



# After the strike

EXPOSING THE CIVILIAN HARM EFFECTS OF  
THE 2015 DUTCH AIRSTRIKE ON HAWIJA



## Colophon

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Cover photo: A victim of the June 2015 airstrike on Hawija looks at the destruction in the industrial neighbourhood. Photo by PAX/Ayman al-Amiri, February 2022.

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### Al-Ghad League for Woman and Child Care

Al-Ghad was established in 2004. It is an Iraqi not-for-profit organisation that is focused on serving vulnerable people in many Iraqi governorates in order to reach a world of optimism. Al-Ghad is focused mainly on basic human rights, community capacity building, and the strengthening of state institutions through implementing development projects in partnerships with international and local agencies in which every man, woman and child can enjoy an empowered life in security, and with dignity and equal opportunities. Al-Ghad works hard to contribute to the protection of people through enabling them to get their basic human rights.

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Founded by Prof. dr. Jolle Demmers and dr. Lauren Gould in 2017, Utrecht University's The Intimacies of Remote Warfare (IRW) is an evidence-based research programme that aims to inform academic, public and policy debates on the intimate realities of remote wars waged by advanced militaries. The programme investigates the politics, practices, technologies, and political economy of remote warfare, as well as its impact on civilian harm and blowback. IRW engages with key stakeholders to co-create knowledge, hold expert round tables, and formulate policy recommendations. It shares its findings through academic journals and books, op-eds, podcasts, documentaries, public events, and (social) media outlets. The Intimacies of Remote Warfare programme falls under Utrecht University's Institutions for Open Societies and UGLOBE's Contesting Governance flagship.

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This is a joint publication by the PAX Protection of Civilians (PoC) programme, Utrecht University's Intimacies of Remote Warfare (IRW) programme and the Al-Ghad League for Woman and Child Care. Saba Azeem and Lauren Gould are the research leads on behalf of PAX and IRW respectively. For queries and comments regarding the report, reach out to [azeem@paxforpeace.nl](mailto:azeem@paxforpeace.nl) and/or [L.M.Gould@uu.nl](mailto:L.M.Gould@uu.nl).

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# List of abbreviations

ABC	Area Based Coordination
AOAV	Action on Armed Violence
CDE	Collateral Damage Estimate
CENTCOM	Central Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Authority
EUR	Euro
EWIPA	Explosive weapons in populated areas
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBU	Guided bomb unit
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRW	Intimacies of Remote Warfare
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	Intelligence, Reconnaissance and Surveillance
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KII	Key informant interview
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KVA	kilovolt-ampere
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières/ Doctors without Borders
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
PoC	Protection of Civilians
PoL	Pattern of Life
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RCH	Red card holder
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
US	United States
USD	United States Dollar
VBIED	Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device

# Executive summary

On the night of 2-3 June 2015, two Dutch F-16s targeted a factory for vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) in use by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the city of Hawija, Iraq. The strike was carried out as part of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) and the larger US-led Coalition against ISIS. The airstrike caused a large secondary explosion which resulted in the destruction of a major share of the industrial neighbourhood of Hawija and led to severe civilian harm.

The airstrike on Hawija was not an isolated event. From October 2014 until December 2018, the Netherlands flew over 2,100 F-16 missions across Iraq and Syria. Overall, the Coalition against ISIS has been responsible for over 34,000 airstrikes, dropping over 100,000 bombs that have severely affected the lives of civilians across Syria and Iraq. Compared to earlier campaigns, Western states involved in OIR rely heavily on remote warfare and verticality, made possible through airstrikes and local partnerships.

For the case of Hawija, neither the Coalition against ISIS, nor the Dutch government – which only admitted responsibility for the strike in 2019, 4.5 years after the event – has taken any steps to investigate and assess the impact of the airstrike in greater detail, or to speak with civilians themselves – victims and witnesses – to hear their accounts of the strike and its resulting civilian harm. When it came to civilian harm, the idea of ‘unknowability’ prevailed in the political debates about Hawija: it was considered impossible to trace civilian harm effects after so many years. This opaqueness is a general pattern in remote military operations.

This report addresses this gap. It is the product of a joint research by Al-Ghad League for Woman and Child Care, PAX and the Intimacies of Remote Warfare (IRW) project at Utrecht University. It informs on the human impact of the airstrike, primarily through interviews with 119 victims, supplemented with visual material, interviews with 40 key informants, 4 focus group discussions, field trips and secondary literature.

So far, reports and accounts of civilian harm have often applied a limited scope, focusing mostly on immediate impacts such as deaths, physical injuries, and property damage. As such, the reverberating civilian harm effects of military operations remain understudied: long-term and indirect effects are often forgotten or neglected.

Therefore, this report makes a distinction between *direct civilian harm effects* like deaths, injuries, material damages and psychological trauma, and *reverberating civilian harm effects*, such as displacement, economic harm, and the impact of the strike on access to medical care and education. In addition, we show what the airstrike on Hawija means to the affected civilians: how this event figures in their collective *interpretations of civilian harm* and how these translate into particular claims and demands.

## Key findings

In terms of *direct civilian harm effects* this research shows that at least 85 civilians died as a direct result of the June 2015 airstrike, of which we were able to verify 44 based on official documentation. Moreover, we found evidence that points to a potentially greater number of civilian casualties that has not been investigated. Among others, this concerns internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have not been identified and remain buried under the rubble in the targeted area. In addition, dozens of civilians suffered physical injuries because of the airstrike, ranging from amputated limbs; loss of sight, hearing, or smell; burns; fractures; facial deformities; to respiratory difficulties. The fact that this was a remote intervention in an area controlled by ISIS led to greater harm, as people could not access the medical care that would have ameliorated their condition or – as alleged in certain cases – would have saved their lives. Nearly all respondents reported suffering from one or more symptoms that indicate psychological trauma. Examples are insomnia, sensitivity to loud noises, panic attacks, and in a few cases, suicidal tendencies. A reported 6,000 houses and 1,200 shops and businesses were damaged due to the impact of the strike and subsequent secondary explosion. Several important governmental buildings and community infrastructure were destroyed, including the civil defence department, an electricity sub-station, and a number of schools.

The June 2015 airstrike has caused a wide range of *reverberating civilian harm effects*, including an increase in displacement; many forms of economic harm (e.g., increase in health care-related expenses, decrease in or loss of income, loss of the family breadwinner, increase in child labour cases); and reduced availability of access to important services like electricity, clean water, and adequate healthcare and education. Various forms of civilian harm intersect and reinforce each other. For instance, some of those who sustained injuries that were not seen to in the immediate aftermath of the strike, are now disabled and cannot find a job to sustain their family.

Where it concerns the *interpretations of civilian harm*, many respondents indicated that they initially welcomed the Coalition airstrikes against ISIS and believed they would be able to defeat ISIS in a precise and discriminate way. After the June 2015 airstrike, the harm it caused and the lack of acknowledgement and assistance afterwards, civilians felt trapped under indiscriminate Coalition airstrikes as well as ISIS' violent rule. This led to a more negative perception of the Coalition. Most respondents indicate they blame the Coalition and the Netherlands for what happened to them and for failing to address the civilian harm done. After ISIS was driven out of Hawija in 2017, reconstruction of the industrial neighbourhood has been slow and does not adequately address current needs in Hawija. The 4.4 million EUR in funding to rehabilitation efforts allocated by the Netherlands is insufficient. Victims demand an official apology from the Dutch government and direct financial compensation to address their needs.

# Recommendations

Considering one of the main aims of this report is to amplify the voices of the affected civilians in Hawija, we would like to start by reiterating their main demands here. From our research it has become indisputable that they seek an apology, specifically from the Dutch Government, the then-Minister of Defence (who has since assumed the role of Special Representative of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, UNAMI), and those responsible for carrying out the attack. They also seek individual compensation.

PAX, IRW and Al-Ghad want to draw the Dutch Government, Parliament and the broader Coalition's attention to the civilian harm experienced by the victims of the June 2015 airstrike on Hawija, as well as to the general risks of engaging in remote airstrikes in rebel-held urban settings for civilians. These actors should recognise the direct and reverberating civilian harm effects of airstrikes, and how these can undermine the short and long term aims of bringing 'enduring security' for civilians in theatres of war. Our advice is directed at the Dutch Parliament, Government, and specifically the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, however, we strongly encourage other (Coalition) states to follow suit.

### ***Recommendations regarding Hawija***

- Provide a meaningful explanation and apology to the victims of the airstrike. Visit the area, meet with local authorities and victims in the city, and acknowledge and apologise for the civilian harm done.
- Offer appropriate compensation, regardless of legal responsibilities, to all civilians who suffered direct and/or reverberating harm.
- Set up an independent civilian harm accountability cell to think through ways to ethically deal with requests for individual and collective compensation. When mapping and providing funds for compensation, the cell should take into account civilian perceptions regarding aid organisations and should prioritise working with and through trusted local civil society organisations.

### ***Politically deliberate the possibility of civilian harm***

- Prior to engaging in a military operation, investigate and politically debate potential civilian harm, and the challenges to the mitigation thereof.
- Avoid using 'precision' and 'zero civilian casualties' discourse in relation to (procedures and technologies of) military operations and acknowledge the inevitability of civilian harm in armed conflict.
- Be transparent in the use and understanding of the term 'civilian harm', distinguish between direct and reverberating effects, and use definitions.
- Make transparent and uniform reporting on civilian harm to Parliament a baseline requirement for participation in military coalitions.
- Add mitigation, monitoring, reporting, and accounting for civilian harm to the article 100 procedure.

### ***Mitigate civilian harm***

- Systematically include direct and reverberating civilian harm effects in collateral damage estimates.
- Make an in-depth analysis and gain understanding of the complexity of local (urban) settings



before engaging in remote airstrikes. Be aware of the shifting alliances and affiliations on the ground, as well local grievances, political sensitivities, economic and infrastructural interdependencies.

- Consider the potential for secondary explosions when developing and approving a target. Refrain from carrying out airstrikes in populated areas when secondary explosions are anticipated to occur.
- Take into account the compounding effects of conducting airstrikes in rebel-held populated areas when developing and approving a target. Refrain from carrying out airstrikes when rebels do not permit civilians to travel, and where they control vital public services.
- Ensure that the red card holder (RCH) has access to all intelligence used to make a collateral damage estimate to inform decision-making when evaluating a target request.
- Do not use explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and join the international declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA).
- Include civilian harm to event-specific, yearly, and end-evaluation reports to draw lessons to inform military-strategic choices for present and future operations.

#### ***Monitor civilian harm***

- Set up a civilian harm mitigation cell to track and investigate all (allegations of) civilian harm caused by military operations immediately after they occur.
- Make a distinction between direct and reverberating effects when investigating civilian harm and study the ways these effects intersect and reinforce each other.
- When investigating civilian harm, triangulate data as much as possible by combining military data with open-source intelligence, geolocation analysis, on-the-ground investigations, witness interviews, and document analysis. Remain open to cooperation with non-military organisations to address potential evidentiary gaps when any of the above (e.g., ground investigations) are not considered possible.

#### ***Report and respond to civilian harm***

- Include civilian harm to event-specific, yearly, and end-evaluation reports to Parliament to inform political decision making regarding the continuation of, and participation in, military missions.
- Set up a budget, policy, and standard operating procedures to enable compensation in the event of direct and reverberating civilian harm, regardless of legal responsibilities.
- When civilian harm incidents occur, offer a detailed explanation of how this could have happened, as well as a meaningful apology to the victims.
- Set up an independent civilian harm accountability cell to think through ways to ethically deal with requests for explanations, apologies, and individual and collective compensation.

# Chapter 1

# 1. Introduction

This report is about the Dutch F-16 airstrike on Hawija of 2-3 June 2015 and its aftermath. It informs on the intimate realities of civilian harm in remote wars. We aim to understand, by means of an in-depth case study analysis, the consequences of remote military interventions for civilians in rebel-held territories, in particular OIR in Syria and Iraq. The report examines the direct and reverberating civilian harm caused by the airstrike. It combines research on material impacts, as well as reported effects on (mental) health, income, and education, with an additional focus on socio-political effects: how the airstrike figures in collective interpretations of violence and war. These include stories of blame and accountability, perpetrators and victims, and liberators and enemies. Apart from investigating how civilians cast blame and responsibility, the research also documents the hopes and expectations of civilians for compensation and recognition.

This introduction provides a description of the airstrike and its immediate impact, our motivations and objectives in researching its civilian harm effects, as well as our reflection on the wider significance of 'Hawija' as a case study of civilian harm in remote interventions, and what constitutes so-called 'remote warfare'.

## 1.1 The airstrike of 2-3 June 2015

*We were sleeping in the yard of the house, my family and me. It was like an atomic bomb. The sound of the explosion reached Kirkuk. On the second morning, we saw the streets consisting of rubble from doors, windows, glass, and iron. The families who lived in the industrial area did not come out from under the rubble. Seven days after the bombing, their smell came out from under the rubble. Everything was destroyed including stores, car dealerships, and the industrial area.<sup>1</sup>*

On 2 June 2015, various people in Hawija heard a fighter jet heading towards their town, an all too familiar sound during that stage of the war. The plane flew over the city's industrial neighbourhood and then disappeared. Reportedly, at different moments throughout the day, a jet returned and hovered, but nothing happened.<sup>2</sup> People went about their day as always and returned home in the evening. It was a hot Iraqi summer, and many people chose to sleep on the roof or outside where it felt slightly cooler. Other people were inside, often near open windows, asleep or preparing to go to bed. Then, at twelve o'clock at night, again two fighter jets flew over Hawija, changing everything.

Moments earlier, two Dutch F-16s had been given permission to target a collection of three buildings in the industrial neighbourhood of Hawija, a city in Iraq. These buildings had been identified by the US-led Coalition as an ISIS factory for VBIEDs.<sup>3</sup> The planes dropped their munitions, later assumed to be Boeing guided bomb unit (GBU)-39s. As the GPS-guided missiles came into contact with an estimated

18,000 kilos of TNT stored in the factory a large secondary explosion took place.<sup>4</sup> The explosion was so strong that it was reportedly felt in Kirkuk, at a distance of approximately 50 kilometres from Hawija.<sup>5</sup> The impact of the shock wave reached a diameter of more than five kilometres and left an eleven-metre-deep crater.<sup>6</sup> The blast recorded 4.3 on the Richter scale.<sup>7</sup>

Civilians who lived through the events of that night described the impact of the explosion as 'hell': 'It was an explosion so powerful that I thought it was an atomic bomb. I thought the source of the noise was that a missile hit my house.'<sup>8</sup> And: '[W]e all thought it was an earthquake by how violently the ground shook, and then there were so many particles and dust in the air, that it felt like a storm.'<sup>9</sup>



Figure 1: Debris strewn across the industrial neighbourhood, which housed many car dealerships and garages, September 2021. PAX/Ros Boer.

<sup>1</sup> Hanan Fadhil Jawad, interview 8 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq. Note that pseudonyms were used for most victims of the airstrike we spoke to. For more information see chapter 3 on Methodology.

<sup>2</sup> Abdul Razzaq Khalid Ali, interview 27 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Ghazi Khalil Ibrahim, interview 12 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Defence, "Wob-besluit Defensie over aanvullend onderzoek Defensie burgerslachtoffers Hawija", Letter (BA202001976), February 17, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Jannie Schipper and Kees Versteegh, "Hoe Nederland met ondeugdelijke informatie de strijd met IS aanging," *NRC*, November 27, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Lex Runderkamp and Ben Meindertma, "In Hawija is niemand de Nederlandse bomaanval vergeten," *NOS*, October 18, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Georgia Edwards and Megan Karlshoej-Pedersen, "Survivors of Hawija call for justice, two years after Dutch finally admitted role in 2015 catastrophe," *Airwars*, November 4, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Head of Hawija Department of Water Resources, key informant interview 15 September, 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>8</sup> Abdul Razzaq Khalid Ali, interview 27 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>9</sup> Sabah Kareem Ali, interview 9 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



In the air hung ‘the smell of sulphur and the atmosphere turned into dust and [was a] yellowish [hue] after a while.’<sup>10</sup> People described the situation after the explosion as ‘terrifying and frightening’<sup>11</sup>, with debris flying around them: ‘[S]hrapnel was flying above us, electricity [cables] fell on us. [...] We were not able to see because of the dust, the smoke and the atmosphere as everything became white. We could not see a thing[.]’<sup>12</sup>

After the explosion, Hawija’s industrial neighbourhood was a flattened wasteland, with ‘trees uprooted from the ground’.<sup>13</sup> Jassim recalled: ‘On the second day, when we went out to the industrial neighbourhood, we saw the industrial neighbourhood destroyed. All of it from shops to stores to factories, including my own, they were reduced to ashes.’<sup>14</sup>

The resulting situation in Hawija’s affected neighbourhoods and hospital was horrifying:

*I saw children, the elderly, young men, and women, all of them injured. I saw them in the hospital, some of them had their feet cut off, some had amputated hands, some had their eyes come out, some had severe head injuries. Whereas some were burned because of shrapnel, and some had injuries to their stomach and intestines, and some of them had back injuries.*<sup>15</sup>

Since Hawija General Hospital was under ISIS control at the time, many injured civilians were denied treatment, or in other cases, had to wait for long hours and only received emergency first aid, often without anaesthetics. Estimations by media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Coalition itself of the number of civilians who died as an immediate result of the airstrike range from 70 to 170.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2 Why study this airstrike?

For many Dutch citizens ‘Hawija’ was their first encounter with the Netherlands being at war in the Middle East. It was, however, only four years after the bombardment, in October 2019, that investigative journalists from news outlets NOS and NRC exposed the Dutch airstrike to the larger public.

One reason why the Dutch public was largely unaware of the consequences of its military’s active participation in the US-led coalition war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria was simple: they were scarcely reported on. Different from the military engagement in Afghanistan there were hardly any Dutch ‘boots on the ground’ in OIR. And thus, no returning military casualties or wounded to write about. This is illustrative of how over the past decade, Western militaries have shifted to so-called ‘remote warfare’. Wars are fought from a distance, and largely from the air. And with this, they disappear off the public’s radar.

A second reason is that the then-Dutch Minister of Defence, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, on multiple occasions withheld information on the airstrike and its aftermath from the Dutch Parliament. Only weeks after the destruction in Hawija, on 30 June 2015, the Minister informed Parliament that ‘there has not been collateral damage’.<sup>17</sup> By now it is clear, however, that the Minster was well aware of the likelihood of severe civilian harm at the time (see chapter 4). Immediately after the attack, upon their control flight, the F-16 pilots reported to the Dutch Ministry of Defence (MoD) that a whole district in Hawija had been destroyed. On 15 June 2015, the Minister also received a Civilian Casualty Credibility Assessment report from the commander of the Coalition, the US Central Command (CENTCOM). Herein, the latter acknowledged that claims made by multiple open sources, including Reuters, were credible, namely that over 70 civilians had died in the incident.<sup>18</sup>

For the following four years the Dutch government kept Hawija silent for operational and security reasons. Only after the news of the Dutch involvement in October 2019 did a series of parliamentary queries and debates begin. These debates largely revolved around questions of legality, protocols, procedures, and civilian casualty numbers. When it came to civilian harm, the idea of ‘unknowability’ prevailed: it was considered impossible to trace civilian harm effects after so many years. In addition, doing research in Iraq was deemed too risky, both because of the ongoing violence and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the end, the government adopted a resolution to review the military’s civilian casualty and transparency policies. A year later, in October 2020, a commission, led by Minister of State Winnie Sorgdrager, was installed to further investigate the airstrike. In December 2020, the Minister of Defence also earmarked a ‘voluntary compensation’ of 4.4 million EUR supporting ‘projects for the community of Hawija’.<sup>19</sup> At the time of writing, these initiatives have materialised in only limited concrete results.<sup>20</sup> Also, the Dutch government has not officially apologised for the damage done, and no official delegation has visited Hawija so far.

Soon after the reports on the destruction in Hawija of 2019, PAX and the IRW programme at Utrecht University decided to set up a joint research project on the civilian harm effects of the airstrike. As practitioners and academics, we saw that the civilian harm dimension and the civilian voices were being overlooked in most conversations on Hawija. With the help of our Iraqi partner, the Al-Ghad League for Woman and Child Care, we set up a joint project to inform on the human impact of the airstrike. As will be outlined in chapter 3 on Methodology more thoroughly, in the period from February to November 2021, local researchers interviewed 119 civilians impacted by the airstrike and 40 key informants, and PAX staff made three field trips to Hawija to collect information and interview stakeholders.

With this research, PAX, IRW and Al-Ghad aim to bring to the fore the experiences of civilians in Hawija. In doing so, the main aims of this research include:

<sup>10</sup> Nour Hamad Majeed, interview 4 August 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>11</sup> Sabah Kareem Ali, interview 9 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>12</sup> Huda Rafeeq Saleh, interview 7 April 2021, Tuz Khurmato, Iraq.

<sup>13</sup> Hamad Mohammad Sultan, interview 2 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>14</sup> Jassim Mohammad Hussein, interview 23 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>15</sup> Khalid Qassem Abdullah, interview 6 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>16</sup> These figures, what they are based on, as well as the challenges in counting civilian deaths are discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ministers of Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, “Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme: Letter (27 295, nr. 593), June 30, 2015: 53.

<sup>18</sup> CENTCOM, “Al Hawijah ISIS VBIED Factory”, *The New York Times*, December 18, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Compensatieprojecten voor gemeenschap Hawija starten in 2021,” Press release (Ministry of Defence), December 15, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> The press release of the MoD of 15 December 2020 highlights that the allocated budget of 4.4 million EUR will be spent ‘in consultation with the community’. As recently as 1 December 2021, however, the Mayor of Hawija, Sabhan Khalaf Ali, declared that he has not been contacted about this.

- To make visible what has remained invisible so far, to reveal and interrogate that which is officially rendered an unfortunate but inevitable manifestation of ‘collateral damage’
- To demonstrate that civilian harm is about much more than mere casualties, and that the airstrike continues to have an effect on civilians’ lives and livelihoods until today
- To humanise those who have suffered the consequences of the airstrike by collecting, translating, and publishing their testimonials and demands. That is, to facilitate their position as interlocutors in a conversation on what this violence is about, and how it should be dealt with
- To highlight the need for transparency, recognition, and accountability on civilian harm in OIR, and on the Hawija airstrike in particular
- To insightfully inform the Dutch public and Parliament, as well as other interested parties, on the unintended direct and reverberating local effects of the (remote) war that is waged in their name
- To further our understanding of war and violence as supported and contested through stories: about necessity and inevitability, suffering and blame, right and wrong, justice and revenge. An analysis of collective interpretations of violence is crucial in understanding societal support for the continuation or possible resolution of violent conflict
- To help decision makers (e.g., the Coalition, member governments, MoDs, parliamentary commissions,) make an evidence-based assessment of whether the military campaign of OIR is able to fulfil its aim to ‘defeat ISIS and create enduring security’
- To contextualise the notion of ‘precision warfare’ as promoted by the Coalition

Although the legal underpinnings of the Dutch contribution to OIR are an important topic in and of itself, these are not investigated here.<sup>21</sup> We do not deal with the question of whether this strike was, according to International Humanitarian Law, a lawful one. What we aim to highlight in this report is that also in allegedly lawful settings of war, awful human suffering takes place. Legality is not synonymous with good strategy: what is lawful can still be awful.

### 1.3 Prior research

Since 2019, NGOs Airwars and PAX, as well as Dutch investigative journalists and academics have reported on the civilian casualties and material damage caused by the airstrike on Hawija. The devastating effects of urban conflict for civilians and the direct, as well as indirect harm this causes were earlier explored in *Seeing Through the Rubble*, a joint report by Airwars and PAX (2020).<sup>22</sup> This publication analysed the impact of explosive weapons in three cities – Raqqa, Mosul, and Hawija – in the context of the fight against ISIS. This report builds on the findings of that publication by offering a more detailed research of the civilian harm caused specifically by the 2-3 June airstrike on Hawija’s industrial neighbourhood. The data in the previous report is supplemented with fieldwork and over 100 in-depth interviews with witnesses, victims, and key informants. This is moreover the first research that combines an assessment of the direct and reverberating effects of a specific OIR airstrike with research on what this devastation means to civilians and communities in rebel-held territories, and how it figures in collective interpretations of war and violence.

<sup>21</sup> At the timing of writing this report human rights lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld submitted a subpoena against the Dutch state in name of eleven civilian casualties in Hawija. The court is yet to decide whether this was a legitimate target under International Humanitarian Law. For a legal review of the Dutch participation in OIR as a whole, see: Gelijs Mollier and Martijn Hekkenberg, “The Dutch Contribution to the Armed Coalition Against ISIS,” in *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law 2016: The Changing Nature of Territoriality in International Law*, Martin Kuijer and Wouter Werner, eds. (The Hague: M.C. Asser Press, 2017), 315–336.

<sup>22</sup> Roos Boer, Laurie Treffers and Chris Woods, “Seeing Through the Rubble: The civilian impact of the use of explosive weapons in the fight against ISIS,” Report (Airwars and PAX: 2020)



Figure 2: Al-Ghad and PAX research teams interview civilians affected by the June 2015 airstrike. Here, a mother and son whose personal accounts can be read in full on pages 93-94, February 2022. PAX/Ayman al-Amiri.

A detailed investigation of the case of Hawija is significant. First and foremost, for the above reasons of disclosing the harm done to civilians, and to facilitate discussions on transparency, recognition, and accountability. A large part of this report is therefore dedicated to the testimonies of those who are still ‘living the blast’ up until today. But Hawija also helps us to think through the changing nature of contemporary warfare, and the role of democratic oversight herein. For this, we need to first understand how ‘precision strikes’ figure in the new way of (remote) war.

### 1.4 The significance of Hawija: the failures of precision warfare in rebel-held urban settings

The airstrike on Hawija was not an isolated event. From October 2014 until December 2018, the Netherlands flew over 2,100 F-16 missions across Iraq and Syria.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the Coalition against ISIS has been responsible for over 34,000 airstrikes, dropping over 100,000 bombs across Syria and Iraq, often called in by local partners. Compared to earlier campaigns, Western states involved in OIR rely

<sup>23</sup> The Dutch government recently announced that it will remain active within the anti-ISIS Coalition in Iraq until at least the end of 2022. Due to a continued threat of ISIS in the region the Dutch military will stay present to secure the airport of Erbil and protect military advisors operating in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Source: *Trouw*, November 6, 2022.

heavily on remote warfare and verticality, made possible through airstrikes and local partnerships (the so-called Security Force Assistance). This reliance on air power not only made this a low-risk war and almost perfectly asymmetrical, it also implied a distancing from what is termed ‘ground knowledge’ including the ability to assess, monitor, and effectively report on civilian harm. The dependence on air-based warfare also involved an emphasis on the key role of precision technology through a reliance on smart laser or GPS-guided bombs. From the very beginning the military campaign was presented as the most precise military operation in history.

Only weeks after the Hawija bombardment, on 30 June 2015, then-Dutch Minister of Defence Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, highlighted the precise nature of the Dutch air operations and the resulting lack of civilian harm. In what is now acknowledged by her successor Ank Bijleveld as an act of ‘misleading of parliament’, the Minister stated at the time that:

*The targeting process always includes a risk-assessment of collateral damage. That actually has to come down to zero. All of this is so carefully carried through that until now we have had no real cases. It was a difficult process, because the F-16s are not present on the ground, and we do not have boots on the ground, but we have had to establish that there has not been collateral damage in that sense. You can also bomb just a part of a building. It is that precise. It is not as if you destroy a whole neighbourhood or district. That is because of these smart weapons I just referred to.<sup>24</sup>*

The airstrike on Hawija crushed any such claims about precision warfare as a way to protect civilians in settings of urban combat. At the time, the civilian casualty toll at Hawija was the highest of the Coalition’s war. Two years later, in 2017, the heavy shelling of other ISIS-held cities such as Mosul and Raqqa, led to even higher numbers of civilian casualty. All that time, ‘precision warfare’ was embraced as the Coalition’s strategy of intensive urban combat and continued to be seen as to significantly reduce the risk of civilian casualties. In hindsight, had the Netherlands and the Coalition admitted the high casualty toll at Hawija in 2015, lives could have been spared later in the campaign as a result of challenges to this ‘precision strike’ narrative. In addition, several parliamentary votes and debates on Dutch participation in the war against ISIS took place between 2015 and 2019, the outcome of which may have been substantially affected by the disclosure of at least 70 civilian deaths from the Dutch action.

All this calls for a careful analysis of the Hawija airstrike and its aftermath. The shift to remote warfare in densely populated, and rebel-held cities confronts Western societies with a new set of political, ethical, and also military-strategic challenges and risks that deserve attention and deliberation. We argue that any such deliberation is incomplete without taking into account the human suffering of those at the receiving end of remote warfare.

## 1.5 The larger picture: the shift to remote warfare

But what is this ‘remote warfare’? Over the past decade, Western democracies have increasingly resorted to governing their security threats from a physical distance. Remote warfare is characterised by a shift away from ‘boots on the ground’ deployments towards light-footprint military operations

(often in coalitions) and involves a combination of drone and airstrikes. Western militaries, but also military powers such as Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia, rely on special operation teams and private contractors, and work through local ‘proxies’ who do the actual fighting and dying on the ground. In many ways, OIR is a classic example of remote warfare.

But why do we see this turn to remote operations now? First of all, the failures and costs of interventionist ground wars of the early 2000s such as that of Afghanistan and Iraq invoked a sense of war fatigue among Western publics and governments, ushering in a ‘pull-back’ era. The US and its coalition partners resorted to ‘precision’ airstrikes with a shift to smaller, clandestine, more focussed interventions over the past decade. A second reason is democratic risk-aversion. Simply put, decision makers in democracies dread losses among their military personnel, more so than authoritarian leaders, because rising numbers of casualties, they fear, will have adverse effects on public support and lower their chance of re-election. Finally, the recent revolution in military technology and the emergence of a ‘military-tech complex’ is a driving force behind remote warfare. Both the classic weapons industry, which produces armed drones, fighter jets, smart bombs, and so on, and the developments in artificial intelligence and autonomous weapon systems push for, and transform contemporary warfare.<sup>25</sup>

Taken together, this ‘remoting’ of war, expressed by a reliance on air force, limited ground knowledge, and dependency on complex and often rivalling local partnerships, comes with a set of challenges. As this report will demonstrate, the Hawija airstrike and its aftermath exposed many of the political, ethical, and military-strategic challenges and paradoxes of remote warfare. Key among these is how remote-controlled warfare allows for the denying, silencing, and dismissing of civilian harm as ‘unknowable’. The lack of acknowledgement of civilian harm, and the wide gap between military and public reporting on civilian fatalities in rebel-held territories, risks significant harm to democratic standards of information, oversight and control, in addition to further risks to civilians in war zones, and lack of recognition and accountability for victims.

## 1.6 Outline

The report is structured as follows. We begin with unpacking the complex notion of civilian harm and explain how we *define* (chapter 2) and *investigate* civilian harm (chapter 3). Moving to the case study, we discuss the monitoring and transparency regarding civilian harm in OIR more broadly, and in the Hawija case specifically (chapter 4). Then we present a historical background of Hawija and life under ISIS (chapter 5). Consequently, the airstrike of 2-3 June 2015 and its *direct* (chapter 6) and *reverberating* effects (chapter 7) are presented through the voices and testimonials of victims, witnesses and stakeholders combined with geo-location analysis. Additionally, we outline how civilians ‘made sense’ of the airstrike, how it (re)configured interpretations of blame and responsibility, and we list what our respondents’ demands, hopes and expectations are regarding issues of recognition, acknowledgement, and accountability (chapter 8). In the final chapter, we discuss our main findings.

<sup>24</sup> Dutch Parliament, “Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme”, Letter (27 925, nr. 560), June 30 2015, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Jolle Demmers and Lauren Gould, “The Paradox of Remote Warfare,” in *Remote Warfare: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Alasdair McKay, Abigail Watson and Megan Karlshøj-Pedersen, eds. (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2020), 34-47.

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# Chapter 2



## 2. Defining civilian harm

The frequent occurrence of remote warfare in urbanised contexts requires an understanding of the impact of these military strategies on civilians living and working in the homes, towns and cities being targeted. What are the material costs and human toll associated with remote and urbanised warfare and how do we even begin to define and assess these? This chapter offers an introduction to the challenges posed by these types of warfare to the protection of civilians, provides our definitions of civilian harm and the direct and reverberating effects as employed throughout this report. In addition, we explain why it is important to study the interpretations of civilian harm.

### 2.1 Civilian harm in urban conflict

The effects of urban warfare on civilians have come under intensified attention in recent years as we have seen a number of conflicts with worrying numbers of civilian deaths, injuries, and unimaginable material damages. Recent wars have involved fighting and destruction in densely populated cities like Mosul (Iraq), Aleppo and Raqqa (Syria), Hudeidah (Yemen) and Mariupol (Ukraine). In 2015, 50 million people lived in cities that were affected by conflict; as more people flock to cities, this number is expected to grow in coming decades.<sup>26</sup>

It is not merely the population density that raises concerns in urban warfare. Cities – because they are built around complex networks of infrastructure and (interconnected) systems – are particularly vulnerable to the effects of warfare. Many urban services are interdependent and are relied upon by large numbers of people simultaneously. When fighting causes damage to one system, the effects carry over to other systems or create additional problems:

*If a water or sewer line is damaged by a bomb, thousands of people might lose access to clean water, which in turn leads to sanitation problems and a far greater risk of infectious diseases. If a hospital is bombed, the impact goes well beyond the tragic deaths of the health-care workers and patients and the destruction of the health-care facility. Over time, thousands more people may die of easily treatable diseases and infections because the health-care facility and its workers were not there to help them.*<sup>27</sup>

A violent event like the explosion of a single bomb can thus ‘create ripple effects that extend far beyond the original target’.<sup>28</sup>

Waging war in cities poses additional challenges for the protection of civilians. Civilians and/or civilian infrastructure often live and exist in close proximity to combatants and military targets. Some infrastructure may even have ‘dual use’, that is having both military and civilian functions. Combined, this puts civilians at greater risk of being in harm’s way when military forces misidentify

targets, when the destruction of a target occurs too close to civilians, or when military forces fail to account for the impact of infrastructure destruction on civilians.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Explosive Violence Monitor, on average no fewer than nine out of ten casualties from explosive weapons used in towns and cities are civilians.<sup>30</sup> Explosive weapons with so-called wide area effects like large bombs and missiles in particular put civilians at great risk.<sup>31</sup> This ratio decreases to approximately one out of four when these weapons are used in lesser populated areas. However, we must remain aware that the Explosive Violence Monitor statistic only says something about the direct impact of explosive weapons; it does not monitor the indirect effects of such weapons use on civilians.

In contemporary warfare, the aircrafts and launch vehicles used by advanced militaries are increasingly defined by their ability to attack from afar. These include drones, F-16s, but also artillery strikes launched 50 kilometres away from the urban centres they target. As explained in the Introduction, resorting to this type of warfare has enabled advanced militaries to wage war from a distance with relatively little risk to their own troops. However, with this type of warfare come many risks for local populations. For them, there is nothing ‘remote’ about the harm such weaponry causes. In the fight to recapture the cities of Mosul and Raqqa, for instance, the Coalition relied on aerial warfare – artillery and airstrikes – to combat ISIS. In Mosul this caused an estimated 9,000–11,000 civilian casualties, the destruction of over fifteen neighbourhoods, three-quarters of roads, and all of the city’s bridges; as well as damage to most of the electrical network. It is estimated that eight out of ten buildings that were hit were residential buildings. In Raqqa, Coalition bombings left over 70 per cent of the city in ruins, causing more than 1,600 civilian fatalities and 11,000 houses to become uninhabitable.<sup>32</sup>

Understanding the particularities of remote warfare in urbanised settings is crucial to this report, for the 2-3 June 2015 strike on Hawija was also carried out using remote means – namely GPS-guided missiles dropped by F-16 jets – in a populated area. By using the existing body of research on remote and urban warfare our findings contribute to our collective understanding of the dangers and challenges this type of warfighting causes. Of particular interest in this report is the inclusion of longer-term impact on ordinary civilians, and the understanding that the reverberating effects of this sort of harm go far beyond direct civilian casualties.

<sup>26</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross and Interaction, “When War Moves to Cities: Protection of Civilians in Urban Areas,” Roundtable Outcome Report (May 2017).

<sup>27</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, “I Saw My City Die: Voices From the Front Lines of Urban Conflict in Iraq, Syria and Yemen,” Special Report (May 2017), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Erin Bijl, Welmoet Wels and Wilbert van der Zeijden, eds., *On Civilian Harm* (Utrecht, PAX: 2021), 245.

<sup>29</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross & InterAction, “When War Moves to Cities.”

<sup>30</sup> “Homepage,” Action on Armed Violence, accessed December 6, 2021, <https://aoav.org.uk>.

<sup>31</sup> See the textbox on page 28 for a more elaborate discussion of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA).

<sup>32</sup> Abigail Watson and Alasdair McKay, “Remote Warfare: A Critical Introduction,” in *Remote Warfare: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Alasdair McKay, Abigail Watson and Megan Karlshøj-Pedersen (E-International Relations, 2021), 7–33; Amnesty International, “New reports place Mosul civilian death toll at more than ten times official death toll,” *Amnesty International*, December 20, 2017; Alex Emmons, “Coalition Airstrikes in Raqqa Killed at Least 1,600 Civilians, More Than 10 Times U.S. Tally, Report Finds,” *The Intercept*, April 25, 2019.

## 2.2 A broader understanding of civilian harm

While ‘civilian harm’ seems like a straightforward concept – the suffering civilians experience as a consequence of fighting and conflict – there is an ongoing debate about how it should be defined, and what type of impact it should and should not include, with different interpretations and definitions out there. Often, the concept is used without being explained or defined at all.<sup>33</sup> This creates ample opportunity for misunderstandings and miscommunication: one party to a discussion may regard civilian harm as limited to the direct impact of armed action – civilian deaths, physical injuries, and property damage – whereas others consider it self-evident to also include more indirect and longer-term effects, such as loss of livelihood, other economic impact, or health concerns related to infrastructure destruction.<sup>34</sup>

PAX has recently demonstrated how such conceptual misunderstandings can have considerable and potentially damaging real-life consequences.<sup>35</sup> For instance, different interpretations of what ‘civilian harm’ constitutes have consequences for the understanding and application of crucial International Humanitarian Law concepts like proportionality.<sup>36</sup> The question whether the anticipated damage to civilians from armed action can be considered *proportional* to the expected military benefits may be answered differently depending on whether an assessment of anticipated harm only includes (immediate) civilian deaths or also includes (the effects of) injuries and damage to critical infrastructure.

From a researcher’s point of view too, ‘a lack of clarity [on definitions, methodologies and frameworks] will continue to frustrate attempts to understand the civilian harm in modern warfare.’<sup>37</sup>

Based on the above, this research advocates a broader understanding of civilian harm as this does more justice to the plight of civilians living through war and its aftermath. It is crucial to cast a wide net if we want to come to an as comprehensible as possible understanding of what it means for ordinary people to live through military interventions. Therefore, this report provides definitions of direct and reverberating civilian harm, maps their manifestations and collects first-hand accounts of civilian harm, and studies the ways in which people interpret what has happened to them.

## 2.3 How do we define civilian harm?

Practitioners make use of a wide range of terminology to classify civilian harm but the overlap and differences between certain concepts are not always clear. Some of the more common ways in which civilian harm are described and classified are by referring to first, second and third order effects; cascading effects; primary, secondary, and tertiary effects; knock-on effects; or cumulative effects. In this report, we apply the following definition of civilian harm:

*Negative effects on civilian personal or community well-being caused by use of force in hostilities. Effects can occur directly (death, physical or mental trauma, property damage) or indirectly through the destruction of critical infrastructure, disruption of access to basic needs and services, or the loss of livelihood.*<sup>38</sup>

The advantages of this understanding of civilian harm are that it carves out attention for both individual and communal negative impact, as well as for the direct and indirect effects of armed action. It also does not limit our understanding of civilian harm to physical consequences; rather, it leaves space to also include psychological and economic effects.

Drawing from this definition, we further make the distinction between direct and reverberating civilian harm effects, a classification that is used throughout this report:

- Direct effects: the ‘immediate and (usually) physical impact directly from the armed conflict.’<sup>39</sup> This includes civilian deaths, physical injuries, immediate damage to civilian infrastructure, and most forms of psychological trauma.
- Reverberating effects: ‘those effects that are not necessarily caused directly by the attack, but are nonetheless a product thereof.’<sup>40</sup> This includes displacement, health concerns related to the disruption of essential services like water provision, loss of livelihood, and so on.

Besides direct and reverberating civilian harm effects, we study a third element, we look at what the devastation brought on by the airstrike on Hawija means to the affected civilians; how this event figures in their collective interpretations of war and violence.

- Interpretations of civilian harm: includes stories of loss, personal victimhood and suffering, and assigning blame and accountability.

By using this threefold distinction, we are able to map the various ways in which the strike on Hawija affected people directly (chapter 6) and indirectly (chapter 7), and how they subsequently made sense of this event (chapter 8). This not only enables the tracing of the development and interconnectedness of certain forms of harm, making clear how one civilian harm effect (e.g., a physical injury) can lead to another (e.g., loss of livelihood), it also helps illustrate how interpretations of that civilian harm can feed into claims for acknowledgement, reparations, and justice. If these interpretations and claims go unaddressed, they could lead to new cycles of violence. Therefore, we argue that both the quantity of civilian harm as well as how it is given meaning should be included in any evaluation of the impact of remote interventions in urban settings.

<sup>33</sup> Bijl, Wels and Van der Zeijden, *On Civilian Harm*.

<sup>34</sup> Sahr Muhammedally and Marla Keenan, “Civilian Harm Tracking,” in “Acknowledge, Amend, Assist: Addressing Civilian Harm Caused by Armed Conflict and Armed Violence,” ed. Bonnie Docherty (Harvard Law School, 2015), 8; Christopher D. Kolenda, et al., “The Strategic Costs of Civilian Harm: Applying Lessons from Afghanistan to Current and Future Conflicts,” Report (Open Society Foundations, 2016), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Bijl, Wels and Van der Zeijden, *On Civilian Harm*.

<sup>36</sup> “Fundamentals of IHL,” International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed November 29, 2021, <https://casebook.icrc.org/law/fundamentals-ihl>.

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Holewinski et al., “Beyond Casualty Counts: Building Dynamic Models to Capture and Foresee Civilian Harm,” White Paper (Frontlines Lab, 2021), 5.

<sup>38</sup> Erin Bijl and Wilbert van der Zeijden, “Civilian harm tracking, analysis and response: What it is and why it matters”, Position Paper (PAX, 2020), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Holewinski et al., “Beyond Casualty Counts”, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen Nohle and Isabel Robinson, “War in Cities: The Reverberating Effects of Explosive Weapons,” *Humanitarian Law and Policy*, last modified March 2, 2017, <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2017/03/02/war-in-cities-the-reverberating-effects-of-explosive-weapons/>.

## Patterns of harm from the use of EWIPA

Explosive weapons are used in conflicts around the world on a daily basis, creating a distinct pattern of harm amongst civilians. When explosive weapons are used in towns and cities, they directly put civilians at grave risk of death and injury. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is commonly referred to as EWIPA. Data monitoring by the not-for-profit organisation Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) indicates that when explosive weapons are used in towns and cities, nine out of ten of the casualties are civilians. In 2020 alone, AOAV registered 18,747 civilian deaths and injuries from the use of explosive weapons.<sup>41</sup> Besides the direct impact, EWIPA also displays a wide range of indirect negative civilian harm effects, such as displacement or decreased access to healthcare, water, gas, and electricity.

'Explosive weapons' refers to a broad range of weapons and munitions, and includes mortars, artillery, grenades, missiles, rockets and aircraft bombs. During the airstrike on Hawija's industrial neighbourhood, it is likely that the Dutch military used GBU-39 Small Diameter Bombs: a GPS-guided, relatively small missile.<sup>42</sup> What explosive weapons have in common is that they project blast and fragmentation around the point of detonation. It is especially those explosive weapons that create wide-area effects that put civilians at great risk.

Wide area-effects are created either by a large blast radius, inaccuracy of delivery, or the use of multiple munitions. Wide-area effects can be caused by either of these individual characteristics or a combination thereof.<sup>43</sup> As it has never been publicly confirmed what type of missile was used in the Hawija airstrike, its wide-area effects are unknown to us. Yet, it is evident that because it came into contact with a large amount of explosives stored in the factory the subsequent secondary explosion ended up affecting a large area.

The correlation between the wide-area effects of explosive weapons and the risk of civilian harm is at the heart of concerns of a growing group of states, United Nations (UN) and international organisations, as well as civil society groups. Over a hundred states have expressed concerns over the harm caused by explosive weapons, and a series of consultations in 2020 and 2021 were led by Ireland with the goal to develop a political declaration to address the humanitarian harm from the use of EWIPA.<sup>44</sup> The failure to protect civilians from this practice has been raised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as successive UN Secretaries General, who have repeatedly called upon parties to conflicts to avoid using explosive weapons that have wide-area effects in populated areas.<sup>45</sup> PAX encourages all governments to support the political process and to commit to avoiding the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. Final negotiations are scheduled to resume in 2022, once restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic allow for a face-to-face meeting.

# Chapter 3

<sup>41</sup> "Explosive violence monitor: 2020," Action on Armed Violence, last modified January 1, 2021, <https://aoav.org.uk/2021/explosive-violence-in-2020/>

<sup>42</sup> Airwars, "Refusal by The Netherlands Defence Ministry to identify specific civilian harm events impedes natural justice, and runs counter to actions by other Coalition allies," Brief (Airwars: 2018).

<sup>43</sup> PAX and Article36, "Areas of harm: Understanding explosive weapons with wide area effects," Report (PAX and Article36: 2016).

<sup>44</sup> "Political response," International Network on Explosive Weapons, consulted February 11, 2021, <https://www.inew.org/political-response/>

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict," Reference S/2009/277, May 29, 2009; United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict," Reference S/2019/373, May 7, 2019; "Note to correspondents: Joint Appeal by the UN Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Cities," United Nations, last modified September 18, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2019-09-18/note-correspondents-joint-appeal-the-un-secretary-general-and-the-president-of-the-international-committee-of-the-red-cross-the-use-of-explosive-weapons>

# 3. Methodology

This section reflects on our research aims and strategy, the ways in which data was collected and analysed, as well as on the limitations and ethics of the research project.

## 3.1 Research design

For this report, Al-Ghad, IRW and PAX adopted a qualitative research strategy to learn about the various, interconnected, and compounding ways civilians in Hawija were harmed by the 2015 Dutch airstrike, aiming to go beyond solely looking at numbers of deceased and injured civilians. This study draws on discursive and visual analysis of new empirical data, as well as desk research. This means it relies on a careful analysis of information as reported to us by civilians in Hawija and informants, and uses both satellite imagery and primary and secondary sources to corroborate and help contextualise this information. We used the following data collection techniques: (1) in-depth interviews with affected civilians, (2) focus group discussions (FGDs) with affected civilians, (3) key informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders and subject matter experts, (4) visual investigation of satellite imagery (before and after the airstrike), and (5) primary and secondary source reviews of a range of policy briefings, political, and NGO reports, as well as media reports and academic literature.

### 3.1.1 SAMPLING

We employed a purposive sampling technique during data collection, meaning that we selected interlocutors and respondents based on their relationship and affinity with the goals and features of the research. Our in-depth interview and focus group participants were all either directly affected (e.g., through direct physical or mental injury, loss of or harm to a loved one), or indirectly affected (e.g., economic harm, loss of livelihood, displacement) by the June 2015 airstrike. Given Al-Ghad's long-term presence in Kirkuk, its programming and credibility in Hawija, it took the lead in on-the-ground data collection and provided the consortium with the necessary access and knowledge of cultural practices. When we started our collaboration, Al-Ghad had already gathered and verified a database of civilian victims and affected persons based on victims' appropriate available documentation; including death certificates for their deceased close family members or official documents detailing the loss attested by courts. This database initially covered 50 civilians who could verify they were directly affected by the airstrike. Al-Ghad then used posters to invite more affected civilians who were at least sixteen years of age, living in Hawija when the airstrike happened, and felt comfortable in coming forward and sharing their accounts. To verify that those whom came forward were indeed impacted specifically by the Dutch airstrike, respondents were asked to show appropriate documentation. The consortium, however, did not make a copy of these documents as this is not a forensic research or investigation. Currently, the database has expanded to include 348 civilians who were both directly and indirectly impacted. In the end, 119 civilians in the database could be interviewed for this research.

### 3.1.2 INTERVIEWS

Al-Ghad and PAX hired and trained four research assistants (two males and two females) to contribute to qualitative data collection. The research assistants were from the region, bringing necessary proficiency in the Iraqi Arabic dialect spoken in Hawija, cultural fluency, and knowledge of local practices and physical infrastructure in Hawija.

The research assistants conducted on-the-ground interviews with civilians in teams of two, so that the research assistants never had to travel alone, which is crucial given the often-precarious security situation in Hawija; and given the length and subject of the interviews. Each team included a male and a female member to ensure that respondents of either sex felt comfortable speaking openly with the researchers.

All interview recordings were uploaded to a secure cloud-based system for security and privacy reasons. A local, verified translator translated each of the interviews into English. Al-Ghad's Head of Programmes, Protection Specialist and their General Coordinator oversaw all these operations, all three of them also providing strategic oversight of the on-the-ground research, as well as providing contextual advice to the rest of the consortium members.

To supplement the data received from the interview testimonies, key informant interviews were held with experts who had extensive knowledge of local critical infrastructure (e.g., water supply, electrical grid), or key governmental services such as the medical and educational systems. Additional interviews were conducted with those that are seen as leaders within the community. Several international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) offering humanitarian assistance in and around Hawija were also consulted. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted with civilian groups in Hawija, by both PAX and Al-Ghad staff to validate findings, and to gather additional insight.

In total, we collected data for this report through:

- In-depth interviews with affected civilians: 119
- Focus group discussions: 4
- Key informant interviews with authorities in Hawija: 11 personnel in 10 interview sessions
- Key informant interviews with journalists: 5 personnel in 3 interviews
- Key informant interviews with (international and Iraqi) NGO staff: 24 personnel in 15 interviews

Thus, in total we spoke to 119 impacted civilians and 40 key informants. As outlined below, we collected detailed satellite images through Google Earth, allowing us to make a visual analysis of the industrial neighbourhood before and after the airstrike (see page 66 for a labelled satellite image of the area).

## 3.2 Data collection and analysis

At the outset of the data collection phase, the consortium gathered and reviewed existing data and relevant literature about the situation in Hawija. The literature reviewed consisted of area- and city-based assessments of Hawija, and various media items about the airstrike on the industrial neighbourhood in Hawija itself, which aided in determining the status of infrastructure and services in Hawija immediately prior to and following the airstrike. Information gathered in the review process was used to build contextual knowledge to inform the data collection and analysis phase, as well as to triangulate findings from the primary data gathered.

The consortium used a questionnaire for the in-depth interviews with affected civilians that was semi-structured along four topics: life under ISIS occupation; liberation from ISIS and the Western intervention; the airstrike on 2-3 June 2015; and life now. Under each of these topics, the researchers asked various open questions about displacement, housing situation, livelihood, availability of food



products, access to medical services, and access to water and electricity, as well as the personal and community-wide harm sustained over the period under scrutiny. Under the topics ‘liberation’ and ‘the airstrike on 2-3 June 2015’, respondents were specifically asked to share their perspectives on the intervention against ISIS, and how they experienced the night of the explosion and its aftermath.



Figure 3: Al-Ghad and PAX research teams interview the Mayor of Hawija, Mr. Sabhan Khalaf Ali, one of the key informants, February 2022. PAX/Ayman al-Amiri.

During the interviews, researchers used visual techniques to help the respondent with memory recall and mitigating memory bias. For example, researchers provided respondents with maps and satellite imagery of the industrial neighbourhood to aid them in locating their destroyed shop or place of residence. Satellite imagery was also used to verify the destruction of particular factories and workplaces, government buildings, and specific infrastructure as a consequence of the airstrike.

The researchers informed all interviewees about the purpose and voluntary nature of the interview and the ways the information would be used. Researchers thereby obtained informed consent from all interviewees, who understood they will receive no compensation from the consortium for their participation.

After transcribing and translating the interview recordings – by research assistants and an independent certified translator, respectively – PAX and IRW research teams performed data coding and analysis. PAX and IRW research teams read through all of the translated interview transcripts and coded them along themes in the qualitative data analysis tool NVIVO. To verify and to obtain a higher level of accuracy in the data gathered, we triangulated the data from the in-depth interviews with the information obtained from the key informants, secondary data review, satellite imagery, pictures, FGDs, and vice-versa. The triangulation process demonstrated that our findings are sufficiently consistent across different interviewees and data sources. For six months, the research teams met on a weekly basis to discuss codes, emerging new themes and to share and compare patterns. This way, we distinguished a set of regularities, working from specific observations to more general patterns (inductive reasoning).

### 3.3 Limitations

A considerable research limitation concerns the frequent absence of death certificates or medical reports, which could verify civilian claims of fatalities and physical injuries caused by the airstrike. This is an unfortunate reality of conducting research in post-conflict, and in this case specifically the post-ISIS occupation, contexts where such documentation is frequently lacking for a number of reasons. These reasons and the ways in which we have sought to mitigate this evidence gap are discussed in greater detail in chapter 6 on the direct effects of the airstrike.

The identity of the research assistants who conducted the in-depth interviews is arguably another limitation of this research. The closed nature of the Hawija community and the specific Iraqi Arabic dialect spoken in the region meant that we had to recruit assistants who were from the Hawija district, even if they currently resided elsewhere in the governorate. While we tried to minimise the bias of our local researchers by informing them about the potential effects of their own perspective and providing them with a semi-structured questionnaire to guide the conversation, researcher bias is always a difficult dilemma in social research. For the reasons outlined above, however, we considered the benefits of hiring local staff to outweigh the costs of potential biases in data collection. A further limitation relates to the identity of the data analysts – notably from PAX and IRW, none of whom speak Arabic, which caused us to translate the gathered data from Arabic to English. It is possible that certain cultural and linguistic nuances may have been overlooked during the process of data analysis that would have been noticed and acknowledged by a local and native speaker of the Iraqi Arabic dialect.

Moreover, during the research period, we limited interviews to people who were currently living in Hawija. As such, we were not actively pursuing interviews with people who had left Hawija after the 2015 airstrike or those who were living temporarily in Hawija and have subsequently left again due to hostilities. There was a total of five interviewees who were not in fact from Hawija or living in Hawija at the time that the interviews were conducted; however, they were contacted as their extended families living in Hawija referred them to us. The losses they suffered were large, and thus important for the research, to also understand the dynamics that IDPs were facing at the time and continue to face. It must be noted that the airstrike itself also led to mass displacement, not only to camps as will be discussed in the following chapters, but also to neighbouring governorates and abroad. The goal of the consortium has not been to identify each and every family impacted by this airstrike for this report. As explained, Al-Ghad's victims' database stands at 348 civilians, of which we interviewed 119. With 119 interviews, we conclude that for the purposes and scope of this report, the data reached a saturation point and that the findings are sufficiently generalisable. It is not, however, a full or comprehensive list of all the harm that befell the civilians of Hawija as a consequence of the Dutch airstrike on 2-3 June 2015.

The fact that over six years have passed since the airstrike on the industrial neighbourhood constitutes a further limitation, as it may be difficult for respondents to accurately recall details of their lives from that time and the period preceding it. The 519 Coalition airstrikes conducted during ISIS occupation in Hawija specifically,<sup>46</sup> and additional airstrikes conducted in Kirkuk governorate more generally,<sup>47</sup> also potentially

<sup>46</sup> As per Airwars data on 'Declared US-led Coalition air strikes on ISIS in Iraq & Syria between 2014 and 2018': For Hawija, these airstrikes took place between 25 January 2015 and 29 November 2018.

<sup>47</sup> As per the same data, the total number of airstrikes in Kirkuk governorate (including the ones in Hawija) amount to 856 carried out between 22 September 2014 and 29 November 2018.

decrease the reliability of memories of this specific incident. We tried to mitigate the recall issue by using satellite imagery from the industrial neighbourhood before and after the strike and researchers were instructed to ask the respondents for photos of their houses and their livelihood from before the strike. It should be noted that this airstrike stood out clearly for most civilians because of the magnitude of the secondary explosion, which permanently altered the face of the industrial neighbourhood and its surrounding residential neighbourhoods. The strike would become one of the 'deadliest examples' of Coalition aerial warfare in OIR.<sup>48</sup> All this makes the incident hard to forget for civilians who have lived through it, saw their loved ones lose their lives or be injured, lost homes or livelihoods.

### 3.4 Ethics

Research ethics are important to keep in mind when conducting any type of research, and especially so when collecting information on sensitive issues such as civilian harm and loss of life, considering the significant risk of re-traumatising respondents. Our research team treated the people we interviewed and approached with dignity and respect, while aiming to ensure safety and security for our interlocutors and research team.

The ethical principles that we followed while conducting this research are respect, avoiding bias, safety and avoiding harm, privacy and confidentiality, and informed consent. First, we sought to establish mutual respect by fostering trust to ensure respondents are comfortable with providing information. Our researchers prioritised the security of both data collectors and respondents during the entire research process. During training, scenario exercises simulated interviews and informed the researcher about indicators of trauma, as well as the appropriate ways to create space for the interlocutor to stop the conversation. The ability to recognise challenging moments in a conversation and pause where necessary assisted in avoiding harm during data collection. To adhere to the informed consent principle, our researchers informed all interviewees about the purpose and voluntary nature of the interview and the ways the information would be used. Interviewees were offered the possibility to stop the interview at any given moment, and also retract their interview after it was over. Respondents were also given Al-Ghad's contact information to get in touch with relevant staff whenever they deemed necessary.

Harm could also be done through mismanagement and faulty storage of data. To avoid and minimise the risks of losing or mismanaging data, we used the encrypted data transfer software Box when transmitting the interviews between consortium members in Iraq and the Netherlands. The translations of the interviews were only made available through Box to the team which was coding interviews in the Netherlands for a short duration of time. The raw data, including interview recordings and transcripts in Arabic, will be stored on PAX's secure servers and can only be accessed by two selected persons. All analysed data is housed in NVIVO under the responsibility and control of Utrecht University and PAX. Both Utrecht University and PAX will make sure that measures are taken to protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants in the research at all times. Only one respondent wanted to remain anonymous. However, due to the volatile and unpredictable security situation in Iraq we decided to use only pseudonyms in this report. That is, with the exception of the small number of interviewees who appeared as well-known faces or spokespersons in public fora and the media.

<sup>48</sup> Azmat Khan, "The Civilian Casualty Files: Hidden Pentagon Records Reveal Patterns of Failure in Deadly Airstrikes," *The New York Times*, December 18, 2021.

# Chapter 4

## 4. Monitoring civilian harm under OIR

The 2-3 June 2015 bombing of Hawija was just one F-16 mission within a large-scale military operation against ISIS, named OIR. Herein, since 2014 a US-led coalition of predominantly Western states teamed up with the Iraqi national army and several non-state actors to jointly combat ISIS. First, this chapter introduces how OIR was justified by the Western states involved, and what military aims and strategies it entailed. Second, it reflects on how OIR's impact on civilian casualties has been monitored and reported on both by civil society organisations as well the Coalition and its individual members. Third, it unravels the Dutch government's transparency records with regards to the civilian harm done in Hawija. We conclude that the Hawija incident is just one of many OIR missions in which civilian casualties have been undercounted and remain unaccounted for.

### 4.1 Operation Inherent Resolve

In 2014, a new player in the Middle East increasingly drew the attention of Western media. A group of jihadi fighters, referring to itself as ISIS, was quickly expanding its territorial control across Iraq and Syria with the intent to establish an Islamic caliphate (see chapter 5).<sup>49</sup> By mid-2014, they had successfully captured the city of Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq.

In September 2014, shortly after ISIS released a video of their militants beheading American hostage and journalist James Foley, then-US President Barack Obama declared that the US had to act:

*There can be no reasoning – no negotiation – with this brand of evil. The only language understood by killers like this is the language of force. So the United States of America will work with a broad coalition to dismantle this network of death.*<sup>50</sup>

This broad coalition came to be known as the US-led anti-ISIS Coalition, including over 80 countries and partner organisations. Its military division is named the Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, from here on out simply referred to as OIR. Herein, over twenty states, including the US, United Kingdom (UK), France, Belgium, Australia, Denmark, and the Netherlands, forged a military alliance with the stated purpose of ‘destroying ISIS’s parent tumour in Iraq and Syria, combating its worldwide spread, and protecting all homelands’.<sup>51</sup> Its official mission objective is to bring enduring security to civilians in Iraq, Syria, and in the homelands of Coalition members by definitively defeating ISIS.<sup>52</sup>

49 For an in-depth description of the rise of ISIS see, for instance, Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2015).

50 Simone Molin Friis, “Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen”: Beheading Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War Against Isis,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July 2015): 737.

51 Kathleen J. McInnis, “Coalition Contributions to Countering the Islamic State,” Report (Congressional Research Service, 2016), 2.

52 See “Fact Sheet: Our Mission,” Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve, accessed 23 February 2022, <https://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/Documents/Mission/20170717-%20Updated%20Mission%20Statement%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-093803-770>.

Led by the US CENTCOM, OIR set out to achieve its goals by using ‘coordinated airstrikes, training and equipping local security forces, and targeted special operations’.<sup>53</sup> Since its establishment, OIR has engaged in extensive security cooperation with local partners such as the Iraqi military, Kurdish Peshmerga and the Syrian Democratic Forces, to engage in direct battle with ISIS. In addition, OIR engaged in 34,000 airstrikes, firing over 100,000 munitions across Syria and Iraq.<sup>54</sup> From here on out, the Western militaries involved in carrying out both airstrikes and training local forces are referred to simply as the Coalition.

The Netherlands contributed to OIR by flying 3,000 F-16 missions across Iraq and Syria between October 2014 and June 2016, and then again from January to December 2018. Ammunitions were fired in at least 2,100 of these missions. This made the Netherlands at times the fourth most active military member of the Coalition.<sup>55</sup> To this day, the Netherlands continues to contribute to the Coalition by financing and training local state and non-state actors, such as the Iraqi forces and Kurdish Peshmerga.<sup>56</sup> Dutch contributions have recently been extended to the end of 2022.<sup>57</sup>

The Coalition justifies OIR by contrasting the violence perpetrated by ISIS against Western and local civilians with its own actions characterised as being carried out with ‘surgical precision’. Former US Secretary of State John Kerry described ISIS as ‘ugly, savage, inexplicable, nihilistic, and valueless evil’;<sup>58</sup> while former US Secretary of Defence James Mattis emphasised: ‘We are the good guys [...] We do everything humanly possible consistent with military necessity, taking many chances to avoid civilian casualties at all costs’.<sup>59</sup> The Dutch MoD has frequently used similar language, emphasising that the ‘(targeting) process is so precise because the prevention and minimalization of unintended damage to Iraqi citizens [...] is our very highest priority’.<sup>60</sup>

From the above, it is clear that the Netherlands and its Western coalition partners chose to combat ISIS from a distance. Instead of sending large numbers of ground troops to Syria and Iraq, they relied heavily on drone and airstrikes. On the ground, small training teams and special operation forces assisted local forces to fight against ISIS on the battlefield and call in the airstrikes. The Coalition thus executed a military intervention with little ‘exposure’ of their own military to their opponent. The operation was justified by branding ISIS as the evil enemy other, while also underlining how the Coalition’s remote strategies, including new targeting procedures and smart technologies, would allow them to both protect the lives of Western military personnel and friendly civilians on the ground.

53 McInnis, “Coalition Contributions to Countering the Islamic State,” 2.

54 Every strike releases an average of 3.4 munitions. See Chris Woods, “Cause for Concern: Civilians Killed in Coalition Strikes,” Report (Airwars, 2015), 25.

55 Airwars, “The Renewed Netherlands Mission Against Isis Risks the Lowest Levels of Public Transparency and Accountability Among Allies in a Very Different War,” Briefing (Airwars, 2017), 13.

56 Minister of Defence, “Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme,” Letter (27 925, nr. 670), November 4, 2019.

57 Ministry of Defence, “Nederlandse Bijdrage Irak Verlengd,” Defensie.nl, last modified 5 November 2021, <https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/11/05/nederlandse-bijdrage-irak-verlengd>.

58 Friis, “Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen,” 725–46.

59 “Transcript: Defense Secretary James Mattis on ‘Face the Nation,’” *CBS News*, May 28, 2017.

60 Minister of Defence, “Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme,” Report of a General Meeting (27 925, nr. 670), August 11, 2015.



## 4.2 OIR and the monitoring of civilian casualties

Compared to the large ground invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these remote strategies indeed led to very few military body bags returning from the battlefield. As of January 2022, the US military had lost 20 soldiers in active combat since OIR commenced in 2014, the Netherlands had lost zero.<sup>61</sup> This is a considerable difference compared to the over 3,481 US military lives lost during the US-led ground invasion Operation Iraqi Freedom, between 2003 and 2012.<sup>62</sup>

### 4.2.1 MONITORING OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES BY CIVIL SOCIETY

This increase in safety for Western military personnel, however, stands in contrast to the realities on the ground for civilians across Syria and Iraq. From the outset of the war against ISIS, investigative journalists, (I)NGOs, and academics have monitored, and tracked civilian casualty numbers using a wide range of methods, including open-source intelligence, geolocation techniques, and field investigations. They have uncovered that OIR has come at a significant cost for civilians. For the operation as a whole, Airwars – a non-profit organisation specialising in recording civilian casualties as a result of airstrikes – estimates that between 8,186 and 13,222 civilians have been killed in Coalition strikes across Iraq and Syria.<sup>63</sup> These numbers only include events either assessed by Airwars as ‘fair’ based on triangulated local reporting, or incidents confirmed as credible by the Coalition itself (see 4.2.2). They are thus assumed to be conservative.

In December 2021, *The New York Times*’ Azmat Khan brought out an investigation comparing the content of the Coalition’s own declassified Civilian Casualty Assessment reports (explained in 4.2.2) with the lived realities on the ground for civilians in Syria and Iraq. She concludes:

*I have spent the past five years traveling throughout the theatres of war [...] trying to gain a clear picture of the ground reality created by the air campaign. [...] On the ground, I found a pattern of life that was very different from the one that the military described in its credibility assessments, and documented death rates that vastly exceeded U.S. Central Command’s own numbers. [...] They [civilians] also have come to understand that on occasion, and with no warning, a bomb might pierce the sky, inexplicably targeting their homes, killing their families and neighbors in a terrifying instant. And they knew that if this were to happen, it was unlikely anyone would ever tell them why.*<sup>64</sup>

Others have zoomed in on the impact of OIR on civilian casualties in large urban centres. Amnesty International and Airwars, for instance, investigated the battle for Raqqa. The 2017 OIR campaign to drive ISIS out of the city of Raqqa in Syria lasted six months. Sergeant Major John Wayne Troxell later declared that ‘they fired more rounds in five months in Raqqa than any other Marine artillery battalion since the Vietnam War’.<sup>65</sup> In the aftermath, the UN described Raqqa as the most destroyed city in Syria. Through a combination of open-source data, geolocation techniques and a field investigation, Amnesty International and Airwars found that Coalition strikes destroyed 70 per cent of the city and 1,724

civilians were reportedly killed, of which they have named 1,028.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, specific attacks have been monitored. In November 2021, *The New York Times* reported that over 70 civilians, predominantly women and children, were killed in a 2019 OIR airstrike on the Syrian town of Baghuz. They discovered that US legal officers flagged the incident as a possible war crime immediately after the attack and requested an investigation. The investigation never took place.<sup>67</sup>

### 4.2.2 MONITORING OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES BY THE COALITION

In contrast to the civilian casualty numbers listed above, as of January 2021, the Coalition itself estimates that only 1,417 civilians were killed as the result of its military actions in the war against ISIS. They thus acknowledge just over 10 per cent of Airwars’ overall estimate of between 8,186 and 13,222 civilian casualties. This pattern repeats itself for specific urban battles. In the immediate aftermath of the battle for Raqqa, the Coalition initially acknowledged just 23 civilian casualties and refused to conduct any on-the-ground investigations. After Amnesty International and Airwars published their database of 1,724 civilian casualties, the Coalition adjusted its estimation to 159, which again constitutes roughly 10 per cent.<sup>68</sup> In reaction to the *The New York Times* investigation, the Coalition acknowledged 80 deaths in the individual incident of Baghuz, yet they acknowledged only four of them as being civilian. For the remaining 76 casualties, the Coalition maintain that the civilian identity of the people killed was impossible to determine because women and children in ISIS sometimes took up arms.<sup>69</sup>

These discrepancies in civilian casualty numbers can be partly explained by how the Coalition monitors civilian casualties. In December 2016, CENTCOM established a permanent Civilian Casualty Cell for OIR, made up of US military personnel. The Cell relies predominantly on Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) to both determine any civilian presence prior to an attack, particularly in urban areas - and any possible civilian casualties resulting from an action. Especially in urban areas, this is problematic. Post-strike video analysis taken from the air can show the extent of the damage after an air or artillery strike on a building. Still, it rarely offers information about how many people may have been sheltering in the building and whether they were ISIS fighters or civilian families seeking refuge. As former British Air Marshal Greg Bagwell noted in 2018: ‘We cannot see through rubble.’<sup>70</sup> With time, the CENTOM’s Civilian Casualty Cell also started to review locally alleged civilian casualty reports, often brought to their attention by the external monitoring organisations and investigators discussed above.<sup>71</sup>

The Coalition has conducted over 2,866 such civilian harm assessments, including one on Hawija. Until recently, however, nearly all these investigations remained classified. Instead, each month, the

61 “U.S. Military Casualties: Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Casualty Summary by Casualty Category,” Defense Casualty Analysis System, last modified 22 February

2022, [https://dcas.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report\\_oir\\_type.xhtml](https://dcas.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_oir_type.xhtml)

62 Defense Casualty Analysis System, “U.S. Military Casualties.”

63 “US-Led Coalition in Iraq and Syria,” Airwars, accessed 2 September 2022, <https://airwars.org/conflict/coalition-in-iraq-and-syria/>.

64 Azmat Khan, “The Human Toll of America’s Air Wars,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2021.

65 Shawn Snow, “These Marines in Syria fired more artillery than any battalion since Vietnam,” *Marine Times*, February 6, 2018.

66 “Rhetoric Versus Reality in the War in Raqqa,” Amnesty International and Airwars, last modified 2019, <https://raqqa.amnesty.org>.

67 Dave Philipps and Eric Schmitt, “How the U.S. Hid an Airstrike That Killed Dozens of Civilians in Syria,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 2021.

68 Amnesty International and Airwars, “Rhetoric Versus Reality.”

69 Philipps and Schmitt, “How the U.S. Hid an Airstrike.”

70 “Interview of Air Marshall Greg Bagwell by Chris Cole, Drone Wars U,” *Drone Wars UK*, last modified January 2018, <https://dronewars.net/interview-of-air-marshall-greg-bagwell-drone-wars-uk/>.

71 See for a detailed description of Airwars and Centcom’s methods and collaboration: Laurie Treffers, “Het tellen van de doden: burgerslachtoffers in de langeafstandsoorlog tegen IS” in *Hawija Burgerslachtoffers en geheimhouding in de langeafstandsoorlog tegen Islamitische Staat*, eds. Lauren Gould et al. (Soesterberg: Aspekt, forthcoming).



Coalition published a summary report, generally consisting of the date of the allegation, the general location of the strike, and what the assessment concluded: that the allegation is ‘credible’ – that is, military investigators deemed it ‘more likely than not’ that an airstrike caused civilian casualties – or that it is ‘noncredible’. Only after a Freedom of Information Act request did 1,300 of these Civilian Casualty Assessment reports become publicly available in 2021. After reviewing these reports, Azmat Khan from *The New York Times* concluded:

*What I saw after studying them was not a series of tragic errors but a pattern of impunity: of a failure to detect civilians, to investigate on the ground, to identify causes and lessons learned, to discipline anyone or find wrongdoing that would prevent these recurring problems from happening again. It was a system that seemed to function almost by design to not only mask the true toll of American airstrikes but also legitimize their expanded use.*<sup>72</sup>

(I)NGOs have repeatedly stressed that military sources and local reports should be corroborated by on-the-ground investigations by the Coalition to achieve a comprehensive assessment of civilian casualties based also on witness interviews and forensic evidence.<sup>73</sup> Only once is the Coalition known to have conducted an accompanying ground investigation: for the Al-Jadida event of March 2019 in which a US strike on a Mosul house killed up to 140 civilians sheltering inside.<sup>74</sup>

#### 4.2.3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES BY COALITION MEMBERS

Of the Coalition’s conservative total body count of 1,417, the US has taken responsibility for the great majority, conceding almost 1,300 fatalities from its own strikes. After conducting thousands of strikes between them, to date, however, the US’ most active European coalition partners (France, Belgium, and the UK) have not publicly accepted killing any civilians in Iraq – even if certain attacks were confirmed European action and the Coalition’s Civilian Casualty Cell itself has assessed it ‘credible’ that civilians were killed in the attack.<sup>75</sup> Of these European coalition partners, only the UK has acknowledged killing just one civilian in Syria.<sup>76</sup>

For years, the Netherlands was one of the least transparent coalition partners.<sup>77</sup> For most of the duration of the Dutch participation in OIR, the Dutch MoD had a practice of not disclosing information about ongoing missions citing ‘national, operational and personnel security’. In 2018, for the first time, the Dutch MoD conceded to possibly killing civilians in up to three incidents in Iraq between 2014 and 2016 but refused to identify the dates and locations of these events or even the number of civilians harmed due to security concerns.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Khan, “The Human Toll of America’s Air Wars.”

<sup>73</sup> Anna Khalfaoui et al., “In Search of Answers: U.S. Military Investigations and Civilian Harm,” Report (Center for Civilians in Conflict; Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute, 2020); InterAction et al., “Civil Society Guidance for a Model Policy,” Report (InterAction et al., 2021).

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Martin, Matthew Isler and Jeff Davis, “Department of Defense News Briefing on the Findings of an Investigation into a March 2017 Coalition Air Strike in Mosul,” Transcript (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017).

<sup>75</sup> Joe Dyke, “Pentagon Revelations Increase Pressure on European Militaries to Acknowledge Killing Civilians,” *Airwars*, August 18, 2018; Chris Woods, “Europe’s Shame: Claims by Key Allies of No Civilian Harm in War Against ISIS Exposed,” *Airwars*, March 15, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Megan Karlshoej-Pedersen, “As Warfare Changes, the UK’s Protection of Civilians Falls Further Behind,” *Airwars*, August 17, 2021.

<sup>77</sup> *Airwars*, “The Renewed Netherlands Mission,” 13.

<sup>78</sup> *Airwars*, “Refusal by the Netherlands Defence Ministry to Identify Specific Civilian Harm Events.”

All in all, the limited transparency shown by individual OIR members worryingly seems to indicate that a military coalition structure can ‘disincentivize transparency by enabling states to attribute civilian casualties to the coalition as a whole’, whereby ‘the premise of collective action obscures individual state responsibility and transparency.’<sup>79</sup>

#### 4.2.4 MONITORING AND REPORTING ON THE CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN HAWIJA

As explained in the Introduction, OIR’s airstrike on Hawija on the night of 2-3 June 2015 led to a large secondary explosion. The next day the destruction was reported on by Al-Jazeera and Reuters.<sup>80</sup> Two days later, when questioned about the Hawija bombardment and its aftermath, US Lieutenant General Hesterman stated ‘we haven’t seen any evidence of civilian casualties so far, but we’ll conscientiously look into it as we do with every allegation.’<sup>81</sup> On 15 June 2015, two weeks after the Hawija attack, the then-Dutch Minister of Defence, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, received a classified Civilian Casualty Credibility Assessment report from CENTCOM. Herein, it was acknowledged that the allegations of up to 74 civilian casualties, made by open sources including Reuters and Al-Jazeera, were credible, although the exact number of civilian or ISIS casualties could not be confirmed.<sup>82</sup>

Yet, on 28 June 2015, the Minister of Defence informed the Dutch Parliament that although she could not disclose any exact information about Dutch airstrikes due to ‘national, operational and personnel security’, she could relay that ‘as far as known at the moment, the Netherlands had not been involved in any instances of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes in Iraq.’<sup>83</sup> Only in November 2019 (4.5 years later), when investigative journalists uncovered that the Dutch military had in fact carried out the Hawija airstrike,<sup>84</sup> did the Dutch MoD acknowledge its responsibility for the attack.<sup>85</sup> In the three parliamentary debates that followed, however, the Dutch government claimed that the around 70 civilian casualties were based on ‘open sources’ and just ‘rumours’ and were not part of the Coalition’s official body count.<sup>86</sup> All the while, CENTCOM’s Civilian Casualty Assessment report on Hawija remained classified. Finally, the Dutch Parliament demanded that the MoD get an undisputed and written confirmation by CENTCOM that the estimated 70 deaths were not part of its official civilian casualty body count.<sup>87</sup> In March 2020, after verifying with CENTCOM and just before the Hawija Civilian Casualty Assessment report was declassified through a Freedom of Information

<sup>79</sup> Annie Shiel, “The Sum of All Parts: Reducing Civilian Harm in Multinational Coalition Operations,” Report (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2019), 20-21.

<sup>80</sup> As can be read in Coalition reports published by *The New York Times* after a FOIA request. The documents are accessible at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/c-6-2-15-iraq/055d09f8f8b256a4/full.pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> John W. Hesterman III, “Department of Defense Press Briefing by Lt. Gen. Hesterman via Telephone from the Combined Air and Space Operations Center, Southwest Asia in the Pentagon Press Briefing Room,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 5, 2015, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/607056/>.

<sup>82</sup> As can be read in Coalition reports published by *The New York Times* after a FOIA request. The documents are accessible at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/c-6-2-15-iraq/055d09f8f8b256a4/full.pdf>.

<sup>83</sup> Ministers of Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, “Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme,” Questions and Answers (27 295, nr. 540), June 24, 2015: 12.

<sup>84</sup> Kees Versteegh and Jannie Schipper, “De Nederlandse ‘precisiebomb’ op een wapendepot van IS,” *NRC*, October 18, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Minister of Defence, “Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme,” Letter (27 925, nr. 670) November 4, 2019, 3.

<sup>86</sup> “Bericht dat de minister-president geïnformeerd zou zijn over de 70 burgerdoden in Irak,” House of Representatives: Debat Gemist, 27 November 2019, 03:35:00, <https://debatgemist.tweedekamer.nl/debatten/bericht-dat-de-minister-president-ge%C3%AFnformeerd-zou-zijn-over-de-70-burgerdoden-irak>; “Zeventig Doden Zijn Geen Gerucht,” *BNR*, 28 November 2019, <https://www.bnr.nl/nieuws/binnenland/10396107/70-doden-zijn-geen-gerucht>.

<sup>87</sup> “Onderzoeksrapport CENTCOM over luchtaanval op Hawija,” House of Representatives: Debat Gemist, December 19, 2019, 01:33:00, <https://debatgemist.tweedekamer.nl/debatten/bericht-dat-de-minister-president-ge%C3%AFnformeerd-zou-zijn-over-de-70-burgerdoden-irak>.

Act, the Dutch MoD admitted that the Coalition had in fact been officially counting the 70 civilian casualties for over three years.<sup>88</sup>

In the fourth parliamentary debate that followed these revelations, the then-Minister of Defence, Ank Bijleveld, underlined that according to 'CENTCOM's cited open sources, around 70 casualties occurred [...], including both IS fighters and civilians', however, 'the ratio between IS fighters and civilians could not be established after the event'. Bijleveld emphasised that even for CENTCOM's Civilian Casualty Cell it is hard to know the true number or identity of the casualties, 'due to a lack of on-the-ground investigations, the fact that the dead get buried quickly in Muslim communities, incomplete population registers, and [...] the difficulty of distinguishing retrospectively between IS fighters and civilians'.<sup>89</sup> Here she seemingly shifts the onus of proof to the casualties themselves, suggesting the victims should have (posthumously) proven their civilian innocence.

In response, the Dutch Parliament requested that an independent commission of inquiry be set up and that the survivors and affected community in Hawija receive voluntary compensation.<sup>90</sup> In October 2020, the MoD established an independent committee, led by Minister of State Winnie Sorgdrager, with the task to research how the Dutch strike could have led to civilian deaths and what lessons can be learned from Hawija for future military action.<sup>91</sup> At the time of writing this report, the Commission has not yet disclosed its terms of reference or the date for publishing its findings. Nor has it visited Hawija, as the MoD will not provide it with clearance to visit the site, positing it is not safe enough to visit.<sup>92</sup> Putting forth the same line of reasoning, the Dutch MoD itself has also not committed to conducting an on-the-ground investigation in Hawija and no official delegation has visited thus far. Representatives of the Dutch embassy in Baghdad and the consulate in Erbil are also yet to visit the area.

Finally, in December 2020, the Minister of Defence announced a 'voluntary compensation' of 4.4 million EUR supporting 'projects for the community of Hawija'.<sup>93</sup> Since, the MoD has outsourced this money to two international institutions, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to invest in 'electricity supplies, economic activities, job opportunities, and water supplies'.<sup>94</sup> The Dutch MoD has repeatedly emphasised that this will be done in direct consultation with the local communities. As will become clear throughout this report, the victims we spoke to in Hawija are yet to be consulted about this donation and at the time of writing, these initiatives have materialised in only limited concrete results (see the box on page 105).<sup>95</sup> Finally,

the Dutch government has not officially apologised for the damage done.

From the above, it seems that the impact of the Hawija attack on civilians and the subsequent lack of reporting on this by the responsible Coalition partner is not a one-off incident but part of a larger pattern where civilian deaths are systematically undercounted. What stands out is that OIR is legitimised in terms of its precise and caring nature for civilians, yet paradoxically, when large numbers of deaths do occur in individual attacks or urban battles, it is often stated by the Coalition that it cannot know how many civilians perished and what civilian harm was done. Chapters 6 through 8 of this report illustrate what knowledge can be created through a ground investigation.

88 Minister of Defence, "Stand van zaken uitvoering moties en toezeggingen in het kader van transparantie burgerslachtoffers," Letter (27 925; 35 363, nr. 707) March, 24, 2020.

89 "Transparantie over luchtaanvallen in de strijd tegen IS (eerste termijn kamer)," House of Representatives: Debat Gemist, May 14, 2020, <https://debatgemist.tweedekamer.nl/debatten/transparantie-over-luchtaanvallen-de-strijd-tegen-eerste-termijn-kamer>

90 Floor Bouma, "Onafhankelijk onderzoek naar luchtaanval Hawija, geen compensatie," NRC, October 2, 2020.

91 "Winnie Sorgdrager gaat onderzoek naar wapeninzet Hawija leiden," Rijksoverheid, last modified 2 October 2020, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/10/02/winnie-sorgdrager-gaat-onderzoek-naar-wapeninzet-hawija-leiden>.

92 Kees Versteegh, "Veel weerstand in onderzoek naar het bloedige bombardement voor Nederland in Hawija," NRC, November 30, 2021.

93 Ministry of Defence, "Compensatieprojecten voor gemeenschap Hawija starten in 2021," Press release (Ministry of Defence, 2021).

94 "Compensatieprojecten voor gemeenschap Hawija starten in 2021," Ministry of Defense, last modified 15 December 2020, <https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/12/15/compensatieprojecten-voor-gemeenschap-hawija-starten-in-2021>.

95 The press statement of the MoD of 15 December 2020 highlights that the allocated budget of 4.4 million EUR will be spent 'in consultation with the community'.

As recently as 1 December 2021, however, the Mayor of Hawija, Sabhan Khalaf Ali, declared that he has not been contacted about this.

## The targeting process

There are generally two types of airstrikes when deploying aerial weapons: deliberate and dynamic. Deliberate targeting represents strikes planned against targets that have been validated during an extensive planning phase, in which a collateral damage estimate (CDE) to minimise civilian harm is conducted, typically employing a pattern of life (PoL) assessment to determine if civilians are present, and using an extensive weaponeering process to determine the proper weapon for the target while minimising potential civilian harm. The CDE uses an engineering model to predict the anticipated civilian harm from a strike so that a strike may be altered to minimise potential casualties. The PoL is a recent development where overhead observation (typically by drones) of the target area is conducted for hours or days to determine if civilians are present. If the PoL detects civilians, the strike may be altered or even cancelled. Together, these are the main tools used by the targeting community to minimise civilian harm from airstrikes. Deliberate targeting is typically assumed to result in relatively few civilian casualties due to the precautions employed. Dynamic strikes are conducted against time-sensitive targets that present a specific threat to the force, or to transient targets of high value that have a small engagement window. As such, dynamic targets do not receive the full target development of a

deliberate strike and may lack a PoL and/or a full CDE.<sup>96</sup> A recent report by RAND illustrates that a majority of the strikes conducted in OIR were dynamic strikes.<sup>97</sup>

The June 2015 airstrike on Hawija, however, concerned a deliberate strike.<sup>98</sup> A CDE was conducted that indicated that if the strike was carried out at night, the anticipated collateral damage would be limited to material damage within the industrial neighbourhood itself. More precisely, a single shed was identified as 'collateral concern'.<sup>99</sup> That the strike on Hawija could nonetheless result in such extensive damage, as well as a high number of civilian casualties, is attributed to the CDE not taking into account the potential impact of secondary explosions caused by the presence of the large amount of explosives that was stored in the bomb factory.<sup>100</sup> The CENTCOM Chief of Targets, while not finding any fault with the employed targeting procedure, acknowledged that he 'did not think it was a reasonable assumption to think that there would not be any collateral damage' and that 'based on the fact that the intelligence stated that this was a VBIED facility and the significant amount of collateral structures in the area, one might have reasonably concluded that there might be civilian casualties as a result of the strike'.<sup>101</sup>

Later in the targeting process, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Member States such as the Netherlands, provide an additional level of scrutiny through the presence of a red card

holder (RCH). This person is the senior national liaison officer serving at the Combined Forces Air Component Headquarters who is charged with ensuring national policies are upheld in the application of force. This person can veto the use of national assets (such as strike aircraft) for missions, and acts as part of the decision to strike or not in certain cases.<sup>102</sup> For Hawija, it is known that the Dutch RCH supported the airstrike on the industrial neighbourhood. It later became known, however, that the RCH was unaware of existing reservations within the US military about the intelligence the Coalition had received about this target when making his decision.<sup>103</sup>

Unfortunately, the Hawija incident illustrates that there are several weaknesses in the targeting cycle with regards to civilian harm. Although weapons are accurate, they are only as good as the intelligence used to target them.<sup>104</sup> If the information supporting a strike is wrong, it often leads to incidents of harm. Additionally, it is of great concern that the CDE is never validated by the military; meaning, the number used to determine how many civilians may be killed in a strike is never checked against the real number killed, as evident from the battle damage assessment for instance.<sup>105</sup>

As this number is a product of the military's own information, and is never checked for accuracy, the true value of the CDE is suspect. Finally, the military pays little attention to reverberating

effects, meaning that most long-term post-strike concerns are ignored.<sup>106</sup>

96 Becca Wasser et al., "The Air War Against the Islamic State: The Role of Airpower in Operation Inherent Resolve," Report (Rand Corporation: 2021).

97 Wasser et al., "The Air War Against the Islamic State", 64.

98 Declassified information from the CAOC CIVCAS Credibility Inquiry, June 2, 2015, available through a Freedom of Information Act at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/c-6-2-15-iraq/055d09f8f8b256a4/full.pdf>.

99 Declassified information from an email by the Chief of Targets, August 18, 2015, available through a Freedom of Information Act at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/c-6-2-15-iraq/055d09f8f8b256a4/full.pdf>.

100 Ben Meindertma, "Bombardement in Hawija was riskanter dan berekend, maar werd toch doorgezet," *NOS*, February 18, 2020.

101 Declassified information from two emails by the Chief of Targets, August 14 and 18, 2015, available through a Freedom of Information Act at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/c-6-2-15-iraq/055d09f8f8b256a4/full.pdf>.

102 Wasser et al., "The Air War Against the Islamic State."

103 Lennart Hofman, "Waarom liep de Nederlandse luchtaanval in het Iraakse Hawija anders dan de bedoeling was?", *De Correspondent*, December 2, 2020.

104 Merel A.C. Eckelhof, "Lifting the Fog of Targeting: 'Autonomous Weapons' and Human Control Through the Lens of Targeting," *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 3 (Summer 2018).

105 Giulio di Marzio, "The Targeting Process: Part I and II," Exercise (NRDC-ITA:2009).

106 Paul Robinson, "The Bombing of Dual-Use Targets," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Military Ethics*, eds. James Turner Johnson and Eric D. Patterson (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2016).

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# Chapter 5



## 5. Hawija before the Dutch airstrike

Hawija city forms the centre of Hawija district, part of Kirkuk governorate, and lies approximately 45 kilometres west of Kirkuk city. Hawija district was occupied by ISIS between June 2014 and October 2017 and came to be known as one of its strongholds. In order to map the consequences of the Dutch airstrike on Hawija's industrial neighbourhood it is essential to present a brief account of the city's socio-political position within the region, as well as the state of its infrastructure and economy prior to the airstrike. In this chapter, we therefore provide a brief description of Hawija before and during ISIS occupation up until the 2-3 June 2015 airstrike.

### 5.1 Socio-political history: Hawija and the Arabisation project

The history of Hawija district, which covers 450 villages and cities, has been marked by government projects and population flows that have caused numerous protracted intercommunal grievances. Between 1936-1953, the Hawija project created a new irrigation river and thereby new opportunities for farming. This resulted in thousands of Arab Sunni families from neighbouring Salahaddin and Mosul to migrate to Hawija. In 1961, the government of Iraq officially created the district of Hawija, adding this Arab majority district to Kirkuk governorate, which was up until that moment a predominantly Kurd and Turkmen governorate. This was followed by the Saddam regime's official Arabisation programme in the late 1970s, which incentivised Arab families to move to oil-rich Kirkuk governorate to make it into an Arab majority area. The Arabisation programme also included changing the official boundaries of Kirkuk governorate, which in some cases removed Kurd and Turkmen majority areas and joined them with other governorates, while in others it meant Arab majority areas becoming a part of Kirkuk.<sup>107</sup> This Arabisation programme led to grievances among those who identify as Turkmen and Kurds in Kirkuk, which are still felt to this date. These grievances impacted how Arab civilians fleeing Hawija were received in Kirkuk during ISIS occupation (see chapter 7), as well as how aid has been distributed following the Dutch airstrike (see the box on pages 107-8).

### 5.2 Infrastructure, services, and businesses: Hawija before ISIS

Hawija district – prior to ISIS occupation – represented one of the largest agricultural hubs in Iraq. Hawija was the second in the country in terms of growing fruits, vegetables, wheat, barley and corn, and the first in terms of cotton production prior to 2014.<sup>108</sup> Its former agricultural prowess is also evident when looking at satellite images taken of the industrial neighbourhood before the strike, which show at least four large warehouses belonging to the Department of Agriculture (see Figure

6 on page 66), which contained agricultural machinery, seeds, and fertilizers.<sup>109</sup> The city's agricultural research centre near the industrial neighbourhood moreover produced seeds and saplings that were used throughout Iraq to plant and harvest vegetables and fruit, underlining Hawija's importance for the rest of the country.

As seen in the 2013 satellite image (see page 66), the industrial neighbourhood in Hawija contained many additional businesses. It housed an estimated twenty car dealerships, five ice factories, three brick factories, a textile mill, one flour mill, and an asphalt factory, along with numerous workshops for car repairing, as well as many other shops and workplaces.<sup>110</sup> Former business owners estimate that the total worth of the privately owned houses and shops (including the materials inside) in the industrial neighbourhood before the strike amounts to over 11 million USD (9.9 million EUR<sup>111</sup>).<sup>112</sup>

In terms of governmental infrastructure, the industrial neighbourhood contained an electricity sub-station, a fuel station, the civil defence department, the municipality department, the Department of Education building, the Department of Sewage building, the Department of Veterinary Services building, and the Department of Religious Affairs/Sunni endowment fund building. Prior to 2014, electricity was available for an estimated eighteen hours per day.<sup>113</sup> The electricity was and still is provided from Kirkuk, as Hawija does not have the capacity to produce electricity on its own. Two water stations existed in Hawija city and sub-district; filtered water was therefore provided at the household level through a piped network and was available day and night across the city.<sup>114</sup>

Regarding healthcare, aside from the Hawija General Hospital, the entire district of Hawija had eighteen primary health care centres for medical treatment. The healthcare system included specialised doctors, a dialysis centre, a dedicated surgical wing, an emergency care department as well as necessary medical equipment like x-ray and MRI machines.<sup>115</sup> Hawija city, moreover, housed 42 primary and secondary schools. Despite the precarious times following the 2003 US invasion and the ensuing civil war, the literacy rate was slowly rising, and before the ISIS occupation in the summer of 2014, the education department employed an estimated 5,040 teachers in the entire district.<sup>116</sup>

### 5.3 Marginalisation, rising tensions and ISIS occupation in Hawija

Hawija has had a devout Sunni reputation since long before the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003; the Muslim Brotherhood had established a foothold in Hawija already in the 1970s. Following the US invasion and its instalment of a Shiite government in Iraq in its wake, many Sunni Arabs, on account

<sup>107</sup> On 16 November 1987, Republican Decree 111 removed the Arab sub-district of al-Zab from the governorate of Salahuddin and allocated it administratively to the Hawija district of Kirkuk.

<sup>108</sup> Shalaw Muhammad and Abdullah Khalid, "Hawija: Shadow of Violence, Peace Horizons!," Report (Alternative Network for Development and Democracy: 2020).

<sup>109</sup> The warehouses were reportedly looted under ISIS occupation. It was one of these now empty warehouses which was used as a factory for VBIEDs by ISIS and which was the site of the Dutch airstrike.

<sup>110</sup> As shared by the OMDA NGO, interview 3 October 2021; as shared by the neighbourhood's *mukhtar*, interview 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>111</sup> Throughout this report, we have used the Iraqi dinar to US dollar currency rate of June 2015 (approximately 1:0.0008), as well as the US dollar to Euro currency rate of June 2015 (approximately 1:0.9).

<sup>112</sup> Some of these estimates, especially of larger factories and businesses which were destroyed have been verified by local courts (see Annex A for example).

<sup>113</sup> As confirmed by the head of the Hawija electricity department, and through civilian interviews.

<sup>114</sup> Engineer Ali from the Hawija Department of Water Resources, interview 15 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>115</sup> Dr. Mohammed from the Hawija Health Department, interview 15 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>116</sup> Ahmed Mohammed Khalaf from the Hawija Education department, interview 19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

of their religious sect and being seen as Saddam supporters, were expelled from working for the Iraqi state, excluded from post-conflict reconstruction processes, and felt socio-politically marginalised. Some go as far as to claim that the poor accommodation of Sunni Arab communities constitutes ‘the single most critical failure of post-Saddam planners’.<sup>117</sup>

The Sunni population in Hawija in particular was heavily securitised and marginalised from service provision and economic opportunities by the newly established Shiite government. This disenfranchised the local communities and created fertile ground for extremist organisations to recruit and grow.<sup>118</sup> In Hawija, resistance to US occupation and the new Shiite-dominant government was so intense that American troops dubbed the town the ‘Anbar of the North’.<sup>119</sup> During the insurgency that followed the US invasion (2003-11), Hawija quickly became one of Al-Qaeda’s strongholds. From here, Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups carried out attacks on the Kirkuk governate.

Fast forwarding to the April 2013 provincial elections, Sunni groups in Hawija and across Iraq began protesting on account of the continued marginalisation by then-Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki’s Shiite government. In April, Iraqi security forces opened fire in order to disperse a crowd of demonstrators in Hawija, killing over 40 protestors and injuring over 150.<sup>120</sup> Many believe that this allowed ISIS, another militant Islamist organisation whose origins in part go back to Al-Qaeda in Iraq, to forge alliances with disgruntled Sunni Arab tribesmen and exploit communal grievances and anger over sectarian politics and corruption associated with Al-Maliki’s government. This set the stage for ISIS taking control of the city a year later.<sup>121</sup> As an analyst from the Washington Institute of Near East Policy stated in relation to territorial gains made by ISIS in 2014, ‘they couldn’t have seized a fraction of what they did without coordinated alliances with other Sunni groups’.<sup>122</sup>

In 2014, shortly after ISIS captured Mosul and Hawija, the Kurdistan Democratic Party’s (KDP) 80th brigade and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan’s (PUK) 70th Peshmerga brigade took over control of the city of Kirkuk. Between 2014-17, approximately half of Kirkuk governorate thus fell under Kurdish control, while the other half was controlled by ISIS.

Even though soon after their arrival, the majority of the population of Hawija grew to resent ISIS as much as the rest of the governorate, country and international community, its inhabitants were, and still are, frequently labelled as ISIS sympathisers on the basis of their Arab Sunni affiliation.

## 5.4 Life under ISIS

ISIS operated in Iraq and Syria with the intent to establish an Islamic caliphate, to be governed according to their Salafi interpretation of Islam. As such, civilians in ISIS-controlled areas, like Hawija,

had to live according to strict rules, with little to no space for other religious minorities or the practice of more moderate interpretations of Islam. Our respondents’ accounts of life under ISIS spoke of a difficult time with many restrictions.<sup>123</sup>

ISIS, for instance, limited civilians’ ability to move around the city freely as they suspected people would try to leave Hawija. ISIS checkpoints were present across the area. One respondent shared:

*The streets were deserted and scary. I can only describe it as a ghost town; ISIS members were the only ones who could walk through the streets freely. There was no transportation of any kind at the time of ISIS, not private or public. Moving on foot was the only option. Moving between towns and cities was also all on foot under ISIS rule, life was bitter and non-existent, no services were available. Even moving on foot was scary because all areas were full of bombs and explosives.*<sup>124</sup>

Civilians were also afraid of passing the checkpoints. One respondent shared:

*All entrances and exits to Hawija were controlled by ISIS. I felt very uncomfortable passing through them, as one day I saw something very frightening. I saw that ISIS had hung the bodies of [former] security personnel at the checkpoint. My children were with me at the time, so I had to cover their eyes to shield them from seeing this horrific scene.*<sup>125</sup>

When civilians did dare to venture out into the city, ISIS often harassed them about the length of their garments, women’s veils including niqab, the length of the men’s beards, and so on:

*We were afraid of them harassing us and accusing us of things that did not exist. They would hold us accountable for facial hair and the length of the dishdasha [an ankle-length robe worn by men]. The hair must be shaved completely. Only if you belong to them, you had the right to grow your hair.*<sup>126</sup>

Moreover, ISIS did not allow civilians to smoke, to keep mobile phones, or to have television sets in their houses. If ISIS found someone ‘using TV or mobile phones, they would be punished or flogged’.<sup>127</sup> Mobile phone networks were also cut. Those who did have phones would use them secretly, often going towards the outskirts in the villages after dark, where they could catch signals from other cities.<sup>128</sup>

Yet, despite all the restrictions outlined above, the industrial neighbourhood was still functioning, and civilians could go about their businesses. Even though business was not as good as it used to be before ISIS, our respondents informed us that it was still enough for many civilians to be able to feed their families. People worked in shops and factories in the industrial neighbourhood, were self-employed, or worked for daily wages. A man, working in a car wash garage, explained that in the first period of ISIS rule his garage ‘was enough to support my family [...] We were living normally.’<sup>129</sup>

117 Muhammad H. Almaliky, “Is There Hope for Iraq?”, *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, Summer 2017.

118 Al-Ghad League for Woman and Child Care, “Hawija City-Based Assessment,” Report (Al-Ghad League for Woman and Child Care: 2019).

119 Florian Neuhofer, “Battle to remove ISIL from Hawija could unlock further sectarian tensions,” *The National*, September 8, 2017.

120 Suad al-Salhy, “Iraq raid on Sunni protest sparks clashes, 44 dead,” *Reuters*, April 23, 2013; Margaret Griffiths, “Protest Clashes and Random Attacks Leave 111 Killed, 233 Wounded Across Iraq,” *Antiwar.com*, April 23, 2013.

121 Derek Henry Flood, “The Hawija Offensive: A Liberation Exposes Faultlines,” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 10, no. 9 (October 2017).

122 Tim Arango, “Uneasy Alliance Gives Insurgents an Edge in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, June 18, 2014.

123 For an impression of the life under ISIS see, for instance, *The Islamic State*, directed by Medyan Dairieh (2014; VICE News Specials), documentary.

124 Khalid Qassem Abdullah, interview 6 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

125 Assem Ali Khattab, interview 24 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

126 Saleem Khalil Mohammed, interview 8 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

127 Jassem Younis Khudair, interview 31 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

128 Ramadan Musleh Ahmed, second interview 13 July 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Qasim Ali Habib, second interview 6 July 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

129 Faisal Darwesh Jabbar, interview 4 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

Yet, many respondents also complained about the limited availability of food and its increasing costs – apart from meat – under ISIS rule (see chapter 7 for more details on increasing food costs). Whatever people earned, generally had to be spent on meeting their primary needs.

Regarding service provision under ISIS, by January 2015 electricity was fully cut in Hawija as the main line from Kirkuk was severed. Electricity was therefore provided through communal civil generators, which ran on fuel provided by ISIS.<sup>130</sup> Similar trends were seen in the education sector, where by January 2015 ISIS had replaced most of the teachers with its own members or had teachers pledge allegiance to them. It also changed the curriculum, and taught students about ‘weapons, bombs and how to kill’.<sup>131</sup> As one respondent recalled:

*There was no education during time of ISIS. On the contrary, children moved backwards and their psychological state deteriorated because they could not go out and practice their lives, learn and be educated. Life was non-existent, neither public nor private educational institutions were available. There were no books or uniforms, because education ceased to exist, but there are people who travelled to other places, they migrated to Kirkuk, to Salahaddin to get rid of ISIS and complete their studies there. At the time of ISIS, thirteen students left territories controlled by ISIS in order to study, [but] ISIS caught and executed them directly without any hesitation.<sup>132</sup>*

The healthcare system also deteriorated tremendously as many medical staff had to flee Hawija if they wanted to continue receiving their salaries from the government. The ones that remained therefore had either pledged allegiance to ISIS or were ISIS staff. One interviewee shared that doctors and specialised staff were ‘available, but they were under the pressure of ISIS. ISIS and their families got preference for medicines and treatments because of the shortage. And ISIS also tried to forbid some of the medical personnel and their families from leaving’.<sup>133</sup> In chapter 7 we discuss how these conditions exacerbated the impact of the Dutch airstrike on the availability of healthcare and education.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Before ISIS came to power in Hawija in 2015, there were already many intercommunal grievances between the Kurdish, Turkmen, Arab Sunni and Shiite populations in particular. Hawija gained a reputation as a devout Sunni Arab and radical Islamist district, which led to the marginalisation of its Sunni Arab inhabitants by the federal government, causing further grievances among this segment of Hawija’s population that ISIS could later exploit. Yet, many respondents describe that they mainly suffered from ISIS’ rule and their imposed restrictions. It is particularly important to note that Hawija was an important agricultural centre in Iraq and that, even under ISIS rule, its industrial neighbourhood represented an economic hub where many civilians were employed in its workplaces and factories. It moreover housed many governmental buildings and infrastructure. While life had become increasingly difficult under ISIS rule in terms of economic opportunities and violent suppression, the June 2015 airstrike made the situation much worse, as will be explored in the next chapters.

<sup>130</sup> Chief Engineer Haadir Ramadan Mohammed of the Hawija Electricity Department, interview 16 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>131</sup> Khalaf Ahmed Saleh, interview 29 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>132</sup> Mouna Ali Attiya, interview 11 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>133</sup> Hameed Mohsin Mahdi, interview 31 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

# Chapter 6



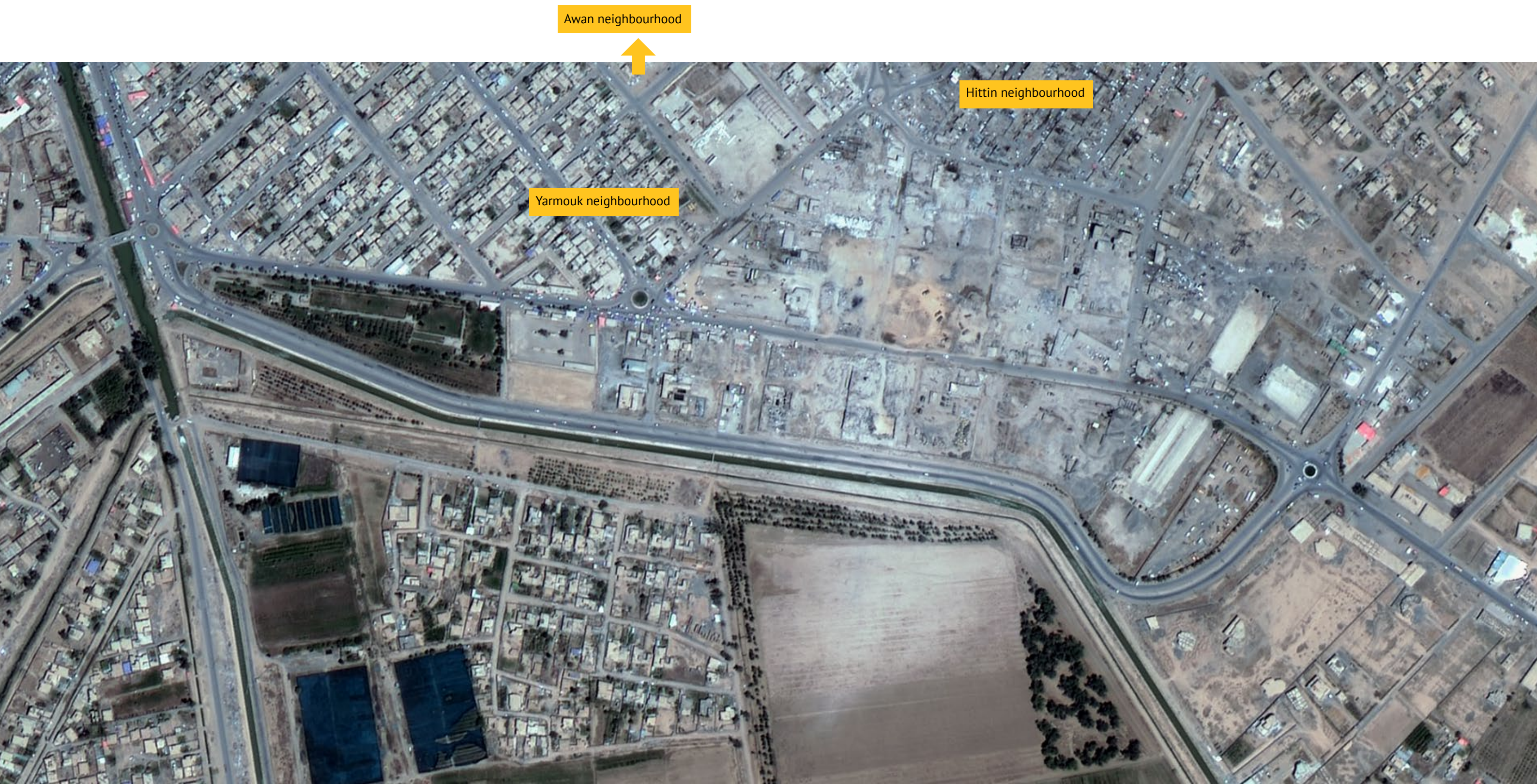


Figure 4: The destruction after the 2-3 June airstrike on Hawija. The industrial neighbourhood is largely flattened, but damages have also occurred in the surrounding residential neighbourhoods. Satellite image from 15 June 2015. UNOSAT.



## 6. Direct effects of the airstrike

This chapter outlines the direct civilian harm effects of the 2-3 June 2015 airstrike on Hawija's industrial neighbourhood. In chapter 2, we put forward our working definition of 'direct effects': the immediate and (usually) physical impact directly from the armed conflict. This includes civilian deaths, physical injuries, immediate damage to civilian infrastructure, and most forms of psychological trauma. In this chapter we first provide a brief description of the events of the night itself, the airstrike and the secondary explosion it caused, relying largely on the experiences and impressions of civilian witnesses. The subsequent sub-sections analyse four direct civilian harm effects: civilian deaths, physical injuries, material damages, and psychological harm.

### 6.1 The airstrike: 'It was like hell'

*It was a painful night and it was scary and frightening. All people imagined that the strike occurred right in their house because of its severity and its proximity to civilians [...] First, [Hawija] was a city full of construction and we were living in our homes. Then, a whole neighbourhood was destroyed along with innocent people. [...] [T]he Dutch strike unfortunately ended our lives completely.*<sup>134</sup>

During the day of 2 June 2015, civilians in Hawija noticed a fighter jet hovering over the city. After years of war, they had grown accustomed to such sights and did not think much of it. They went about their day as any other. At around midnight, two F-16 fighter jets returned to Hawija and dropped their missiles on an identified target in the industrial neighbourhood: an ISIS factory for vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. When the missiles came into contact with an estimated 18,000 kilos of explosives, it caused a huge secondary explosion that could allegedly be felt even 50 kilometres away in Kirkuk.

Civilians compared the impact of this explosion to an immense storm, a large earthquake, or even a nuclear bomb. There were 'so many particles and dust in the air, that it felt like a storm'<sup>135</sup>, with a 'yellow cloud'<sup>136</sup> covering the area of impact. Many could not see properly because ash was covering everything and there was no electricity at the time of the airstrike. Moreover, many civilians were in a state of shock, not knowing what had just happened: 'When I heard the sound of the explosion, I was in another world, imagining something else [...] [I] was in shock due to the sound of the explosion.'<sup>137</sup>

Given the strength of the blast, many people – even those living several kilometres from the site of impact – recounted how they thought the explosion must have happened right next to them, or at

least in their street. Because of 'the force of the explosion, my family and me expected the explosion to have been in the house.'<sup>138</sup>

The Hawija General Hospital was quickly overcrowded by people seeking help: 'There were many injured persons. There were those who had an eye out, who had bleeding in the mouth, or their hands cut off. Many people were refused at the door. Some because they had lighter injuries, others because ISIS turned them away as they had not sworn allegiance. A man whose wife's foot was hurt and whose mother lost an eye, recalls that both of them 'were not treated, [ISIS was] just saying, "wait outside", and they were shouting at the injured people. We then went outside of the hospital and went back home without treatment, operation or anything else.'<sup>139</sup>

After having been turned away at the hospital, one interviewee went to the house of a doctor to find help for her injured children and herself: 'We saw his house full of people at that hour, people were injured. Everyone was helping the others, bandaging, and also sewing injured people without anaesthesia.'<sup>140</sup>

For many, the actual impact and extent of damages only became clear the following morning. An Al-Ghad researcher who lived about five kilometres from the targeted area recalled how he and his relatives walked towards the industrial neighbourhood the next morning. Seeing the rubble in the first street they crossed, they imagined the explosion must have occurred there, only to see even more damage in the next street. This continued until they finally reached the industrial neighbourhood itself.

The area was entirely reduced to rubble; collapsed buildings and uprooted trees were pretty much all that remained. According to one civilian, when he reached the industrial neighbourhood on the morning after, '[a]ll of it, from shops to stores to factories, including my own, [...] were reduced to ashes.'<sup>141</sup> Another respondent recalled how the area was strewn 'with iron, rockets, bricks and containers [...] which made the streets impassable.'<sup>142</sup> There was little life left amid the devastation: 'Even dogs fled and did not remain in Hawija.'<sup>143</sup>

### 6.2 Civilian deaths

*When he stood, shrapnel from the missile hit and killed him, and he fell on my mother. My mother went running and screaming, 'My son is killed, my son is killed. Save my son, save my son.' [...] My other brothers could not do anything, only hold him up. He passed away, because the explosion was severe, the shrapnel was in his waist and nothing was left of him. He was a young boy who did not marry until he was 25 years old, he was at the beginning of his life, but they ended his life so easily.*<sup>144</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Nawaz Ali Mahdad, interview 31 May, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>135</sup> Sabah Kareem Ali, interview 9 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>136</sup> Jassim Mohammad Hussein, interview 23 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>137</sup> Khalaf Ahmed Saleh, interview 29 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>138</sup> Ziad Marwan Hamad, interview 10 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>139</sup> Faisal Darwesh Jabbar, interview 4 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>140</sup> Khameesa Fadhil Ibrahim, interview 5 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>141</sup> Jassim Mohammad Hussein, interview 23 May, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>142</sup> Hanan Fadhil Jawad, interview 8 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>143</sup> Hanan Fadhil Jawad, interview 8 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>144</sup> Omar Abdullah Mahmoud, interview 28 February 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

This section looks at how the airstrike and subsequent secondary explosion caused civilian deaths. First, we describe what caused these deaths. Second, we reflect on the number of casualties reported by different actors at different stages after the airstrike. Third, we reflect on the number of civilian casualties we have been able to distil from our research and that conducted by Al-Ghad. We then consider the number of casualties that remain unknown. Finally, we argue why we consider the most commonly reported number – 70 civilian deaths – to be a conservative estimate.

6.2.1 THE CAUSES OF DEATH

Many people, especially those in the industrial neighbourhood itself or those residing in the surrounding Awan, Hittin, or Yarmouk neighbourhoods (see the satellite image on pages 54-55, were defenceless against the impact of the explosion. Many civilians close to the site of impact died immediately from the intensity of the airstrike and subsequent secondary explosion itself. Many more others died from the shrapnel, glass, iron, and other debris flying around. During that time in June when the airstrike took place, people were particularly vulnerable to such projectiles as many preferred to sleep outside or close to the windows during the warm summer months in Iraq, where the heat could reach up to 50 degrees Celsius. As one respondent told us:

*There were people on the roof who were injured because of the debris and the shrapnel from the rockets hitting them. There was no electricity and it was hot, so many people were sleeping on the roof or in their gardens, so they got hurt because of all the debris flying around[.]*<sup>145</sup>

The other main cause of civilian deaths was the destruction of buildings. Many people died when the walls, roofs or floors of their houses collapsed on them. This was how one woman lost both her son and 8-month-old grandchild:

*They killed my son and my grandson, who meant everything to me [...] Zaid was my dearest, my son, and the breadwinner whom I depended on for everything. They were killed and they were taken before my eyes. I could not do anything. He died and his son Abdul Hadi died because of the Dutch strike [...] The second floor fell on them and killed them. [...] What was the sin of Abdul Hadi, eight months old, who was killed?*<sup>146</sup>

Another person stressed how especially people living in the industrial neighbourhood itself did not stand a chance, as most of them were buried under collapsed buildings. People spoke of pulling out the bodies of their own loved ones, and ISIS members pulling out the bodies of ISIS elements. Very few, however, were looking for the many IDPs living in the industrial neighbourhood who were passing through without family or friends in Hawija (for more on this see 6.2.5).<sup>147</sup> One respondent relayed: ‘The [IDP] families who lived in the industrial area did not come out from under the rubble. Seven days after the bombing, their smell came out from under the rubble.’<sup>148</sup>

6.2.2 COUNTING CIVILIAN DEATHS

A nursing staff who was on duty on the night of the airstrike revealed that at least 80 civilians came to the hospital for assistance. Some were dead or died while being treated, others were injured.

145 Hussam Yousaf Ramadan, interview 30 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

146 Nisa Tahir Aboud, interview 7 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.

147 Maysa Attiya Sagheer, interview 8 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

148 Hanan Fadhil Jawad, interview 8 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

Additional civilians, who were found under the rubble, were brought in the next morning. According to the hospital’s former Director, over 200 victims were immediately impacted by the airstrike.<sup>149</sup>

Different casualty reports surfaced in the days and weeks following the airstrike. Soon after the attack, Dutch pilots notified the Dutch MoD of ‘unintended collateral damage’ from the airstrike through a classified Battle Damage Assessment.<sup>150</sup> The day after the strike, the Head of the Kirkuk Provincial Council estimated that 150 civilians had died in the airstrike although it remains unclear what this number was based on, whereas other Iraqi news sites and Reuters put this number at 70, based on conversations with residents and not further specified security sources.<sup>151</sup> On 15 June 2015, the Dutch Minister of Defence received a classified Civilian Casualty Report from CENTCOM (see chapter 4), which contained references to open-source estimations of up to 74 casualties it considered ‘credible’.<sup>152</sup> In August 2015, the ICRC shared a list of (unconfirmed) civilian deaths with the Dutch embassy, which included an estimate of 170 civilian deaths caused by an attack that appears to correspond with the Dutch airstrike on Hawija.<sup>153</sup> Again, it is not clarified on what sources this figure of 170 casualties was based. In 2016, a UNAMI Protection of Civilians report referred back to the Kirkuk Provincial Council’s estimate of 150 but indicated it had been unable to verify this number as UNAMI could not access the site to conduct field investigations.<sup>154</sup>

From November 2019 onwards, when the Dutch Minister of Defence confirmed that the Netherlands carried out the attack, the number of civilian deaths came under renewed attention and contestation. The Dutch MoD first reported that the 70 casualties were not part of CENTCOM’s official body count (see chapter 4).<sup>155</sup> When that statement was later revised, the then-minister explained that CENTCOM would not be able to learn how many of those 70 casualties were affiliated to ISIS or were civilians for a number of reasons. She referred to a lack of on-the ground investigations, the fact that the dead get buried quickly in Muslim communities, incomplete population registers, and the difficulty of distinguishing between ISIS fighters and civilians retrospectively.<sup>156</sup>

6.2.3 WHAT CAN BE KNOWN ABOUT CIVILIAN DEATHS

As explained in the Introduction and Methodology chapters, one of the research aims has been to learn what knowledge can be gathered about civilian harm in Hawija through a field investigation. First, the *mukhtar*, the village chief of the Hittin and Yarmouk neighbourhoods of which the industrial neighbourhood is a part of, shared that the deaths from the airstrike in these areas alone amounted to 73 casualties. These neighbourhoods were not the only one affected: the Awan neighbourhood was also greatly impacted by the airstrike.<sup>157</sup> Second, we learned that Al-Ghad had been developing

149 Runderkamp and Meindertsma, “In Hawija is niemand de Nederlandse bomaanval vergeten.”

150 Dutch Ministry of Defence, “Feitenrelas transparantie burgerslachtoffers bij lunchtaanvallen,” Briefing, (27 925 nr.663) November 5, 2019.

151 “Airwars assessment CI070,” *Airwars*, last consulted on 20 December 2021, <https://airwars.org/civilian-casualties/ci070-june-3-2015/>; Reuters, “Air strike in north Iraq killed dozens, including civilians, residents say,” *Reuters*, June 4, 2015.

152 Chris Woods, “Minister verzweg burgerdoden Hawija voor politiek gewin,” *NRC*, November 5, 2019.

153 Dutch Ministry of Defence, “Brief van de Minister van Defensie” Briefing (673), November 25, 2019.

154 OHCHR & UNAMI, “Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1 May-31 October 2015,” Report (OHCHR & UNAMI: 2016), 23.

155 “Onderzoeksrapport CENTCOM over de luchtaanval op Hawija,” Dutch Parliament, last modified 19 December 2019, <https://debatgemist.tweedekamer.nl/debatten/onderzoeksrapport-centcom-over-de-luchtaanval-op-hawija>.

156 Duch Ministry of Defense, “Brief aan de tweede kamer,” Briefing (707), March 24, 2020.

157 Key informant interview 18 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



a database of civilians who were affected by the airstrike to track the number of civilians killed. By December 2021, this database included 348 civilians. Among these, Al-Ghad has so far been able to verify 44 civilian deaths with absolute certainty by triangulating claims and reviewing documents, such as death certificates (an example of a death certificate from a relative of Abdullah Rashid Saleh - see the box on pages 72-3 - who died as result of the airstrike is included in Annex B). This database is not exhaustive, since it only includes those civilians who came forward and contacted Al-Ghad themselves after they put up a poster of their contact details in Hawija.

The 119 people interviewed for this research are a part of Al-Ghad's larger database of 348 people. Of these 119, 70 people reported losing at least 245 loved ones overall. Often in great detail. For instance, one respondent recalled:

*There was no electricity and [my wife] was making dinner at that time and was close to the kitchen window at the moment of the explosion. She was injured by the shattered window which wounded her neck. I took her to the hospital of Hawija, and they could not save her because there was internal bleeding [...] [W]e stayed in the hospital for about a week, and [she] died due to severe internal bleeding. I lost my wife and the mother of my only child.<sup>158</sup>*

However, upon closer inspection, there was overlap between at least 160 out of those 245 alleged civilian casualties (e.g., one respondent talked about a son who died, who was another respondent's cousin). The total number without duplication is thus 85 'unique' casualties from all our witness testimonies. Of these 85 casualties, 44 can be confirmed with certainty as these concern the dead that Al-Ghad verified in its database; the remaining 41 could not be confirmed with documentation (see next section).

In addition, though not included in our casualty count, five women we spoke to reported having suffered a miscarriage during the night of the airstrike. One woman was nine months pregnant when the strike occurred: shrapnel hit her stomach and killed her unborn child. Because of the injury, her uterus had to be surgically removed, ending any chance of future pregnancies.<sup>159</sup> Two other women have been unable to conceive since.<sup>160</sup>

#### 6.2.4 THE UNDOCUMENTED CASUALTIES

One of the ways we could have verified all of the above civilian casualties was to verify death certificates like Al-Ghad managed to do in 44 cases. However, there are a number of issues regarding official documentation from that time that made this difficult. First, there was no official authority in charge during ISIS occupation. Staff of the Hawija civil defence department, which was one of the few government departments still active in Hawija during ISIS occupation<sup>161</sup>, were told by ISIS about

<sup>158</sup> Mohsen Jaffar Abdulhassan, interview 28 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>159</sup> Maha Saleh Mahdi, interview 30 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>160</sup> Daniya Ramadan Ali, interview 28 June, Hawija, Iraq; Huda Rafeeq Saleh, interview 7 April 2021, Tuz Khurmato, Iraq; Mouna Ali Attiya, interview 11 April 2021,

Hawija, Iraq; Zainab Khairalla Hamoud, interview 28 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Maha Saleh Mahdi, interview 30 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>161</sup> Under ISIS occupation government employees in all sectors had to leave ISIS-held areas and go to government-controlled areas if they wanted to continue to receive their salaries. Those employees who did not leave the area were seen by their departments as having pledged allegiance to ISIS. While this was the case all over Iraq for areas which were occupied by ISIS between 2014-17, this was also confirmed during KIIs that PAX and Al-Ghad held with authorities from the education, health, and water resources departments on 15 and 19 September 2021.



Figure 5: One of the vehicles belonging to the civil defence department that got damaged by the airstrike and subsequent secondary explosion, June 2015. Image obtained from the Hawija civil defence.

a month before the airstrike to lock the premises by sundown and to return home every day.<sup>162</sup> When the airstrike occurred, well after sundown, there were thus no institutional or formal emergency medical technicians or firefighting services available that could coordinate or conduct search-and-rescue operations. Yet, even if civil defence personnel would have been present during the time of the airstrike, their building and vehicles were approximately 50 metres from the site of impact and were completely destroyed.

Second, the Hawija General Hospital was under ISIS control, and prioritised emergency medical care for ISIS fighters, their families, and those who pledged allegiance to them. Many civilians reported that they were denied treatment when they went to Hawija General Hospital. Those who had the means went to Mosul General Hospital, approximately 195 kilometres away, also under ISIS control. Some others reported that they went to pharmacists in nearby villages to receive medical treatment. As a result, there is no official medical documentation. Médecins Sans Frontières/ Doctors without Borders (MSF) staff, one of the key partners of the Department of Health in Hawija, confirmed that there are no records from the time that the General Hospital was under ISIS occupation.<sup>163</sup>

Finally, civilians who did not pledge allegiance to ISIS often did not get any death certificates issued

<sup>162</sup> Head of the civil defence department, key informant interview 19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>163</sup> MSF, remote interviews 4 and 31 May 2021.

by them. Moreover, any documents that were issued by ISIS were and still are not accepted by any official authorities in Iraq. If a civilian is in possession of an ISIS-issued document, the said civilian is often seen as an ISIS member or supporter. Finally, getting legal documentation in Iraq, especially for those who were displaced or lived under ISIS occupation remains a challenge.<sup>164</sup>

### 6.2.5 THE UNKNOWN CASUALTIES

The civilian casualties we were able to count (with and without death certificates), however, only concern the victims as known by survivors who are still living in Hawija and who we spoke to. There are likely to be many more because at the time of the airstrike, there were many movements of displaced persons within Iraq. Civilians fled areas of active fighting or moved elsewhere after they had lost their house or livelihood. This was no different in Hawija, and many interviewees indicated that there were numerous displaced families living in the town's industrial neighbourhood. These people fled from different places in Iraq, most prominently from Salahaddin and Anbar governorates, both under ISIS occupation at the time, who passed through Hawija when traveling to safer territories in Iraq, specifically to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).<sup>165</sup>

Many of the IDPs who ended up in Hawija flocked to the industrial neighbourhood where they lived in the 'car dealership area, where there were rooms housing many displaced families because inside the district there were no empty houses. So the displaced people lived there'.<sup>166</sup> These families were closest to the area of impact and hardly stood a chance, as the entire area got flattened. In 2019, the then-Director of Hawija General Hospital shared that there were scores of IDPs left buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings: 'We do not know where they came from. We have not been able to register them as fatalities'.<sup>167</sup> Our researchers were also told that these families 'all died because of the strike'<sup>168</sup> and 'were never found and remained under the rubble'.<sup>169</sup> In the wake of the airstrike and the liberation from ISIS, there has been no one to report these people missing or to identify their remains, as their presence, let alone their identities, were not always known to Hawija's residents.

Another source of potential casualties that remained inaccessible to us, is the existence of mass graves. During the course of this research, we were told about at least five such graves in Hawija, with at least two being dug as a result of the airstrike. The authorities in Baghdad did not allow us to visit these sites. Thus far these graves have not been exhumed by Iraqi authorities either to identify whether those buried in them are ISIS elements or civilians. Similarly, although many civilians we interviewed shared that they buried their loved ones in Jahesh cemetery in Hawija, we did not receive permission to visit this site. Forensic research could thus aid in finding and identifying additional civilian casualties from the airstrike. We conclude, that given the vast amount of damage to houses and lived-in workplaces (as will become even more evident in section 6.4), the numbers derived from sources immediately after the airstrike, Al-Ghad's database, our interviews with survivors and key informants, and the many unidentified displaced families living in the industrial neighbourhood, the number of 70 civilian fatalities is likely to be a conservative estimate.

164 UNHCR, "Iraq: IDPs – Civil and Identity Documentation (Jan-Dec 2020)," Brief (UNHCR: 2020).

165 As discussed with a staff member from Al-Ghad in 2020.

166 Assem Ali Khattab, interview 24 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

167 Runderkamp and Meindertsma, "De Nederlandse bomaanval"

168 Suhail Mohammad Hussein, interview 23 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

169 Ishaq Abed Mamoun, interview 7 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

## 6.3 Injuries

*I thought it was a nuclear bomb. A very large tremor occurred. I saw flares flying and felt the ground shaking. I was hit by shrapnel that cut a part of my body [...] I lost part of my hip and pelvis, and the shin and thigh bones were damaged. I still suffer from my injuries and I need surgery, and the price of this operation is beyond imagination. [...] I became disabled and I have not worked for six years. [...] I cannot go to work and cannot support my family.*<sup>170</sup>

The number of people injured due to the airstrike was overwhelming and the capacity at the hospital was severely overstretched. As mentioned before, many people with 'lighter' injuries were turned away as they showed up. In other cases, ISIS gave preferential treatment to their supporters and turned others away at the hospital:

*I felt something hit my feet, and [it was] as if my bones were outside the flesh of my feet, and I crawled and called for them [ISIS members] to carry me, and none of them carried me and ISIS said to me, 'You did not join us, so we will not carry you, we will go to those who pledged allegiance to us and carry them' because many people were hurt by the strike. They left us and walked away.*<sup>171</sup>

Many others described having to stitch or otherwise treat their own wounds or those of relatives and friends without any medicine or anesthesia to ease the pain.

During an interview held on 2 December 2021, the Mayor of Hawija alluded to over 500 persons being directly injured due to the airstrike.<sup>172</sup> Of our 119 respondents, 46 people reported having sustained injuries themselves; 68 people indicated that one or more family members got injured, many of these reports concern children.

Again, the exact number of people injured is hard to pinpoint as the Hawija General Hospital was under ISIS control at the time, not everybody was treated in the hospital, there were a high number of IDPs living in the city and medical institutions did not keep records, or after liberation these records could not be found.

Interviewees described a wide range of injuries caused by the airstrike. Particularly frequent was damage to the body because of shrapnel and debris, which to this day have not been removed from all people affected because the operation is too specialised or expensive. Additionally, many people described that they or people they knew lost limbs like hands, arms, or legs in the airstrike. Sometimes this was a direct result of the explosion and the damage it caused. In other cases, the lack of proper healthcare worsened an already dire situation, as one respondent told us: '[T]here were those who were hit by shrapnel [...], but because there was no treatment or medicine available, or they were too expensive for them to be able to afford them, their limbs had to be amputated later on'.<sup>173</sup> Many of these chronic outcomes could likely have been prevented had proper and timely medical attention been available.

170 Ibrahim Attiya Kareem, interview 27 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

171 Mohammad Ali Ahmed, interview 28 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

172 PAX, "Hawija as told by residents (with the Mayor of Hawija) – PAX PoC Conference 2021," *YouTube*, last modified December 22, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WPn6YL67J0>

173 Sabah Kareem Ali, interview 9 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



Other injuries included facial deformities; fractures; burns; skin diseases; shrapnel in the torso; lung problems after inhaling dust and smoke and resulting dizziness or tightness in the chest; and internal bleeding. For some, the explosion led to the loss of one or more senses. Several people lost partial or full eyesight after shrapnel had taken out or damaged their eye(s). In at least one case a victim lost her sense of smell when shrapnel damaged her nose. Others lost their hearing because their ear was ripped off or their eardrums were damaged by the noise of the explosion. A woman shared:

*We were on the roof when the explosion happened, and we were very close to it. My son's ears are also still damaged, he cannot hear. I call him a lot and he wakes up but does not respond. I cannot hear anyone unless they speak close to me. People now call us the deaf family who cannot hear.*<sup>174</sup>

Regarding direct, yet long-term impact, it is important to note that for many people their injuries have led to a deteriorated quality of life as their health has worsened. Some died from their injuries months or even years after the event:

*My mother was severely injured after that explosion, she had kidney failure. After that night, she stayed alive for almost two years while she was living on oxygen. [...] It was with the help of my brothers, sisters, relatives, and friends that I could buy an oxygen device for my mom. The device was not enough, it was useless. She used to choke, and her face turned blue. She was like that until she passed away.*<sup>175</sup>

It was often not until after Hawija was liberated from ISIS in 2017 that many of our respondents could seek medical treatment for their injuries. Yet, as of December 2021, the Hawija General Hospital does not have a surgical wing. This means many people have to travel far, usually to Kirkuk city, which is approximately 50 kilometres away, to get even basic medical attention. This entails additional travel costs, money many civilians lack as their place of employment – the industrial neighbourhood – was destroyed.

## 6.4 Material damage

*[I] lost hope in life because the strike left nothing. It was utter destruction: people lost their cars, there were those who lost their homes, and I lost nine shops, a garage, and all the things that were in them. I had nothing left.*<sup>176</sup>

### 6.4.1 DAMAGE TO PERSONAL PROPERTY

The impact of the airstrike was considerable and many hundreds of people have reported material damages. In our own research, 101 out of the 119 respondents indicated that their personal cars and/or houses were damaged that night, often to the extent that cars became unusable and houses uninhabitable. Reported damage to houses included shattered windows, collapsed walls and/or floors, doors that got blown out of their frames, wrecked furniture, and damage to the water and electricity provision: ‘My house was completely destroyed. Nothing was left but ruins, including the building and furniture, even the doors, windows, and curtains were pulled out of their place.’<sup>177</sup>

A reported 6,000 houses in Hawija were impacted directly by the airstrike. Some, especially those close by in the Awan, Hittin, and Yarmouk neighbourhoods, were completely destroyed, had their roofs or walls collapse, or sustained significant damage to the structural foundations. Others further away only sustained minor damages like broken windows. It is estimated that buildings within a two-kilometre radius from the site of the airstrike were completely destroyed and buildings within a ten-kilometre radius sustained damages to varying degrees.<sup>178</sup> The Coalition’s own Battle Damage Assessment from 3 June 2015 already noted that 136 buildings were confirmed destroyed, and a further 544 damaged.<sup>179</sup>

Given that the explosion occurred in the industrial neighbourhood, where many businesses, factories and shops were situated, the damage to workplaces was overwhelming (see Figure 7 on page 67). Of 119 respondents, 108 people told us that they either lost a shop or workplace they owned or that they lost their job as their place of employment was destroyed. According to the *mukhtar* of the industrial, Hittin and Yarmouk neighbourhoods, at least twenty car dealerships, the electricity sub-station, five ice factories (one government owned and four privately owned), the municipality department building, three brick factories, a textile mill, a flour mill, the civil defence department, the Tal’ea fuel station, and a reported 1,200 shops and business, varying in sizes (including, among others, tea stalls, butcheries, car repair workshops, car electronics shops, blacksmiths) were directly impacted by the airstrike.<sup>180</sup> One man summarised it by stating that, ‘the strike was like a nuclear strike that ended the lives and economies of many families.’<sup>181</sup>

The materials stored in a workplace were often damaged as well, as illustrated by this statement of a man who worked as an electrician in his family’s blacksmith and car repair shop:

*We used to go to our stores and work every day, but when we arrived the next day, we saw that most of the stores had been destroyed and turned into dust [...] But my workplace, the damage to it was beyond anything I had imagined, since my shop was in the industrial area itself, and the industrial area was completely destroyed. [...] We could not find the door to our shop and part of the wall was also destroyed. The kit inside the shop was all gone. [...] We lost a lot, such as oxygen bottles, welding kits, and welding machines. My brother had several car repair kits which were all lost. We also had metallic rods, batteries for various vehicles, electrical tools, and several charging kits, which were all destroyed. The items we lost cost approximately 30 million [Iraqi] dinars [24,000 USD/21,600 EUR]. The shop to be reconstructed and rehabilitated needs 15 million [12,000 USD/10,800 EUR].*<sup>182</sup>

Similarly, a privately owned textile mill, belonging to Warith Adam Mustafa, approximately twelve metres from the site of the airstrike, was destroyed. The total damages estimated and verified by a local court amount to close to 3 million USD (2.7 million EUR) (details of the damages are added as Annex A). Thus far, he has spent an estimated 48,000 USD (43,200 EUR) from his own resources to clear the debris and rubble from his mill, but he is still unable to set up his business again.<sup>183</sup>

178 As shared by the NGO coordinator appointed by the Mayor’s office, Ali Hussein Alawi, and eighteen civilians from the industrial neighbourhood, key informant interview 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

179 As can be read in Coalition reports published by *The New York Times* after a FOIA request. The documents are accessible at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/c-6-2-15-iraq/055d09f8f8b256a4/full.pdf>.

180 Mukhtar, key informant interview 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq; nine former business owners of the Hawija industrial neighbourhood, focus group discussion

19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

181 Hamza Mohammad Hamid, interview 8 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

182 Sabah Kareem Ali, interview 9 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

183 Warith Adam Mustafa, focus group discussion 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

174 Manal Ibrahim Nasser, interview 26 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

175 Suhail Mohammad Hussein, interview 23 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

176 Hussein Fadhil Mohammad, interview 30 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

177 Jassem Younis Khudair, interview 31 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



Satellite images showing Hawija’s industrial neighbourhood before (left) and after the June 2015 strike (right).

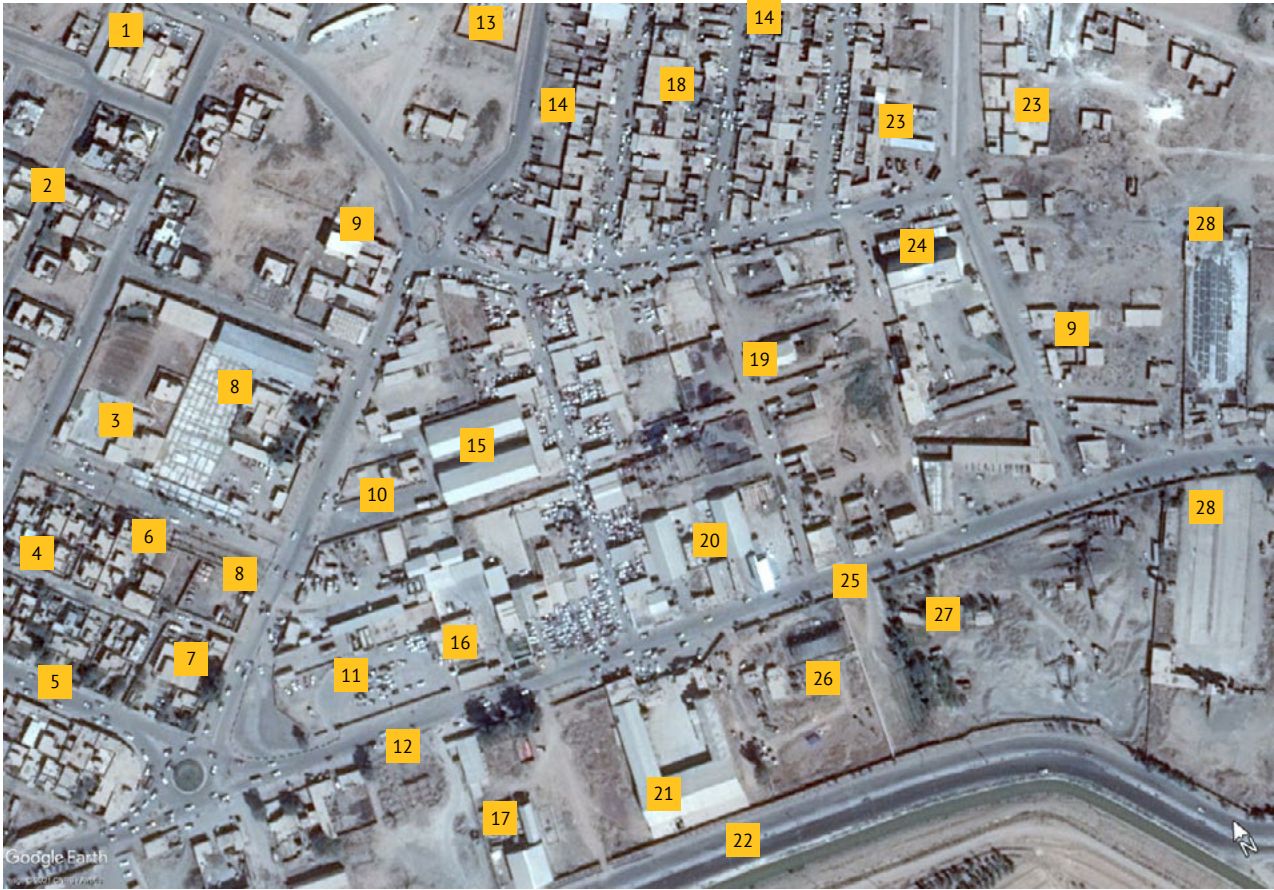


Figure 6: Part of the industrial neighbourhood and some of its businesses and infrastructure before the 2015 airstrike. Satellite image from 2013. Google Earth.

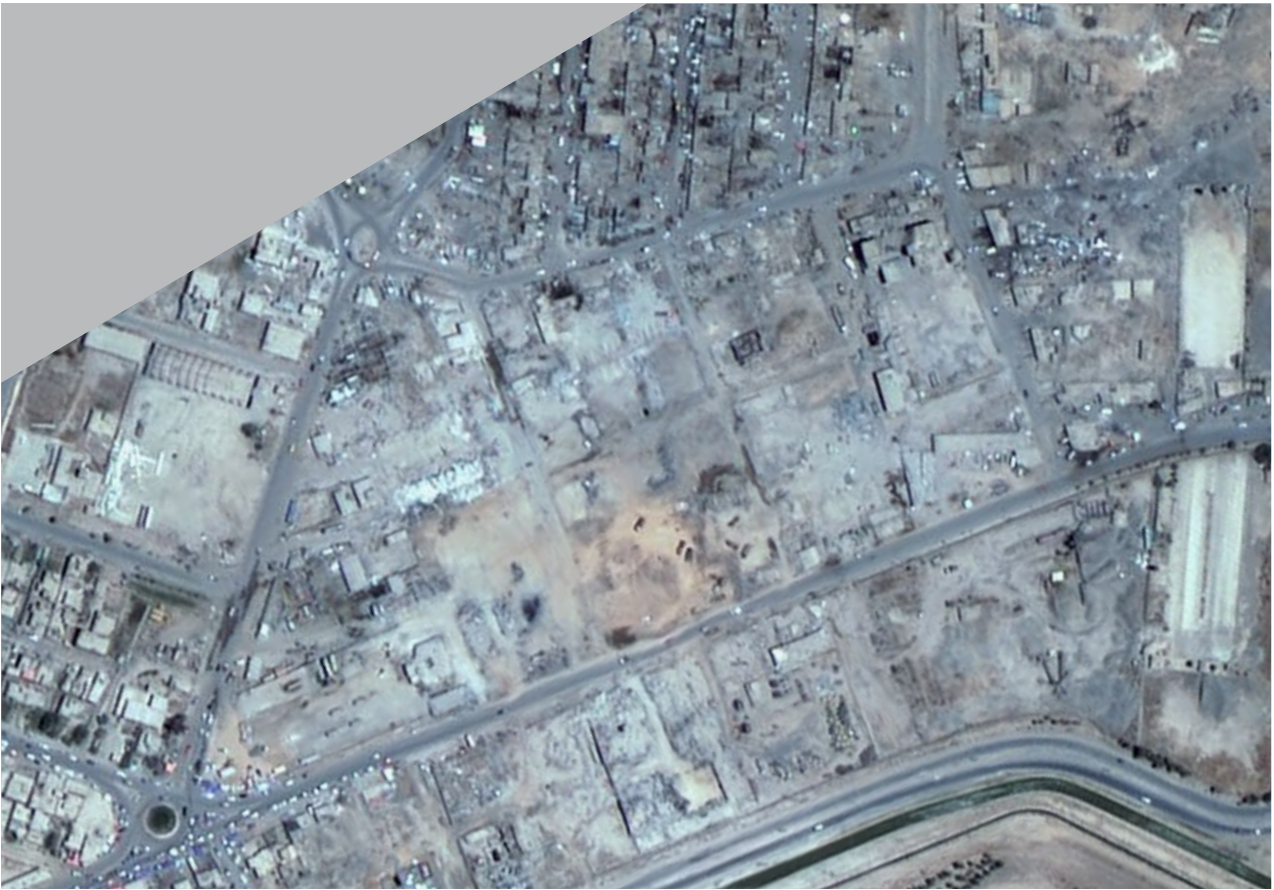


Figure 7: Part of the industrial neighbourhood after the 2015 airstrike. Satellite image from 15 June 2015. UNOSAT.

- |    |                                       |    |                                     |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| 1  | Health centre                         | 16 | Civil defence                       |
| 2  | Awan neighbourhood                    | 17 | Ice factory (private property)      |
| 3  | Houses of Directorate of Health staff | 18 | Directorate of Education            |
| 4  | Yarmouk neighbourhood                 | 19 | Ice factory (government property)   |
| 5  | Shahra-e-Tiba (road)                  | 20 | Agriculture department warehouses / |
| 6  | Real estate office                    |    | ISIS IED storage: site of airstrike |
| 7  | Directorate of Sewage                 | 21 | Textile factory                     |
| 8  | Municipality department               | 22 | Al-Hawli street                     |
| 9  | Car repair workshops                  | 23 | Car showrooms                       |
| 10 | Directorate of Veterinary Services    | 24 | Flour mill                          |
| 11 | Ta'lea fuel station                   | 25 | Kirkuk-Hawija road                  |
| 12 | Garage                                | 26 | Electricity sub-station             |
| 13 | Directorate of Religious Affairs      | 27 | Asphalt factory                     |
| 14 | Hittin neighbourhood                  | 28 | Brick factory                       |
| 15 | Agriculture department warehouses     |    |                                     |



6.4.2 DAMAGE TO PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Besides the damage to privately owned homes and workplaces, the damage to Hawija’s communal infrastructure was considerable, as already briefly alluded to in the previous sub-section (see also Figure 7 on page 67). Overall, there was not much left standing in the industrial neighbourhood and surrounding areas: ‘The entire infrastructure was destroyed, especially the area in which the bombing occurred and the area surrounding it [...] It became an area completely empty of buildings.’<sup>184</sup>

The Hawija General Hospital, located two kilometres away from the industrial neighbourhood, suffered from windows imploding and doors coming off their frames. Mohammed Ibrahim, a nursing staff, who was in Hawija at the time of the airstrike, shared that all the hospital’s windows imploded, and that the blood bank sustained a lot of damage due to shards of glass becoming embedded in its walls. The ceiling of the hospital’s administrative building also collapsed. Since the structure of the administrative building was already weak, there were thankfully no patients in that area, hence no casualties occurred. There were numerous cracks on the wall, and furniture was destroyed, as were two to three big generators dedicated to the hospital, a sonar machine, and an x-ray machine.<sup>185</sup>

Hawija’s electricity sub-station, which had a capacity of 33-11 kilovolt-ampere (KVA) transmission, was also destroyed because of the airstrike. Due to the force and intensity of the explosion, the transformers, circuits, and machines all melted and fused together: nothing was distinguishable anymore in the morning. Only the firewall remained standing and in its original condition. Apart from the station, the network was also heavily impacted, especially to the neighbouring areas of Hittin, Yarmouk, and Awan.<sup>186</sup>

While no water treatment plant was directly damaged as a result of this airstrike<sup>187</sup>, massive damages were reported to the water supply network, especially to the pipelines. Moreover, even after quick repairs, the destruction of the electricity sub-station greatly impacted the water treatment plant as it was unable to pump water to its catchment areas.<sup>188</sup>

Of particular importance was the civil defence department, responsible for firefighting, mine action and emergency response for the entire district of Hawija. The main office was only 50 metres away from the site of the airstrike and was one of the few government departments which was still functioning in Hawija during the ISIS occupation. The airstrike destroyed all twelve of the civil defence department’s emergency response vehicles, with the cost of most of the vehicles estimated at around 1 million EUR each.<sup>189</sup>

Finally, where it concerns education, Ahmed Mohammed Khalaf from the department of education in Hawija revealed that a total of fifteen schools were directly impacted by the airstrike. These include: Al-Majd Al-Araby school; Ishbilia school; Al-Ikhlās school; Al-Haramēen school; Al-Adnanya

184 Khalid Qassem Abdullah, interview 6 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

185 Mohammed Ibrahim, interview, Hawija, Iraq.

186 Raad Mohammed Abdullah, Head of Hawija Electricity Department, and Chief Engineer Haadir Ramadan Mohammed, key informant interview 16 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

187 There are two central water treatment plants supplying water to Hawija.

188 Information received from Mr. Ahmed Ali, the head of Hawija water department, through an anonymous local contact, in April 2021.

189 Head of civil defence, Mr. Ibrahim Attiya Ahmed, key informant interview 19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



Figure 8: Damaged houses next to the industrial neighbourhood, November 2021. PAX/Saba Azeem.

school; Aaraf school; Alula school for boys; Al-Nawares school for girls; Al-Ansam school; Nedhamya school; Al-Baraka school; Al-Ahd Al-Jadeed school; Al-Shafei school; Al-Abraj school; and, the Um Al-Baneen school for girls. Out of these, six schools were completely destroyed, while the rest had varying degrees of damage. Currently over six years later, the department of education building is still damaged, as are two schools.<sup>190</sup>

The airstrike thus caused extensive material damage. In chapter 7 we delve into the reverberating effects of such material damages, both to individual civilians and to the broader community of Hawija.

6.5 Psychological harm

*We used to have nightmares and dreams of aircrafts flying over us, which would come and bomb us. We would panic when we would hear loud noises, and even now we do not leave each other or sit alone because of fear. We all gather and keep together in the same place.*<sup>191</sup>

Less tangible than fatalities, physical injuries, and property and infrastructure damage, psychological harm can be an important – yet often overlooked – direct effect of armed action and military

190 Key informant interview 19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

191 Saleem Khalil Mohammad, interview 8 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

interventions. It may not always be possible to trace certain psychological effects to a particular violent incident – after all, the people in Hawija had been living through conflict and a brutal ISIS occupation for about a year by the time of the Dutch airstrike – but many of the interviewees have indicated that the night of 2-3 June 2015 contributed heavily to their or their relatives’ psychological distress (as reported by 108 and 114 out of 119 respondents respectively), with many forms of trauma described consistently across different cases.

Particularly frequent were (and still are) the occurrence of nightmares and sleep deprivation. For many this causes long-term exhaustion, panic attacks, and feelings of fear and anxiety. While we heard of these matters across different sexes and age groups, children appear disproportionately affected by these forms of psychological harm, as multiple interviewees mentioned this specifically: ‘After the airstrike, my children became fearful and anxious, and they were afraid of another explosion. They had nightmares, all of which caused fear. They would wake up trembling with fear.’<sup>192</sup>

One man described how his son appears to have gone into shock after the airstrike and has never been the same again:

*He lost his mind and became mentally ill because of the shock due to the explosion. He is always running outside, not knowing us. He has lost his mind. He does not speak anymore. If he leaves the house, he does not come back.*<sup>193</sup>

Possibly the most frequently occurring psychological impact concerns a fear of loud noises, which many people have indicated to experience since the 2015 explosion. After the airstrike, the war continued and many interviewees – as in the opening statement – described how they fled or became very fearful whenever they heard another fighter jet approaching. Fear of aircrafts or other loud noises often lasted up to several months or years after the airstrike and continues for some into the present day. A respondent told us:

*My daughter was also afraid of planes and ran any time she heard one when she was four years old. But then when we went to Urfa, Turkey, and there was an airport nearby. When they would see the planes, they were running and screaming. We would be sitting in the park, and when a plane landed, my children would start screaming with fear and people around us would get confused and ask us what was wrong with the children. I used to say that she was afraid of the plane. Even months after we left, my daughter continued to be scared.*<sup>194</sup>

Many people shared with us that they themselves or, more often, their children would still run and hide whenever they hear an airplane. While his son was only nine months old at the time of the airstrike, a respondent told us that if his child ‘hears the sound of a plane, he runs and becomes terrified of it as if he lived and remembers that day even though he is a child and does not know anything.’<sup>195</sup> Finally, our respondents informed us that fear is not only triggered by the sound of planes, some people get shook up by the sound of cars or even the noise of a door closing loudly or an object falling.

Not only did people tell us personal stories of psychological trauma, compared to other topics interviewees frequently used terms like ‘everyone in Hawija,’ ‘all people’ or ‘all of us’ to describe psychological harm. This suggests that this has been and continues to be an overwhelming problem for the Hawija community. While generally a taboo subject in Iraq, there were indications of depression in some of the interviewees or stories about their loved ones. In select cases, this has driven individuals towards suicide attempts in the period following the airstrike, as also evident in Ashwaq’s personal account, as included on pages 93-4.

## 6.6 Conclusion

A number of key points were raised in this chapter. First, it becomes evident that remote military interventions in rebel-held urban centres, which are often legitimised in terms of being precise and leading to a minimal number of civilian casualties, can go hand in hand with considerable uncertainty about civilian casualty numbers. The discussions on casualty counts in Hawija but also more broadly across OIR (see chapter 4), show the uncertainty around the number of direct civilian fatalities in the (continued) absence of post-strike field investigations. In Hawija, this issue is compounded by a lack of search-and-rescue operations, rubble clearance and official documentation, as well as a large amount of IDPs. This chapter, however, does illustrate that even six years after a strike has occurred, one can gain a significant amount of knowledge about the civilian harm done by interviewing the local population and cross-referencing claims based on the documentation that exists and the material damage done. This way, we could identify between 44 and 85 civilian casualties, while keeping in mind that the actual number may be higher.

Second, civilian fatalities are only one part of the civilian harm caused by the June 2015 airstrike. Our data also lends insight into the direct physical injuries, psychological trauma, and extensive damage to urban infrastructure that this strike has caused.

Third, it is important to note that many of these direct civilian harm effects did not occur in isolation. While they are here presented neatly per category, many of the people affected by the airstrike were the victim of two or more forms of harm at the same time; having suffered for instance the loss of a loved one and extensive damage to one’s home. When combined, two or more distinct forms of civilian harm can create an overall worse outcome.

Finally, as is evident from the testimonies regarding access to immediate medical care, the fact that this was a remote intervention in an area controlled by ISIS led to greater harm, as people could not access the kind of medical care that would have ameliorated their condition or – as alleged in certain cases – would have saved lives.

<sup>192</sup> Hussam Yousaf Ramadan, interview 30 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>193</sup> Yussef Hamdan Ali, interview 16 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>194</sup> Hiba Imad Muhanad, interview 14 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>195</sup> Abdullah Rashid Saleh, interview 4 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.



Abdullah’s account

*‘They have left a scar in my heart that can never be erased’*

NAME Abdullah Rashid Saleh<sup>196</sup>  
DATE INTERVIEW 4 April 2021  
THE AIRSTRIKE Lost seven family members: his two wives Khamisa and Sajidah and his children Yamamah (age 11), Rasheed (age 7), Ibrahim (age 6), Amal (age 4), and Mahmoud (9 months old)

During the war against ISIS, Abdullah and his family moved from their home in Salahaddin governorate to Hawija in order to escape the fighting and Coalition airstrikes. He did not want to stay in Hawija, but he did not manage to reach another governorate because of ISIS, which captured and tortured people on the run. Hawija in 2015 was a mustering point of sorts for civilians trying to escape from Salahaddin as it had routes into Kirkuk city and Erbil. In Hawija, he and fifteen family members lived in a simple rented house, which he estimates was about 250 metres away from the later area of impact. There were also some members of his extended family from his tribe living in Hawija. He was unaware of the proximity of the VBIED factory: ‘If I had known about the ammunition factory and the Dutch plane strike, we would not have gone to that area.’ He did not let his children go to school in Hawija because these had all been taken over by ISIS, which ‘used to teach their curriculum in schools, the ways of carrying weapons’, so instead he ‘hid them from ISIS’.

About the Coalition, Abdullah says that, initially, ‘people were very happy and excited about the arrival of the Western forces because we wanted

to be saved from ISIS[.] Our life was full of pain, fatigue and deprivation. So, we wanted to get rid of them in any way, but [the Coalition’s] targets were wrong without [accurate] intelligence or knowledge [on the ground]. They were hitting more populated areas than ISIS targets. Most of their strikes were wrong, especially the Dutch strike. How could they carry out a strike in a large residential neighbourhood full of people, knowing that there was a pile of missiles for ISIS?’ As such, people, Abdullah included, became increasingly negative about the international intervention.

Abdullah: ‘On the day of 2 June 2015 at twelve midnight, it was a painful and sad day, a day in which my loved ones left. I lost my wives, my sons, and my daughters. [...] Before going to sleep, I used to pray and read the Quran. My first wife and her children were sleeping on the roof of the house and my other wife was sleeping in the space at the top of the house. [I] went up to the first floor, and I saw my children and my wife asleep[.] [...] I heard the sound of a plane hovering in the area, a missile was launched from the plane [...]. I felt that the Day of Judgment had come because of the horror of the situation as the blast threw me a distance of five to six metres. My wife was sleeping beside me, but I could not see her because of the white smoke, and shrapnel landed on my bed in which I should have slept. I would have been cut into two halves if I had slept there. [...] I went to my family on the first floor. Bricks and walls fell on them, I shouted and cried out loud, “Come and save my children.” I could not remove the bricks and rubble that fell on my family. The rubble was too big[.] My older son called me: “My father, my father, I did not die. Save me.” Bricks fell on his leg. [He] pulled himself out with difficulty. My daughter also called me saying, “Dad, I did not die, please save me.” A neighbour came and helped me to remove the rubble. [My daughter] was hurt from her waist and below.

Abdullah’s wives Khamisa and Sajidah, his daughter Amal, and his sons Rasheed, Ibrahim and Mahmoud died immediately that night. He took his daughter Yamamah, who was a little over eleven years old at the time, to a hospital in Mosul, where she died later that morning. While they were driving to Mosul, she asked her father about her mother and her youngest brother, Mahmoud. Abdullah had no choice but to say that they were fine, and they were waiting for her to get better so they can all be reunited. ‘She hugged me and said that she loves me. She slept while hugging me and then she died. [...] Overnight, I lost my soul, my body, my family, everything.’ He goes on to state that his family has ‘left a scar in my heart that can never be erased.’

Because of the bombing, Abdullah lost most of his family, his home, and his car. He now lives in a house in bad living conditions, with no money for renovation. He has trouble making ends meet: ‘We do not have enough money to support the family or to have a decent life because [my job] is a daily wage, which is not sufficient because I work one day and then there is no work for five days, and so on.’

Ever since the bombing, Abdullah and his remaining children suffer from trauma. His son ‘cannot focus on his studies’ and ‘cries a lot because he remembers his mother and siblings. He has been hurt so much.’ His other child gets scared every time he hears an airplane. Abdullah himself continues to suffer from nightmares and sleeping disorders.

Now, more than six years later, Abdullah has not been given any form of assistance. He holds the Coalition, and in particular the Dutch government, responsible for his tragedy. ‘We did not receive any support of any kind, neither financial, psychological, legal, nor even medical. [...] We only met with Al-Ghad organisation and

we filed a [legal] complaint and we hope that our voice will reach the Dutch government, so that it may compensate us and help us to go back to what we were before.’ He wants psychological support for his son, and financial support to rebuild his life. He moreover wants answers: ‘I hope I can meet [the Dutch] face-to-face. I want to meet the person who killed my family and ask him why did he do that? Why did he kill many innocent people? What was their guilt? Did he regret his action that has hurt me and hurt many Iraqis and all those who have lost loved ones? [...] I want to ask him, “Would you like this to happen with your family as it happened with my family?”’

196 Abdullah’s account is also included in *Als de bom valt: Danny Ghosen in Irak* (2022: VPRO), documentary.

Pictures of Abdullah's lost family members



Sajidah



Khamisa



Yamamah



Amal



Rasheed



Ibrahim



Mahmoud



Chapter 7

## 7. Reverberating effects of the airstrike

Where the previous chapter explored the direct civilian harm effects of the 2-3 June 2015 airstrike on the people in Hawija, this chapter aims to provide a sense of the attack's reverberating effects. In chapter 2 we defined reverberating civilian harm effects as those effects that are not necessarily caused directly by the attack but are nonetheless a product thereof. This includes displacement health concerns related to the disruption of essential services like water provision, loss of livelihood, and so on. The chapter is organised along three main themes: displacement, economic harm, and infrastructural damage and its associated negative reverberations. Discussing harm across these categories enables us to provide a sense of the ways harm can develop, with one effect of the attack leading to another, or becoming worse over time.

### 7.1 Displacement

*This strike completely destroyed people. After the damage that was inflicted by ISIS, this catastrophic strike came, which led to the city becoming completely empty. Despite the control of ISIS, there were a lot of residents [in Hawija] before the strike, but then many of them were displaced outside of the city and to distant villages. This greatly affected the lives of the city's residents, whose shops were destroyed, and the city became almost a ghost town.*<sup>197</sup>

As discussed in chapter 6, the attack on the industrial neighbourhood destroyed most of what was Hawija's economic centre, with at least 1,200 shops, factories, offices, and other workplaces reduced to rubble, alongside tools and machinery damaged or lost to the fire. An interviewee relayed that, '[W]hen the strike hit the industrial neighbourhood, that is when I lost my shop, which was my only source of livelihood', this being problematic as 'I was the only breadwinner for the family. I am the only male in the family among sisters.' This man and his family stayed in Hawija for about a half a year but realised that 'there was nothing to live from anymore, so we moved to Salahaddin.'<sup>198</sup>

As in most conflicts, displacement was a key issue in Hawija during the course of the entire war against ISIS. However, during a period that coincides largely with the Dutch airstrike in June 2015 and its immediate aftermath, the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix data shows a larger wave of displacement from Hawija, with over 46,000 persons being displaced.<sup>199</sup> This section is focused on the reasons why the 2015 Hawija airstrike led to displacement as a reverberating effect, where and how people ended up displaced, what some displacement-associated problems are, and what the current outlook is for some people.

<sup>197</sup> Khalaf Mustafa Rasheed, interview 23 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>198</sup> Mohammad Abdulmahdi Hussein, interview 15 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>199</sup> "Displacement Dashboard," Iraq Mission, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, accessed December 9, 2021, <https://iraqdtm.iom.int/MasterList>.

#### 7.1.1 DISPLACEMENT AS A REVERBERATING EFFECT

In many of the cases of displacement discussed by interviewees, there was an intermediate factor that led from the bombing to displacement. Often, this intermediate factor was directly caused by the attack on the industrial neighbourhood. Among the reasons offered by interviewees to leave Hawija was the loss of their livelihood, the loss of their home, trauma associated with Hawija, a lack of functioning (medical) infrastructure, and the (perceived) need to go in search of a safer place.

The situation following the strike was sometimes so dire that people had to resort to immediate, yet temporary solutions to afford food and other necessities. Among the testimonies provided, many people recalled selling their personal belongings as a last resort before they fled:

*[A]fter this strike, my workplace was destroyed. I sat at home. I had no work left. I lived by selling jewellery and the items I owned and my cars after that. I crossed to Shirqat [Salahaddin] and stayed there until after the liberation.*<sup>200</sup>

Similarly, many people fled Hawija because their houses were destroyed or had become uninhabitable, or because damage to infrastructure made life in the city close to unbearable: 'Life in Hawija was completely non-existent, and there was not a thing left for me; no food, workplace, house, infrastructure, or electricity, so we crossed to Kirkuk.'<sup>201</sup> People whose houses became uninhabitable directly after the strike had no option but to move to the surrounding villages, until they could secure a safe passage (often through smugglers) outside of the district of Hawija.

Another very tangible cause for displacement was the lack of healthcare and medicine available in Hawija at the time, which many people needed to treat their injuries from the explosion. A woman whose son's neck and face were injured recounted that she 'left Hawija because treatment was not available. I fled with my children into another city.'<sup>202</sup>

Although not as tangible, another important cause for displacement was the fear and trauma caused by the bombing: 'Immediately after the strike, I did not even stay inside Hawija [...] I became terrified, I did not enter Hawija. I migrated to the villages because my children, my parents and my mother were afraid.'<sup>203</sup> Someone else recalled:

*When a plane came, [my children] put their fingers in their ears and [...] were crying and shaking with fear. Even if I was far away and heard the sound of the plane, I would come back quickly wherever I was to hug them and reassure them until the plane left. This situation remained like this for a year and a half until we crossed and they were able to relax a little.*<sup>204</sup>

Others felt they would physically be safer elsewhere, such as an interviewee who feared the 'random bombing of the International Coalition' after the 2015 strike and left for a place where he thought he

<sup>200</sup> Saleem Khalil Mohammad, interview 8 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>201</sup> Hassan Ali Hamoudi, interview 14 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>202</sup> Fairoz Ali Hadeed, interview 7 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>203</sup> Abdul Razzaq Khalid Ali, interview 27 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>204</sup> Hussein Fadhil Mohammad, interview 30 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

would be safer from Coalition planes.<sup>205</sup>

It should be noted that it is not possible in all cases to point to a *single* cause for displacement: for some interviewees it was a combination of two or more of the motivations discussed above, for instance, the loss of home and livelihood. Or their decision was related to the bombing and the living conditions under ISIS occupation:

*I lived for five years inside Hawija, but because of the indiscriminate bombing and the war we moved to the villages [in the outskirts] from house to house. The first place I moved to was in a school with my uncles. Then the bombing happened. We moved to Tal Al-Ali and then moved from house to house inside the village, but we encountered objections from ISIS. They issued orders to the families that migrated to the villages not to live in them and forcibly return to the district to be like human shields for ISIS, so we would flee from one house to another to avoid these orders.*<sup>206</sup>

After the airstrike and its destruction life became increasingly difficult while Hawija remained under ISIS occupation. People felt trapped between two dangers; they had no easy means to leave Hawija but often lacked access to basic needs like shelter and healthcare that provided a reason to stay.

### 7.1.2 JOURNEYS OF THE DISPLACED

People who fled Hawija after the bombing ended up in a variety of places. Among those mentioned more frequently were various villages nearby, the cities Salahaddin, Kirkuk, Erbil or elsewhere in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Some went as far as Turkey. People stayed with friends and relatives, in rented accommodation, ended up in IDP camps like Laylan 1 or Debaga camp<sup>207</sup>, or sought refuge in abandoned buildings. Most people left Hawija at night and on foot, sometimes using a car if they still had one or could afford it. Of those interviewees who were displaced, over 90 per cent were displaced more than once. These people describe changing places three, four, or even as many as eleven times in the span of several months.

This may make it seem that leaving Hawija was easy, yet we know from the testimonies that while the city was still under ISIS occupation it was in fact very dangerous to leave. The risks were multiple. First, ISIS did not allow people to leave on their own accord. If ISIS caught civilians escaping, they were brought back and often kept and tortured in ISIS prisons. One civilian recalled: 'I wanted to flee, but they caught us, and they imprisoned and fined me with 2,000 USD [1,800 EUR], and tortured me.'<sup>208</sup> In extreme cases, civilians who were caught were also killed with their bodies placed in public places with the person's name and 'offence' written on them, such as 'wanted to escape into *kafir* or 'infidel' areas'. This served as an example to instil fear in others. As one civilian stated, 'I had to lower my children's heads not to see such a horrific scene. It was a very difficult experience.'<sup>209</sup>

Second, even if you did manage to leave unnoticed, the dangers were not over. As in many warzones, the roads in the surrounding areas were often mined and booby trapped. For some getting out was worth the risk:

*We went on foot and we walked for nine hours until we reached the security forces, and the roads were all mined. I saw it with my own eyes, the bones of a human being exploded with a mine. Faateh is dead, and only his bones are still there. We were forced to flee, as we said, 'Either we die or we live a decent life.'*<sup>210</sup>

Because of the risks, many civilians paid smugglers to leave Hawija and ISIS-controlled territories, which came at a high price and without guarantee. One respondent recalled having paid 400 USD (360 EUR) to smugglers, which he borrowed from loved ones, to cross into Kirkuk. He made the journey on foot, walking for thirteen hours, despite a tumour in his body and a swollen abdomen.<sup>211</sup> Many people's reliance on smugglers came at a considerable financial cost. As per testimonies, being smuggled out of Hawija cost an average of 400 USD (360 EUR) per person. However, if the person was relatively well-off, the cost could increase. Given the expenses involved, crossing into another governorate could cost people everything they had: 'I did not have the money back then, so we sold my family's gold to cross. We had nothing left after that.'<sup>212</sup>

A female respondent recalled how she had to pay 2,500 USD (2,250 EUR) to smugglers for a total of five persons to be able to cross into Kirkuk with her children. The smugglers separated the males from the females. This made the woman fear for her children, especially as they were walking across minefields with many snipers along the way. Thankfully her smuggler had a deal with ISIS to let his 'clients' out. She recalled a heavy exchange of bullets between the Kurdish security forces and ISIS, until her family finally made it to a safer area as daylight broke.<sup>213</sup> Sometimes, however, smugglers were frauds who took people's money to hand them over to ISIS along the way.

A few respondents also shared that even after such a horrendous journey they were not received well when they made it to Kirkuk. Mostly because Kirkuk was under control of the Kurdistan Regional Government at the time and the people who fled were Arabs from Hawija who did not speak Kurdish. As one respondent relayed: 'We reached the checkpoints of the Kurds. We received insults and disrespect from them [...] and when I reached Kirkuk, we were subjected to harassment by the Kurds.'<sup>214</sup> Another respondent shared that while they had gone to Kirkuk before the strike, they were harassed so badly they decided to return to Hawija and live under ISIS control. This regrettably meant they were back by the time of the Dutch airstrike.<sup>215</sup>

Given the many difficulties, not everyone who wanted to get out of Hawija succeeded in doing so immediately. Some people did not manage to get out at all or only after multiple attempts. Others did not take the risk while living under ISIS occupation or simply did not have the money to pay the smugglers to ensure a safe passage, but then moved out of Hawija upon its liberation in 2017 when they found there still was not much left to stay for.

205 Abed Kareemullah Ali, interview 1 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

206 Hameed Mohsin Mahdi, interview 31 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

207 Two IDP camps located in Daquq district, Kirkuk and Makhmour district, Erbil respectively.

208 Mahmoud Tareq Khattab, interview 1 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

209 Assem Ali Khattab, interview 24 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

210 Mouna Ali Attiya, interview 11 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

211 Jassem Younis Khudair, interview 31 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

212 Mustafa Salman Hussein, interview 13 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

213 Fairoz Ali Hadeed, interview 7 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

214 Thabit Mohsin Ismail, interview 2 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

215 Ibrahim Hussein Saleh, interview 15 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



7.1.3 DISPLACEMENT AS A CAUSE OF FURTHER HARM

Displacement may be a form of harm in and of itself, it is also a situation typically considered to contribute to further harm.<sup>216</sup> This is also the case for many victims of the attack on Hawija. For one, as discussed above, displacement can cause an economic burden for people and their families. Various respondents described having to sell their possessions to afford being smuggled out of Hawija or to pay for goods like fuel. Some of those who lost their homes had to resort to rented accommodation elsewhere, putting a further strain on their resources.

Others could not find another roof to live under. As one respondent recalled: ‘I was in a tent on the mountain for six months and waited for liberation and I could not even sleep, because the tent was so small.’<sup>217</sup> Others ended up in IDP camps like Laylan 1 in Kirkuk or Debaga camp in Makhmour, where living conditions were often difficult. A person, displaced to Laylan Camp 1, recalled that, ‘[I] went to the camp because I had nothing left. I lost it all.’ Adding that:

*[L]ife in the camp cannot be described. Certainly, we wanted to go back to live in our houses. Living in a tent was very difficult. When I learned that life, electricity, and water had returned to Hawija, I returned with my family immediately.*<sup>218</sup>

There is also a psychological aspect to being displaced, with people unwilling to talk about their experiences in detail or expressing a sense of shame at their fate. In relation to her home, one woman stated: ‘It was a very simple house, but it used to protect us, and now we are humiliated without it. We do not know where to go because we lost it due to the strike.’<sup>219</sup>

Female researchers in our team relayed in a validation workshop after data collection had come to an end<sup>220</sup>, that many displaced women they interviewed suffered from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Although this did not come forward in the interviews, because it is a taboo subject, our female researchers shared anecdotes that especially widowed women with younger children had to perform sexual favours in order to be registered in camps or to access basic services like food kits and non-food items during distributions in camps. The perpetrators were both Iraqi security forces as well as NGO staff members. Moreover, when these female-headed households returned to Hawija and found their houses destroyed and possessions damaged or looted, they experienced SGBV incidents when trying to file reports, get documents, or when trying to rent shelter.

Currently, the people who got displaced after the bombing have met with a variety of fates. Some have not returned to Hawija and have stayed in places like Kirkuk, because there are more livelihood and education opportunities there. Others have returned but now live in damaged houses or in rented accommodation because their homes have not been rebuilt. Those who have come back have returned at different times: some as early as 2017 once ISIS was driven out of Hawija, others in 2018 once Hawija was deemed safe enough to return, or only in 2020 when the Iraqi government closed all IDP camps in the governorate. According to the Mayor of Hawija, shelter is one of the main

216 See for instance the “Impacts of Displacement” report series by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

217 Nisa Tahir Aboud, interview 7 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.

218 Haidar Fayad Jumma, interview 13 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

219 Waheeda Mohammad Dawood, interview 15 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

220 Workshop, 23 September 2021, Erbil, Iraq.

unaddressed needs in his city.<sup>221</sup>

Many who returned found their houses still in ruins, such as a respondent who recalled that, ‘after liberation, I stayed for nearly a year in a tent because the house was completely demolished, from the walls, doors, windows, to the furniture’.<sup>222</sup> The respondent then moved in a rented house for another year, while he borrowed circa 12,000 USD (10,800 EUR) to renovate his original home before moving back.<sup>223</sup> It was therefore not uncommon for people who returned to feel ‘joy and sadness at the same time: the joy that we returned to our homes, and the sadness when we returned and found nothing.’<sup>224</sup>

7.2 Economic harm

*We have nothing left. I cannot work because of my injury. Now, my children go out to work. They pick up waste from the street to eat it so we do not starve.*<sup>225</sup>

Through various ways, the airstrike has had a reverberating impact on people’s economic situation. This chapter discusses economic harm by first looking at economic harm at a personal and then at a communal level. The subsequent section discusses the importance of Hawija as an agricultural centre for the rest of the region, and how this status was affected by the airstrike.

7.2.1 PERSONAL ECONOMIC HARM

The first manifestation of economic harm is a decrease of income for many of those affected by the airstrike. This can have a number of causes, and in many instances, interviewees suffered from a combination of them. As the bombing destroyed Hawija’s commercial and industrial hub, many people lost their source of livelihood overnight as the shops or workplaces they owned or were employed by were damaged or entirely obliterated. One interviewee described the change as following:

*Before the strike, we were working in the industrial neighbourhood, working and benefiting from the industrial neighbourhood. After the strike, the industrial neighbourhood was fully demolished, cutting off our source of livelihood. So we sold our furniture, television, a fridge and freezer, and gold in order to live. Even my car was sold because I had a large family that needed food. Before the strike, I had a shop and the business was decent and enough for my family to live.*<sup>226</sup>

Another civilian shared that ‘we used to be owners, now we are mere workers’, alluding to the loss of his business and now being forced to become a daily wage worker.<sup>227</sup> Many of Hawija’s former business owners shared that they now earn an average of 5 USD (4.50 EUR) per day, even though the cash working group in Iraq has set 20 USD (18 EUR) per person as the daily rate for unskilled

221 PAX, YouTube, “Hawija as told by residents.”

222 Abid Abdul Wahab, interview 25 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

223 Abid Abdul Wahab, interview 25 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

224 Mohammad Abdulmahdi Hussein, interview 15 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

225 Jassem Younis Khudair, interview 31 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

226 Hussam Yousaf Ramadan, interview 30 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

227 As shared by 39 business owners from the industrial neighbourhood, focus group discussion 19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

workers.<sup>228</sup> However, given high rates of unemployment, civilians have no option other than to accept this lower daily wage. One man shared that his wage is only enough to buy water for a small family for four days. Another civilian shared that before the airstrike, even when ISIS had besieged the area and they had to smuggle in parts for their businesses, he used to earn an average of 200 USD (180 EUR) per day. For the past five years he has been earning 5 USD (4.50 EUR) per day, while having to support a household of thirteen persons.<sup>229</sup>

Not only do the losses of workplaces, factories and businesses lead to a heavy economic burden, they can also contribute to psychological harm as people lose something they or their families have worked hard for all their lives, something that gives them a sense of pride: ‘We lost our possessions: the house, the car, the factory, and everything. I lost an entire life my grandfather, father and I have built from scratch. Now I have gone back to below zero[.]’<sup>230</sup> An older interviewee recounted that:

*The explosion took the last thing I had left, I did not have anything left after that. I crossed to Kirkuk and I did not have any money for my family. I worked as a labourer even though I was born in 1957 and over 50 years old at that time. I was carrying dirt and carrying blocks just to provide for my family.*<sup>231</sup>

A decrease in income is sometimes also caused by an injury that continues to prevent someone from working. This is also what happened to an interviewee who, in addition to losing his workplace that night, stated that ‘I became disabled, and I have not worked for six years.’<sup>232</sup>

Perhaps the worst cause of economic harm has been the loss of a family breadwinner. Multiple interviewees recalled cases where a family lost the person who provided for them, often a husband, father, or older son, in the night of the strike or days thereafter. A woman recalled how, in the first days after the strike, ‘my husband continued to suffer [...] until he died due to his severe injuries.’ She continued: ‘My children are now orphans and we lost our breadwinner. [...] My source of income diminished[.] I lost my workplace, the livelihood, the car and the breadwinner[.]’ Until, in the end, they were ‘begging for food and survival’, in addition to selling off their remaining livestock and the woman’s jewellery.<sup>233</sup>

Worryingly, the above manifestations of economic harm have led to an increase in instances of child labour. Multiple interviewees told us that children dropped out of school to work and supplement the family income. A respondent shared that because his income alone does not suffice anymore, his son ‘goes to work for a daily wage to help us with income’, as the family is currently under a debt of 55 million Iraqi dinars (44,000 USD/39,600 EUR).<sup>234</sup> Another man recalled that, as the strike damaged their home and he was unable to work because of bad health, he and his family had to move to rented accommodation. This led to increased living costs, so ‘[m]y son had to drop out of school and work

to provide us with a living.’ The son ‘works for 200 thousand dinars [160 USD/144 EUR]. We pay 100 thousand dinars [80 USD/72 EUR] rent and we have 100 thousand [Iraqi] dinars left for us, and [...] I need 50 thousand dinars [40 USD/36 EUR] per month for treatment.’ As a result, the son has dropped out of school, while ‘now his peers continue to study.’<sup>235</sup>

In addition to the frequent loss of income, the airstrike led to an increase in expenses for many. As people got injured in the strike, they became in need of (expensive) medical care, sometimes long term. The financial impact could be considerable, particularly in cases where people had also lost access to income:

*I have no income left. I became jobless. I worked at daily wages, as a construction worker[.] [...] I borrowed an amount of money to treat my injured daughter, approximately 12 million Iraqi dinars [9,600 USD/8,640 EUR]. Then, I sold our properties and my wife’s jewellery.*<sup>236</sup>

As described in greater detail earlier in section 7.1, another large expenditure for some was the money they spent on smugglers to leave Hawija after they decided there was nothing left to stay for.

For many, the reverberating economic impact of the strike has forced them to borrow large sums of money from friends or relatives, or to sell their personal belongings. Many women had to sell their jewellery to provide for their family’s basic needs. Many of these debts are still not paid off: ‘I borrowed a lot from friends and relatives because of my mother as she was sick at that time[.] [M]any people also stood beside me, but all of that is debt on me up to now.’<sup>237</sup>

7.2.2 COMMUNAL ECONOMIC HARM

If we take on a wider perspective, moving from the personal to the communal level, the extent of economic harm becomes even more apparent. As Hawija’s economic hub, factories and businesses inside the industrial neighbourhood employed many people, an estimated 1,900 persons.<sup>238</sup> As it got destroyed, many people lost their place of employment, as well as many opportunities for future employment. This lack of opportunities is also what drove many people out of Hawija. With people moving and staying away, however, jobs and income in Hawija got even harder to come by. This had its own negative reverberations, as clearly explained by a respondent:

*At the beginning of ISIS occupation, [food] items were available, but after the start of the bombing, these items were no longer available, especially after the strike that targeted the industrial neighbourhood, which contributed to merchants fleeing [...], which led to the unavailability of these materials, as the merchants went to safe places [...]. They left their property and livelihood and fled into other cities.*<sup>239</sup>

The departure of many merchants also meant that many food products had to be smuggled into Hawija from other areas, significantly raising the prices, which made it more difficult for many people

228 The cash working group is a thematic multi-sectoral working group to coordinate, promote and facilitate sustainable activities related to cash and voucher assistance post-crisis.

229 Focus group discussion, 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

230 Mohammad Abdul Majeed Hafez, interview 14 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

231 Yussef Hamdan Ali, interview 16 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

232 Ibrahim Attiya Kareem, interview 27 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

233 Rajja Kateb Hussein, interview 11 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

234 Omar Abdullah Mahmoud, interview 28 February 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

235 Hassan Ali Hamoudi, interview 14 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

236 Saman Ali Ahmed, interview 28 February 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

237 Suhail Mohammad Hussein, interview 23 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

238 As shared by the Mukhtar, key informant interview 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

239 Yasseen Ali Abdullah, interview 6 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.





Figure 9: One of the ice factories which got damaged in the June 2015 airstrike, September 2021. PAX/Saba Azeem.



Figure 10: The brick factory which got damaged in the June 2015 airstrike, February 2022. PAX/Ayman al-Amiri.

to foresee in their basic needs. To provide a few examples: a kilo of sugar went from 80 to 120 USD (72 to 108 EUR)<sup>240</sup>; a can of tomato paste from 24 to 40 USD (21.60 to 36 EUR)<sup>241</sup>; onions went up to 16 USD (14.40 EUR) per kilo<sup>242</sup>; and the price of rice became 32 USD (28.80 EUR) per kilo<sup>243</sup>; a kilo of cooking oil cost 28 USD (25.20 EUR) and a kilo of tea leaves 40 USD (36 EUR).<sup>244</sup> Only meat was available at a reasonable price (4 USD/3.60 EUR per kilo<sup>245</sup>), as people would slaughter their own cattle and livestock. Fresh food items like fruits and vegetables were not available at all, or available at exuberant prices.<sup>246</sup> Even basic medicines like Paracetamol were being sold for over 5 USD (4.50 EUR), whereas now it costs 1.60 USD (1.44 EUR).<sup>247</sup>

Such rising food prices can lead to coping strategies that are, in itself, harmful. It was not uncommon to hear from people in Hawija that they were forced to reduce their food intake. An interviewee described that after losing their livelihoods they 'had gold we sold in order to get a little food from it. We ate one meal, skipped breakfast and dinner, and only ate lunch. This is how we lived until we were able to cross into Kirkuk.'<sup>248</sup>

**7.2.3 ECONOMIC HARM: HAWIJA AS AN AGRICULTURAL CENTRE**

Finally, as explained in chapter 5, Hawija represented an important agricultural centre for Iraq. This role was greatly impacted by the airstrike. First, the supply of irrigated water, which the sector heavily depends on, was reduced by an estimated 25 per cent due to damages sustained by the airstrike, as well as later by the lack of operation and maintenance of irrigation canals. Moreover, since the industrial neighbourhood was destroyed, there was no place to repair agricultural machinery in Hawija anymore. People therefore had to take their agricultural machinery approximately 50 kilometres away to Kirkuk city. As a result, the agricultural production has decreased to 70 per cent. The most affected crops include wheat, barley, and corn. To this day, however, the demand for repairs of agricultural machinery has greatly been reduced. As one interviewee explained:

*Through my children's work in Kirkuk, the money was collected and then spent on the house to rebuild it, and the shop is also open. But as you know the farming sector has been impacted because there are no incentives for farmers anymore. Most of the work in the industrial neighbourhood is related to farmers' activities like machines and tractors and other farming equipment. But since there is no cultivation and harvests by the farmers, they do not come to the shops anymore either to repair their equipment. So, there is no work for us.*<sup>249</sup>

240 Jamal Mohammad Hussein, interview 14 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

241 Abid Abdul Wahab, interview 25 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

242 Ashwaq Ebad ul Kareem Sharif, interview 28 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

243 Ashwaq Ebad ul Kareem Sharif, interview 28 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

244 Jassem Younis Khudair, interview 31 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

245 Ashwaq Ebad ul Kareem Sharif, interview 28 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

246 Ziad Marwan Hamad, interview 10 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

247 Abid Abdul Wahab, interview 25 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

248 Manal Ibrahim Nasser, interview 26 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

249 Jassim Mohammad Hussein, interview 23 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



Hawija also has an agricultural research centre, which produces saplings – young, germinated seeds used for commercial sowing – of various agricultural products for the rest of the country. As a result of the strike, 140 out of 520 dunams (representing 140,000 out of 520,000 square metres) were directly impacted as the trees and saplings on it burnt from the explosion. Staff also claim that the soil was poisoned, and they smelled sulphur at the time of the airstrike. This area was only 300 metres away from the site of the airstrike. Another building of the research facility is 500 metres away from the site of the airstrike and was partially damaged. This damage included one greenhouse for strawberries and five plastic houses used for tunnel farming for vegetables. Prior to 2014, this facility used to produce 1.2 million saplings a year and now is only able to product 200,000 saplings a year.<sup>250</sup>

Currently, while the airstrike occurred over six years ago, many of those affected have not been able to return to their financial situation as it was before the strike was carried out. One of the most obvious factors is the state of the industrial neighbourhood itself, which still lies largely in ruins. For instance, there is only some economic activity visible within the area as some civilians are starting up their businesses again in a rudimentary way, opening for example small workshops for repairing tyres. The debris is still present, with no systematic efforts made for clearance. Whatever debris has been removed has been done so by civilians themselves. A former business owner remarked: 'I spent 60 million Iraqi dinars [48,000 USD/43,200 EUR] of my own money for clearing rubble from my factory.'<sup>251</sup> The flour mill is again fully rehabilitated and functional, but this too was done through private funding.<sup>252</sup>

### 7.3 Infrastructure

*The entire infrastructure was demolished, especially the area where the bombing took place, and the nearby factories, electricity, hospitals, schools, water and electricity wires all turned into ashes, and even the roads became completely impassable, and the car dealerships, its equipment, and cars were completely destroyed, in addition to the destruction of the court. Everything ceased to exist. It has become an area devoid of buildings.*<sup>253</sup>

The June 2015 airstrike has had a considerable impact on Hawija's infrastructure, both in the short and long term. Due to the scope of the damages brought on by the airstrike, and the many ways in which these have reverberated, we have chosen to focus on a few key areas: healthcare, water and electricity, and education. This is, however, no way near comprehensive.

#### 7.3.1 HEALTH CARE

A number of aspects related to healthcare provision were discussed in the previous chapter, in the sections on civilian deaths and physical injuries (6.2 and 6.3), in relation to which interviewees stated that there was little treatment available in Hawija. The secondary explosion caused by the strike not only directly damaged the Hawija health centre (for its location, see Figure 6 on page 66), but it also caused damage to the Hawija General Hospital, located approximately two kilometres from the site of the airstrike.

The availability of health care was further decreased by displacement. Already before the bombing, but even more so after, doctors and other hospital staff fled Hawija. As a result, less (specialised) health care was available to the local population. The lack of specialised treatment often meant that people injured due to the 2015 airstrike had to travel to receive the care they needed, which came at an economic cost, or were left without it altogether. A man recalled trying to find help for his injured daughter:

*On the second day [after the strike], my wife told me that the girl was not well, and my wife took some glass fragments from her head. She was not walking normally. She got up and fell. I took her to a specialist doctor and the doctor said that he cannot treat her. [...] She was about six to seven years old. Her head was swollen as if there is a tumour in her head and the doctor asked us to take her to another governorate or another country. [...] She arrived at Baghdad Hospital three months after the injury. The doctor at Baghdad Hospital said I was too late to treat the girl. The tumour in the girl's head had grown and we could not treat her. She lost consciousness and then died in the hospital[.]*<sup>254</sup>

The reverberating impact of weak healthcare provision was, first, that the death of loved ones could allegedly have been avoided had there been immediate and adequate treatment after the explosion. Nisa Tahir Aboud lamented that her son, who was the only breadwinner of the family and who succumbed to his injuries three hours after the airstrike, 'would not have died had there been proper treatment available'.<sup>255</sup> Abdullah Rashid Saleh, who lost seven members of his family to the airstrike was diverted to Mosul in order to receive treatment for his children. One of his daughters died in his arms on the way to Mosul. According to him, '[a]t least two to three members of my family would still have been alive' had they been tended to immediately with proper supplies in Hawija (for a lengthier account of the consequences of the airstrike on Abdullah's family, see the box on page 72-3).<sup>256</sup>

Second, many people suffered unnecessarily from their wounds or continue to have problems to this day because they did not receive proper treatment. A respondent shared that his child's hand was fractured on the night of the airstrike and was not treated immediately. The hand is now deformed, and his child is disabled.<sup>257</sup> Someone else was crushed under a fence and his family was unable to access medical care, so they ended up going to a neighbourhood doctor instead.<sup>258</sup> Until this day, the man is unable to move his hand and he is consequently unable to find work.<sup>259</sup> The long-term impact of an injury can also be less obvious. One interviewee mentioned that his 14-year-old daughter 'has no future left' because she can no longer walk because of her injuries and is in bad health, matters that are perceived to negatively affect her marriage prospects.<sup>260</sup>

Third, there are high costs associated both with the injuries sustained during the airstrike as well as with having to travel to hospitals further away because of lack of treatment in Hawija. A man had

250 Director of the research centre, key informant interview 19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

251 Warith Adam Mustafa, focus group discussion 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

252 Mr. Ali Hussein, NGO Coordinator, key informant interview 15 September 2021, Hawija

253 Rajja Kateb Hussein, interview 11 April, Hawija, Iraq.

254 Saman Ali Ahmed, interview 28 February 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

255 Nisa Tahir Aboud, interview 7 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.

256 Abdullah Rashid Saleh, interview 4 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.

257 Assem Ali Khattab, interview 24 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

258 Khameesa Fadhiil Ibrahim, interview 5 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

259 PAX and Al-Ghad staff met Khameesa and her son Ishaq on 17 November 2021.

260 Fatima Omar Fateh, interview 17 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

to wait with finding treatment for his daughter – who had gotten glass fragments in her eye in the explosion – until after liberation. He then took her to a hospital offering specialised treatment, which cost him circa 6 million Iraqi dinars [4,800 USD/4,320 EUR], excluding travel expenses ‘because I had to get her surgery done from Baghdad, so we had to go there four times and pay private hospital fees because the operation was a major operation.’<sup>261</sup>

Health care provision in Hawija has been slow to return to pre-ISIS levels. An interviewee relayed that ‘after 2018, the specialists, pharmacies and hospitals, all returned gradually.’<sup>262</sup> Others echoed that in the first few months after liberation many doctors did not yet feel safe enough to return and only started coming back around 2018-19.<sup>263</sup> Yet, health care is still lacking in a few key areas. In an interview with Dr. Mohammed, the head of the Hawija Department of Health, it was revealed that while before 2014 the hospital had specialised doctors, materials, a dialysis centre, a surgical wing, a continuous supply of water and electricity, and specialised medicines available, none of these are present in Hawija General hospital six years later. Although the lack of these materials cannot be directly attributed to the Dutch airstrike, the attack’s impact has significantly increased the need for specialised staff and care for mental health issues – both for children and adults. What is needed is an artificial limbs centre given the high number of amputations and unhealed fractures causing disabilities, a physical therapy unit for those suffering from disabilities, and a continuous supply of medicines.

### 7.3.2 WATER AND ELECTRICITY

The secondary explosion caused by the airstrike damaged Hawija’s electricity department and circuit located on the edges of the industrial neighbourhood (for its location, see Figure 6 on page 66). As a result, a large part of Hawija was left without electricity after the strike:

*At first, there was electricity due to the presence of the department of electricity and its employees. But after the bombing, there was no more electricity. We used to rely on burners that run on kerosene to provide electricity for the purpose of obtaining water and things like that.*<sup>264</sup>

Others described how you could see cut electricity wires or wires reduced to ashes on the streets.<sup>265</sup> Those with more financial means could compensate for this loss by buying fuel and generators, but for many people this was not an option.

Loss of electricity in turn caused problems to the provision of water. An interviewee explained that because ‘the circuit was bombed, so the water was cut off as well, because the water machines run on electricity.’<sup>266</sup> This was corroborated by the head of the Hawija water department.<sup>267</sup> This is worrisome as people then may come to depend on contaminated water, which poses health risks.<sup>268</sup>

261 Hussam Yousaf Ramadan, interview 30 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

262 Saleem Khalil Mohammad, interview 8 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

263 Sabah Kareem Ali, interview 9 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Abid Abdul Wahab, interview 25 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

264 Haidar Fayad Jumma, interview 13 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

265 Manal Ibrahim Nasser, interview 26 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Rajja Kateb Hussein, interview 11 April, Hawija, Iraq.

266 Manal Ibrahim Nasser, interview 26 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

267 Information received from Mr. Ahmed Ali, the head of Hawija water department, through a local contact in Kirkuk in April 2021, who wishes to stay anonymous.

268 See Saba Azeem, “Weaponizing drinking water,” in *On civilian harm*, eds. Erin Bijl, Welmoet Wels and Wilbert van der Zeijden (PAX: 2021), 197-208, for a detailed discussion of the impact of unclean water on civilian lives.

An interviewee recalled resorting to collecting water from streams, which she described as ‘dirty water full of germs.’<sup>269</sup> Those who could afford to could buy clean water from tanks. Or even if they could not really afford this: ‘There was no water so there was a tank and we bought water from the tank for 5,000 [Iraqi] dinars [4 USD/3.60 EUR]. We worked all day and bought either water or food – we could not get both on the same day.’<sup>270</sup>

After liberation from ISIS electricity did not immediately return to its former state. Various interviewees have described that it took several months, years even, for the electricity network to be repaired. A man who returned to Hawija with his family remembered that:

*At the beginning of liberation, we did not return directly from Kirkuk to Hawija. We waited for a while so that the situation calmed down and we were sure and assured that the city was free of ISIS elements. When we returned, we were one of the first houses in the area to return to our street [...] Services were non-existent, such as water and electricity. At night you could hear the sounds because the area was completely empty. It was dark and there was no lighting. We were running generators for electricity because the government electricity network was not working properly.*<sup>271</sup>

Since then, the situation has improved slightly, as the Iraqi government has been able to rehabilitate some of the infrastructure. Depending on the season, electricity is now generally available between eight (during winter) and twelve hours (during summer) each day. In an interview with the Hawija Electricity Department it was shared that prior to 2014 before ISIS took control of Hawija, the sub-station next to the industrial neighbourhood was fitted with two new transformers of sixteen megawatt each. Both of these got completely destroyed by the airstrike. They further shared that soon after liberation in 2017 the IOM and UNDP also installed 25 small transformers to Abassi and Al-Zab sub-districts. Each of these transformers was estimated at 5,000 USD (4,500 EUR) and could provide electricity to 20-25 households. However, since then the department has heard of millions of dollars being pledged to Hawija, mostly by UN agencies, but that is not fully translated into effective results on the ground. For instance, they shared that in 2018-19 the UNDP sent the department transformers without any tools to be able to fit them.<sup>272</sup>

Currently, the Iraqi government has restored a 63 megawatt sub-station that supplies electricity to the entire district. Moreover, the UNDP, with the funding from the Dutch government (for details see the box on page 105), has started implementing another electricity project in Hawija. Unfortunately, without any consultation with the Hawija Electricity Department. Instead, it is working through private contractors to fit a 25 megawatt mobile sub-station with six out-going feeders. Personnel from the Hawija Electricity Department shared that this is a duplication of the efforts of the Iraqi government. Moreover, the sub-station is mobile and hence can be taken away at any moment.<sup>273</sup> This leaves no guarantee for the people in Hawija that their future electricity needs will be met. The Electricity Department further shared that in order to make Hawija self-sustainable a 250 megawatt sub-station is needed that ideally should be run on renewable energy to ensure that Hawija has its

269 Farooq Raad Salah, interview 22 February 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

270 Hussein Fadhiil Mohammad, interview 30 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

271 Mussa Ali Khalaf, interview 1 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

272 Staff of the Electricity Department, key informant interview 16 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

273 Staff of the Electricity Department, key informant interview 16 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

own electricity generation capacity and is not dependant on Kirkuk.

7.3.3 EDUCATION

As can be read in the previous chapter (section 6.4.2), a total of fifteen schools got damaged by the strike. Of these, six were completely destroyed, hugely affecting the availability of education after liberation as many school buildings remained dysfunctional. An interviewee described some of the damages:

*[At] the beginning of liberation [the schools] were burned, some of them were damaged by the bombing and the furniture was broken, including chairs and whiteboards. People in the region used to donate among themselves in order to renovate the school next to them.*<sup>274</sup>

The availability of education for children in Hawija was further reduced by the fact that – partially due to the destruction brought on by the airstrike – many teachers fled the area: ‘Most of the teachers were in the Kirkuk governorate. They did not return to Hawija because the teachers’ houses were damaged.’<sup>275</sup> While speaking with staff from the Department of Education in Hawija, it was shared that before 2014, the Department of Education employed an estimated 5,040 teachers in Hawija and now only 3,200 are left. In some schools, the student to teacher ratio is as high as 700 students to 1 teacher. Moreover, there have been no refresher courses for the teachers who are still working. This leads to a shortage of qualified staff, especially since the teaching staff also need to ensure that students can catch up with their studies as they were out of school for over three years, and many of whom suffer from psycho-social issues.<sup>276</sup>

As a result, many children of families that stayed in Hawija are now behind on their education as illustrated by the following statement: ‘We became ignorant. My son for three years neither reads nor writes. I wanted to cross [into another governorate], but I could not. I was only able to send them to school again in Hawija after liberation.’<sup>277</sup> Another parent shared: ‘The children are now at fifth primary stage, yet they do not know how to read and write. We have become ignorant and illiterate.’<sup>278</sup>

Another interviewee reflected on the circumstances of several of those who left Hawija after the bombing:

*Only government institutions are present and I am the only one [of my family] who completed the study. And the number of people in my area who completed the study can be counted on the fingers of one hand, since most of them when they crossed [into another governorate], they had crossed at the age of enrolling in school and the schools did not accept them, so they could not complete their studies.*<sup>279</sup>

It should also be noted that in Iraq, there are strict age limits per class for students: once a student crosses that age limit he or she cannot re-enter the system at a later stage when older. Therefore,

274 Hanan Fadhil Jawad, interview 8 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

275 Ghazi Khalil Ibrahim, interview 12 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

276 Shared in a meeting held with PAX staff on 19 September 2021.

277 Hussein Fadhil Mohammad, interview 30 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

278 Mohammad Abdul Majeed Hafez, interview 14 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

279 Abed Abd Salah Hammadi, interview 7 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

those who were out of school for four years, are unable to join back in the same grade they left.<sup>280</sup>

Other children were, or continue to be, deprived of an education because of another reason. After the bombing, some children sustained an injury or suffered psychological trauma that prevents them from returning to school, for instance because of having been blinded by shrapnel flying around in the explosion.<sup>281</sup> One man recalled his desperation in trying to find help for his son after the airstrike, fruitlessly:

*[My son] went in a state of shock as a result of the explosion. There is no doctor or hospital left where I did not take my boy, but to no avail. I sold everything, including my property, even the clothes from my back to get him treated but nothing worked. Now he does not focus, and 24 hours runs outside the house. And he cannot speak. [...] My son does not go to school anymore. If he was healthy, he would have continued his education.*<sup>282</sup>

Others are unable to re-enter school because of their financial situation, such as the young man who stressed that ‘I would certainly love to study and would like to obtain a certificate, but I do not have the money to provide for school expenses such as clothes, stationery, books, transportation expenses, and others.’<sup>283</sup> As can be read in the section on economic harm (7.2), other young people have dropped out of school in order to supplement the family income, often reduced as a result of the 2015 airstrike. In this way, the airstrike has contributed to parts of a generation (largely) missing out on education opportunities, setting them back for years to come. This is highly detrimental, especially when one considers that schools can play a crucial role in reintegrating students who may have or might yet be influenced by ISIS’ ideology or that of other violent organisations.

7.4 Conclusion

Overall, the patterns in our data put forward in this chapter show the enormity of the airstrike’s reverberating impact, affecting people in many different areas in their lives like access to health care, livelihood, and education. Three important conclusions can be drawn from this. First, we see how the direct civilian harm effects discussed in the previous chapter were often the cause of further harm. The airstrike killed breadwinners and destroyed many workplaces and so cost many people their livelihood; because people’s homes had become uninhabitable, they became displaced; damage to the electricity network reduced civilians’ access to clean (and thus safe) drinking water. These reverberating effects, in turn, can create new harm, such as exemplified by the SGBV incidents related to displacement. This demonstrates how one single airstrike can cause reverberating civilian harm effects that last years, even generations.

Second, as with the direct civilian harm effects, it is evident that these reverberating effects reinforce

280 The Iraqi Ministry of Education and the INGO Mercy Corps have set up a mechanism for younger students to catch up on lost education through an accelerated programme. However, this is only for students of eighteen years and younger. Those who were in the later years of high school or early years of college when dropping out are often unable to re-start their education. As shared by Ahmed Mohammed Khalaf, Hawija Department of Education, key informant interview 19 September 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

281 Youssef Abdul Wahab Kadhim about his daughter, interview 6 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

282 Yussef Hamdan Ali, interview 16 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

283 Yasseen Ali Abdullah, interview 6 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



each other. Economic harm, for instance, due to a loss of employment or the death of the family breadwinner is often all the more problematic because people are in dire need of expensive medical care or money to travel to hospitals after such an attack takes place. When medical treatment is not affordable, injuries can ultimately lead to disability and an inability to work. It is therefore essential that our understanding of civilian harm takes into account how different forms of harm intersect and reinforce each other.

Third, again similar to the direct civilian harm effects, many of the reverberating effects that were discussed were amplified because they occurred in ‘rebel-held territory’. People had to navigate all these indirect effects under another two years of ISIS occupation, which restricted matters like freedom of movement and access to medical care. In the next chapter we reflect on how civilians look back on what happened to them and who they blame for the suffering that they endured.

### Ashwaq’s account

*‘When I look at him, I cry from sadness for his situation’*

NAME Ashwaq Ebad ul Kareem Sharif<sup>284</sup>  
DATE INTERVIEW 28 March 2021  
THE AIRSTRIKE Lost her home; her son Omar got severe burns and dropped out of school

Ashwaq, her husband and their children used to live in Hawija’s Hittin neighbourhood, one of the residential areas around the industrial neighbourhood. When ISIS occupied the city, life became increasingly difficult. Ashwaq describes how ‘foodstuff became very expensive’, how they were ‘terrified of ISIS and the bombings’, and how they had ‘a salary that was cut off after a period of ISIS control’. Her husband had a car oil store, the income of which hardly covered their basic needs. For two years of ISIS occupation, her children did not go to school. Twice, she and her family tried to flee Hawija, but they were caught by ISIS and brought back home. As Coalition bombing increased, Ashwaq felt she could not go anywhere to escape the violence: ‘We were trapped between ISIS and the airstrikes. Western forces were killing us.’

On the night of 2-3 June 2015, ‘I was sleeping in the yard of the house because we were afraid of the bombing of the planes. We did not sleep on the roof of the house, fearing the bombing. My children were playing at about twelve o’clock. Others were watching TV. I was putting mattresses in the garden. Then, I heard an explosion. I never expected it to be like this. The car exploded on us, and my children were burned, and I did not know what to do. It was a very cruel night. The house flared up and the car burned. Shrapnel flew and hit the car. Three of my children were burned because

flying pieces of the car burned them as they were playing near the car. Two of my children were burned lightly. But Omar was severely burned. He was burned in his face and in his hands because of the petrol of the car. [...] I was thinking that the strike was close to the house. I did not know that it was in the industrial area because it was far from the house. I did not expect the strike to be that far. It was destructive. [...] I took my children to the hospital because Omar, my son, was in a very bad condition due to the burns and I did not expect that he would survive.’

Omar survived, but his face became disfigured by the burns, a condition that required specialised plastic surgery that was not available in Hawija. After liberation, she went to Erbil and Kirkuk where she was told that Omar needs to be taken to another country to perform the required cosmetic surgery. She moreover believes that had she been able to leave Hawija before, it might have been better for Omar: ‘[I]t was too late [...] If the burn was new, we would have been able to treat it.’ Omar’s burns have further caused him to be bullied by his peers in school. They have changed schools twice already but every time he gets bullied again. Currently, Omar is refusing to go to school.

In addition to her son’s injury, their family lost their home that day, their car, and her husband’s workplace was destroyed. Their neighbours all died in the explosion as the house collapsed on them. To cover basic needs, as well as Omar’s medical expenses, the family has since resorted to borrowing money, and selling their last possessions including Ashwaq’s jewellery. The whole family continues to suffer from mental health problems: They have nightmares and are sensitive to loud noises, fearing the sound of airplanes. Her father-in-law, who owned a shop in the industrial neighbourhood, is unable to deal with the trauma of the night’s events and has

284 Ashwaq’s account is also included in *Als de bom valt: Danny Ghosen in Irak* (2022: VPRO), documentary.



Figure 11: Ashwaq's son, Omar, whose face got burned as a result of the airstrike and subsequent secondary explosion, February 2022. PAX/Ayman al-Amiri.

since attempted to commit suicide twice. Once by jumping of a building's second floor, the second time by setting himself on fire. They are unable to find treatment for her father-in-law.

Currently, Ashwaq and her husband are renting a house as they have no money to rebuild their old home.

Ashwaq blames the Coalition for the harm that was done to their family. 'Why were we bombed and what was our fault? We are innocent people. We were afraid of the bombing more than ISIS because of the incorrect and inaccurate strikes [...] The situation became worse than ISIS. They did not think about the families and children that were in the houses; why did they bomb?' Since the bombing, she has never received financial or medical assistance. She says about the interview: 'This is the first time that an organisation comes to us to share our story', adding that 'they [the Dutch military] were

supposed to come to the site of the bombing and see what they did to us that night.'

She looks to the Dutch government to make amends: 'I want compensation in order to treat my son's deformity, which happened to him because of the explosion, and he has a bad psychological state because of his face becoming deformed that night and he is becoming more aware of his deformity. He feels bothered by people's words. When I look at him, I cry from sadness for his situation, and we do not have the means to treat him.'

## Chapter 8

# 8. Interpretations and expectations following the airstrike

After discussing the direct and reverberating civilian harm effects of the Dutch airstrike in Hawija in chapters 6 and 7, this chapter relays how civilians in Hawija interpret the harm that they have experienced and what expectations they have vis-à-vis an adequate response. The first half of this chapter (8.1) addresses how our respondents perceive OIR and make sense of this 2015 airstrike, to learn how the airstrike figures in their collective interpretations of right and wrong, enemy and victim, suffering and blame, and necessity and avoidability. The second half of the chapter (8.2) then moves on to reflect on how these interpretations inform people's expectations about how their needs should be addressed, and who they deem responsible for providing this assistance. It is important to reflect on and learn from these testimonies, and to relate them to OIR's mission statement of bringing 'enduring security'.

## 8.1 Why interpretations matter

Any study of war has to begin 'in the middle'. That is, we are always in the middle of war: 'in a world already saturated with the history, present and anticipation of war'.<sup>285</sup> For the case of Iraq this is no understatement. The country has been through many violent conflicts in its recent past, from the second Iraqi-Kurdish war of 1974, the wars with Iran and Kuwait, to the 2003 US-led invasion, and the many sectarian wars that were waged in its aftermath, including the ISIS occupation.

Civilians in Iraq take in different positions and recount 'their wars' in different ways, depending on their specific histories of violence, their political, religious, ethnic or tribal identifications, and their gender and family roles. This recounting of war is often a collective process, where people who are placed in the same socio-political time in history, share a collective narrative of who they are, what threatens them, who protects and provides for them, and how they see their future. These narratives, or as we call them in this report 'interpretations', matter because wars are fought from memory and often over memory. For instance, ISIS was able to mobilise people within Iraq and across the world by emphasising the large-scale civilian harm that was done to Iraqi civilians during the 2003 US and UK military invasion, as well as against the Sunni population by the subsequently installed Shiite government.<sup>286</sup>

From this point of view, the way citizens and their political leaders collectively interpret violence is therefore key to understanding how they may resist or support future wars. As the Taliban co-founder and former leader, Mullah Omar, who was featured in an article in *Harper's Magazine* underlined: 'At

first, there was no support for the Taliban [...] It was when the Americans started killing civilians that people started supporting us, giving us food, bullets, and offering men.'<sup>287</sup> These unintended local consequences of 'military strategies that are often kept secret from Western publics' - yet can ultimately undermine their own security - is what the CIA coined blowback.<sup>288</sup>

### 8.1.1 INTERPRETATIONS OF THE 2015 AIRSTRIKE AND CIVILIAN HARM IN HAWIJA

Throughout the interviews, four clear interpretations related to the Dutch F-16 airstrike and its ensuing civilian harm can be discerned:

- First, before the Hawija airstrike took place civilians considered OIR a necessary military intervention to stop ISIS occupation in Hawija
- Second, our respondents claim they could distinguish between Iraqi and Coalition airstrikes and initially perceived the latter to be precise, accurate and able to prevent civilian casualties, at least in the initial stages of OIR
- Third, respondents claim they therefore knew that the 2015 bombing was a Coalition airstrike. This created a subsequent sense of disillusionment and fear of Coalition strikes because they were no longer perceived as being either discriminate or precise
- Fourth, they blame the Netherlands and the broader Coalition for the strike and its ensuing civilian harm. They blame the Netherlands for the negligence of the civilian harm it caused

### 8.1.2. INTERPRETATION 1: NECESSITY OF OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

*[It] was as I was waiting for Eid, we were feeling joy until we were liberated. When we heard the forces approaching, we were crying out of joy. We wanted the security forces to come to get rid of ISIS.*<sup>289</sup>

Confronted with life under ISIS, all respondents initially embraced the necessity of OIR. As described in chapter 5, faced with the threat of death and torture, limited access to health services, and only access to education promoting ISIS ideology, respondents describe life under ISIS as 'no life'.<sup>290</sup> An interviewee expressed that he wanted the Coalition and Iraqi forces to cooperate 'so that they can rescue the people from the injustices of ISIS. We wanted the Iraqi forces and the Coalition to get rid of ISIS members, because ISIS was more powerful than us. It was not easy at all'.<sup>291</sup>

### 8.1.3 INTERPRETATION 2: COALITION AIRSTRIKES ARE PRECISE AND DISCRIMINATE

Civilians also believed that Coalition airstrikes were more accurate than those carried out by the Iraqi military or others:

*Their work was very good. When the planes came to bomb, we were not afraid because their targets were accurate. They were targeting ISIS. We were happy. We were not afraid, but when Iraqi or Iranian planes came, for example, we were afraid because they would target randomly.*<sup>292</sup>

<sup>285</sup> Antoine Bousquet, Jairus Grove, and Nisha Shah. "Becoming war: Towards a martial empiricism," *Security Dialogue* 51, no. 2-3 (2020): 105.

<sup>286</sup> The medical journal *The Lancet* estimated that 600,000 civilians were killed in the wake of the 2003 US and UK-led invasion in Iraq, see Gilbert Burnham et al,

"Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey," *The Lancet* 386, no. 9545 (October 2006): 1.

<sup>287</sup> Andrew Quilty, "When the raids came: The war's toll on one Afghan family", *Harper's Magazine*, August 17, 2021).

<sup>288</sup> Cited in Johnson Chalmers, *Blowback. The Costs and Consequences of an American Empire*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000).

<sup>289</sup> Youssef Abdul Wahab Kadhim, interview 6 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>290</sup> For instance, Jamal Muhammad Hussein, interview 14 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Abid Abdul Wahab, interview 25 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Mohammad Abdul Majeed Hafez, interview 14 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>291</sup> Kamaran Hussein Khalil, interview 1 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>292</sup> Saleem Khalil Mohammad, interview 8 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



After having lived through years of war, civilians thus recount that they can make a distinction between Coalition and Iraqi or Iranian airstrikes. They claimed they could identify the planes by their sound, as the Iraqi planes were not as sophisticated as Coalition planes. Respondents emphasise that they perceived the Coalition's targeting as being informed by good intelligence and advanced technologies, and therefore they would be 'very precise and they would not hurt innocent victims'.<sup>293</sup> At the start of OIR this, in fact, was a widely-held belief amongst civilians across Iraq and Syria. As Hussam Essa, Syrian founder of monitoring organisation *Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently*, relayed to a *Washington Post* journalist in 2017: 'People used to feel safe when the American planes were in the sky, because they knew they didn't hit civilians'.<sup>294</sup>

**8.1.4 INTERPRETATION 3: IMPRECISE COALITION BOMBINGS AND INSECURITY**

*[First] we were satisfied with them, because we wanted to get rid of ISIS. The American forces and the Coalition helped us to defeat ISIS. However, after the strike in the industrial area, many people were hurt or lost their lives and property. Therefore, we felt afraid of their warplanes and forces. We had a negative reaction different from the one at the beginning.*<sup>295</sup>

Given their capacity to distinguish between fighter planes, civilians in Hawija relayed that they knew immediately after the 2015 bombing that the Coalition carried out the airstrike: 'We heard the sound of the planes, the Coalition planes were bombing the ammunition factory in the industrial area'.<sup>296</sup> Therefore, some questioned why the Coalition did not 'drop leaflets' and inform civilians 'to evacuate the place to save many innocent lives at the time of the strikes'.<sup>297</sup>

After the Hawija bombing, expectations about the Coalition's ability to defeat ISIS in Hawija in a precise and discriminate way changed considerably, as illustrated by an interviewee who expressed that 'we were satisfied with them, because we wanted to get rid of ISIS. The American forces and the Coalition helped us to defeat ISIS.' But as the strike caused a situation in which 'many people were hurt or lost their lives and property', this feeling changed, and people became 'afraid of their warplanes and forces. We had a negative reaction different from the one at the beginning'.<sup>298</sup> The Dutch airstrike in particular is remembered as a key turning point in their perceptions. Respondents often recite how, just a week before, there was a French airstrike which targeted another ISIS stronghold, the Hawija Technical Institute, but no civilians were harmed directly.

Respondents clarify the imprecise nature of the Coalition attack in two ways. First, a handful of respondents assume that the bombings and the secondary explosion could only have been a mistake: 'It was not intentional, because the international Coalition has satellites, drones and advanced technologies. They know and see everything.' It is explained as a failure in the Coalition's intelligence: 'if they knew [how much explosives were stored in the ISIS factory], the Coalition would not have bombed it'.<sup>299</sup> It is thus seen as an exception to the rule that the Coalition was 'not accurate in the

293 Sabah Kareem Ali, interview 9 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

294 Loveday Morris and Liz Sly, "Panic spreads in Iraq, Syria as record numbers of civilians are reported killed in U.S. strikes", *Washington Post*, March 28, 2017.

295 Kamaran Hussein Khalil, interview 1 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

296 Dua Tarek Hassan, interview 16 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

297 Abid Abdul Wahab, interview 25 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

298 Kamaran Hussein Khalil, interview 1 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

299 Mohammad Abdul Mahdi Hussein, interview 15 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

bombing and its target' in this incident.<sup>300</sup>

Most of our respondents, however, assume that exactly because the Coalition collects vast amounts of intelligence and has advanced technologies, it must have been aware of the risks of a secondary explosion. Therefore, they conclude, the Coalition must have not cared about their lives or their wellbeing when it carried out the attack:

*Of course it was deliberate: The Netherlands is a superpower. How could it not know about the factory? It has great intelligence information and they have many information and sources through which they can know what is there. How can they strike such a region full of citizens who are powerless under the control of ISIS? People could not get out.*<sup>301</sup>

All respondents underline that the airstrike left them either dead or severely injured and trapped in ruins under ISIS' control for over two more years. After the attack, they feared attacks by both the Coalition as well as ISIS, and they recounted Coalition airstrikes as being more indiscriminate. As one respondent told us:

*After the Dutch strike, we were frightened of the Coalition because their targeting was not accurate. It claimed the lives of many people. I started to be afraid of airplanes and the Coalition. People got afraid of entering homes when hearing a plane.*<sup>302</sup>

Another interviewee stated:

*We were afraid of the bombing more than ISIS, because of the incorrect and inaccurate strikes and ISIS were very unjust and the bombing caused more damage. The situation became worse than ISIS. They did not think about the families and children that were in houses. Why did they bomb?*<sup>303</sup>

This shift in perceptions of OIR Coalition bombing being precise towards being indiscriminate did not just happen in Hawija. As Hussam Essa recounted in the same 2017 interview with the *Washington Post*: 'They [Syrian civilians] were only afraid of the Russian and regime planes. But now they are very afraid of the American airstrikes. American planes are targeting everywhere'.<sup>304</sup>

Looking back, many of our respondents claimed they would have preferred Coalition ground troops because they believe troops would have been able to better distinguish between ISIS militants and innocent civilians, negotiate access to much needed healthcare, and reclaim territory from ISIS. As a respondent emphasised: 'If they were present on the ground, then people would not have been affected and they would have taken control of the place without losing many lives and buildings'.<sup>305</sup>

300 Jamal Mohammad Hussein, interview 14 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

301 Abdullah Rashid Saleh, interview 4 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.

302 Farha Yasser Mohammad, interview 24 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

303 Ashwaq Ebad ul Kareem Sharif, interview 28 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

304 Morris and Sly, "Panic spreads."

305 Huda Rafeeq Saleh, interview 7 April 2021, Tuz Khurmato, Iraq.

8.1.5 INTERPRETATION 4: BLAMING ISIS, THE COALITION AND THE NETHERLANDS

When asked who they blame for the airstrike, a handful of respondents only mentioned ISIS. As Hussein relayed: ‘ISIS was certainly responsible as they [the Coalition] bombed because of ISIS’s presence.’<sup>306</sup> Most of the people, however, blame ISIS, the broader Coalition, and specifically the Netherlands. As Yasseen shared:

*In fact, ISIS members were the ones who placed and stored explosives and bombs in that residential area. Yes, ISIS and the international Coalition were responsible for the bombing because you should not strike an area full of innocent people. I heard the Dutch state was responsible for the strike, according to my information from the people and the news.*<sup>307</sup>

And some blame just the latter two: ‘The Dutch state, among the International Coalition, is responsible for the bombing that night. It was the one that killed many innocent people and caused an enormous destruction.’<sup>308</sup> When asked how they found out it was a Dutch fighter jet, all respondents mentioned ‘news broadcast on television and on social media’.<sup>309</sup>

Not only do our respondents blame the Coalition and the Netherlands for the airstrike and its impact on civilian harm, they feel particularly aggrieved by the fact that to this day they have not received assistance of any kind from the Iraqi government, the Coalition, or the Netherlands:

*I did not receive any financial, legal, psychological or medical aid, nor medical support. I did not know any government programs that provide aid, and I could not deliver my voice to any party. I did not receive any reparations for the loss of my daughter, my house, my car.*<sup>310</sup>

The civilians also expressed being very disappointed that thus far not a single representative of the Dutch government or the embassy in Iraq has visited Hawija.<sup>311</sup> A lack of having a voice and the hope of being heard is underlined by many victims. Huda told us:

*We did not receive any support of any kind, whether it was financial, psychological, legal or even medical. We did not get all of them from the day of the strike until the present moment. We only met with Al-Ghad organisation and filed a complaint. Therefore, we hope that our voice will reach the Dutch government so that they compensate us, also help us get back to our normal life.*<sup>312</sup>

Paradoxically, during our FGDs it was mentioned that ISIS would compensate within 72 hours if innocent civilians were killed in ISIS bombings. Based on certain criteria, this compensation ranged between 200-700 USD (180-630 EUR). Although we could not verify these claims with official documentation,

306 Haitham Ali Khattab, interview 16 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

307 Yasseen Ali Abdullah, interview 6 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

308 Salah Safwan Attiya, interview 9 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

309 Mouna Ali Attiya, interview 11 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

310 Saman Ali Ahmed, interview February 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

311 Thus far, the Dutch embassy has only had two virtual calls with the Mayor – one call was with a junior officer asking for the needs on the ground. In the context of Hawija, such video calls are not considered as formal meetings.

312 Huda Rafeeq Saleh, interview 7 April 2021, Tuz Khurmato, Iraq.

it has been reported on elsewhere too.<sup>313</sup> The fact that these claims exist, influences how civilians perceive the Netherlands. As one respondent concluded: ‘[H]ow can ISIS, a terrorist organisation, be more merciful than the Netherlands, which prides itself as being a champion of human rights?’<sup>314</sup>

The above patterns in our data show that people in Hawija initially had high expectations about OIR’s ability to defeat ISIS and relieve them from the ‘death world’ they found themselves in. Respondents believed the Coalition when it claimed its airstrikes are technologically advanced, precise, and caring for Iraqi civilians. These interpretations shifted profoundly after the 2015 Dutch airstrike on Hawija. Victims relayed how in the wake of the Dutch airstrike, they perceived the Coalition airstrikes as random, and how they lived in constant fear of both Coalition bombardments and ISIS’ violent occupation. A majority of the respondents blame ISIS, the Coalition, and the Netherlands for the airstrike and its deadly aftermath. This illustrates how all three parties are now seen as perpetrators. As victims, our respondents are especially disillusioned by the fact that they received no help at all from the Coalition or the Netherlands either in the immediate aftermath of the bombardment or after ISIS was driven out of Hawija. It has left many with a bitter aftertaste of a Western remote style of liberation: ‘At first we thought they were there to liberate us, but they did the opposite as they destroyed us more than they freed us or liberated us.’<sup>315</sup>

8.2 Why expectations regarding acknowledgment and compensation matter

From the Second World War, to civil wars in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, to the Western military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, to the Dutch military’s involvement in Srebrenica (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Chora (Afghanistan), history proves that in the aftermath of violent conflict civilians seek acknowledgement, reparations, justice, and accountability for the suffering they have endured. While research underscores that if these post-conflict expectations are not addressed, they could be the seeds for future processes of radicalisation, mobilisation, and violent uprisings: blowback.<sup>316</sup>

8.2.1 EXPECTATIONS AFTER THE 2015 AIRSTRIKE ON HAWIJA

Throughout the interviews, we could distill three clear expectations amongst the victims of the Hawija airstrike. Our respondents long for:

- The Dutch representatives involved in the airstrike to publicly acknowledge and apologise for the civilian harm done, but not to ask for forgiveness
- The Dutch government to pay individual financial compensation
- The Dutch government to be brought to court if they do not meet the above expectations voluntarily

313 Judit Neurink, “Six years later, ex-Islamic State stronghold in Iraq feels left behind,” *Al-Monitor*, December 10, 2021.

314 Focus group discussion, November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

315 Hamid Dawood Ali, interview 5 April 2021, Salahaddin, Iraq.

316 See Leila Hudson, Colin S. Owens, and David J. Callen, “Drone warfare in Yemen: Fostering emirates through counterterrorism?” *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (2012): 142-156 and; Leila Hudson, Colin S. Owens, and Matt Flannes, “Drone warfare: Blowback from the new American way of war” *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 3 (2011): 122-132.

8.2.2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND APOLOGY

*The Netherlands must be brought to trial. They must admit their mistake and ask for forgiveness, and must also pay financial compensation, because they are the ones who caused this disaster. But violence should not be used against them.*<sup>317</sup>

First, victims want the Dutch government to publicly acknowledge and apologise for the harm they have endured due to the airstrike and the secondary explosion. As simply put by Manal, ‘they should apologise for what they did to us.’<sup>318</sup> Notably, many respondents say the Netherlands should take responsibility for the civilian harm done and ask for forgiveness, but not to expect civilians to forgive or forget. As one victim underlined: ‘The responsible party must confess and admit their mistake and ask for pardon, but we will not forgive them.’<sup>319</sup> Another relayed that the Netherlands should therefore only acknowledge their mistake, but not ask to be pardoned: ‘they must be brought to trial and they must admit their mistake, but they should not ask for pardon because I do not pardon them.’<sup>320</sup>

During FGDs<sup>321</sup>, civilians shared that they want the Dutch pilot as well as the then-Minister of Defence, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, in particular to issue a formal apology. They also want Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert to resign from her current role as the Special Representative of UNAMI. The civilians shared that their apology needs to be sincere. They believe that this sincerity can be shown through taking the demands of the civilians seriously and responding to their needs in a timely and effective manner.

8.2.3 INDIVIDUAL FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

All our respondents highlighted they not only seek an apology, but also compensation from the Netherlands, often in the same breath. As Dua relayed:

*At least the Netherlands should admit to their actions after the strike, confess their mistake and provide financial compensation to the families who lost many shops, homes, people, the injured ones, cars and many more things after that night.*<sup>322</sup>

As recounted in the previous two chapters, many people have experienced considerable economic harm following the airstrike, whether from material damages, an increase in medical expenses, or loss of livelihood. It is therefore not surprising that many participants seek financial compensation, specifically to rebuild their homes and businesses, to access necessary medical care, and to restore the material possessions they have lost as a result of the airstrike. Omar explained:

*I want financial compensation in order to compensate for the losses that occurred to me. Because of the explosion that night I lost my house, my car, the livestock that I had and my workplace. In addition, I need a doctor to treat myself for the physical injuries that I have had[.]*<sup>323</sup>

317 Hammad Ali Ibrahim, interview 31 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

318 Manal Ibrahim Nasser, interview 26 May 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

319 Majd Abdul Samad Awad, interview 7 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

320 Waheeda Mohammad Dawood, interview 15 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

321 Focus group discussion, November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

322 Dua Tarek Hassan, interview 16 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

323 Omar Abdullah Mahmoud, interview 28 February 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

The testimonies indicate that there is an immediate and urgent demand to address first-level livelihood, medical bills especially for those who were injured and are suffering from chronic issues as a result, and security needs. Finally, civilians have also expressed a strong desire for the Dutch government to finance psycho-social support to deal with the trauma from the airstrike: ‘I want psychological support for my son, who has suffered psychological trauma and is still suffering from it due to the strike.’<sup>324</sup>

Respondents expressed that individual compensation would be the best solution to make sure their needs get addressed, especially as there is a large distrust in INGOs and UN agencies, as well as the federal and governorate level governments.

As Warith Adam Mustafa shared:

*[W]e do not trust the government or the [international] NGOs. These [international] NGOs are working with the government. During and after any chronic conflict, such as in Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, there is chaos. There is chaos currently in Iraq as well when it comes to funding, and this chaos leads to corruption. We therefore want individual compensation, since if funding is given to the government or to NGOs, we will never see a single penny. Moreover, when it comes to projects like rehabilitating electricity or infrastructure, these should be taken out of the compensation, since this is the responsibility of the government of Iraq, and not any NGO or international government. We are taxpaying citizens, and therefore, the government needs to rehabilitate the infrastructure.*<sup>325</sup>

It was also shared that when NGOs or foreign governments provide funding to the government of Iraq for infrastructure rehabilitation, civilians are never kept in the loop of where this funding came from and how it is spent.

In light of this mistrust, civilians expressed that the Dutch government should reconsider how it spends its 4.4 million EUR in ‘voluntary compensation’, considering the IOM and the UNDP have consulted neither them nor the local authorities about their needs. Instead, the Dutch government should show that the initiatives they undertake in Hawija are real, and there is actual accountability and transparency in where the funds go, and how they are spent (for details about these Dutch-funded projects see the box on page 105). Reconstruction efforts moreover need to be fast and efficient, as the rubble still has not been cleared, while, for instance, the French have already contributed to the rebuilding of the Technical Institute they struck in May 2015.<sup>326</sup>

8.2.4 A COURT CASE

Nearly all our respondents started their calls for an apology and compensation by stating that the Netherlands should be taken to court. As Mussa argued: ‘Legally we must bring them to the courts, they must admit their mistakes and provide compensation.’<sup>327</sup> After over six years of waiting, it is as if civilians no longer trust the Dutch government to act on its own accord and they believe that a trial is the only way their demands will be met. In fact, in response to the devastating impacts of the Hawija attack, 52 civilians from Hawija have filed a claim for damages with the Dutch MoD. These individuals

324 Abdullah Rashid Saleh, interview 4 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.

325 Warith Adam Mustafa, focus group discussion 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

326 PAX, Youtube, “Hawija as told by residents”; Neurink, “Six years later”.

327 Mussa Ali Khalaf, interview 1 June 2021, Hawija, Iraq.



were either injured in the explosion, had a family member who was killed by the explosion, or both. As of February 2022, a subpoena was served on behalf of eleven civilians from seven families. The outcome of the court case is yet to be determined, but our interviews with victims indicate that they largely support this process and trust the Dutch legal system. As the *mukhtar* shared: '[W]e do not trust the Dutch government anymore, but we have full faith in the Dutch legal system.'<sup>328</sup>

8.2.5 VIOLENT RETALIATION

Demands for an apology and compensation, and support for a legal trial abound, but a number of respondents, including Farha, hastened to add that none of the above should be achieved 'through force and violence'.<sup>329</sup> Abdullah asserted:

*I certainly want to bring them [the Netherlands] to trial, and they must admit their mistake. But even if they ask for forgiveness, we will not forgive them. They must give us money and support and help us after we have been destroyed, but we do not want to use violence. We want to deal with it by talking.*<sup>330</sup>

Salah similarly told us that he supports a trial and acknowledgement. Moreover, the Netherlands 'must provide financial compensation, but without violence. We will follow it legally.'<sup>331</sup> The victims we spoke to are adamant that the Dutch government should give them the acknowledgement, compensations, and the apology they believe they deserve, but they were also clear in that they choose trials and talking above violence to achieve these goals.

8.3 Conclusion

As with many other post-conflict contexts, civilians in Hawija seek redress for the suffering they endured or continue to endure. This chapter shows how victims hold the Coalition and specifically the Netherlands responsible for the aftermath of the attack, and the direct and reverberating harm they still face. Their priority is acknowledgement in the form of a sincere apology and individual compensation, both to restore their dignity, as well as to meet their basic human needs. After over six years of living in the rubble, they now turn to a trial in the hope that this will force the Netherlands into action. However, it is also clear that our respondents are not ready to either forgive or forget what happened to them on that deadly night of 2015. It remains to be seen whether their testimonies will be heard, compensation will be provided, and their basic needs will be met – voluntarily or through a court case. The Netherlands and the broader Coalition must grapple with the potential risk of not offering an apology and individual compensation for the harm they have caused. Our research shows that their absence in Hawija is leading to a deterioration in perceptions and relations and could push victims (although not evident in our data) into the hands of rebel organisations with extremist ideologies and reinforce yet another cycle of violence. This could severely undermine the Coalition's aim of bringing 'enduring security'.

328 Mukhtar, key informant interview 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

329 Farha Yasser Mohammad, interview 24 March 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

330 Abdullah Rashid Saleh, interview 4 April 2021, Albu Ajil, Iraq.

331 Salah Safwan Attiya, interview 1 April 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

Dutch funding following the 2015 airstrike

In December 2020, the Dutch government announced that it had awarded IOM over 3.6 million USD and UNDP over 1.7 million USD for community-level rehabilitation for the people in Hawija who were impacted by the Dutch 2015 airstrike.<sup>332</sup> Contracts with the two agencies were signed midway 2021 for projects to be carried out in 'direct consultation with the community'.<sup>333</sup> As of September 2021, neither the Mayor of Hawija nor the NGO coordinator were aware of the existence of these projects.

On 5 November 2021, in response to questions raised about these funds, however, the Dutch MoD shared with the Parliament that both projects were well underway.<sup>334</sup> The Parliament was informed that UNDP has been given the responsibility for the provision of a mobile sub-station and other electricity-related equipment. Yet, our research found that the Hawija Department of Electricity was not consulted on the project, and a private contractor is undertaking the implementation. Personnel from the Department of Electricity are expected to monitor the progress, although they have not received the details of the project, such as the bills of quantity, specifying the materials, labour and costs that are required.<sup>335</sup> Currently, a billboard with the Dutch flag can be seen in the industrial neighbourhood, announcing a UNDP

project (see Figure 12 on page 106).

The update provided to Parliament in November 2021 further stated that two end user committees – advisory bodies that consist of persons representing the Hawija community that should benefit from these projects – had been established between July and September 2021.<sup>336</sup> Again, neither the Hawija Department of Electricity, nor the Mayor's office, the NGO coordinator or the mukhtar were aware of the existence of such committees.<sup>337</sup>

Regarding the IOM project, the MoD stated that it had started in May 2021 and that local authorities were closely involved in every step of the way. According to the MoD, multiple FGDs and KIIs were held to identify the needs of the communities, and preparations had been made for the actual repair work. The update shared that IOM had partnered with Tetra Tech for demining the industrial neighbourhood.<sup>338</sup> The Mayor of Hawija, the NGO coordinator and the mukhtar were all visibly shocked when this update was read out to them by our research team as they had no knowledge of this.<sup>339</sup> In November 2021 and February 2022, our research team visited the industrial neighbourhood where this work had allegedly begun; nothing was visible on the ground, and civilians in the industrial neighbourhood were unaware of any demining or rubble clearance activities taking place. The IOM team working on Hawija has not entertained any meeting requests by PAX.<sup>340</sup>

332 Dutch Minister of Defence, "Brief van de Minister van Defensie," Letter (27 925, no. 766), December 15, 2020.

333 Dutch Minister of Defence, "Brief van de Minister van Defensie," Letter (27 925, no. 766), December 15, 2020.

334 Dutch Minister of Defence, "Stand van zaken compensatieprojecten gemeenschap Hawija," Letter (27 925, no. 862), November 5, 2021.

335 Raad Mohammed Abdullah, Chief Engineer Haadir Ramadan Mohammed and Engineer Khalid Jassim of the Hawija Department of Electricity, key informant interview 16 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

336 Dutch Minister of Defence, "Stand van zaken compensatieprojecten gemeenschap Hawija."

337 Hawija Department of Electricity, meeting 16 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq; Mayor of Hawija, NGO Coordinator and *mukhtar*, meeting 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

338 Dutch Minister of Defence, "Stand van zaken compensatieprojecten gemeenschap Hawija."

339 Mayor of Hawija, NGO Coordinator and *mukhtar*, meeting 17 November 2021, Hawija, Iraq.

340 Five emails requesting meetings were sent to IOM in October and November 2021. It should be noted that there were no issues getting a meeting with the IOM personnel around the same time, who are responsible for rubble clearance in Mosul, as part of another project.



Figure 12: A billboard with a Dutch flag, announcing a UNDP project in the industrial neighbourhood. So far, funding pledged by the Dutch government has led to only limited results on the ground in Hawija, February 2022. PAX/Ayman al-Amiri.

### The ‘politics of aid’ and marginalisation of Hawija

While the airstrike on the industrial neighbourhood occurred over six years ago, there is little underway in this part of Hawija city in terms of reconstruction and assistance. This has left many people in Hawija feeling marginalised. This text box provides some insight into why aid generally has been slow to reach Hawija. The three contributing factors are the distribution of aid across different government levels, the way aid organisations typically operate, and instances of corruption. The status of the Dutch-funded assistance projects, which were announced in 2020 following Dutch acknowledgement of responsibility for the airstrike is discussed elsewhere (see the box on page 105).

To understand the distribution of aid and funding in Iraq, it is necessary to realise there are different administrative layers: the industrial neighbourhood that was targeted in the June 2015 airstrike is located in Hawija city. Administratively, this city is part of the Hawija sub-district and this, in turn, of the larger Hawija district, one of four districts in the Kirkuk governorate. Consequently, when aid or assistance is meant for ‘Hawija’, this can mean different things. Multiple INGOs and UN agencies that are working in Hawija do not necessarily operate in the city of Hawija, but work in the larger Hawija sub-district or even district. A lot of aid is therefore spent elsewhere and has not reached the industrial neighbourhood.

An example of the above is when in October 2017, two days before ISIS was driven out of Hawija, the UN OCHA-operated Iraq Humanitarian Fund announced a 20 million USD (18 million EUR) reserve allocation fund for Hawija.<sup>341</sup> Despite the title of this allocation, it was not only for Hawija, but also for the city of Shirqat in Salahaddin governorate. The only funding to reach Hawija city concerned emergency education and mine action sectors.<sup>342</sup> In the end, of the 20 million only 14 million USD (12.6 million EUR) was disbursed, and this across a total of five governorates, rather than just the Kirkuk governorate.<sup>343</sup>

A recent example is the Hawija Area Based Coordination (ABC) plan of action.<sup>344</sup> This notes that between 2021-23 a total of seventeen INGOs and UN agencies will work in Hawija district with a total allocation of 23 million USD (20.7 EUR), with an estimated 17 million USD (15.3 EUR) being allocated to Hawija sub-district. The plan of action also states that governorate level authorities are dependent on allocations from the central government. For Kirkuk governorate, these have been cited as being low compared to the number of affected persons, level of infrastructure destruction and insufficiency of basic services present.<sup>345</sup> The document further revealed that no Iraqi NGO was a part of the Hawija ABC mechanism. While discussing the details of the Hawija ABC plan of action, Mr. Ali Hussein, the NGO coordinator with the Hawija Mayor’s office, shared that he is only ever invited as an observer, and he is not allowed to ask any questions. He further commented on how such a coordination mechanism holds all meetings in Kirkuk city, and never in Hawija.<sup>346</sup>

341 UN OCHA, “Iraq Humanitarian Fund: Hawiga Reserve Allocation Strategy,” Briefing (UN OCHA: October 2017).

342 UN OCHA, “Iraq Humanitarian Fund: Hawiga Reserve Allocation Strategy.”

343 UN OCHA, “Iraq Humanitarian Fund: Hawiga Response Allocation Factsheet,” Factsheet (UN OCHA: October 2017).

344 ABC Plan of Action as shared by the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq on 12 January 2022.

345 ABC Plan of Action as shared by the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq on 12 January 2022.

346 Ali Hussein, key informant interview 8 February 2022, Hawija, Iraq.

It is further interesting to note how funding is allocated for projects in a district or governorate in Iraq. The INGO or UN agency which has secured funding for a particular sector first needs to get permission from the governor's office, which has its own priorities, sometimes personally motivated. Therefore, local level authorities at the city or village level are often not involved in decision making regarding (humanitarian) aid. During research, it was revealed that the case of Hawija city is similar. Even though the current governor of Kirkuk is from Hawija district, not a lot of initiatives or funding have been directed to the city, mainly since the city is not a part of his constituency.<sup>347</sup>

The distribution of funding is also dependent on the way aid agencies operate. INGOs in particular generally prefer to work in areas with easier access and better security to reduce their operational costs as they are normally dependent on donors for funding. Donors have their own (limited) budgets and calculate costs per beneficiary. Operating in Hawija sub-district and city is not easy given the level of permissions needed to travel there<sup>348</sup>, which may disincentivise some NGOs from going there. This contributes to further marginalisation of areas that are less safe or more remote.<sup>349</sup> It is a source of growing frustration in Hawija that residents see neighbouring sub-districts get a lion's share of the funding.

Finally, during our field work many civilians remarked a high level of corruption and nepotism when it comes to INGOs and UN agencies. The research team heard numerous rumours of UN agencies being awarded an estimated 38 million USD (34.2 million EUR) for Hawija in 2019, but only 6 million USD (5.4 million EUR) can be traced on the ground, thereby causing further mistrust.

Similarly, the Iraqi government has also formulated the Hawija Compensation Committee which has the main task of providing financial compensation for victims of Hawija. However, thus far, none of the civilians we spoke to have received anything from the committee, further contributing to frustrations from the civilians on the slow and bureaucratic processes which have not led to anything tangible.

It should be noted that there are some INGOs which have the trust of the local authorities and civilians in Hawija. For instance, MSF is highly respected and has been appreciated as 'saving the Hawija General Hospital from shutting down' when it was struggling with getting funding for operating costs and staff salaries post-ISIS.<sup>350</sup> The agency negotiated with security forces in 2017 immediately after the liberation of Hawija, who guaranteed their safety and security, and rented houses for staff in Hawija so they could remain close to the hospital for patients requiring critical care. MSF was also commended on working in a very transparent manner.<sup>351</sup>

In summary, there are numerous factors regarding the distribution of aid and funding that impede assistance reaching the affected industrial neighbourhood in Hawija city. Limited assistance is caused in part by the administrative set up of Iraq, but can also be attributed to the ways some (I)NGOs operate. Importantly, this has caused civilians in Hawija city to feel even more marginalised as they hear of funds being allocated to Hawija, which rarely reach them. This has meant that, even after more than six years, people have only received limited assistance for the harm that the airstrike caused them. In chapter 8, we reflect briefly on what such grievances may mean for future cycles of violence.

# Conclusion

<sup>347</sup> Observed through KIs in Hawija.

<sup>348</sup> For the case of Hawija, permissions need to be received from the National Operations Centre (NOC) in Baghdad, which is not the case for other locations.

<sup>349</sup> Al-Ghad League for Woman and Child Care, "Hawija City-Based Assessment."

<sup>350</sup> Sabhan Khalaf Ali, Mayor of Hawija, key informant interview 8 February 2022, Hawija, Iraq.

<sup>351</sup> Sabhan Khalaf Ali, Mayor of Hawija, key informant interview 8 February 2022, Hawija, Iraq.



# Conclusion

Civilian harm is 'knowable'. That is perhaps the most simple and straightforward conclusion of this report. It is possible, also after six years, and in times of political insecurity, access challenges and COVID restrictions, to collect data on the direct and reverberating effects of airstrikes on civilian lives, and on the ways these airstrikes shape people's interpretations of war.

For anyone not present on the ground, it is almost impossible to comprehend the layers of destruction that a single set of airstrikes sets in motion. Such is the tragedy of war, from Dresden to Rotterdam, and from Fallujah to Aleppo.

With the shift to remote warfare, and a reliance on airstrikes, however, destruction compounds in new ways. The Coalition (and the Dutch command in particular) made a grave mistake to target the industrial neighbourhood of Hawija in 2015. First, because this was in fact a densely populated urban area, with lots of civilians living on or near the site of destruction. And second, because it was evident that the strike would not instantly drive out ISIS from the city. As a result, civilian victims of the strike continued to live and suffer under the occupation of this extremely repressive and violent rebel regime for more than two years. Civilians were both stuck, as well as often denied access to vital resources, rendering it nearly impossible for injured civilians to get medical attention. And all of this remained largely unseen and unrecognised by the outside world.

Up until today, media coverage and political commentary on civilian harm resulting from the Hawija airstrike have been largely directed to the dead. What is debated is the 'possibility of counting' and also whether the deceased were combatants or civilians, and in that sense guilty or innocent. What we show in this report is that dealing with the dead, although important, is only part of the issue. More than anything, this report tells the story of those who survived, of those who still live among the dead. It confronts us with the long-term, interdependent, complex layers of destruction of just one set of strikes, among the 34,000 airstrikes that were fired in the name of enduring peace and security. Surely, for our respondents, there is neither peace to be found, nor security to be experienced.

These are our main findings:

1. **Various forms of civilian harm intersect and reinforce each other:** physical injury and emotional and psychological harm due to the sudden death of loved ones intersects with human security needs such as loss of homes and businesses, access to services and shelter, destruction of infrastructure, and the loss of employment and income. Direct and reverberating effects compound, often leading to a vicious spiral.
2. **Civilian harm is protracted:** the impact of the strike is having a lasting and protracted impact on civilians. After more than six years, civilians still severely suffer the consequences of the strike: in urgent, structural, and impactful ways. A loss of employment and income, stacking of debts, loss of life due to lack of access to medical services and medicine, trauma and health problems, and a lack of access to education all compound and last up until today. At least part of these problems could have been prevented had civilians received timely assistance.
3. **Airstrikes in rebel-held territories severely heighten civilian harm and increase levels of dependency:** civilians in Hawija suffered under ISIS rule, with selective access to poor services (electricity and water in particular), lack of mobility, and a sense of being stuck. Access to

medical care depended on a pro-ISIS stance, networks, and privileges. This precarity lasted for two more years after the strike. The strike heightened levels of dependency on ISIS-controlled care, which opened room for the further politicisation of services. Also, because of continued ISIS rule, the impact of the Hawija strike was hardly reported on, shielding civilian harm from the outside world, including humanitarian support.

4. **With its reliance on airstrikes and verticality, the Coalition lacks ground knowledge. This is evidenced by its flawed understanding of industrial zones** in cities such as Hawija. As in most non-Western cities, industrial zones can be densely populated areas, with people staying over in workshops and living on or near these sites.
5. **By keeping the information on civilian harm in Hawija 'classified', democratic control on military violence was made impossible**, allowing for a continuation of heavy shelling of other ISIS-held urban sites such as Raqqa and Mosul in 2017.
6. **Civilians are able to 'read' and to 'tell apart' Coalition airstrikes from other air forces.**
7. **After the Hawija strike, local perceptions of the Coalition shifted.** Expectations were that the Coalition was there to liberate the civilian population from ISIS and would do so in precise and discriminating ways. This changed after the Hawija bombing, with civilians feeling either much more insecure (assuming the Coalition is capable of such gross mistakes), or now sense their lives do not count at all – assuming the Coalition was well aware of the risks of a secondary explosion. Informants reported that it soon became common knowledge that Dutch F-16s were responsible for the 2-3 June 2015 attack.
8. **The majority of affected civilians seek an apology and individual financial compensation from the Dutch government.** After almost seven years of waiting, some of them now turn to the Dutch legal system to claim their rights. This can be seen as an indication of the urgency to address first-level security needs. The 4.4 million EUR allocated by the Dutch government to the IOM and UNDP is not spent in consultation with the local government in Hawija, and is considered insufficient.

What the above findings show us more broadly are the ugly consequences of 'security' enforced by remote war. A reality that is not only scarred by family members lost, houses and businesses destroyed, and people displaced, but also of people left injured, without an income, education, or, for instance, the prospect of finding a future spouse. The impact of the airstrike does not end here. For devastation and suffering are given meaning, translated in words, and passed on to younger generations. As we learned through our interviews, civilians of Hawija and victims had high expectations that the Coalition would save and spare them, but this now has shifted to an understanding among many that instead they were sacrificed, and then ignored. They blame the strike on ISIS, the Coalition, and specifically the Netherlands. But it is the latter that they turn to for acknowledgement, an apology and direct compensation for the harm done. After waiting in vain for almost seven years, some of them have now placed their hopes onto the Dutch legal system to enforce what they believe is rightfully theirs and to restore their dignity, as by now, they have largely lost trust in the Dutch government.

It is also clear that our respondents are not ready to either forget or forgive what happened to them on that deadly night of 2015. It remains to be seen whether, if their testimonies remain unheard and their basic human needs unmet, the civilian harm generated by this attack, and OIR more broadly, will invoke future support for ISIS or another radical organisation that espouses an anti-Western ideology. From a political-military stance, this could severely undermine the Coalition's aim of bringing 'enduring security'. One could argue that the likes of Al-Qaeda and ISIS gained support in Iraq because of such frustrations – frustrations of being excluded from political life, and

without access to basic economic needs. More than following ideologies, many members joined the ranks to be able to feed their families.

This report has documented different layers of civilian harm in Hawija, and the ways they reinforce and exacerbate each other, and how they are given meaning. With this, it reveals and makes visible at least parts of a history of violence that has been often rendered 'unknowable'. This documentation stands. The key question is whether it will be seen and read, and whether the devastation and suffering will be recognised. This is an inconvenient story. It is much easier for any society to point their finger at the violence committed by enemy-others. It is already more difficult to acknowledge their own wrongdoings in the past, perpetrated by earlier generations (e.g., in settings of colonial wars). But the real challenge is to recognise the devastation caused by contemporary wars. And to go beyond just numbers. Debates on protocols, or the alleged lawfulness of the violence cannot undo the devastation and suffering on the ground. The airstrike on Hawija was a grave mistake. The only way forward is to face the facts, to officially recognise the harm done, and take concrete action for compensation, which is aligned to the needs of the civilians on the ground, in a timely and effective manner.





Figure 13: A victim of the June 2015 airstrike looks at the debris in the industrial neighbourhood, February 2022. PAX/Ayman al-Amiri.



## Annex A

An overview of the material damages as a consequence of the Dutch airstrike, as experienced by business owner Warith Adam Mustafa.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

العدد / ١٥٠٠ / التاريخ / ١٥ / ٦ / ١٩٩٩

الحي الصناعي

جمهورية العراق  
وزارة الصناعة والمعادن  
المديرية العامة للتبعية الصناعية  
قسم الصناعات النسيجية

العنوان / محافظة التاميم : الحويجه

الموضوع / منح إجازة تأسيس مشروع صناعي

مرقم الإجازة ( ٢٤٣٩٩ ) في ١٩٩٩/٧/٢٥

إشارة الى طلبكم المورخ في: ١٩٩٩/٧/٢٥

اولا: استنادا الى أحكام الفقرة (٣) من البند ثانيا من المادة (٣) من قانون الاستثمار الصناعي للتقاعين الخالص والمختلط رقم (٢٠) لسنة ١٩٩٨ مقرر منكم:

إجازة التأسيس المرقمة ( ٢٤٣٩٩ ) والمورخ في ١٩٩٩/٧/٢٥ لإنشاء مشروع صناعي في محافظة ( التاميم ) وفقا للبيانات التالية:

- اسم المشروع : معمل الحويجه لحلج الاقطان

- اسم مالك / مانح المشروع : خلف ابراهيم احمد ابراهيم الجبوري

- منطوق الإجازة : حلج الاقطان

- الطاقة الإنتاجية : ٦٠٠٠ - ٨٠٠٠ طن / سنويا

- مدة التنفيذ - المباشرة بتأسيس المشروع خلال سنة واحدة واكتمال تأسيسه خلال ثلاث سنوات من تاريخ منح الإجازة .

ثانيا: يراعى تنفيذ المشروع وفقا للضوابط والمعايير المقررة للصناعة وأمانته ضمن المناطق الصناعية والشروط الصحية والبيئة المقررة ( بالتنسيق مع الجهات المعنية ) مع عدم تشغيله على الطاق التجاري إلا بعد تنفيذ بموجب الضوابط والمعايير المشار إليها .

ثالثا: عند إكمال تنفيذ المشروع وفقا لما تقدم . يتوجب عليكم تقديم الطلب منفرزا بموافقات الجهات المعنية ( المدينة في حاشي الكتاب ) وتأييدها بامتنعكم لتنفيذكم للمشروع حسب الضوابط والمعايير الانظمة بنية كشفه وثبته واقعه واصداه ( شهادة اكمال التأسيس )

المدير العام

ماري حمزة علوان

( يتبع لقطا )

ابتسام ٢/٢٢



# مبلغ الحوشية

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
السيد رئيس اللجنة الفرعية للتعويض المتضررين في كركوك المحترم  
م / طلب تعويض

تأنيدهم /

يرجى التفضل بالموافقة على صرف بدل التعويض لي عن بدل الإضرار الحاصلة من جراء  
في منطقة ( وهران الحوشية / مقابل الحي الهادي )  
توقيع

بتاريخ ١٥ / ٦ / ٢٠١٥

ت	التفاصيل	العدد	السعر رقما	السعر كتابية
1	قاعة الإنتاج (٤٥٠) م	1	١٢٥٠٠٠٠٠٠	مائة وخمسة وثلاثون مليون دينار
2	جملون خزن المواد الأولية (١٨٠) م	1	٤٤٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	مئتان وأثنان وأربعون مليون دينار
3	جملون الخزن والعملة (١٩٠) م	1	١٩٨٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	مائة وثمانية وتسعون مليون دينار
4	خزن البعير الثالث والثلاثين (٤٨٠) م	1	٨٤٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	أربعة وخمسون مليون دينار
5	قاعة الورشة (٦٠) م	1	٤٤٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	أربعة وعشرون مليون دينار
6	الادارة الخارجية + معرض + مدخل	1	٦٣٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	ثلاثة وستون مليون دينار
7	مخازن + معارض (١٨٠) م	2	١٠٨٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	مائة وثمانية مليون دينار
8	الادارة الخارجية + مدخل + مخزن + مخزن	2	١٠٨٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	مائة وثمانية مليون دينار
9	مخزن المواد الأولية + مخزن + مخزن	1	٤٥٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	خمسة وعشرون مليون دينار
10	مخزن المواد الأولية + مخزن + مخزن	1	٧٥٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	خمسة وستون مليون دينار
11	صبة الارضيات كوكريت صلب (٩٥٠) م	1	١٢٣٧٥٠٠٠٠٠٠	مائة وثلاثة وعشرون مليون دينار
12	برق فزان الادارة (٢٠٠) م	1	١٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	عشرة ملايين دينار
13	مخزن منظومة الانقاذ كوكريت صلب (١٨٠) م	1	١٦٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	سبعة عشر مليون دينار
14	قنوات طيليه حقل طين	٤	٤٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	اربعة ملايين دينار
15	ابواب رئيسية كبيرة	٤	٤٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	اربعة ملايين دينار
16	منظومة انقاذ الماء والفازم (١٨٠) م	1	٤٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	عشرون مليون دينار
17	دار سكن للعامل مع الاثاث	1	٣٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	ثلاثون مليون دينار
18	خندق حقل (٧٥) م	-	٥٤٥٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	اثنان وخمسون مليون دينار
19	بئر شعير (٥٠) م	-	٤٥٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	خمسة وعشرون مليون دينار
20	صهاريج خزن الوقود	٤	٤٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠٠	خمسون مليون دينار

المجموع (١٢٣٧٥٠٠٠٠٠٠٠) فقط امليار وثلاثمائة وسبعة وستون  
اسم خلف ابراهيم احمد  
٧٧١٠١٤٤١٠٢٨  
السجل  
لأجتماع السجل  
العام  
٢٠١٨

توقيع

السجل

العام

موقع

الضريح

مساحة عام

تبريد

مخزن

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
السيد رئيس اللجنة الفرعية للتعويض المتضررين في كركوك المحترم

قائمة رقم ٢٢

م / طلب تعويض  
يرجى التفضل بالموافقة على صرف بدل التعويض لي عن بدل الإضرار الحاصلة من جراء  
( توصف الطرارة الحريم ) في منطقة ( قطرة الحويجة / ضابل الحي الصافي )

بتاريخ ١٥ / ٦ / ٢٠١٥

ت	التفاصيل	العدد	السعر رقما	السعر كتابة
1	ادوات امتيازية مختلفة	—	٥٤٤٨٨٨	اربع وخمسون مليون ومئتان الف دينار
2	محل عن صفر بطاقة ٥٠ طن / ساعة	١	١٥٤٨٨٨	خمسة عشر مليون ومئتان الف دينار
3	كبيرة سرات ثيريديم (٧٥) طن	٤	٤٥٨٨٨٨	خمسة وعشرون مليون دينار
4	رامعات شوكة حجم ٢٠٠٠ (٢٠٠٠) / ٢٠٠٠	٤	٤٥٨٨٨٨	خمسة وعشرون مليون دينار
5	سولة كهرباء رور رايون انكليزي ٧٥-٧٧٨	١	١٤٥٨٨٨	مائة وخمسة وعشرون مليون دينار
6	عزقة ليل مع الامهزة الكهربائية	١	٥٤٨٨٨٨	اربع وخمسون مليون دينار
7	ورشة تصليح متكاملة	١	٣٠٨٨٨٨	ثلاثون مليون دينار
8	المجموع قائمة رقم ٢٢		٣٤٨٨٨٨	ثلاثمائة وخمسة وعشرون مليون
9	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
10	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
11	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٣٦٧٤٥٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
12	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٣٦٧٤٥٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
13	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٣٦٧٤٥٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
14	المجموع الكلي		٣٦٧٤٥٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
15	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
16	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
17	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
18	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
19	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير
20	قائمة رقم ٢٢		١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨	اربعمائة الف دينار لا غير

المجموع (٣٦٧٤٥٨٨٨) فقط ثلاث مائة الف دينار ومئتان الف دينار  
وبسبب مليون ومئتان الف دينار  
دينار لا غير

القاضي  
فيان ياسين حسن

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
السيد رئيس اللجنة الفرعية للتعويض المتضررين في كركوك المحترم

م / طلب تعويض

قائمة رقم ٢٢

يرجى التفضل بالموافقة على صرف بدل التعويض لي عن بدل الإضرار الحاصلة من جراء  
( توصف الطرارة الحريم ) في منطقة ( قطرة الحويجة / ضابل الحي الصافي ) يتبع

بتاريخ ١٥ / ٦ / ٢٠١٥

ت	التفاصيل	العدد	السعر رقما	السعر كتابة
1	اثاث مكتبية لادارة الرافدية مع	١	١٠٨٨٨٨	عشرة ملايين دينار
2	اثاث مكتبية لادارة الرافدية مع	١	٦٥٨٨٨٨	ستة ملايين دينار
3	سيارة عادية (٥٠٠) طن	٤	٦٨٨٨٨٨	ستة ملايين دينار
4	خولت كهرباء ٦٤٥٧٧٨ مع لمباتها	١	٤٠٨٨٨٨	عشرون مليون دينار
5	مخبر انكليزي في قطرة متنامية	٤	١٨٨٨٨٨	اربعة ملايين دينار
6	مكتب ايرتاتيك لوس امريكي	١	٥٨٨٨٨٨	خمسة ملايين دينار
7	قائمة رقم ٢٢	١	٦٠٨٨٨٨	ستون مليون دينار
8	قائمة رقم ٢٢	١	٦٠٨٨٨٨	ستون مليون دينار
9	قائمة رقم ٢٢	١	٦٠٨٨٨٨	ستون مليون دينار
10	كنديسر تنظيف القطر الشر	١	٥٠٨٨٨٨	خمسون مليون دينار
11	مهاز وقاية البيت من الاشعة	١	٣٠٨٨٨٨	ثلاثون مليون دينار
12	ماتات كعب القطر الشر	٣	٦٨٨٨٨٨	ستة ملايين دينار
13	ماتات رفع القطر الشر	٣	٦٨٨٨٨٨	ستة ملايين دينار
14	ماترات تشغيل (١٥٠) طان	٤	٤٠٨٨٨٨	عشرون مليون دينار
15	ماترات تشغيل (٧٥) طان	٦	٣٠٨٨٨٨	ثلاثون مليون دينار
16	ماترات تشغيل (٥٠) طان	٥	١٠٨٨٨٨	عشرة ملايين دينار
17	ماترات تشغيل (٥٠) طان	١	٣٠٨٨٨٨	ثلاثون مليون دينار
18	ماترات تشغيل (٥٠) طان	١	٥٠٨٨٨٨	خمسون مليون دينار
19	ماترات تشغيل (٥٠) طان	٣٤٠	١٤٨٨٨٨	اربعة ملايين ومئتان الف دينار
20	ماترات تشغيل (٥٠) طان	٣٤٠	١٤٨٨٨٨	اربعة ملايين ومئتان الف دينار

المجموع (١٩٧٩٦٨٨٨) فقط اربعة ملايين ومئتان الف دينار  
وبسبب مليون ومئتان الف دينار  
دينار لا غير

القاضي  
فيان ياسين حسن



# شهادة وفاة



جمهورية العراق  
وزارة الصحة  
قسم الإحصاء الصحي والحياتي

رقم الشهادة 0084797

تاريخ التسجيل ٧/٥/٢٠١٨

١- اسم المولود ولقبه	٢- الجنس	٣- الجنسية	٤- المذهب	٥- الميزان
أحمد النوري رقيب	ذكر	عراقية	مسلم	٥٠٠
٦- أمثلة الزوجية: أعزب ( ) متزوج (x)	٧- تاريخ الولادة	٨- محل الولادة	٩- أمثلة أم الأم	١٠- أمثلة أم الأب
أعزب	١٠/٥/٢٠١٥	بغداد	بغداد	بغداد
١١- تاريخ الوفاة (كتابة الساعة)	١٢- اسم والد المولود	١٣- اسم والد المولود	١٤- اسم المبلغ عن الوفاة	١٥- صلة المبلغ عن الوفاة
١١/٥/٢٠١٨	أحمد النوري	أحمد النوري	أحمد النوري	ابن
١٦- تاريخ الوفاة (كتابة الساعة)	١٧- شهادة الوفاة الطبية	١٨- حدثت الوفاة في:	١٩- شهد أن الوفاة قد حدثت من الأسباب المثبتة أعلاه	٢٠- حدثت الوفاة في:
١١/٥/٢٠١٨	أحمد النوري	البيت	أحمد النوري	البيت
٢١- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٢٢- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٢٣- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٢٤- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٢٥- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)
٢٦- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٢٧- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٢٨- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٢٩- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)	٣٠- ملاحظات خاصة بملفوية الجسدية والأحوال المدنية (وحد من هوية الأحوال المدنية)

ملاحظة: توضع علامة (x) في المكان المناسب

١- نسخة الإحصاء (نسخة الأحوال المدنية)

٢- النسخة الأولى (نسخة الأحوال المدنية)

٣- النسخة الثالثة (خاصة بالطبابة الإلكترونية)

٤- النسخة الرابعة (نسخة منظمة الصحة)

٥- النسخة الخامسة (نسخة منظمة الصحة)

٦- النسخة السادسة (نسخة منظمة الصحة)

## Annex B

A death certificate of one of Abdullah Rashid Saleh's family members, who died because of the Dutch airstrike and subsequent secondary explosion.

