the management of project data on a range of megaprojects throughout the Arab region, including LNG terminals, ports, airports, integrated gas developments, and petrochemical facilities. Previously, Bell was special assistant and aide to Dr. Condoleezza Rice, former U.S. Secretary of State. Bell is a Master of Public Policy candidate, Balliol College, at the University of Oxford, and a Master of Science candidate, construction engineering and management at Stanford University. He holds a Bachelor of Arts, with honors, from Stanford University as well, including coursework at Qatar University, where he focused on U.S. foreign policy.

James 'Mac' Skelton

James 'Mac' Skelton joined IRIS as a research fellow in May 2016, and will split time between Sulaimani and Beirut through April 2017. He is currently completing a PhD in Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. Skelton's doctoral research, funded through fellowships from the Social Science Research Council as well as the American Research Institute in Iraq, focuses on Iraqis' experiences of cancer care and therapeutic travel post-2003. Skelton has co-published for *The Lancet* medical journal and is a contributor to Brown University's Costs of War project. Prior to doctoral study, he was Senior Fellow at the Business Council for International Understanding. He holds an MA in Anthropology from the American University of Beirut and a BA in Religion from Davidson College.

Sherizaan Minwalla

Sherizaan Minwalla is a human rights lawyer who joined the Institute of Regional and International Studies as a non-resident fellow in November 2015. She is working with two co-researchers and with the support of AUIS students and students in the United States to review media content in English, Arabic, and Kurdish to identify and analyze content against ethical guidelines developed by the Global Protection Cluster.



Minwalla has spent the past decade based in the Kurdistan Region and working throughout Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. She is an expert on gender based violence and access to justice for survivors in both the United States and Iraq. In the United States, Sherizaan ran a program to represent immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault to legalize their immigration status under the Violence Against Women Act. Working with the National Immigrant Justice Center, Sherizaan represented several hundred women, men and children throughout State of Illinois. From 2011–12, she was the Director of Legal and Social Services with the Tahirih Justice Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting women and girls fleeing gender-based violence.

Marie LaBrosse

Marie LaBrosse, poet, translator, and former AUIS faculty member, translates classical and contemporary Kurdish poetry, hosts readings with poets, and introduced the annual translation workshop at AUIS over the course of 2015. As a non-resident fellow, Ms. LaBrosse is working to compile and translate the complete works of a Kurdish poet hailing from Kirkuk. She has been published in *The Iowa Review*, *Words Without Borders*, *The Fair Observer*, and *91st Meridian*. She will be starting a PhD in Kurdish Studies at the University of Exeter this year.

Vera Mironova

Vera Mironova, graduate research fellow at Harvard University and PhD candidate at the University of Maryland, conducted research as a visiting fellow with IRIS, in July 2015 and August 2016, on how exposure to violence affects individual economic and political decision-making. Her fieldwork consisted of frequent visits and observation in several IDP and refugee camps in the KRI. Mironova also conducted an advanced workshop on behavioral economics with AUIS students, all of who developed and implemented research projects on how individual attitudes towards international relations affect attitudes towards the milk purchase and consumption. She remains a Non-Resident Fellow of IRIS.

Dalton Dwyer

Dalton Dwyer was a junior summer fellow with IRIS in 2015, and his research focused on the legal instruments used to determine the right to intrastate autonomy and self-determination, specifically as applied to the Kurdish regions. He conducted a survey of local communities gauging their attitudes on the feasibility of pan-Kurdish federalism and the tangibility of a greater Kurdistan. He received over two hundred responses from across Sulaymani, Erbil and Duhok and plans on publishing the results in 2016. Dalton holds a B.Sc. in Foreign Policy and a J.D. in International Law from Georgetown University, and has a diploma in Persian studies from the University of Tehran.



By virtue of being based at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), part of IRIS's mission is to support the work of faculty members with a vision for developing research and resources at the University in their field of expertise. As such, several centers and programs have been recently launched or are in the process of being launched in the coming academic years.

Center for Development and Natural Resources, Dr. Bilal Wahab



The [Center for Development and Natural Resources](#) (CDNR) was launched at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani in the spring of 2015 as an initiative of the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS). The Center is well positioned to bring together representatives from, and create partnerships among, academics, policymakers, civil society and industry in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to engage in constructive discussion and analysis of questions pertaining to the energy sector, stability and economic development. The Center will pursue two types of core activities: first, through research and analysis, CDNR will become a resource on all topics regarding Iraq's oil, governance, and federalism, and will add value to current scholarship in the region. Second, through education and capacity development, CDNR will enhance the levels of expertise of government officials, Iraqi citizens and students to better understand and make decisions regarding oil governance in the country. Among the research projects and events CDNR plans to execute is a 'Cost-Benefit Analysis of an Independent Kurdish Energy Industry', 'Revenue Governance: An Analysis of the Oil and Gas Revenue Fund Law', an annual conference on 'Oil and Economic Development', as a 'Future Leaders Initiative' to empower students interested in governance, politics, and the economic development of Iraq and the KRG to become leaders in their respective fields.

Center for Archeology and Cultural Heritage, Dr. Tobin Hartnell

The [Center for Archeology and Cultural Heritage](#) (CACHE) aims to promote the study and preservation of cultural heritage in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The Center held its first Annual Iraqi Cultural Heritage Conference last April 2015 and will start its first excavation August 2015. There are several projects in the pipeline including the Topographical Mapping and Geophysical subsurface scanning of the area of Peshdar, the creation of a Virtual Museum of Sulaimani History, an environmental history of Sulaimani Province using Remote Sensing, and the establishment of a Digital Humanities Lab and a Virtual Museum of Kurdish Technology.



