

Iraq Situation Report: October 20, 2014

1 On October 20, Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) forces launched an offensive against Qarah Tapa sub-district in northern Diyala that resulted in their taking control of parts of the Saraila village. According to Iraqi Turkmen politicians, ISIS attacked the area with mortars from three axes and the area is now besieged. Sources also indicated ISIS forces disguised themselves in Kurdish clothes during the attack. The Peshmerga repelled the attack, receiving Peshmerga reinforcements from Khanaqin. Reportedly, Iraqi Shi'a militias and Iraqi Police (IP) participated in repelling the attack as well.



5 On October 20, Iraqi Security Forces reportedly reached al-Hajaj area south of Baiji. The ISF are reportedly preparing to clear the Mazraa village on the outskirts of Hajaj. The ISF are reportedly shelling ISIS gatherings in the area. Unconfirmed reports indicate that ISIS forces withdrew from areas in Baiji and Shirqat towards Ninewa province as a result of the ISF operations. U.S., French, and British fighter jets also carried out strikes near Baiji in support of ISF operations.



2 An SVBIED targeted the Peshmerga forces stationed near the Mosul Dam. The attack resulted in the death 15 Peshmerga members and injury of 20.



3 On October 20, ISIS launched an attack in the areas around Sinjar Mountain in western Ninewa. Leader of the Sinjar Mountain Protection Force, Qassim Rasho, stated that ISIS took control of the Dahola and Borug residential compounds near the mountain and now is besieging an area that houses hundreds of Iraqi Yazidi families. Rishwa is appealing to the government "to provide air cover and send weapons and munitions to Yazidi forces."



4 On October 20, ISIS attacked the Rabia district on the Iraqi-Syrian border west of Mosul. The attack reportedly lasted for two hours and included ISIS using "heavy weapons" during the attack. The Peshmerga repelled the attack but sporadic clashes continued after ISIS's initial push.



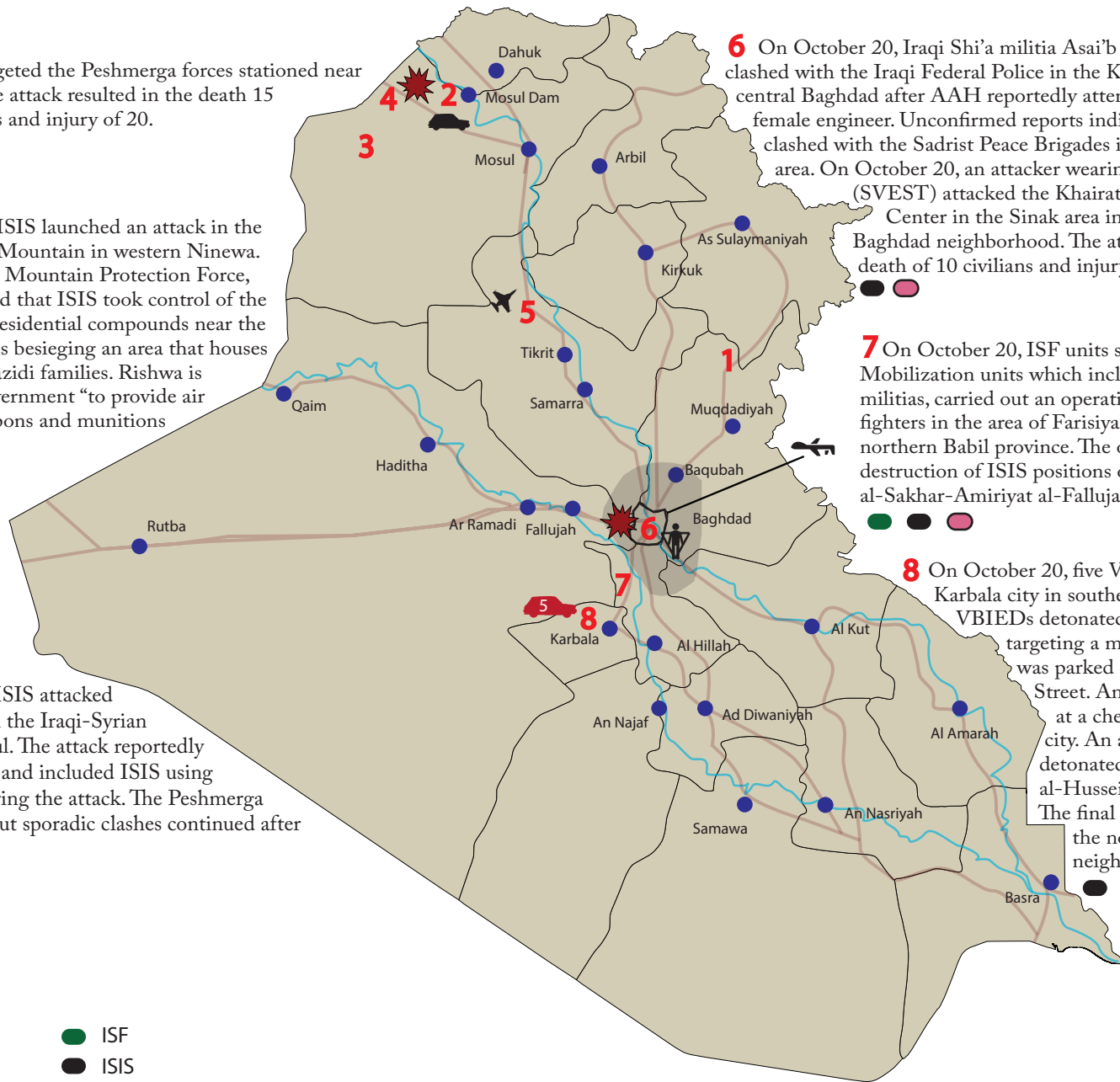
6 On October 20, Iraqi Shi'a militia Asai'b Ahl al-Haq (AAH) clashed with the Iraqi Federal Police in the Karrada area of central Baghdad after AAH reportedly attempted to kidnap a female engineer. Unconfirmed reports indicate that AAH also clashed with the Sadrist Peace Brigades in the Zafaraniyah area. On October 20, an attacker wearing a Suicide Vest (SVEST) attacked the Khairat Shi'a religious Center in the Sinak area in downtown Baghdad neighborhood. The attack resulted in the death of 10 civilians and injury of 30 others.



7 On October 20, ISF units supported by Popular Mobilization units which include Iraqi Shi'a militias, carried out an operation against ISIS fighters in the area of Farisiyah, near Jurf al-Sakhar, northern Babil province. The operation led to the destruction of ISIS positions on the Jurf al-Sakhar-Amiriyat al-Fallujah route.



8 On October 20, five VBIEDs detonated in Karbala city in southern Iraq. Two of the VBIEDs detonated in Bab Twerij, targeting a mosque, one of which was parked on Maitham Tamar Street. An SVBIED detonated at a checkpoint north of the city. An additional VBIED detonated in the central al-Hussein district of the city. The final VBIED detonated in the northern neighborhood of al-Abbas.



- Major Cities
- Major Clash
- VBIED
- SVEST
- Airstrikes
- SVBIED
- Armed Drones
- ISF
- ISIS
- France
- Peshmerga
- Iraqi Yazidi Forces
- Iraqi Shi'a militias
- U.K.
- USA



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The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) appears to be launching a coordinated campaign to target the Peshmerga along three fronts. In Diyala, the situation is critical around Qarah Tapa which ISIS now reportedly besieges. The attack on Qarah Tapa will result in ISIS consolidating gains around Jalula south of the area. ISIS targeted Qarah Tapa with VBIEDs last week and further control of Qara Tapa will renew the threat to the Kirkuk-Baghdad highway, particularly if ISIS is able to pose a threat to Kifri which is strategically located in proximity to the highway. After ISIS attacked Sinjar Mountain in August of this year, decreased coalition airstrike activity in the vicinity has permitted ISIS units in those areas to renew their attack. The Sinjar Mountain attack, along with the attack on Rabia, may be intended to prevent the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga from deploying units to support the YPG in Syria. These attacks on the Peshmerga came after previous ISIS attacks in Kirkuk earlier this month, and it will therefore be important to watch if these events signal a renewed ISIS targeting of Kirkuk. The Karbala VBIED attacks precede the early November Ashura Pilgrimage which is an important occasion for the Shi'a and will be commemorated in the city with hundreds of thousands of people walking to Karbala. ISIS is likely probing the defenses of the city before Ashura or preempting upcoming tightened security measures that normally accompany the pilgrimage. At any rate, the number of VBIEDs points to an escalated ISIS campaign in southern Iraq. Reported AAH-ISF clashes demonstrate increased freedom of movement for militias in Baghdad. Future clashes may occur between the ISF and the militias as the militias attempt to increase their influence in the capital at the expense of the ISF.