

Iraq Situation Report: January 12-15, 2015

1 On January 13, an anonymous security source in Anbar Operation Command stated that ISF and tribal fighters, with U.S. air support, are in ongoing clashes with ISIS in the areas around Rutba district west of Qaim, and have killed 22 ISIS members. Forces “continue advancing towards the entrances of Rutba from the northern and southern directions.” Also, “a senior source from Jazeera and Badia Operations Command (JBOC)” stated that the operation extends beyond Rutba to clearing Walid sub-district, Walid crossing, the Trebil crossing with Jordan, and the Ar-Ar crossing with Saudi Arabia. On January 14, joint forces supported by coalition air cover “cordoned” Rutba in preparation to storm the district while communication and internet services in Rutba were suspended. Another report indicated that the joint forces “halted” their advance to fortify their positions in areas they cleared near Rutba. The source claimed that the forces cleared the areas of Sagara, Owinnat, and “80 km,” located east of Rutba, and Hussainiyat, northwest of Rutba, in addition to the areas of “120 km” and “60 km” on the highway and the Ar Ar area. On January 15, a colonel from the IA stated that forces from the 29th Brigade of the 7th IA Division and forces from the 18th Brigade, likely from the Federal Police, along with forces from the Rapid Reaction Division and tribal fighters are participating in the operation and that an unspecified force conducted an air assault in the area cutting an ISIS supply route.

2 On January 15, ISIS fighters demolished six houses belonging to judges in the Khadra neighborhood of central Tal Afar district, west of Mosul, using IEDs.

3 On January 15, an attacker wearing a Suicide Vest (SVESTs) targeted a popular café in Khrisan Street, in central Baquba, Diyala Province, injuring at least six civilians.

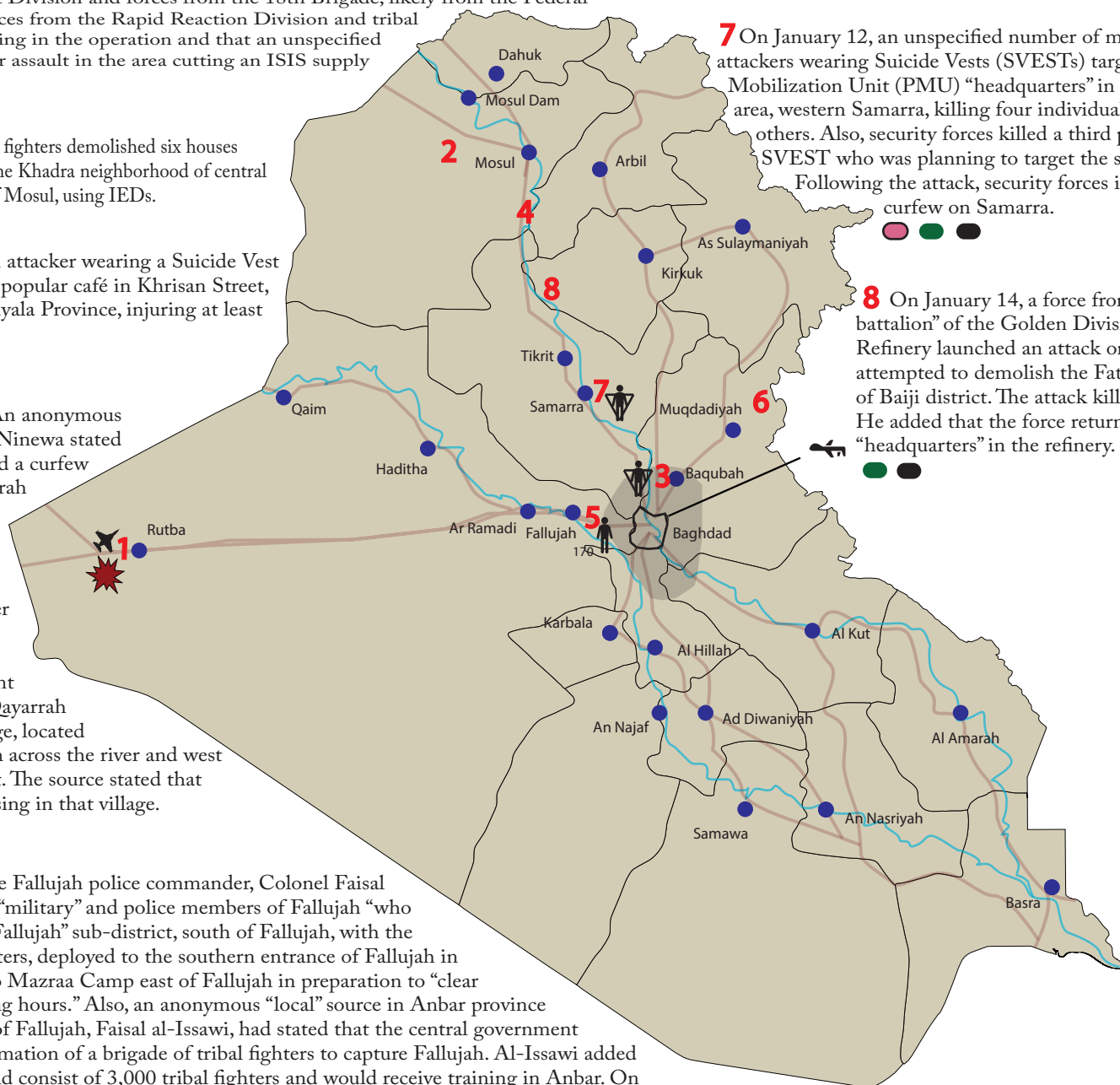
4 On January 15, An anonymous “informed” source in Ninewa stated that ISIS had imposed a curfew on residents of Qayarah sub-district, south of Mosul, warning residents through loudspeakers not to leave their homes after noon to facilitate the movement of ISIS fighters and equipment using the road near Qayarah towards Haj Ali village, located southeast of Qayarah across the river and west of Makhmour district. The source stated that ISIS fighters are massing in that village.

5 On January 13, The Fallujah police commander, Colonel Faisal al-Zubai, stated that “military” and police members of Fallujah “who were in in Amiriyat Fallujah” sub-district, south of Fallujah, with the support of tribal fighters, deployed to the southern entrance of Fallujah in Nuaimiya area and to Mazraa Camp east of Fallujah in preparation to “clear Fallujah in the coming hours.” Also, an anonymous “local” source in Anbar province said that the Mayor of Fallujah, Faisal al-Issawi, had stated that the central government had approved the formation of a brigade of tribal fighters to capture Fallujah. Al-Issawi added that the brigade would consist of 3,000 tribal fighters and would receive training in Anbar. On January 14, the colonel reiterated that the joint forces were “massing” in preparation for an assault although; MoD described such deployments as “routine” procedures and refused to confirm or deny the existence of an operation. On January 15, the commander of the Golden Division, General Fadhil Barware stated that forces from the division, in coordination with Anbar Operations Command (AOC) are “preparing” to launch an assault on Fallujah district. Also, on January 15, ISIS reportedly kidnapped 170 individuals from Fallujah for allegedly forming anti-ISIS “Awaking cells.”

6 On January 14, Governor of Diyala Amir al-Majmai called for tribes in the areas of Sansal and Arab Jubur near Muqdadiah to volunteer to fight ISIS “to receive weapons.” Majmai explained that such forces will “hold the ground” to prevent damage to these areas following operations. He stated that he will have a leadership role in these operations. Meanwhile, the local government in Muqdadiah stated that it received many requests from residents to clear areas north of Muqdadiah that are being used to launch indirect fire attacks on the district. Also, ISIS has reportedly evacuated three of its “main headquarters” in the area of Sansal Basin in preparation for the expected launch of military operations to clear ISIS from the area.

7 On January 12, an unspecified number of mortars and two attackers wearing Suicide Vests (SVESTs) targeted a Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU) “headquarters” in the Albu Nissan area, western Samarra, killing four individuals and injuring 18 others. Also, security forces killed a third person wearing an SVEST who was planning to target the same position. Following the attack, security forces imposed a general curfew on Samarra.

8 On January 14, a force from the “emergency battalion” of the Golden Division in Baiji Oil Refinery launched an attack on ISIS gunmen who attempted to demolish the Fatha Bridge, northeast of Baiji district. The attack killed 10 ISIS members. He added that the force returned to its “headquarters” in the refinery.



- Major Cities
- ★ Major Clash
- ✈ Airstrikes
- 🚁 Armed Drones
- 👤 SVEST
- 👤 Kidnapping
- 🟡 Iraqi Shi'a militias
- 🟢 ISF
- ⬤ ISIS
- 🟠 Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- 🟦 Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- 🟨 Coalition



Content: Sinan Adnan & ISW Iraq Team
 Graphics: Nichole Dicharry
 ©2015 by the Institute for the Study of War.

The last three days have witnessed a prioritization of Anbari areas where the Iraqi Government has largely not committed resources since the fall of Mosul in June 2014. The district of Rutba fell to ISIS on June 25, 2014 and has been under uncontested control by the organization ever since. ISIS control of Rutba has allowed it to control major parts of the highway connecting Iraq to Jordan and Syria. ISIS has used this control to generate revenue by taxing commercial traffic from Jordan. ISIS presence in Rutba has also created a threat to Karbala, prompting the ISF to allocate ISF, Iraqi Shi'a militias, and volunteers to the border with Anbar to defend Karbala from ISIS attacks. Although ISIS has maintained control of Rutba since June, it has not used the area to launch serious attacks until January 4-5, 2015 attacking ISF outposts and Saudi border positions, respectively. It is likely that these recent attacks prompted the Iraqi Government to prioritize Rutba, possibly at Saudi Arabia's request. Moving to eastern Anbar, ISIS has similarly maintained control over Fallujah and its environs since January of 2014, prompting the government and Iraqi Shi'a militias to deploy forces east, southeast, and northeast of Fallujah to prevent ISIS and other anti-government groups from projecting power towards Baghdad. Previous operations launched during the Maliki government to clear the environs of Fallujah have proved to be challenging and stopped short of achieving their objectives. If the reports about an assault on Fallujah are confirmed, it will be important to watch for the composition of the forces, especially if tribal forces play a major role in the operation. This would indicate that some previously un-committed or anti-government tribes have changed their stance. It will also be important to watch for the ISIS response, especially if ISIS launches a major attack from Fallujah through the militia and ISF defenses around Baghdad.