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**Insider's View Bulletin:** Analysis of ethno-sectarian violence in flashpoint disputed territories town of Tuz Khurmatu

Sept. 13, 2016

**Key points:**

- Violence marked by clashes between Turkomen and Kurds, and violence perpetrated by Shia Turkomen against Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkomen
- Kurdish forces in Tuz are aligned with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)
- Multiple Shia militias – led by Badr Corps – have substantial presence in Tuz
- Violence between Kurds and Turkomen has fallen over the past several months
- However, recent history suggests that one catalyst incident can cause an immediate spike in violence, rather than violence increasing at a steady or predictable pace

**Operational impact:** Individuals and entities with business interests in Iraq should continue to monitor the situation in Tuz, as it serves as a bellwether for the ability of the various leaders of Iraq's power structure – and disparate elements of the country's fractured security forces – to operate within a limited space once the pressure from IS recedes. Specifically, it speaks to the potential for violence when KRG security forces (in this case, belonging to the PUK) and Shia militias operating under the al-Hashid al-Shabi framework operate in close proximity, with blurred lines of control.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Analysis of the violence in Tuz since January 2016 highlights trends in two distinct types of violence: A- inter-communal violence between Kurds and Shia Turkomen; and B- violence directed at Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkomen (note that this BULLETIN does not assess violence perpetrated by IS; for more on that, see BULLETIN, "*Data analysis of IS attacks in the disputed territories east of Kirkuk*," from Sept. 12).

Kurdish-Shia Turkomen violence in Tuz has increased over the past two years due in large part to the increased flow of money, guns, and well organized Shia militia groups into Tuz. The upshot of this has been the Shia Turkomen community feeling newly empowered to challenge PUK security forces for control of the city.

The presence of the militias operating under the al-Hashid al-Shabi program has also led to a campaign of violence against Sunni Arab and Sunni Turkomen IDPs residing in Tuz, described by Shia Turkomen as a crack down on IS collaborators, and by Sunni Arab and Sunni Turkomen community leaders as extrajudicial murder and for profit kidnapping.

*The data analyzed in this BULLETIN is collected by local staff via on-the-ground reporting and interviews with local officials. **It is not the product of media monitoring.***

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**Details:** Tuz Khurmatu – a city in the disputed territories in northern Salahaddin province – has experienced significant violence following the surge by IS across much of northern Iraq in summer 2014. The town has an extremely heterogeneous population, with substantial Kurdish, Sunni Arab, Shia Turkomen and Sunni Turkomen populations. Security forces in the town are also diverse, with

PUK Peshmerga and Asayesh, a range of Shia militias operating under the al-Hashid al-Shabi framework (led by Badr Corps), as well as local police.

The city's Shia Turkomen population has seen its relative clout increase substantially over the past two-plus years, with Shia militias operating under the al-Hashid al-Shabi framework surging money, weapons, training and employment opportunities into Tuz.

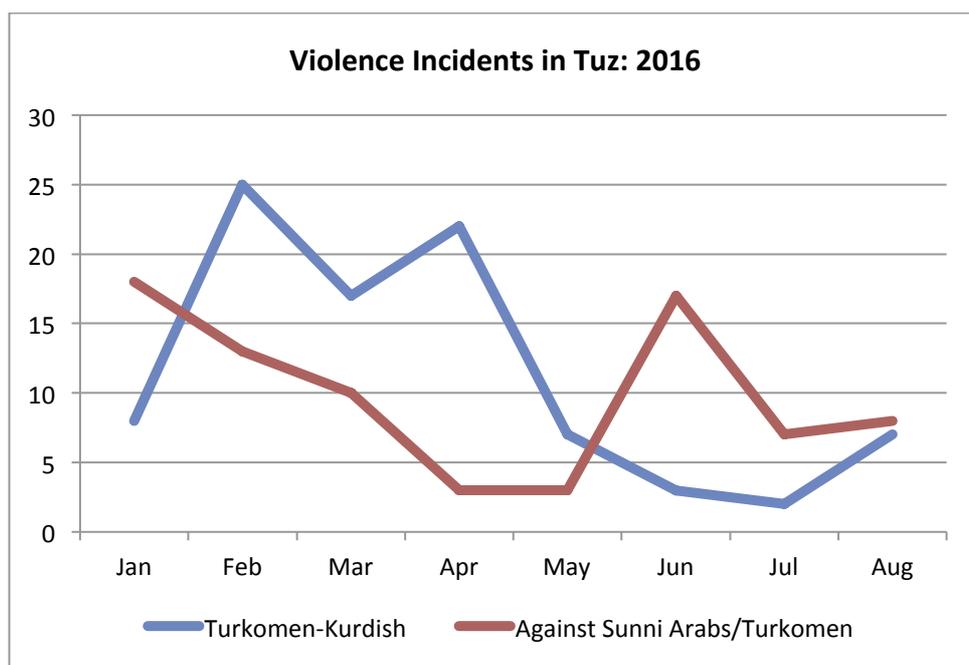
Prior to summer 2014, Tuz Khurmatu was an often-violent place, with violence marked by inter-communal strife and intermittent mass casualty attacks by jihadists. However, since the IS push across northern Iraq, the tenor of inter-communal violence between Kurds and Shia Turkoman has increased, namely because the advent of the al-Hashid al-Shabi program changed the balance of power. Simultaneously, the now empowered Shia Turkomen population – including new members of a number of Hashid affiliated militias, such as Badr, Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Hzbollah – launched a sustained campaign of violence against Sunni Arab residents of Tuz (many of them IDPs from elsewhere in Salahaddin province) accusing them of collaboration with IS.

The upshot has been that residents of the town have faced regular incidents of kidnapping, small arms violence, IEDs and IDF, marked by sporadic direct clashes between Tuz's ethnic and religious communities and the security forces associated with them.

These direct clashes have primarily involved the town's Shia Turkomen and Kurdish populations. Other types of violence, meanwhile, have primarily targeted the town's Sunni Arab and Sunni Turkomen communities.

Data collected over the past year shows that not only have different types of violence involved different ethno-religious actors, but that those incidents are negatively associated. In other words, broadly speaking, when direct clashes between Shia Turkomen and Kurdish actors increased, violence against the Sunni community fell, and vice versa.

### Broad trends in Tuz violence



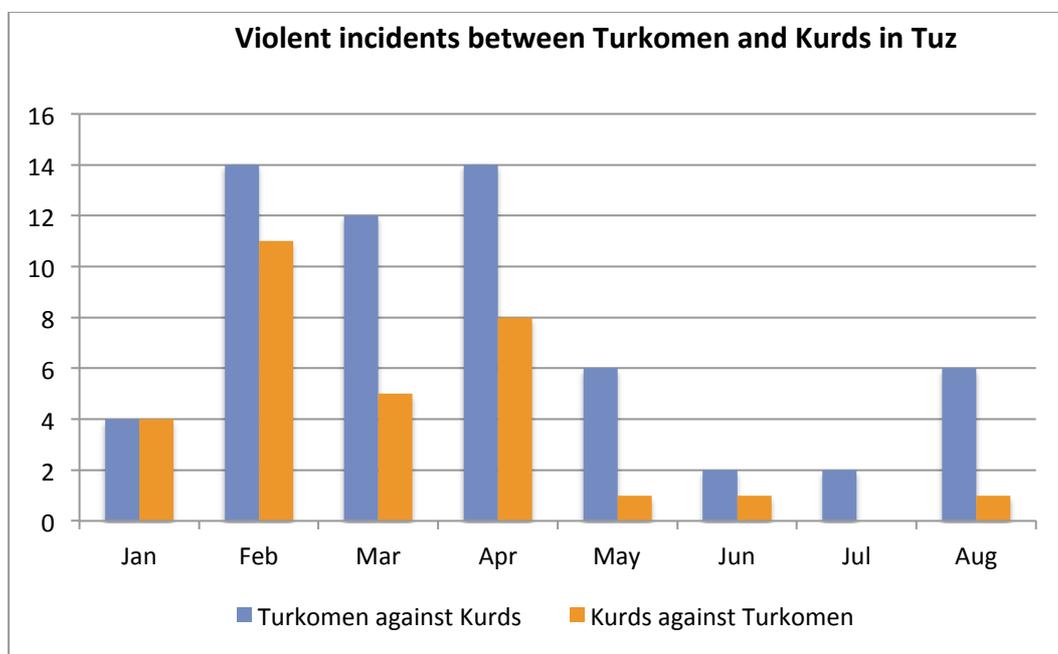
**Analysis:** February and March saw tensions in Tuz rise, leading up to a four-day period of clashes between the Kurdish and Shia Turkomen communities in April. During that three-month period, violence against Sunni Tuz residents fell to almost none. Then, following the ceasefire that ended the April clashes and the deployment of a new joint security force, Kurd-Turkomen incidents fell precipitously between May and July, while attacks on the Sunni community spiked in June before stabilizing.

This data provides clearer evidence for a trend also observed in 2015, after a period of Kurd-Turkomen clashes in November. Interviews with Sunni Arabs and Kurdish security forces in Tuz indicate those populations attribute most of the violence against the Sunni community to elements affiliated with various Shia militias. Therefore, their assumption is that when those militia members were otherwise engaged, as during direct clashes, crime against the Sunni community has tended to fall.

The data from January to August could be used to support this theory, though it remains based on the underlying assumption that militia members are the primary culprits of crimes committed against Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkomen – an assumption based on interviews with local officials and residents, many of whom are biased, or potentially voicing assumptions based on speculation. However, this suspicion is augmented by interviews with Shia militia officials, who acknowledge the violence, and justify it by saying it is an organized effort to detain known IS collaborators (largely Sunni Arabs and Sunni Turkomen displaced from villages south of Tuz and from nearby Suliman Beg).

The narrative from Sunni Arab and Sunni Turkomen leaders is that their entire community has been put in jeopardy, and has to choose between fleeing Tuz for IDP camps, or staying in Tuz and facing extrajudicial violence.

### Kurdish-Shia Turkomen violence



Inter-communal violence between Kurds and Shia Turkomen is marked by fighting between PUK forces and Shia militias, but also (and perhaps more so) by intermittent flare ups in violence between heavily armed civilians from both communities. The line between those two types of violence is

*blurry, given that the "civilians" are in many cases members of PUK forces/Shia militias that are off duty and/or in street clothes.*

*An analysis of the violence between Shia Turkomen and Kurds in Tuz similarly paints the Turkomen community as the aggressors. In every month except January, more cases of violence committed by Shia Turkomen against Kurds were reported than incidents committed by Kurds against Shia Turkomen. Data collected in Tuz came from members of both the Shia Turkomen and Kurdish communities, and the series of events of each incident were compared from among various reports for accuracy. It is unlikely, therefore, that the data collected contains a significant bias toward either group, although some inaccuracies are possible. This is particularly true in regards to numbers of injuries and casualties, which is why the chart above instead tracks frequency of incidents, even though casualty figures would have likely provided a clearer view of the scope of the violence.*

*A likely explanation for this is the widespread belief amongst Tuz's Shia Turkomen population that the city's Kurdish population has been attempting to marginalize them for years. The Shia Turkomen of Tuz see the advent of the al-Hashid al-Shabi program – and the surge of resources to their community – as a chance to seize the initiative, and become the dominant actor in the city.*

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