

Militancy/Terrorism

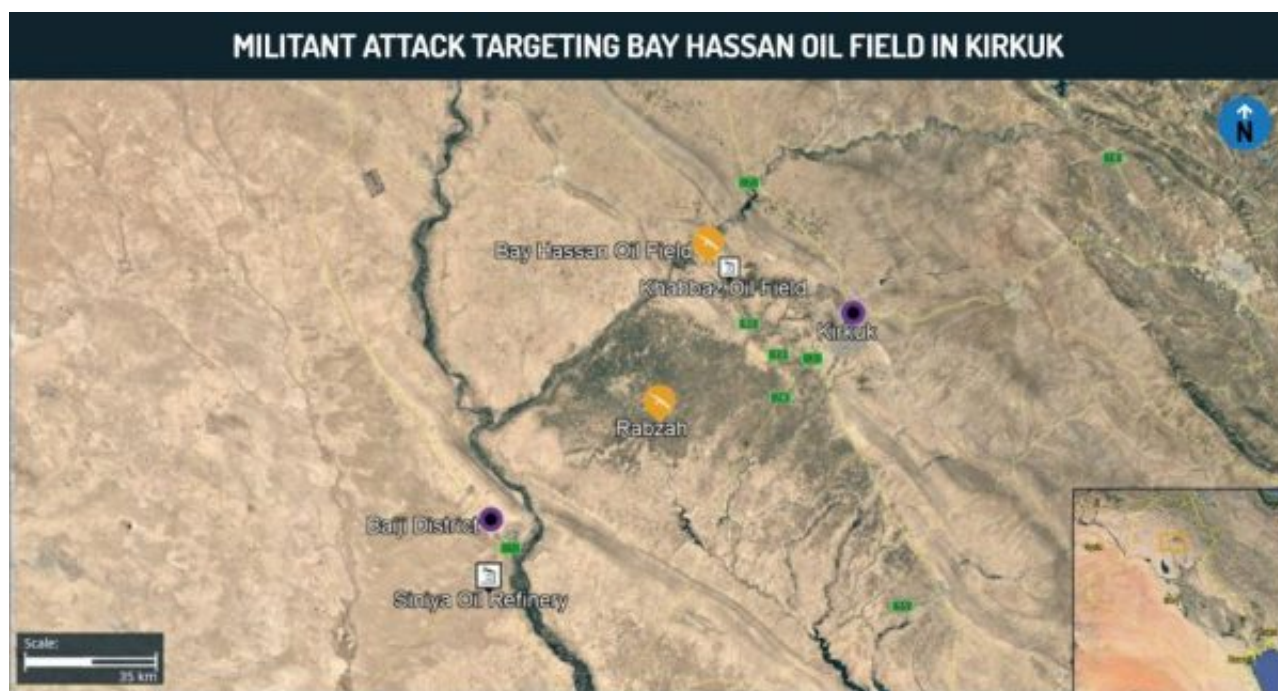
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Iraq Alert (UPDATE): IS militants on May 5 detonate IEDs at two wells in Kirkuk's Bay Hassan Oil Field; similar attacks likely to recur

Please be advised:

- According to Iraq's Oil Ministry, Islamic State (IS) militants detonated two IEDs at Kirkuk's Bay Hassan Oil Field during the overnight hours of May 4-5. The attack resulted in fires at two wells in the oil field.
- The ministry announced that the militants had also opened fire on an Iraqi "Oil [Protection] Police" post near the oil field. Reports indicate that one personnel was killed and two others were wounded.
- Following the attack, Iraqi authorities reportedly detained a regiment commander, as well as several Oil Protection Police personnel, over possible gaps in their operations.
- Iraqi authorities reportedly instructed the deployment of military reinforcements to Kirkuk Province to address local security "gaps".



Assessments & Forecast:

1. This comes amid a current uptick in IS-perpetrated attacks in central and northern Iraq, particularly Kirkuk Province. The holy month of Ramadan is currently being observed, and as in previous years, the Sunni jihadist group increases the scale and scope of its attacks in this period where it can. As indicated by a precedent [April 17](#) IED attack targeting Bay Hassan Oil Field, energy infrastructure also constitute targets which the militants in Kirkuk repeatedly demonstrated their ability to target. This is part of the militant group's objective of hindering the Iraqi government's ability to generate revenues.
2. The planting and detonation of IEDs at local oil facilities in Kirkuk, including the Bay Hassan field itself, in recent months were conducted in a covert manner, without direct confrontations between the militants and oil facilities' security personnel. The fact that the current attacks were part of an assault involving gunfire at security personnel thus points towards an elevated readiness by the jihadists to increase the scope of their attacks on local critical infrastructure. This is despite the fact that in such operations the militants risk being subjected to human losses and to being detected by security forces. **FORECAST:** This resolve by the militants will likely persist at least until the end of Ramadan, slated for May 12, given the period's symbolic importance for the militants.
3. The reports that local security officials were detained by the authorities following the incidents highlight that the Iraqi government itself accepts the idea that security protocols at oil installations in northern Kirkuk indeed need to be scrutinized. The reported deployment of military reinforcements to the area highlights the government's desire to facilitate the stabilization of the security environment and bolster security protocols in and around these installations. Should these reinforcements be deployed without delay, it may make it harder for the militants to conduct similar attacks.
4. **FORECAST:** However, IS's current pace of operations in Kirkuk, which also includes the use of mortar shells and rockets, suggests that the militants will likely continue to seek and be able to conduct further attacks against critical infrastructure in Kirkuk in the coming days and weeks. Overall, given that Iraqi security forces are overstretched in central and northern Iraq amid prolonged efforts to dismantle IS networks, the security volatility in Kirkuk will likely persist over the coming weeks and months.

Recommendations:

1. It is advised to defer all travel to Baghdad at this time due to the threat of militancy in the capital, violence in areas surrounding the city, and the risk of a broad deterioration of security conditions.
2. For those remaining in Baghdad, it is advised to restrict travel to the Green Zone and ensure that contingency and emergency evacuation plans are updated. Contact us for itinerary and contingency support options.
3. Travel to Anbar, Nineveh, Salahuddin, Kirkuk, and Diyala provinces should be avoided at this time due to the possible counter-militancy operations and militant attacks. Those operating in these regions are advised to contact us for itinerary and contingency support measures, including evacuation options, given the deterioration in the security situation.
4. Those operating natural gas or oil facilities are advised to obtain security consultation for facilities in outlying areas, specific to the nationalities and operational needs of their employees.
5. As a general precaution, it is advised that any travel, particularly in outlying areas, be conducted in armored vehicles, with proper security escorts and coordination with authorities.