

**Shaping UK and International  
Foreign Policy in Iraq**

**Case Study**

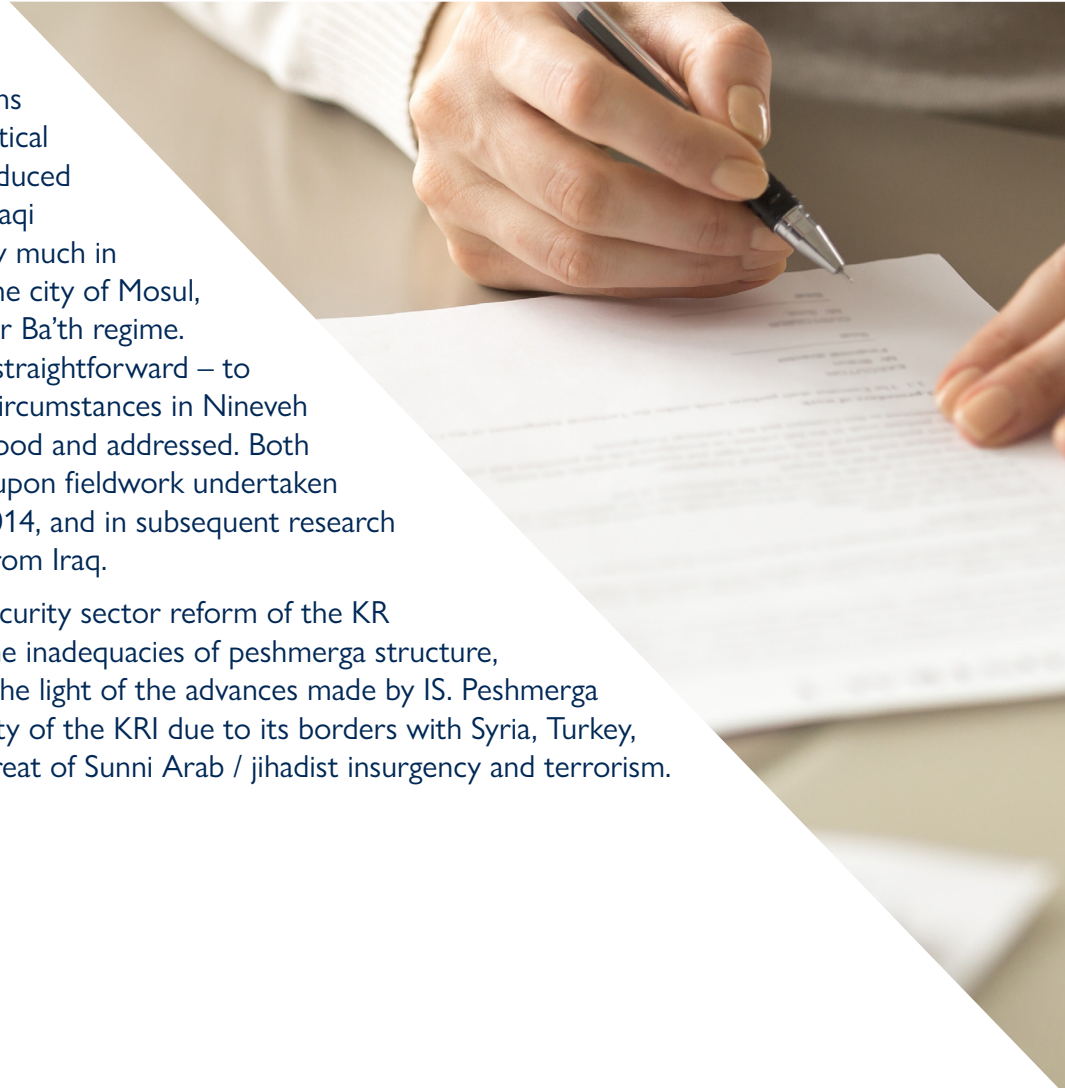
# Background

Prof Gareth Stansfield's ESRC funded project (2015-2019) delivered fresh insights into the contestation of a large swathe of land known as the 'disputed territories' that lie to the south of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR). Parts of the disputed territories were administered jointly by the Government of Iraq (GoI) with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) between 2014 and 2017. Central to the project's focus was the devastating emergence within the 'disputed territories' of Islamic State (IS) in 2014. Prof Stansfield's research informed Her Majesty's Government (HMG)'s approach to containing and then eliminating the IS threat.



# Key findings

- The 'Disputed Territories' project focused upon the origins of IS from sociological and political economy perspectives. It introduced the idea that IS is a distinctly Iraqi organization with its roots very much in the province of Nineveh and the city of Mosul, with a strong link to the former Ba'th regime. The policy relevance of this is straightforward – to prevent IS from re-emerging, circumstances in Nineveh and Mosul need to be understood and addressed. Both lines of argument were based upon fieldwork undertaken in the Kurdish region during 2014, and in subsequent research undertaken with researchers from Iraq.
- Subsequent research on the security sector reform of the KR peshmerga forces addressed the inadequacies of peshmerga structure, doctrine, and performance in the light of the advances made by IS. Peshmerga forces are critical to the security of the KRI due to its borders with Syria, Turkey, and Iran and the continuing threat of Sunni Arab / jihadist insurgency and terrorism.



# Policy recommendations and outcomes

- Responding to the rapidly changing policy, humanitarian and military contexts, Stansfield's research made specific proposals to UK policy actors. His research recommendations translated into UK Government policy by: 1) advocating the provision of training for the Peshmerga fighting ISIL and 2) addressing Sunni disengagement by arguing for a more inclusive political process.
- Stansfield was appointed Senior Adviser to HMG on the Peshmerga Reform Programme and was commissioned to write substantial Political Economic Analyses (PEAs) (2018, 2020). Stansfield worked with the British Embassy Baghdad and the UK Consulate General Erbil, and the UK military advisers, along with peshmerga leadership. The PEAs have informed a fundamental re-shaping of UK policy. Stansfield's recommendations led HMG's support of the reform process. This led to significant progress in developing a more affordable, capable and accountable Peshmerga.

“The most significant progress in developing a more affordable, capable and accountable Peshmerga, in the past 15 years” - Colonel Will Davies, British Army; Chief of the General Staff Research Fellow Chatham House.



# Team

The project was delivered in collaboration with Professor Stefan Wolf at the University of Birmingham, and supported by two RFs (Dr Kelsey Shanks and Dr Argyro Kartsonaki) and PhD student Tallha Abdulrazaq).

## Research funding

ESRC

## Government Areas of Research Interest (ARIs)

FCO: Violence/Extremism/Violent Extremism and Islamist Terrorist Organisations.





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## Get in touch

Send us an email at [PolicyEngagement@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:PolicyEngagement@exeter.ac.uk) at any stage of the process for assistance.



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