



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Drug Trafficking Dynamics Across Iraq and the Middle East: Trends and Responses

Executive Summary

March 2024

Regional Office for the
**MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA**

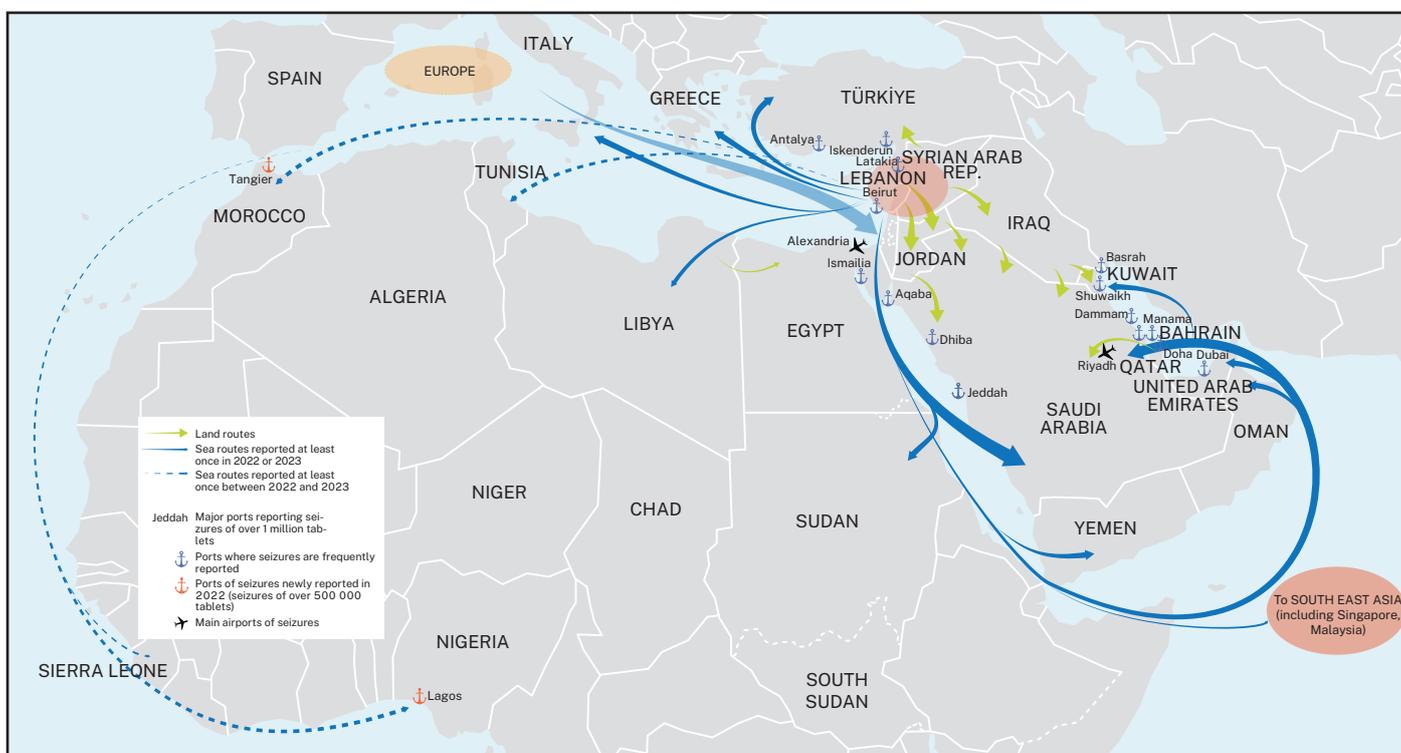
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Introduction

The 2023 World Drug Report notes that trafficking of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) is a growing concern across the Near and Middle East. The market for “captagon”, an illicitly manufactured drug product mostly containing amphetamine, continues to grow in the Near and Middle East.

In parallel to “captagon” trafficking, a methamphetamine market seems to be developing in the Near and Middle East, as shown by a rise in seizures of the drug.¹

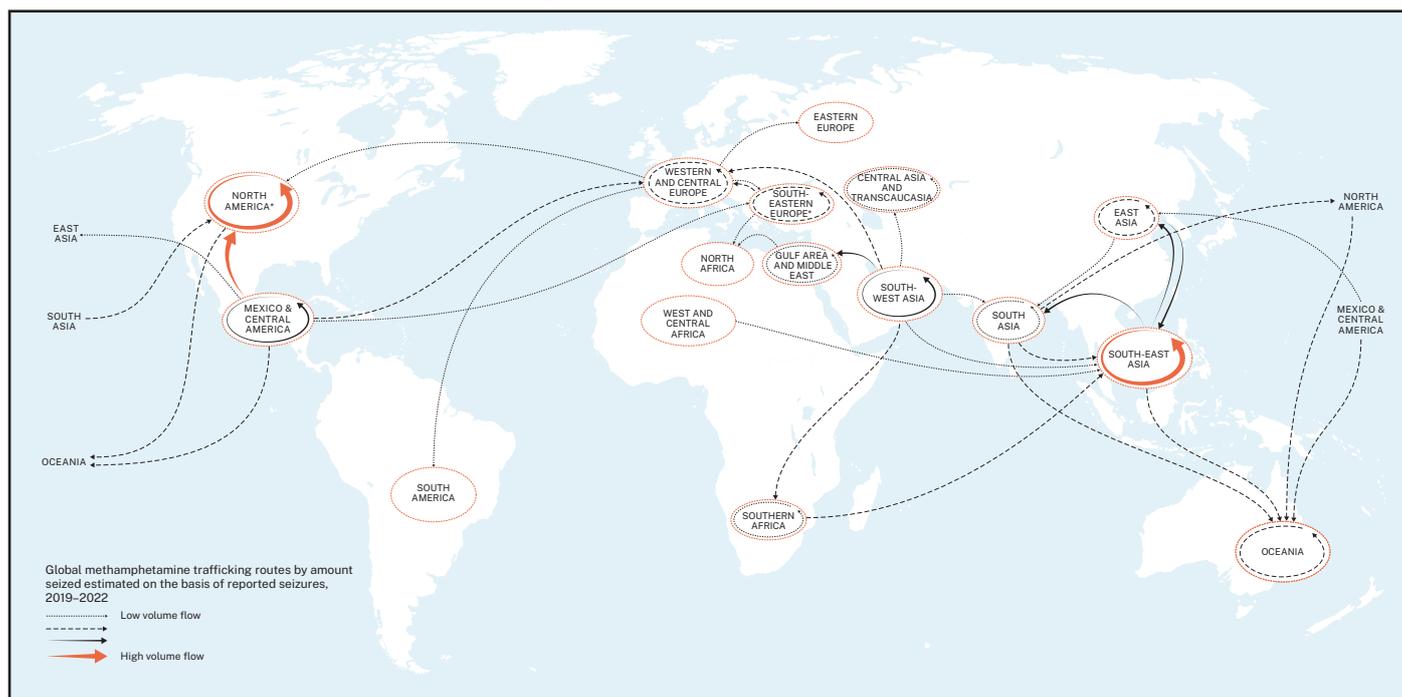
Map 1 Main trafficking routes for counterfeit Captagon, 2021–2023



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

Sources: UNODC, based on a number of sources, including the following: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire; UNODC, Drugs Monitoring platform.

Map 2 Main methamphetamine trafficking flows as described by reported seizures, 2019–2022



This report on “*Drug Trafficking Dynamics Across Iraq and the Middle East (2019–2023): Trends and Responses*” sheds light on the increasingly complex and dynamic drug trafficking landscape across the Near and Middle East region, and the efforts invested by Iraq and other countries in the region in confronting this threat. This can serve as a roadmap to assist national, regional, and international counterparts in implementing coordinated strategies to prevent and reduce drug production, trafficking, and consumption.

As such it provides evidence that can support the implementation of the outcome document of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (2016) and the Ministerial Declaration (2019), aimed at reinforcing global efforts to address and counter the world drug problem, adopting the shared responsibility approach.^{2,3}

Key takeaways

- ⊗ **Countries across the Near and Middle East have registered an escalation in both the scale and sophistication of drug trafficking operations over the past decade. The destabilizing risks posed by illicit drugs have become increasingly prominent on the regional agenda.** Of particular concern to governments and societies across the region is the rising production, trafficking, and consumption of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), in particular tablets containing amphetamine sold under the name “captagon”, and methamphetamine.
- ⊗ **UNODC research has found that Iraq is at risk of becoming an increasingly important node in the drug trafficking ecosystem spanning the Near and Middle East.** Iraq lies at the intersection of a complex global drug trafficking ecosystem spanning Southwest Asia, Africa, and Europe, notably the Balkan and Southern routes associated with opiate smuggling from Afghanistan to Europe, through Southeastern Europe, and towards the Indian Ocean and Eastern Africa, including through the Arabian Peninsula.⁷ Within Iraq, drugs are trafficked along three key internal corridors, including in the north, central and southern regions of the country.
- ⊗ **Iraq and neighbouring countries have documented a sharp increase in the trafficking and use of “captagon” over the past five years.** “Captagon” seizures have increased by almost 3,380 per cent in Iraq from 2019 to 2023. Iraq reported the seizure of over 4.1 tons of “captagon” tablets between January and December 2023 alone.⁴ Seizures of amphetamine (mainly in the form of “captagon”) in the Near and Middle East doubled from 2020, reaching a record high of 86 tons in 2021.⁵ In parallel to “captagon” trafficking, a methamphetamine market seems to be developing in the Near and Middle East, as shown by a rise in seizures.⁶
- ⊗ **A particular challenge facing countries across the Near and Middle East are armed groups with cross-border affiliations and transborder economic interests.** Alongside a recent history marked by armed conflict and corruption, this situation has contributed to cross-border trafficking.

- ☑ **The Government of Iraq and its partners have stressed the need for collective responses to tackle the security, social and economic ramifications of drug trafficking across the Near and Middle East.** As seen in different regional contexts, the persistence – and potential reactivation – of armed groups poses a significant threat, not least given their potential involvement in illicit drug production and trafficking. There is growing awareness among governments of how drug trafficking intensifies corruption, undermines governance and legitimate business, degrades services, and contributes to violent competition between armed groups. There is also growing concern over evidence of increasing drug use and related social harms, requiring sustained treatment and rehabilitation efforts.⁸
- ☑ **Practical responses are being implemented but are still at an early stage.** Iraq established its first drug law and commission in 2017 and launched a National Strategy on Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances (2023–2025) in 2023. Moreover, Iraq organized the first regional event on the issue in 2023 to accelerate collaboration and coordinate efforts in drug detection and disruption.

Drug Trafficking Dynamics Across Iraq and the Middle East (2019–2023): Trends and Responses

Iraq has over 3,637 kilometres of land border with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Türkiye. Its strategic location means that it is also a conduit for the flow of drugs between Southwest Asia, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe. The dramatic increase in methamphetamine trafficking from one side of its border and

“captagon” production and trafficking from the other side, particularly in the Syrian Arab Republic, have consolidated Iraq’s role in the drug trade not just as a bridge between major producers and consumers but reportedly as a potential emerging source of methamphetamine production and increased consumption in its own right.

Map 3 Administrative map of Iraq



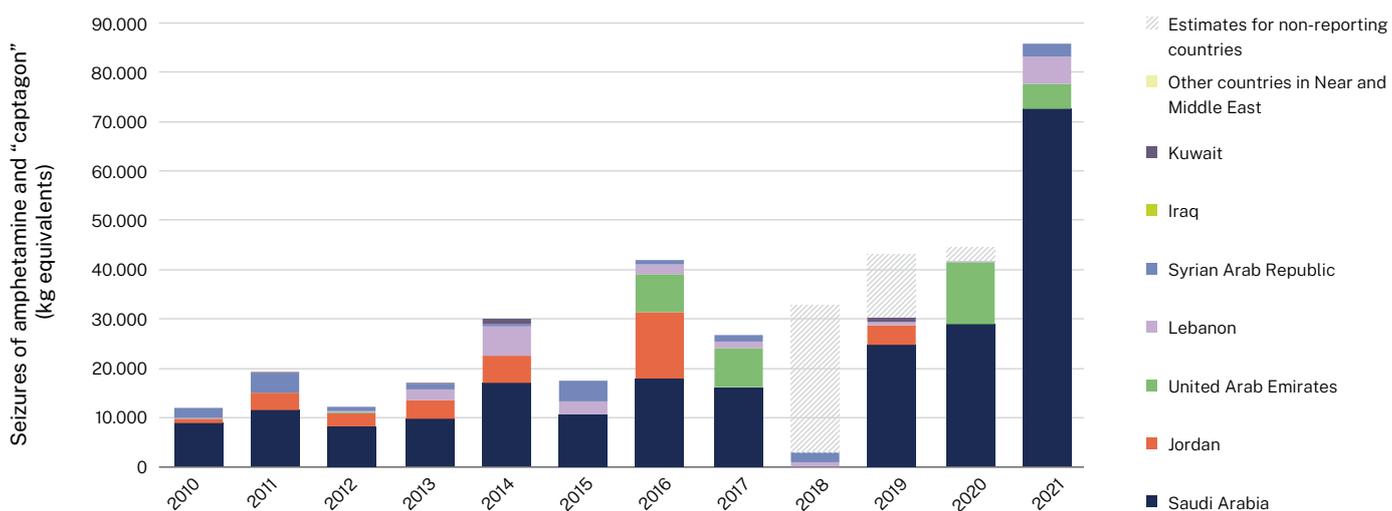
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Sources: UNAMI, Natural Earth, FAO AQUASTAT.

Section 1. Regional dynamics

The Near and Middle East, severely affected by conflict and instability, is an increasingly important location for illicit drug production and trafficking, including from Southwest Asia.⁹ Armed conflicts not only generated significant casualties and development setbacks in the region, but also contributed to the formation of political and territorial entities and dynamic black markets for different types of drugs.¹⁰

“Captagon” trafficking has increased dramatically in Near and Middle East countries over the past five years.¹¹ The largest quantities of “captagon” seized were reported by Saudi Arabia (67 per cent), followed by countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic over the last decade (2012–2021).¹² Several factors are contributing to surging “captagon” availability, including war and instability in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2011.¹³

Fig 1 Quantities of amphetamine, mainly “captagon”, seized in the Near and Middle East, 2010–2021



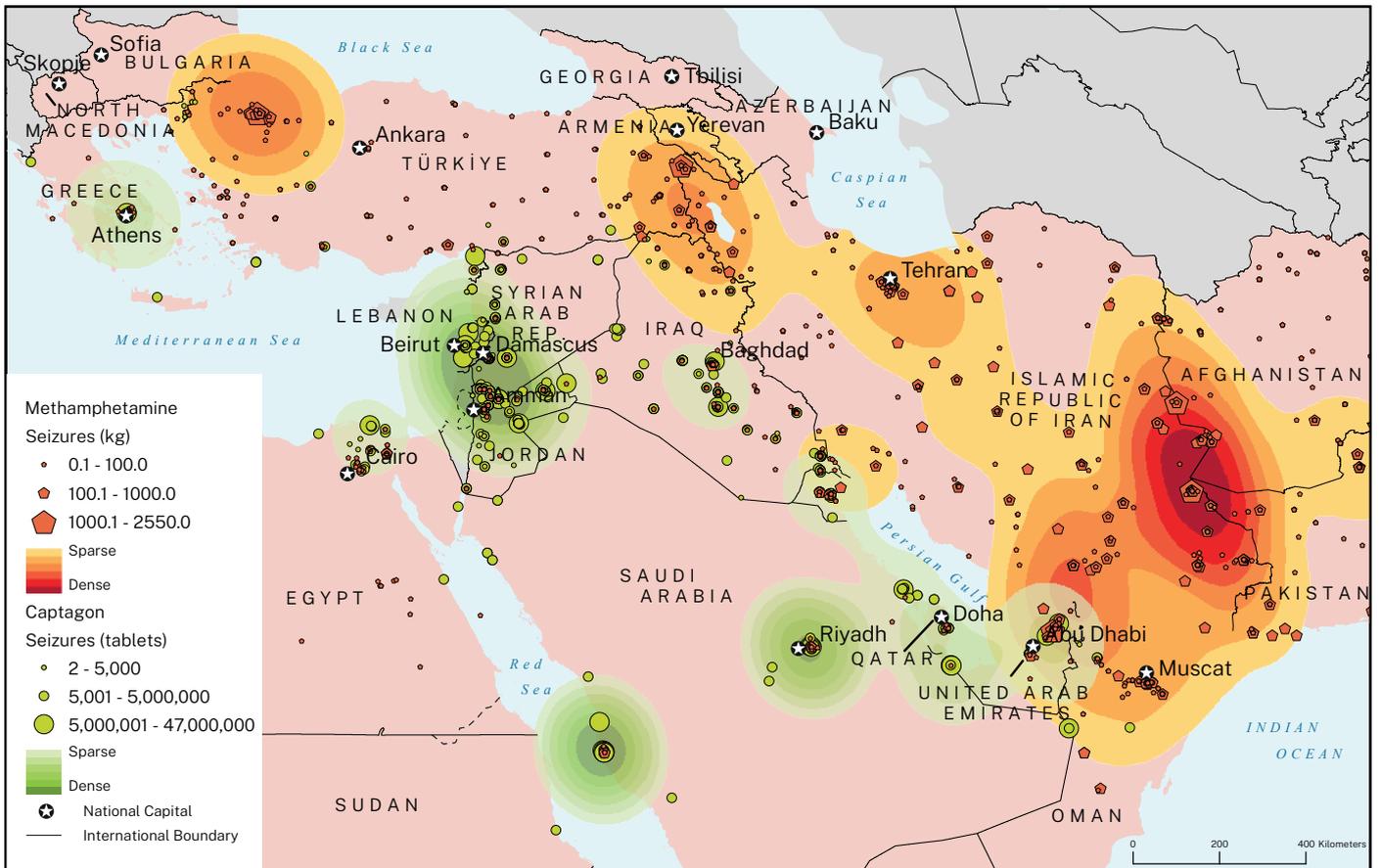
Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.

Note: Estimates for non-reporting countries are based on the assumption that countries which failed to supply information to UNODC in specific years, may have seized similar amounts as a year earlier.

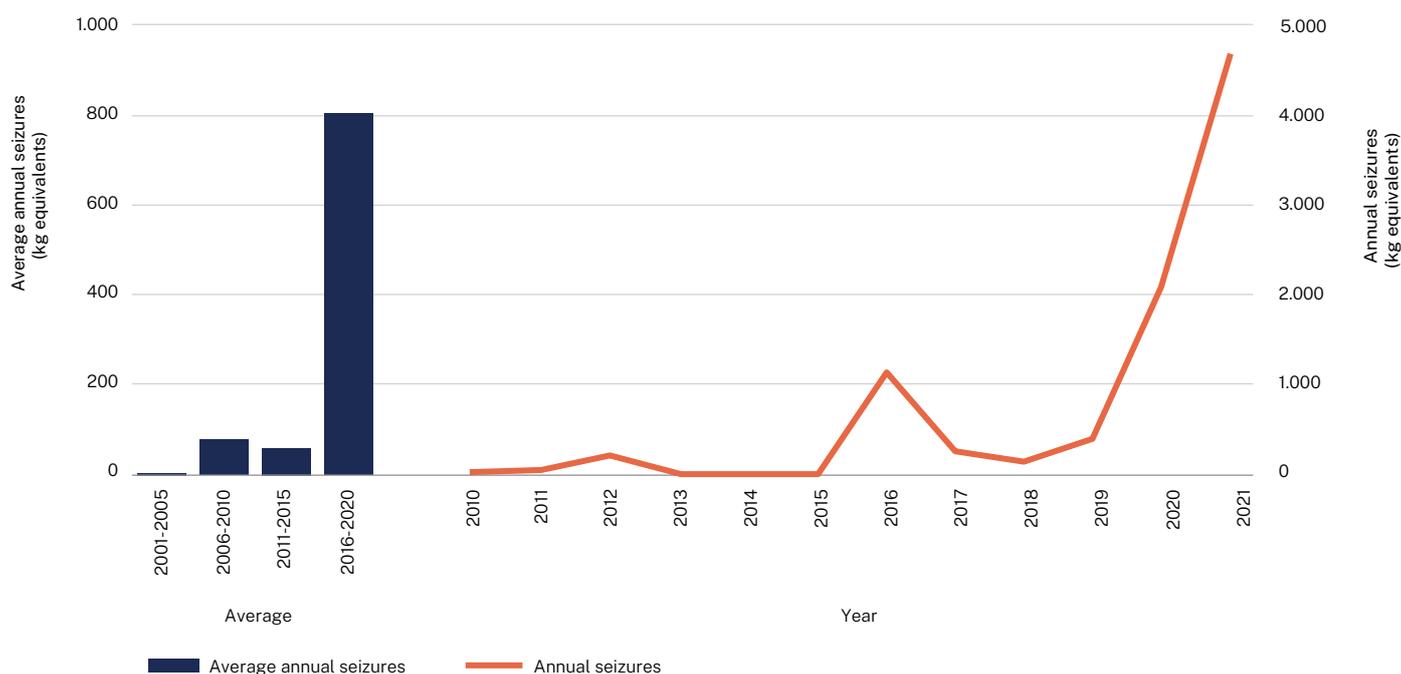
In parallel, a methamphetamine market seems to be developing in the Near and Middle East. Historically, East and Southeast Asia served as the primary source of methamphetamine.¹⁴ However, law enforcement operations indicate a shift in sources, and nearly all countries in the region have reported methamphetamine seizures over the period 2016–2020, with the United Arab Emirates reporting the highest volumes seized.¹⁵

At the same time, countries in Southwest Asia are also increasingly implicated in the methamphetamine supply chain, most prominently Afghanistan.¹⁶ Afghanistan’s drug market is undergoing a major transformation, with opiate production collapsing, which will have an impact on drug trafficking patterns in the region and beyond.¹⁷ While methamphetamine is a synthetic drug that can be produced virtually anywhere, changes in Afghanistan can have implications for its production and trafficking in the Near and Middle East.

Map 4 Main seizures of methamphetamine and “captagon” reported in the Near and Middle East, 2019–2023



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Source: UNODC Drug Monitoring platform.

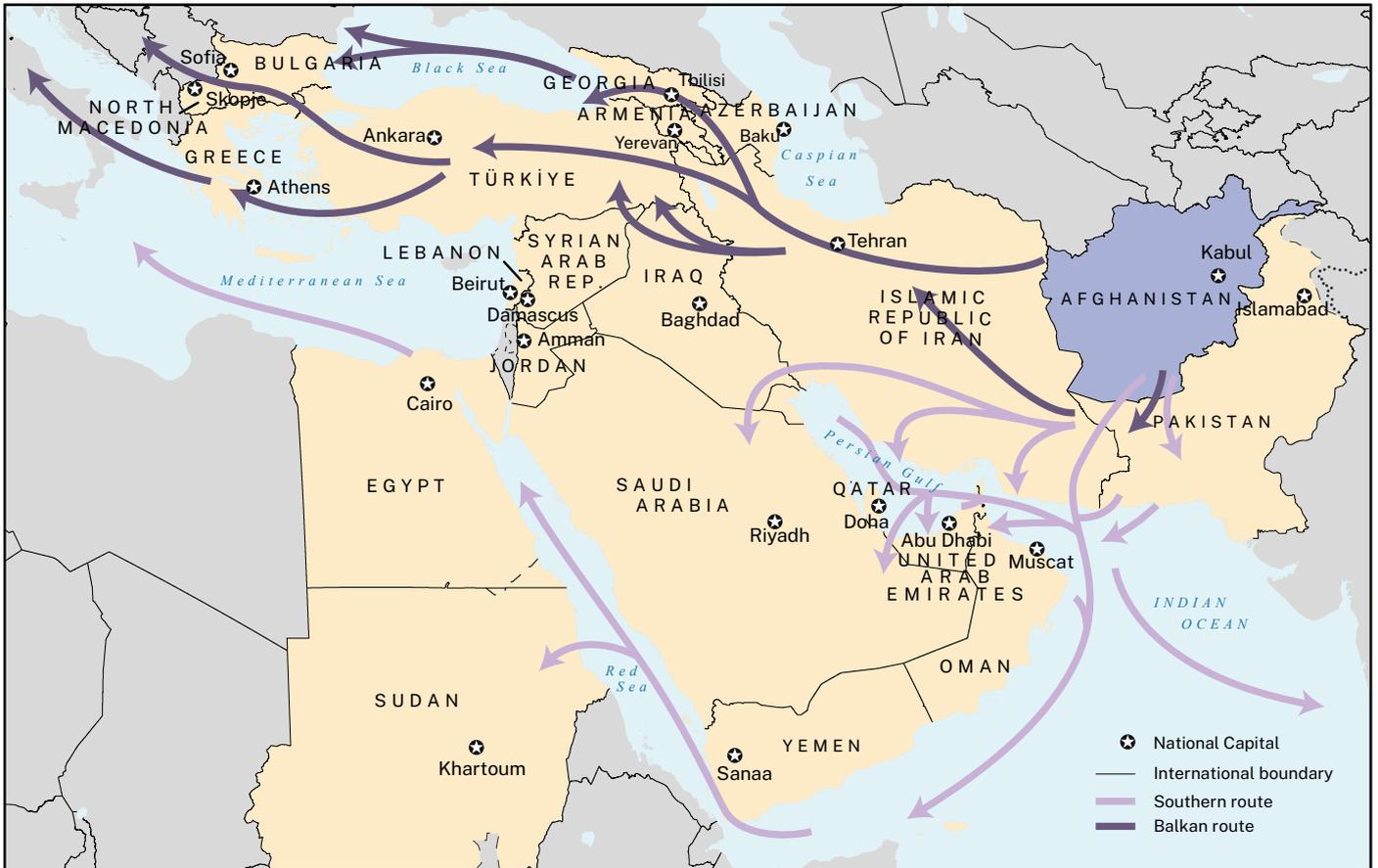
Fig 2 Seizures of methamphetamine in the Near and Middle East, 2001–2021

Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.

Iraq's proximity to two major transnational drug trafficking routes spanning the Near and Middle East potentially leaves the country at risk to broader shifts in drug supply (see map 5). The first transnational trafficking route is the so-called Balkan route, which has served as the main conduit of Afghan opiates to Europe since the 1970s. Tens of billions of dollars' worth of opiates have been trafficked from Afghanistan and Pakistan through the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in some cases through Iraq, continuing onward to Türkiye and into the West Balkans before being transported to markets in Western Europe.^{18, 19, 20}

The second trafficking route is the Southern route, with opiates smuggled from Afghanistan southwards through Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Gulf and Africa.²¹ Parts of both routes are also being used for other drugs, mainly methamphetamine. Iraq appears to have become a subset of both the Balkan and Southern routes, especially for trafficking of synthetic drugs, with methamphetamine trafficking corridors joining with "captagon" trafficking routes from the west.

Map 5 Indicative routes for opiate trafficking originating from Afghanistan along the Balkan and Southern routes, 2023



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Sources: UNODC WDR, AOTP, EMCDDA.

Section II. Trafficking trends in Iraq

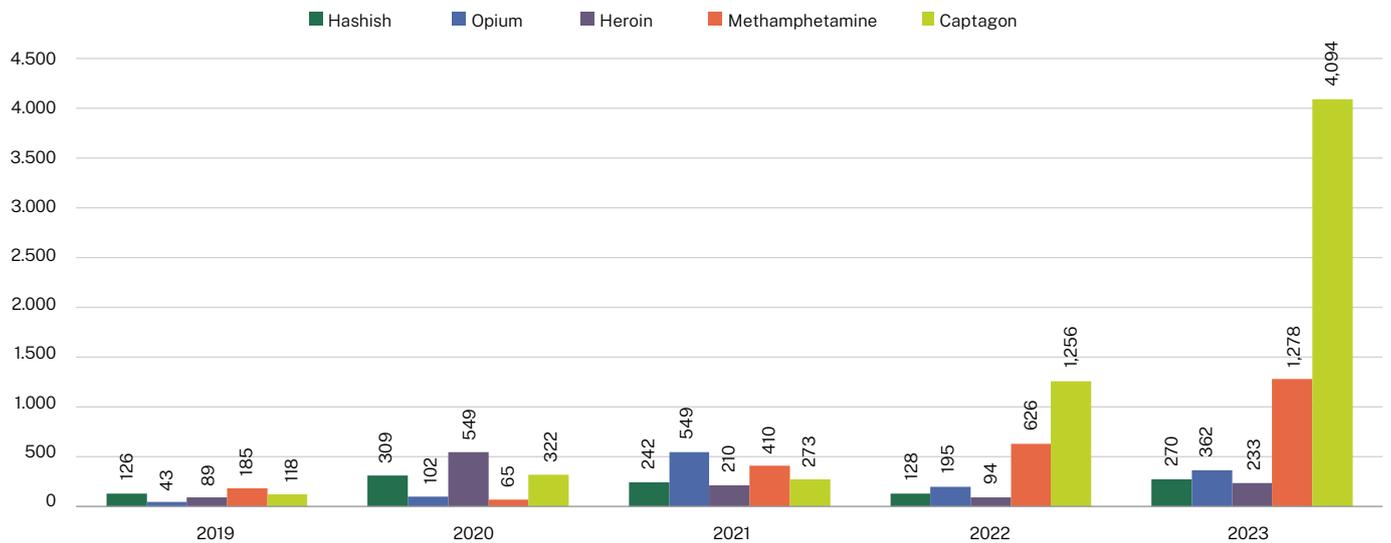
Until recently, assessments of drug trafficking trends in Iraq have been frustrated by limited reliable data on drug production, transshipment and use in the country. Moreover, according to Iraqi officials, the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) potentially diverted attention away from counter-narcotics efforts.²²

According to official sources, Iraq has experienced a significant increase in drug seizures in recent years (see figure 3). Methamphetamine seizures increased almost sixfold in 2023 compared to 2019, while “captagon” seizures reportedly tripled between 2022 and 2023, and overall amounts seized in 2023 are 34 times higher than in 2019.²³ The sharp increase in seizures may reflect both an increased availability of drugs trafficked through the region, as well as enhanced Iraqi and international counter-narcotics and interdiction measures.

Moreover, reports emerged in 2023 of attempts of “captagon” production in the southern provinces of Iraq, especially in the province of Al Muthanna.²⁴

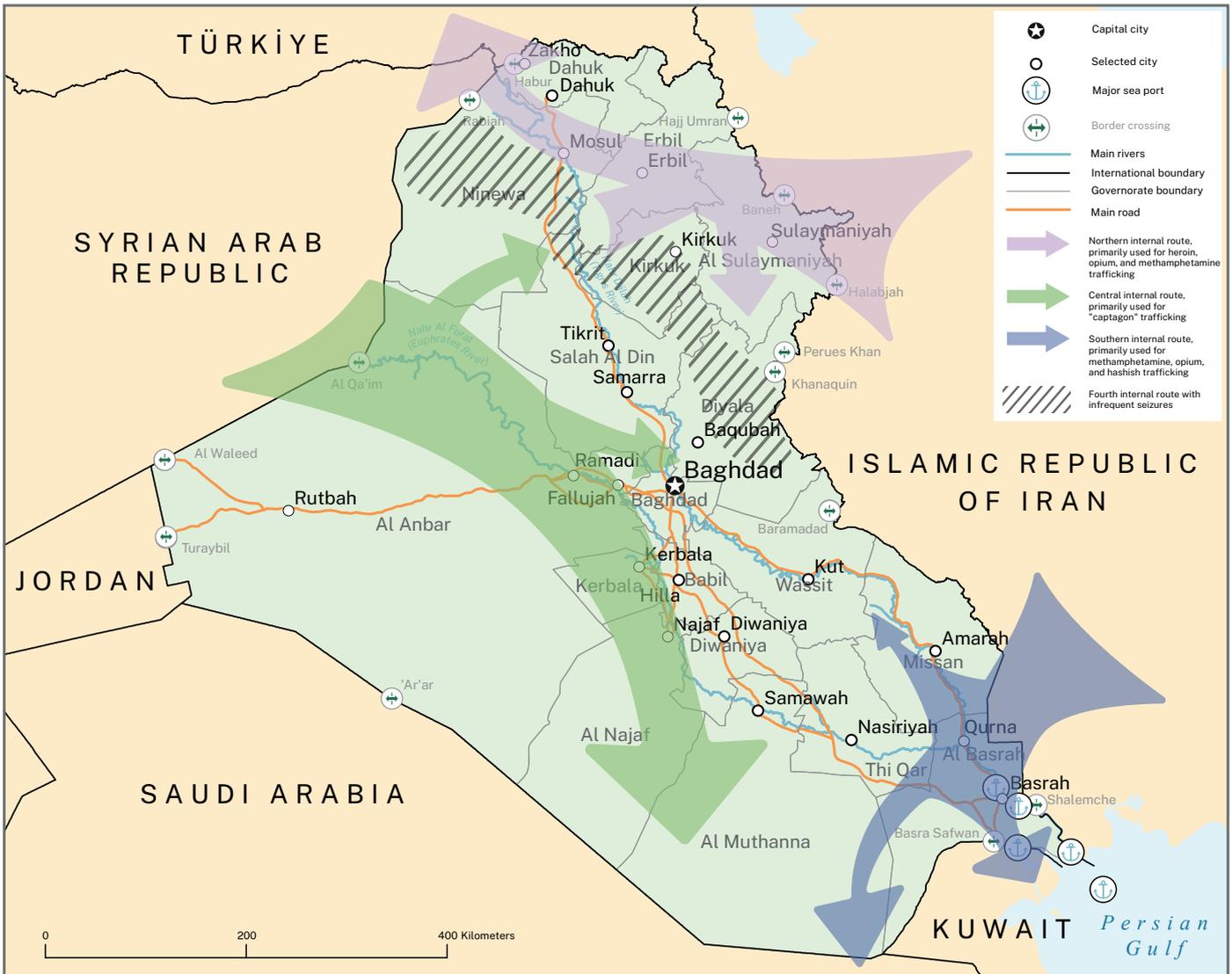
There are three principal domestic drug trafficking corridors through which drugs are transhipped within and across Iraq, linked to particular historical and geopolitical developments, as well as related evolution and affiliations of criminal groups. They include the northern, central, and southern internal routes and connect the borders between Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as Türkiye, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Fig 3 Annual amounts of drugs seized in Iraq per type, 2019–2023 (kg equivalents)



Source: Iraqi Ministry of Interior, including from the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Map 6 The main three internal corridors used for drug trafficking in Iraq

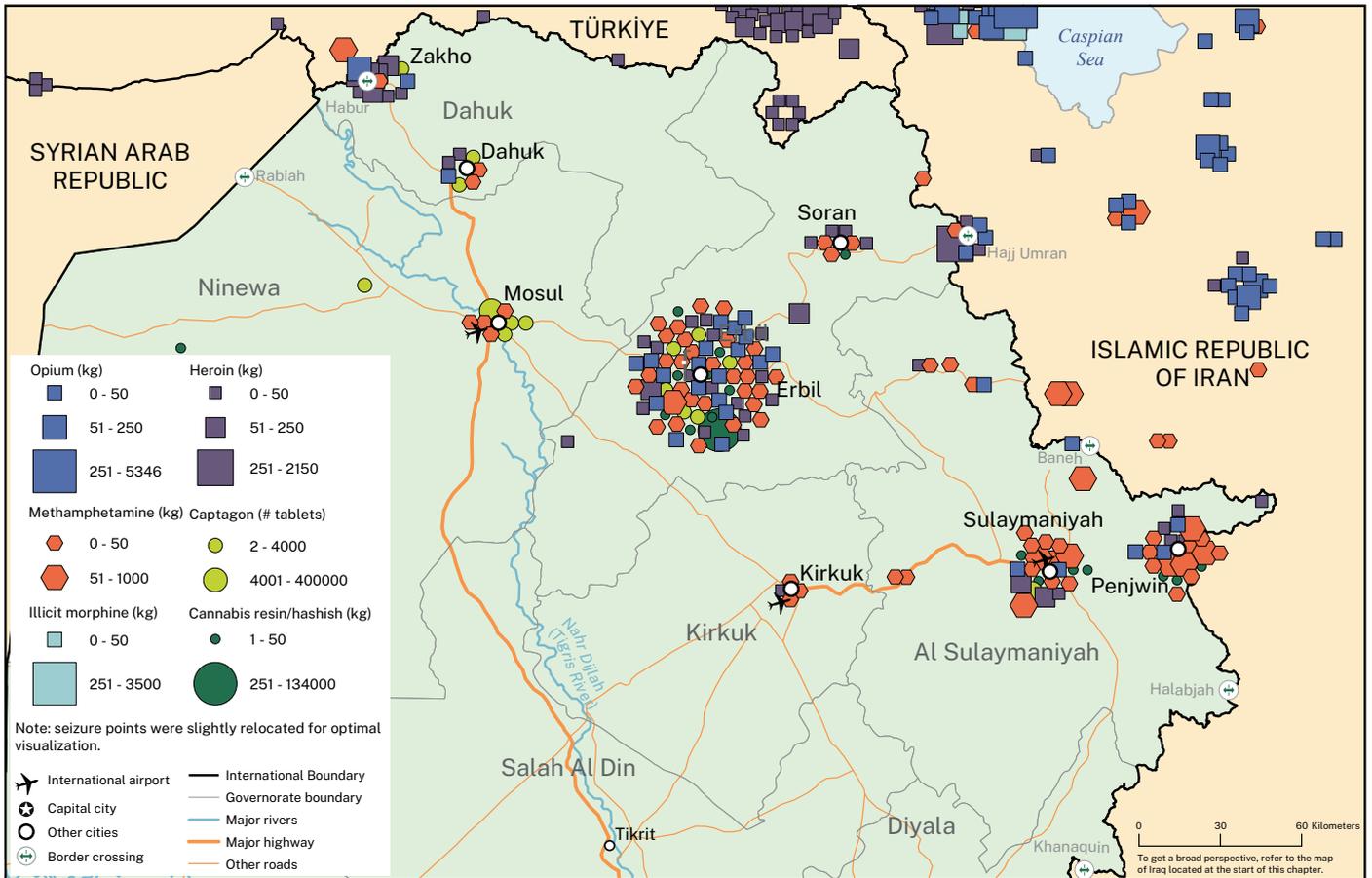


The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Sources: UNAMI, Natural Earth, FAO AQUASTAT. Also based on information provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, including from the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The northern internal route traverses the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI) (see map 7). Since at least 2017, the northern internal route has provided smugglers an alternative to the Iran-Türkiye border for opiates trafficking.²⁵ Trafficking of methamphetamine especially has expanded dramatically, marking a distinct shift in the volume and type of drugs being transported. As of 2022, volumes of methamphetamine and “captagon” have surpassed heroin seizures (see figure 4).²⁶

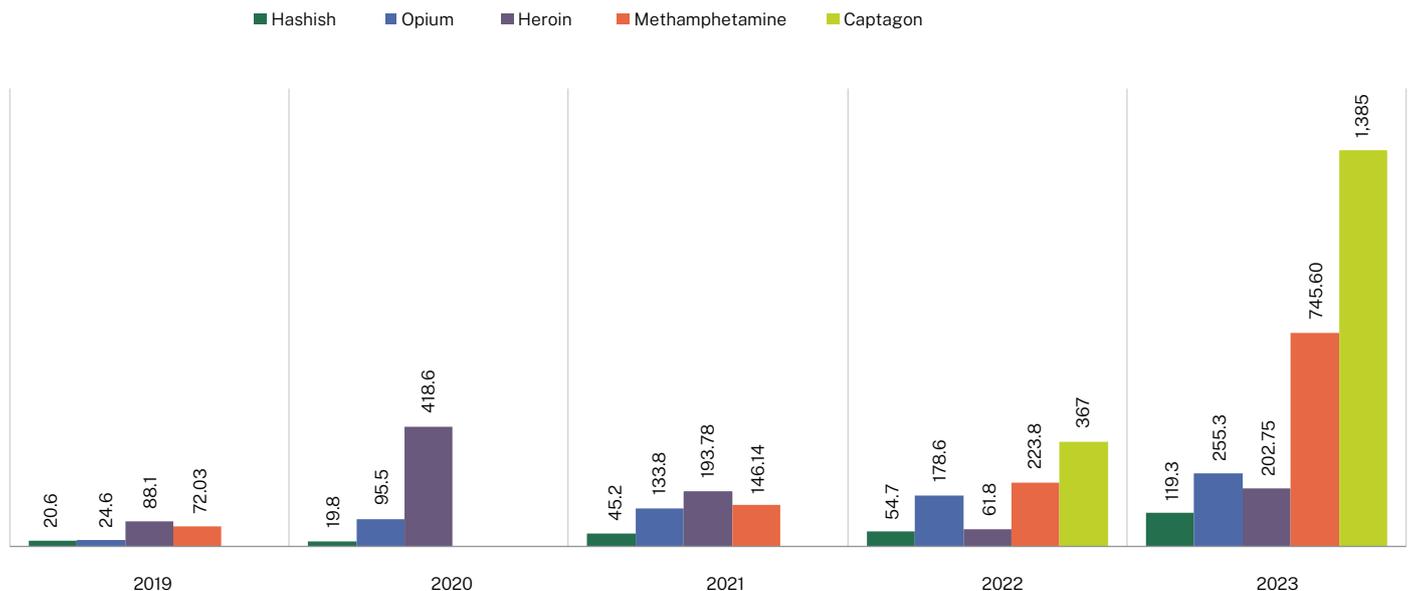
According to the General Directorates of anti-narcotics in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, there are also suspicions of drugs being produced in clandestine laboratories in the outskirts of urban centres near the mountainous borders, and around cities such as Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu.²⁷

Map 7 Main seizures reported on the northern internal route in Iraq and neighbouring countries, 2019–2023



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Sources: UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform, Natural Earth, FAO AQUASTAT.

Fig 4 Annual volumes of drugs seized in the Kurdish region of Iraq by type, 2019–2023 (kg equivalents)

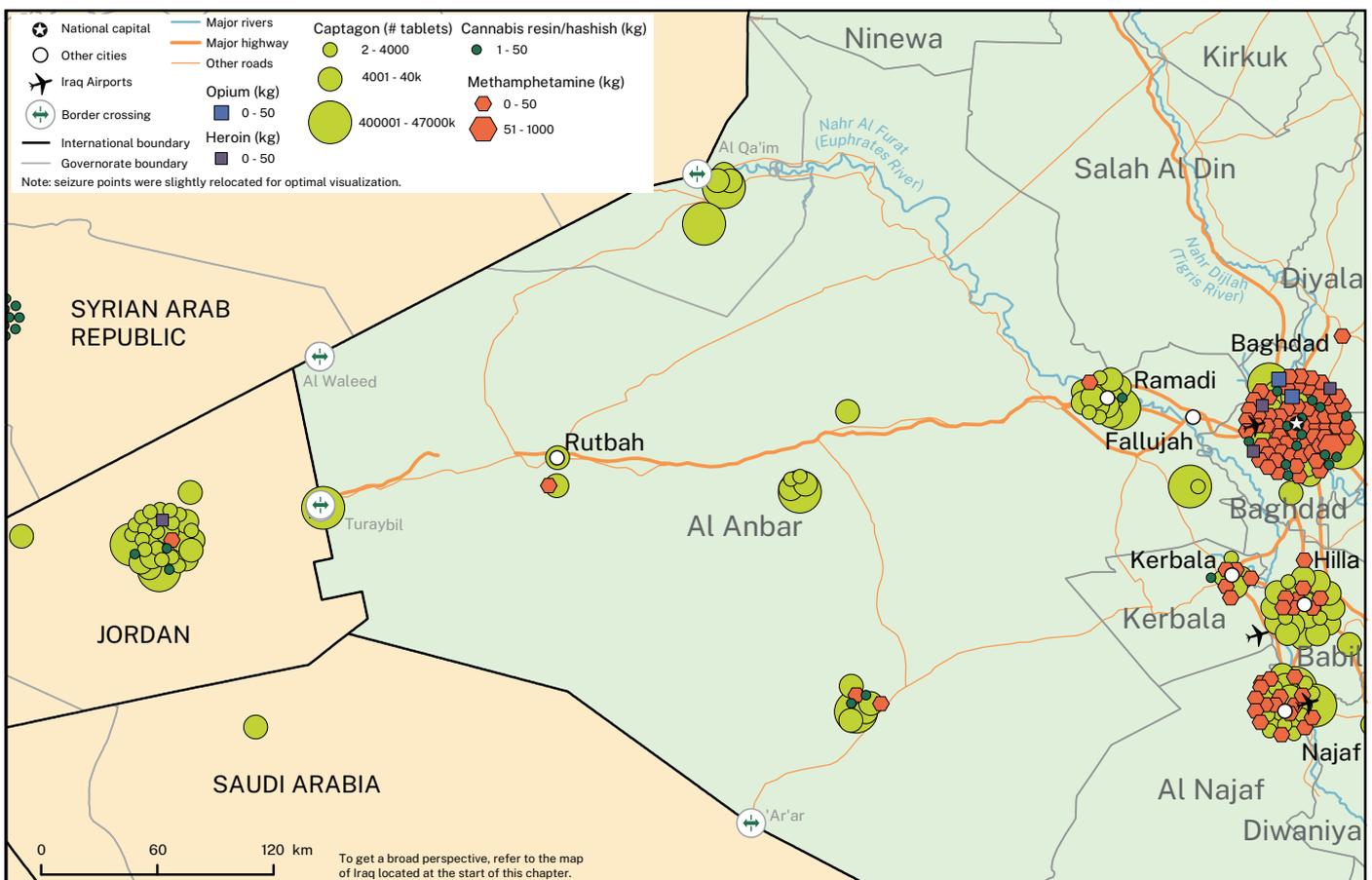


Source: Information provided by the General Directorate of the Kurdish Security Agency for the provinces of Erbil, Dahuk and Al Sulaymaniyah.

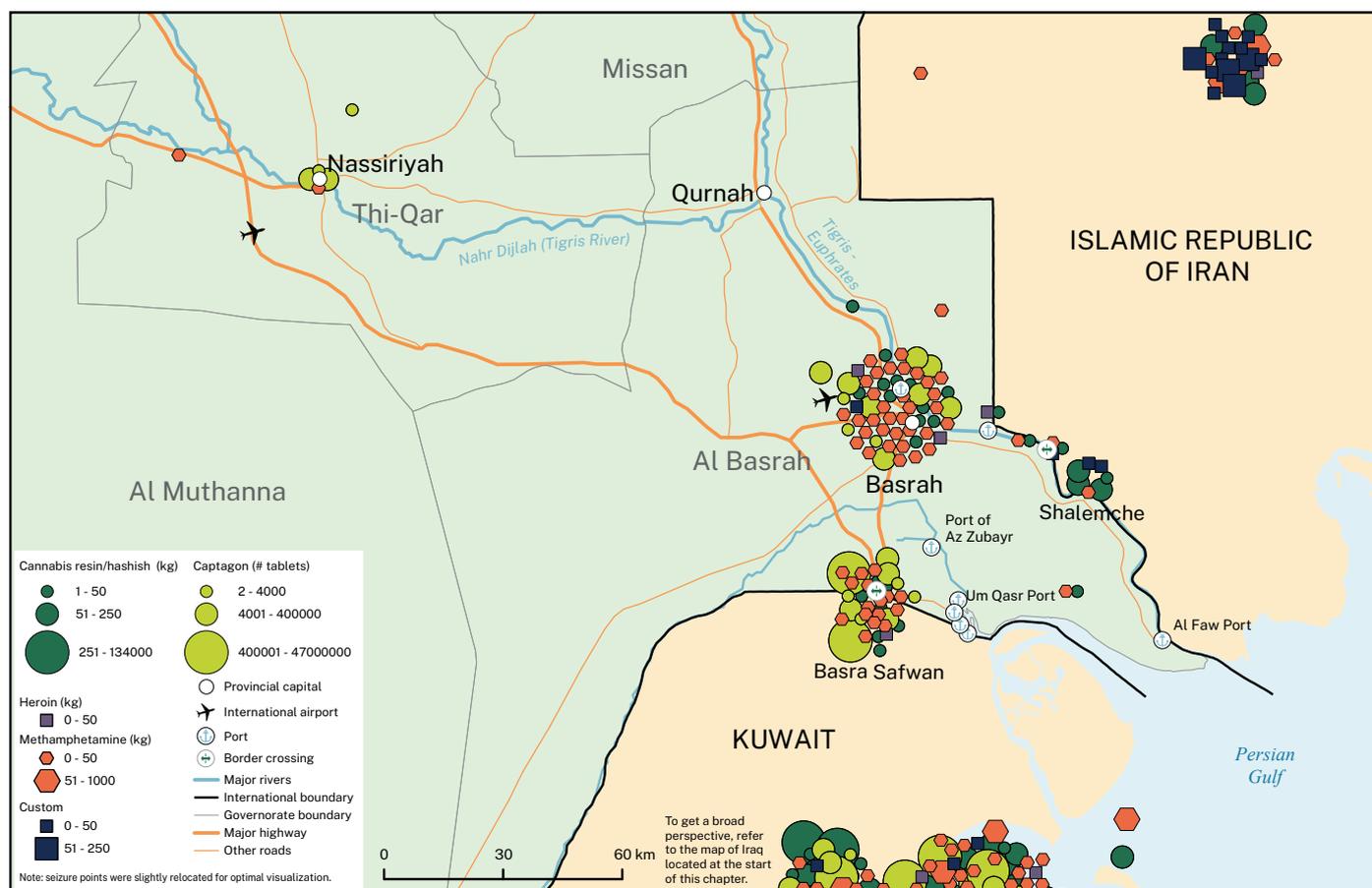
The central internal route connects the Levant to the Arabian Peninsula, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran, primarily via the Iraqi province of Al Anbar. In the past three years, Al Anbar province which borders the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, has become an epicenter for drug smuggling, particularly of “captagon” and, to a lesser extent, methamphetamine.²⁸ Indeed, along this route specifically, it appears that drug traffickers are combining “captagon”, produced in countries to the west of Iraq, with methamphetamine manufactured in the east, and then rerouting these substances to the Arabian Peninsula (see map 8).²⁹ The Al Qa'im border crossing between the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq and surrounding areas is a noted supply route, with the reported presence of multiple groups colluding with drug traffickers, and increasing tensions being reported as competition between those involved in the trafficking has intensified.³⁰

The southern internal trafficking route connects the Iranian province of Khuzestan and Al Basrah to Baghdad and the wider Arabian Peninsula, and the majority of drug seizures along this route appear to comprise methamphetamine and cannabis (see map 9).³¹ Although the numbers of seizures reported in the province of Al Basrah are relatively modest compared to other provinces in the country, the city and ports in Basrah play a pivotal commercial role in the Iraqi economy, with the Port of Um Qasr alone handling most of the country’s legal commercial traffic, and it is suspected that a significant portion of narcotics enter and exit the country via these ports.³² This situation is exacerbated by challenges related to corruption, coupled with the involvement of numerous criminal actors in the trafficking of illicit commodities, including drugs.³³

Map 8 Main seizures reported on the central internal route in Iraq and neighbouring countries, 2019–2023



Map 9 Main seizures reported on the southern internal route in Iraq and neighbouring countries, 2019–2023



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Sources: UNODC Drug Monitoring Platform, Natural Earth, FAO AQUASTAT.

The evolution of drug consumption and responses in Iraq

Rising drug transshipment through Iraq and neighbouring countries has been accompanied by increased domestic consumption across the country. The number of people with drug use disorders registered by public health services doubled from 2,979 in 2017 to 6,101 in 2021.³⁴ Despite the absence of a nationwide survey, some reports indicate a correlation between substance use and communities experiencing higher unemployment rates and economic challenges, espe-

cially among adolescents and young adults.³⁵ Reports are emerging of a surge in methamphetamine use in the city of Basrah, and in “captagon” use in areas such as Al Anbar, Ramadi and Baghdad, in particular (see map 10). As of 2022, over 3,308 Iraqis were receiving treatment for substance use disorders, of which over two-thirds (2,251) were seeking treatment for use of ATS.³⁶ Until recently, there were very few health institutions to support drug dependence and rehabilitation. The first public-private rehabilitation centre in Iraq was launched in Erbil in 2021.³⁷ Starting in 2023, Iraq’s national authorities started opening a series of formal drug rehabilitation clinics.

Map 10 Primary substances for which people sought treatment across Iraq, 2022



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Sources: Official statistics provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Health; UNAMI.

Drug trafficking enablers in Iraq

Iraq's history over the past four decades, marked by continuous armed conflict and instability, has been a significant factor in shaping its current landscape of illicit activities, including drug trafficking.

The Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s was followed by a series of conflicts, including the Gulf War and the post-2003 conflicts after the US-led invasion, as well as counter-terrorism actions from 2013 to 2017 which resulted in Iraq's territorial victory over ISIL (Da'esh).³⁸ These wars caused immense casualties and instability. They also led to the emergence of cross-border criminal networks, including those led by ISIL, and dynamic black markets. These circumstances provided a space for illicit activities as different groups, including drug traffickers, sought to capitalize on the chaos and lack of effective governance at the time.³⁹

Moreover, international sanctions (1990–2003) contracted the Iraqi economy and have fuelled underground economies.⁴⁰ Sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran (2006-) and the different blockades imposed on neighbouring Syrian Arab Republic (2011-) could also have amplified opportunities for trafficking and illegal economies in overcoming sanction restrictions in and around Iraq.^{41, 42}

The 44 interviews conducted for this study highlight the dynamic and diverse ecosystem of actors directly or indirectly involved in trafficking of drugs and related crimes, at times competing or colluding to secure supply chains and financial returns. The fight against ISIL and its fall reportedly reshuffled power dynamics in Iraq, contributing to a complex geometry of actors aiming to control transit areas and potentially engage in illicit economies, including trafficking in drugs.⁴³

The 1,599-kilometre frontier with the Islamic Republic of Iran, dotted with mountains, marshes, and desert, is described as being extremely challenging to control by interviewed Iraqi border control officers.⁴⁴ Extensive trans-border ethnic kinship networks reduce transaction costs, making it easier for criminal groups, drug smugglers and intermediaries to operate.⁴⁵ Checkpoints are easily breached by diverting illegal products from official crossings, blending and concealing products in legitimate shipments, forging documentation and permits, and bribing military, police and customs officials.⁴⁶

Methodology

The UNODC adopted a mixed methodology in preparing this report, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Qualitative methods included key informant interviews with decision-makers, practitioners, subject matter experts, and others. Between 2020 and 2022, a wide range of law enforcement officers, judges, prosecutors, health professionals, and civil servants, as well as individuals connected to drug trafficking networks were interviewed.

Quantitative methods consisted of data collection and analysis of administrative datasets. Primary information included the Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) and Individual Drug Seizure (IDS) database of the Drug Monitoring Platform (DPM). Likewise, UNODC drew on statistical data from 2019 to 2023, compiled and shared by the governments of Iraq and neighbouring countries.

A detailed description of the methodology, including an interview list, can be found online: [link](#)

Section IV. Recommendations

The sheer scale of drug trafficking across the region has led to growing calls for urgent action. Iraq and other governments in the region have increasingly highlighted the need for joint responses. In remarks to the General Debate of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023, Iraq's Prime Minister highlighted Iraq's intensifying efforts to combat drugs and its commitment to being "part of the solution to any international and regional problem".⁴⁷

To advance momentum towards more effective regional solutions, the following recommended actions and support can help to accelerate and operationalize commitments:

- ✓ **The Governments of Iraq and fellow members of the Arab League, Arab Interior Ministers' Council, and Gulf Cooperation Council can facilitate collective action by implementing international drug-related agreements and building on existing regional agreements and frameworks.** The Directorate of Social Policies Department of the League of Arab States, with support from UNODC, launched an *Arab Plan for the Prevention and Reduction of the Dangers of Drugs to Arab Societies* in March 2023.⁴⁸ UNODC also signed an MoU with the Arab Interior Ministers' Council in May 2023 to support member states in the fight against narcotics and psychotropic substances, including new forms of transnational organized crime and terrorism.⁴⁹
- ✓ The establishment of a **regional forum assembling research expertise, law enforcement and security specialists** could be considered to support the design and development of evidence based coordinated and harmonized responses, including to tackle "captagon". Such a regional hub could be modelled on existing regional instruments operating in line with international commitments and in collaboration with different specialized international entities.
- ✓ Support is needed to **improve data quality, collection, and analysis of the sources of drug production, trafficking networks and consumption patterns in Iraq and its neighbours.** While improving, the coverage and quality of data collection and availability on drug trafficking in Iraq remains partial and fragmented. Technical assistance is also needed to enable the measurement of outcomes and impacts of specific interventions to reduce supply and demand, including efforts to address drug use and treatment options.
- ✓ Further support is required to promote balanced drug responses. These should encompass **evidence-based demand reduction interventions**, in particular in areas along key drug trafficking corridors which are suffering from increased drug use, along with measures to ensure that people who use drugs are not stigmatized or prevented from accessing adequate treatment and rehabilitation, in line with the Iraqi counternarcotics strategy (2023–2025).⁵⁰

- ☑ Capacity building for regional and national authorities should focus on **strengthening monitoring, early warning, and disruption capabilities**. Given its rapid spread and use across Iraq and the region, a specific focus is needed to monitor ATS, including local manufacturing, trafficking nodes, and the involvement of different actors.
- ☑ Technical assistance to **operationalize commitments to reduce corruption, including petty corruption**, is needed to limit illicit flows. Iraq is working with international partners, including UNODC, to strengthen border control, customs, and law enforcement with a special focus on addressing the widespread corruption that enables drug trafficking.⁵¹
- ☑ “Whole-of-government” and “all-of-society” approaches are key to building ownership of strategies and ensuring the sustainability of responses. **Promoting shared understanding and commitment to tackle the criminal and drug trafficking ecosystem in the region** is critical.

Measures to crack down on drug production and trafficking in one country can impact the dynamics of drug production, smuggling and consumption in another. Political and economic instability, the introduction and enforcement of international sanctions and changes in the leadership of criminal groups in one jurisdiction can generate knock-on effects. Shifts in the cost of production of drugs, whether due to increased border and counter-narcotics efforts or the rising price of precursors, can also result in the movement of manufacturing across borders. These factors underline the importance of regional cooperation, and of building capabilities to monitor drug production, trafficking and consumption in real time and adjusting responses accordingly.

While there are multiple political sensitivities between and within countries, the resilience and agility of criminal networks represent a serious risk to security and development. The creation of systems to share information and exchange best and promising practices represent opportunities to build a region-wide approach. A pragmatic focus on addressing common drug trafficking challenges on shared borders is to the benefit of all in the region and the international community at large.

Endnotes

- 1 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).
- 2 <https://www.unodc.org/documents/postungass2016/outcome/V1603301-E.pdf>
- 3 https://www.unodc.org/documents/hlr/19-V1905795_E_ebook.pdf
- 4 Based on information shared by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior in December 2023.
- 5 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023*, Executive Summary.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Opiate production and trafficking are undergoing a profound transformation, following an effective ban of opium cultivation by the de-facto authorities in Afghanistan. In 2023, opium cultivation fell by 95% compared to the previous year. If this trend continues, the region may see strongly reduced opiate trafficking, with broader implications for international drug markets.
- 8 Ministry of Interior of Iraq: Iraq annual regional meeting on counternarcotic held on 9–10 December 2023
- 9 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).
- 10 Danilo Mandić, *Gangsters and Other Statesmen: Mafias, Separatists, and Torn States in a Globalized World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), available at: www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv12fw79d.
- 11 UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2022* (United Nations publication, 2022).
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).
- 17 UNODC, *Afghanistan opium survey 2023*.
- 18 UNODC, *World Drug Report, 2023*, Online Segment: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr-2023-online-segment.html>
- 19 UNODC, “Opiate Trafficking along the Early Stages of the Balkan Route,” 2020.
- 20 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), “EU Drug Market: Heroin and Other Opioids – Trafficking and Supply,” January 2024.
- 21 UNODC, *Afghan Opiate trafficking through the southern route*, 2015
- 22 Reported by Iraqi officials during (online) consultations conducted between October and December 2023.
- 23 Based on information provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, including from the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in December 2023.
- 24 Iraq National Security Services reported the dismantlement of a laboratory for “captagon” manufacturing in Muthanna province, near the border of Saudi Arabia, in July 2023. See UNODC Drug Monitoring platform.
- 25 Based on individual drug seizures shared by the General Directorates of anti-narcotics in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in December 2023. About traffickers’ strategy to decrease risks of detection, see also European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), “EU Drug Markets: Heroin and Other Opioids – Production of Opioids,” January 2024.
- 26 Methamphetamine is more frequently seized than heroin and opium since 2019 but in smaller volumes.
- 27 Interviews #15, #16, #21, interviews by UNODC, 2021.
- 28 Based on information provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior from 2020 to 2023, including individual drug seizures.
- 29 Based on individual drug seizures and drug-related incidents shared by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior from 2020 to 2023.
- 30 Interviews #15, #21, interview by UNODC, 2021. Also see drug related incidents reported and registered in UNODC Drug Monitoring platform.
- 31 Based individual drug seizures and on drug-related incidents shared by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior in 2021 and 2022.
- 32 Information provided by the Iraqi delegation, UNODC Container Control Programme (CCP) round table, May 2023, Vienna.
- 33 Interviews #32, #41, #42, interviews by UNODC, 2022.
- 34 Information on people in treatment in 2022, provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Health in December 2023. Also see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4431571/> and for surveys on drug use in Iraq between 2024 and 2023, see <https://jptcp.com/index.php/jptcp/article/view/1984>
- 35 Al-Imam, Ahmed, Michael A. Motyka, Barbara Hoffmann, Hassan Al-Ka’aby, Mohammed Younus, Noor Al-Hemiary, and Michał Michalak, “Risk Factors of Suicidal Ideation in Iraqi Crystal Methamphetamine Users,” *Brain Sciences* 13, no. 9 (2021): 1279, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci13091279>.
- 36 Information shared by the Iraqi Ministry of Health in December 2023.
- 37 Press releases from the KRG, in 2021.
- 38 S/RES/2682(2023) The UN did not impose sanctions on the Syrian Arab Republic. Individual countries and regional bodies have imposed their own sanctions and embargoes.
- 39 Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, The Belknap Press, Harvard University, 2015.
- 40 Jones, Lee, *Societies under Siege: Exploring How International Economic Sanctions (Do Not) Work*. Oxford University Press, 2015
- 41 UN sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran were primarily focused on its nuclear programme, and compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and IAEA safeguards. See the following Security Council resolutions: S/RES/1737 (2006); S/RES/1747 (2007); S/RES/1803 (2008); S/RES/1929 (2010).
- 42 The UN did not impose sanctions on the Syrian Arab Republic. Individual countries and regional bodies have imposed their own sanctions and embargoes.
- 43 Interview #14, interview by UNODC, 2021; and interviews #33, #41, #42, interviews by UNODC, 2022.
- 44 Interviews #1, #2, #15, #16, interviews by UNODC, 2021. Interviews #32, #33, #40, interviews by UNODC, 2022.
- 45 Field interviews conducted between 2019 and 2022. A majority of anti-narcotic officers, customs officers and other law enforcement interviewed mentioned that the Iran-Iraq border especially is “is extremely challenging to control”.
- 46 Interviews #1, #2, and #11, #12, #24, #18, #19, interviews by UNODC, 2021. Interviews #40, #42, interviews by UNODC, 2022. Also based on individual drug seizures shared by the Ministry of Interior, including from the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) between 2021 and 2023.
- 47 See <https://gadebate.un.org/en/78/iraq#:~:text=Statement%20summary,of%20society%2C%E2%80%9D%20he%20added>.
- 48 The Plan provides recommendations for development of national and regional strategies to address the impact of drugs at all levels, drawing attention to the importance of international cooperation in addressing this transnational threat, using international standards when it comes to health issues, importance of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, and sensitizing communities to the nexus with development, human security, violence and organized crime.
- 49 The MoU refers to the need to provide comprehensive responses to countering narcotics and psychotropic substances; ensuring accountability; respecting and promoting human rights in the policy and responses of legal and criminal justice systems; and commit to strengthening border and port security at land, sea and air, and preventing and combatting trafficking in drugs, among others.
- 50 The Plan also stresses that drug use surveys must be undertaken to examine trends and dynamics.
- 51 See, for example, UNODC, “Iraq: International cooperation a means to halt transnational drug trafficking and criminal networks”, 18 February 2021. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/romena/en/Stories/2021/February/iraq-international-cooperation-a-means-to-halt-transnational-drug-trafficking-and-criminal-networks.html>.

