



Integrated Country Strategy

IRAQ

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Iraq remains a critical foreign policy priority for the United States. As cemented by the last round of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue in July 2021, our enduring partnership with the Iraqi people is the cornerstone of our policy for the region.

As Iraq recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to rebuild following the defeat of ISIS, we will focus on enhancing the government's ability to provide for the needs all its citizens, including its most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Through humanitarian assistance programs and support for Iraq's economic diversification and reform efforts, we will empower Iraq to assist vulnerable populations, pursue inclusive private sector growth, and mitigate the worst effects of climate change. These efforts will also combat the threats posed by violent extremist ideologies, preventing them from again threatening the security of the American people, and will promote an economic climate in Iraq that leads to shared prosperity for both countries. We must also continue to defend democratic norms and support the development of a resilient democracy in Iraq. To this end, we will encourage the Iraqi government to root out corruption, enhance the rule of law, and advance citizen rights as enshrined in its constitution. And in the interest of U.S. national security, the Mission will continue to partner with Iraq as it ensures the enduring defeat of ISIS and charts an independent foreign policy free from malign influence.

To achieve these goals, Mission Iraq will empower sections and agencies under Chief of Mission authority through sector-specific working groups focused on Mission Goals and designed to facilitate interagency cooperation and accountability for Mission Objectives. In addition to the working groups' continuous assessments, the Mission will also conduct an annual review of progress on achieving these priorities.

Support an Iraqi Democracy that Delivers for All Citizens: Mission Iraq will seek to encourage governmental and civil society efforts that strengthen citizen-responsive governance, security, democracy, and the rule of law. Mission Iraq will continue to prioritize U.S. assistance programs that encourage durable solutions for Iraq's most vulnerable populations, including IDPs, returnees, ethnic and religious minorities, women, and LGBTQI+ persons.

Promote Inclusive Growth Through Real Economic Reform: Mission Iraq will continue to support the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) implementation of an economic reform agenda that fosters a diversified and inclusive private sector and that combats the corrosive effects of corruption. Targeted legal, regulatory, and governance reforms will enhance transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption. This will promote a business climate more conducive to U.S. companies and U.S. investment, foster an economy which creates more jobs for the Iraqi people, and strengthen the market for U.S. exports. As part of these reform efforts, we will encourage Iraq to accelerate its cross-sectoral actions to mitigate climate change.

Bolster Iraqi Independence: Mission Iraq will encourage Iraqi government, economic, and civil society leaders to focus on building a strong, stable, independent Iraq free from malign influence. The Mission will encourage senior Iraqi leaders to expand, strengthen, and balance Iraq's regional and international security and economic partnerships. In particular, Mission Iraq will encourage Iraq's continued cooperation with its regional neighbors, including the Gulf countries, to enhance security, critical infrastructure, and economic development. Through our security partnership, we will enhance Iraq's ability to counter both internal and external threats to its sovereignty.

Support a Resilient Iraqi Kurdistan Region: Mission Iraq will facilitate dialogue among the different political movements in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) to strengthen the KRG as anchored within a federal Iraq. These efforts include encouraging the KRG to take an active and productive role in Iraq's national political process and ensuring that both the KRG and GOI address seriously each other's legal and constitutional concerns. The Mission will also continue to encourage economic and political reform within the IKR, with the goal of fostering a more business-enabling environment and a protected space for civil society.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Fostering Stability and Economic Growth

- **Mission Objective 1.1:** Iraq improves its ability to address the needs of its people, including vulnerable, marginalized, and disenfranchised populations, such as IDPs, returnees, members of religious and ethnic minority communities, women, LGBTQI+, and those vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies.
- **Mission Objective 1.2:** Iraq expands inclusive private sector growth, creating opportunity for U.S. investment through comprehensive economic reforms, anti-corruption measures, and diversifying Iraq's economy.
- **Mission Objective 1.3:** Iraq accelerates cross-sectoral actions to achieve its 2021 nationally determined contribution (NDC) goals to mitigate climate change, including moving toward a net-zero target for greenhouse gas emissions, in part through adopting renewable energy sources.

Mission Goal 2: Bolstering Democracy and Governance

- **Mission Objective 2.1:** Iraq improves the effectiveness of its democratic processes and its protection of human rights and constitutional freedoms.
- **Mission Objective 2.2:** Iraq's governance institutions improve accountability, transparency, and performance in serving its citizens.

Mission Goal 3: Ensuring Iraq's Sovereignty and Security

- **Mission Objective 3.1:** Iraq increases its capacity to project its sovereignty.
- **Mission Objective 3.2:** Iraq has the requisite operational and institutional capacity to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, counter threats, sustain defense equipment, and effectively secure its borders.

Management Objective 1: Modernized and enhanced the safety, security, and services of the Mission-wide platform to facilitate U.S. diplomacy.

Management Objective 2: Reassessed Mission Staffing levels and management platform were appropriate to efficiently achieve Mission objectives, including thorough incorporation of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) best practices.

Management Objective 3: Improved consular capabilities to provide services to American citizens in Iraq and increased the legitimate travel of Iraqi nationals to the United States while ensuring U.S. security and supporting U.S. economic interests.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1 | Fostering Stability and Economic Growth

Description | To support the development of an Iraq that is an independent and prosperous ally of the United States, we will enhance Iraq's ability to provide for all its citizens, including its most vulnerable, as it continues to recover and rebuild following the defeat of ISIS, emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, and takes steps to address the threats of climate change. Through these efforts we will promote the inclusive economic growth necessary for a stable and prosperous society and create new markets for U.S. exports.

Objective 1.1 | Iraq improves its ability to address the needs of its people, including vulnerable, marginalized, and disenfranchised populations, such as IDPs, returnees, members of religious and ethnic minority communities, women, LGBTQI+, and those vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies.

- **Justification** | Despite success in facilitating nearly five million IDP returns in the immediate years following the defeat of ISIS, the Government of Iraq now must find durable solutions for the remaining 1.2 million displaced individuals, many facing some of the most challenging return and reintegration issues. Iraq's success in finding solutions for this population depends not only on its financial, legal, policy, and organizational contributions needed to empower communities to find durable solutions for IDPs and others affected by the absence of opportunities, but on continued support from the international community that would empower the government to pursue its efforts. Iraq's future stability also rests on empowering disenfranchised youth, supporting the recovery and sustainability of religious and ethnic minority communities, and ensuring that unemployment, lack of basic services, and the effects of endemic corruption do not lead to violence. By empowering Iraqi communities, particularly youth, Iraq will be able to decrease sectarianism and vulnerability to extremist ideology and counter the disinformation and divisive rhetoric.

The United States will partner with Iraq to support its efforts to find long-term solutions for its IDP population, including meeting the needs of religious and ethnic minority communities who were victims of genocide by ISIS. We and the international community will encourage the Government of Iraq to implement social cohesion programs to reintegrate those stigmatized with ISIS-affiliation, by facilitating inclusive, safe, and voluntary reintegration into their areas of origin, assist relocation to other areas in Iraq, or allow local integration.

- **Linkages** | Draft MENA JRS 2022-2026 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; JSP Plan 2022–2026: 1.3, 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 3.5; INSSG; National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality; Department of State “Promoting Gender Equality and Advancing the Status of Women and Girls”; SAR; DRL FSB Goal 1,2,3,4; PRM Mission Statement; Migration and Refugees Assistance Act
- **Risks** | If the Government of Iraq (GOI) does not improve its ability to address the needs of its people in a transparent, accountable, and equitable way, perceptions of neglect and marginalization will persist, leaving communities vulnerable to the emergence of parallel power structures and malicious actors. This will increase both Iraq’s instability and potential threats to the national security of the United States.

Objective 1.2 | Iraq expands inclusive private sector growth, creating opportunity for U.S. investment through comprehensive economic reforms, anti-corruption measures, and diversifying Iraq’s economy.

- **Justification** | Widespread corruption within a largely state-controlled economy has stifled economic opportunity and depressed private sector development. This has heightened political instability, inflamed violent extremism, and exacerbated poor humanitarian conditions. These issues threaten not only the economic and national security of Iraq, but also the United States and its allies in the region. Mission Objective 1.2 aims to help build Iraq’s capacity to strengthen and expand its private-sector economy, expose and minimize corruption, improve the investment climate for both Iraqi and foreign companies, and protect U.S. companies operating in Iraq.

Through sustained diplomatic engagement at all levels, we will enhance Iraq’s ability to implement international best practices, improve institutions, reduce corruption, promote women in the workforce, push for regulatory and legislative reforms to eliminate barriers to doing business and improve the investment climate, and perpetuate a rules-based economic system. We must also work with U.S. energy companies to help support Iraqi goals for economic diversification by pursuing renewable energy sources; sustainable energy development beyond oil production, including gas capture; and assisting Iraq in reducing its greenhouse emissions. In total, these efforts will boost inclusive private-sector entrepreneurship, help Iraq create jobs, lessen dependence on energy from Iran, build trust among Iraqis about the responsiveness of their own government, strengthen political stability, and boost economic prosperity.

- **Linkages** | Draft MENA JRS 2022-2026 3.1, 3.2, 3.3; JSP 2022-2026 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4; INSSG; National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality; Executive Order on Organizing and Mobilizing the United States Government to Provide a Unified and Effective Response to Combat COVID-19 and to Provide United States Leadership on Global Health and Security (EO 13987)
- **Risks** | Failure to assist Iraq in its private-sector development through economic reform, meaningful anticorruption measures, institutional development, and support for economic diversification engenders numerous risks to the viability of the Iraqi state. These risks include diminished trust in Iraqi governance, reduced foreign investment, insufficient levels of entrepreneurship and job creation, increased malign influence in the economy and control over Iraqi hydrocarbon resources, erosion of Iraqi sovereignty, rising youth unemployment, and a bloated public sector.

Objective 1.3 | Iraq accelerates cross-sectoral actions to achieve its 2021 nationally determined contribution (NDC) goals to mitigate climate change, including moving toward a net-zero target for greenhouse gas emissions, in part through adopting renewable energy sources.]

- **Justification** | Addressing climate change is an urgent national security priority. Iraq is the fifth most susceptible country to the adverse effects of the climate crisis according to the UN Environment Program's Global Environment Outlook 6 report and is already challenged by extreme temperatures and water scarcity. Desertification affects 39 percent of Iraq's land area. Deforestation is a major problem throughout the country, with one government report estimating that of the 30 million date palms growing in Iraq prior to the Iran-Iraq War, only a third remain. While Iraq's oil dependence poses significant challenges to its adoption of major climate reforms, there are opportunities on the margins. Iraq flared 17.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2020, accounting for 11.5 percent of the global total, second only to Russia. Harnessing this wasted resource for power generation is the easiest way Iraq can reduce its fossil fuel emissions and achieve its NDC goals. This would also lessen dependence on electricity and natural gas imports from Iran (and exposure to U.S. sanctions on Iran) during the scorching summer months, when demand exceeds domestic power generation capacity. Iraq has great potential for solar energy production and the Council of Ministers in June 2021 approved a plan to seek 12 GW of renewable energy via investment.
- **Linkages** | INSSG; MENA JRS 5.1, 5.2; JSP 2022-2026 2.4, 3.4; Draft USAID Climate Strategy 2022-2030; Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (EO 14008); Executive Order on Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration (EO 14013); National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality

- **Risks** | Failure to address and mitigate the effects of climate change will affect Iraq's future stability, as well as the stability of the region. Iraq has seen climate-related protests throughout the country since 2018, particularly in the south, related to energy and potable water scarcity. Current drought conditions are expected to worsen to historic levels in 2022, with predicted severe impacts on food security, agriculture and related value-chain economic production, and the availability of water. Iraq still struggles to negotiate with its neighbors on water sharing protocols, as both Iran and Turkey continue to manipulate water flows. In addition, Iraq continues to experience climate-related migration, causing tension and instability. Iraq's reliance on electricity and natural gas imports from Iran, as well as water from neighboring countries, places it at high risk of exploitation. Iraq's continued dependence on neighbors for essential resources places it and the region at risk for future instability.

Mission Goal 2 | Bolstering Democracy and Governance

Description | To strengthen democratic values, we will encourage the development of an inclusive, responsive democracy in Iraq that is transparent, accountable, and committed to international norms.

Objective 2.1 | Iraq improves the effectiveness of its democratic processes and its protection of human rights and constitutional freedoms.

- **Justification** | Advancing inclusive democratic governance and human rights is a national security priority. Iraq's constitution enshrines the importance of elections, human rights, and core freedoms including those of belief, speech, and assembly. Iraq holds regular, competitive elections in accordance with its constitution. Iraq's various partisan, sectarian, and ethnic groups are represented in the political system. However, the "muhasasa"/ sectarian apportionment power-sharing system has historically advantaged narrower sectarian and party interests. Iraq's democratic processes are challenged by corruption, violence, external interference, and Iraqi actors interested in maintaining the prevailing status quo. Human rights are generally respected in Iraqi law, but the GOI has limited ability to enforce those provisions, even within its own institutions.

Mission Iraq will advocate for continued reform and policy implementation to further consolidate and reform Iraq's democracy, provide technical assistance and training to strengthen Iraq's political processes including elections, and train and support Iraqi government and civil society alike to uphold democratic values and human rights.

- **Linkages** | INSSG; Draft MENA JRS 2022-2026, Goal 4, Objectives 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4; JSP 2022-2026 3.1, 3.2, 5.2; National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality; Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World; USAID Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Strategy (2013)
- **Risks** | Weakening constitutional freedoms, human rights violations, and compromised or illegitimate political processes would lead to further violence, instability, continued low voter participation in elections, and potentially the eventual demise of Iraq's democratic experience. By bolstering Iraq's democratic institutions such as the Independent High Electoral Commission, the Human Rights Commissions, the Council of Representatives, and the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament, as well as supporting proponents of democracy in Iraqi civil society, the USG can help Iraq consolidate its democratic gains, mitigate drivers of violence and instability, and insulate itself from malign external interference.

Objective 2.2 | Iraq's governance institutions improve accountability, transparency, and performance in serving its citizens.

- **Justification** | Iraq continues to struggle with internal conflict and its associated fallout, systemic corruption, fiscal instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite its wealth of natural resources, poor service delivery remains a chief grievance among Iraq's disaffected citizens, and Transparency International's Corruptions Perceptions Index consistently ranks Iraq among the most corrupt countries in the world. The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators also place Iraq in the tenth percentile or lower for Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption.

Improving the effectiveness – in terms of performance, accountability, and transparency – of Iraq's governance institutions to deliver for all Iraqi citizens, is a pre-requisite to earning the trust of disaffected Iraqis, contributing to the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict, and improving Iraq's trajectory toward sustainable growth and prosperity. While the United States has historically supported capacity building within Iraq's governance institutions, now is an opportune time to transition from a focus on GOI capacity to a focus on GOI performance to tangibly respond to the needs of all Iraqi citizens. Mission Iraq can provide technical assistance, capacity development, grants, and targeted in-kind demonstrative assistance to improve service delivery outcomes in sectors with potential for high impact and visibility, including energy, water, and sanitation and waste management. Mission Iraq will similarly complement performance-oriented assistance to public sector service delivery with commensurate support for Iraqi civil society. Such support aims to improve prioritization and oversight of GOI initiatives and bolsters the Iraqi social contract. Mission Iraq will also continue to support the improved regulatory and procedural environment necessary to attract

private sector investment, a requisite for Iraq's longer term energy challenges. U.S. leadership on these issues will advance democratic norms and mitigate threats to democracy and rule of law.

- **Linkages** | INSSG; Draft MENA JRS 2022-2026 1.2, 4.1; Draft JSP 2022-2026 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5; National Security Study Memorandum 1 to Prioritize the Fight Against Corruption (NSSM1-1); National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality
- **Risks** | The Iraqi government's continued lack of accountability, transparency, and performance (manifested in endemic corruption and inadequate service delivery) further erodes the Iraqi public's trust in government, driving ongoing protests, violence, and instability. The unequitable distribution of services, public investment, and opportunities drives inter-sectarian tensions. By helping Iraq and civil society address the political and economic aspects of corruption, Mission Iraq can help Iraq meet the basic needs of its citizens and mitigate the resurgence of extremist groups or sectarian tensions.

Mission Goal 3 | Ensuring Iraq's Sovereignty and Security

Description | To protect the security of the American people, we will continue our enduring partnership with Iraq's security forces to disrupt terrorist networks, prevent an ISIS resurgence, deter foreign aggression, and combat threats to Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Objective 3.1 | Iraq increases its capacity to project its sovereignty.

- **Justification** | Since 2019, there have been encouraging signs that Iraqis are beginning to oppose the current level of negative Iranian influence in their country, as demonstrated by public opinion polls, the Tishreen protest movement, and the results of the 2021 parliamentary elections. Iraq has also sought to play a constructive role in the region, hosting the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership and increasing its outreach to Jordan and Saudi Arabia, among others, in an effort to project its power and influence and increase regional stability. In general, there is great potential for rival states and non-state actors and ideologies to lose influence in an Iraq whose people, especially the younger generation, are supportive of a strong and independent Iraq active in the world. However, internal conflict, foreign malign influence from neighbors like Iran, and terrorist ideologies persist as threats to Iraqi sovereignty and security, and therefore U.S. national security.

- **Linkages** | NDAA '22; INSSG; Draft JSP 2022-2026 1.4; MENA JRS 2022–2026 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, JSP SO 3.3
- **Risks** | Iraq's failure to adequately project its sovereignty and address citizen grievances, particularly regarding corruption, could lead to civil unrest and leave Iraq at the mercy of competing militias and predatory foreign powers. Given Iran's influence on Iraq's access to electricity, natural gas, and water supplies, this current dependence also threatens Iraq's ability to provide essential services to its citizens. To safeguard and advance gains made in Iraqi sovereignty in recent years, the United States will continue supporting its unified Iraq policy as well as capacity-building programs in civilian security, counter-corruption, and rule of law to empower Iraqi citizens in their daily lives. Mission Iraq will also support Iraq's healthy bilateral and regional relationships as well as partnership with NATO.

Objective 3.2 | Iraq has the requisite operational and institutional capacity to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, counter threats, sustain defense equipment, and effectively secure its borders.

- **Justification** | Historically, budget constraints and institutional shortcomings have hindered the effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces (ISF). Mission Iraq is engaged in efforts to increase the host-nation security forces' institutional capacity by partnering in several U.S. security assistance programs, including Foreign Military Sales (FMS); Foreign Military Financing (FMF); International Military Education and Training (IMET); Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR); International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE); and Anti-terrorism Assistance (ATA). This partnership enhances Iraqi operational and institutional capacity to sustain its borders long-term, enables the host-nation security forces to defend against threats to the Iraqi people and the region, and furthers the continued stabilization of the country.
- **Linkages** | INSSG; Draft 2022–2026 JSP 1.4; MENA JRS 2022–2026 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; Memorandum on Revitalizing America's Foreign Policy and National Security Workforce, Institutions, and Partnerships.
- **Risks** | The failure of Iraq's military would destabilize both the country and the region and threaten U.S. national security objectives. It would embolden internal and external threats and threaten uncontrolled borders, further contributing to breakdowns of civil society, rule of law, and sovereignty. Such failure also would open the door to additional efforts by Iran-aligned militias to intimidate the government and people, as well as a potential resurgence of ISIS. To mitigate this risk, the United States will maintain our partnership with the ISF and assist in support of regional security.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1 | Modernized and enhanced the safety, security, and services of the Mission-wide platform to facilitate U.S. diplomacy.

- **Justification** | Malign actors maintain a capability to inflict harm and disrupt Mission operations necessitating the construction of living and office spaces that met the Overseas Security Policy Board (OSPB) standards. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for less densely packed housing to discourage the spread of future pandemics. The Mission, in collaboration with the Bureaus of Diplomatic Security (DS), Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO), and Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) gave infrastructure issues the highest priority to ensure that all personnel at all three locations lived and worked in spaces with overhead cover. In addition, the Mission worked with the bureaus to ensure that critical infrastructure were protected from attacks. Furthermore, just as the Mission prioritized the physical infrastructure needs, Post needs to address the Information Technology (IT) issues that require attention. Both the Baghdad Embassy Compound (BEC) and BDSC need to modernize their cabling and other IT systems. Besides age, heavy use by large populations further degraded IT systems. Erbil will be in a better position once OBO completes the New Consulate Compound (NCC).

Other issues include the need for a renovated Embassy Operations Center (EOC) on the BEC that is modern and can provide the command and control necessary during a crisis. The existing EOC entered service in 2009 and suffers from aging and outdated equipment, requiring extensive maintenance.

- **Linkages** | INSSG; JSP 4.2, 4.3
- **Risks** | Failure to protect Mission personnel and infrastructure from attacks will limit the ability of the mission to carry out its objectives. Moreover, aging IT infrastructure will slow the Mission's ability to achieve the Mission goals and expose the Mission to security breaches.

Management Objective 2 | Reassessed Mission Staffing levels and management platform were appropriate to efficiently achieve Mission objectives, including thorough incorporation of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) best practices.

- **Justification** | The 2019 staffing cap imposed on Mission Iraq via the Zero-Based Staffing Review (ZBSR) restricted the number of direct hire positions and limited the Mission's ability to operate at full capacity. Given the fact that Iraq has a multi-ethnic, multi-religious composition and that non-Iraqi personnel of all hiring types are drawn from more than 25 countries, implementing best practices for diversity and inclusion was paramount for a smoothly functioning diplomatic Mission. In addition, the management platform has many non-traditional elements, such as over 4,000 contractors, with only 10% of them local Iraqi nationals. The Mission housed and provided life support services for the remaining 90% of the contractor population. In FY2020, the Mission had a \$510 million ICASS budget, representing 14.2% of the worldwide ICASS budget of \$3.59 billion.
- **Linkages:** INSSG; JSP 4.1; Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce (EO 14035); Executive Order on Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council (EO 14020); Memorandum on Revitalizing America's Foreign Policy and National Security Workforce, Institutions, and Partnerships; Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce (EO 14003)
- **Risks** | Inadequate U.S. Direct Hire staffing hamstrung the Mission's ability to accomplish the Mission goals listed above as well as maintain effective management controls. While American direct hires cycle in and out on one-year tours of duty, LE Staff provided the institutional memory, consistency, and expertise for the Mission in a challenging environment.

Management Objective 3 | Improved consular capabilities to provide services to American citizens in Iraq and increased the legitimate travel of Iraqi nationals to the United States while ensuring U.S. security and supporting U.S. economic interests.

- **Justification** | Protecting American citizens was the top priority for U.S. diplomatic missions, but the ongoing conflicts in Iraq made it difficult for consular officers and staff to safely engage with American citizens who visit, reside, and do business in Iraq. Consular services in Iraq were significantly affected by the destruction of the Consular CAC at the BEC on December 31, 2019. Since the loss of the Consular CAC in Baghdad, private American citizens and Iraqi visa applicants had not been able to come onto the Embassy compound, which forced them to either delay receiving services or go to another U.S. post, primarily the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil. Reestablishing mechanisms for U.S. citizens to access consular services in Baghdad, preparing for crises, and broadening consular communication networks improved Mission Iraq's ability to protect Americans who reside, work, and visit Iraq.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the number of staff and customers that could come to the compounds in Erbil and Baghdad, which essentially halted immigrant and nonimmigrant visa processing in Iraq. Travel for business, education, and tourism built economic and people-to-people ties. Immigration reunited families and allowed people to flee harmful situations and seek new opportunities, especially people from vulnerable and marginalized populations. Several hundred Iraqis who worked to support U.S. government initiatives in Iraq awaited processing of their Special Immigrant Visa applications. The Consular Section played a critical role in ensuring security and combating fraud in visa applications. Restoring consular capacity to process visa applications, particularly with regards to in-person interviews, conduct fraud investigations, and perform outreach activities on study and travel to the United States greatly increased U.S. Mission Iraq's ability to facilitate legitimate travel to the United States.

- **Linkages:** Consular Affairs Functional Bureau Strategy Framework Strategic Goals 1, 2, 3.

- **Risks** | If U.S. Embassy Baghdad failed to improve consular services in Iraq, then American citizens residing, working, or visiting Iraq were less likely to receive appropriate and timely services if they were victims of crime or stuck in the country without travel documents, such as women who were held against their will for cultural reasons. Without robust visa services, the United States risked losing positive people-to-people interactions with tourists, students, academics, and businesspeople from Iraq and were less competitive than other nations in securing U.S. interests in Iraq. Without a fully functioning fraud prevention program, the United States missed material fraud trends and potentially weakened border security with regards to Iraqi travelers. In addition, local employees who risked their lives by working for the U.S. government and their families continued to be in significant danger without resumed immigrant visa services at U.S. Embassy Baghdad.