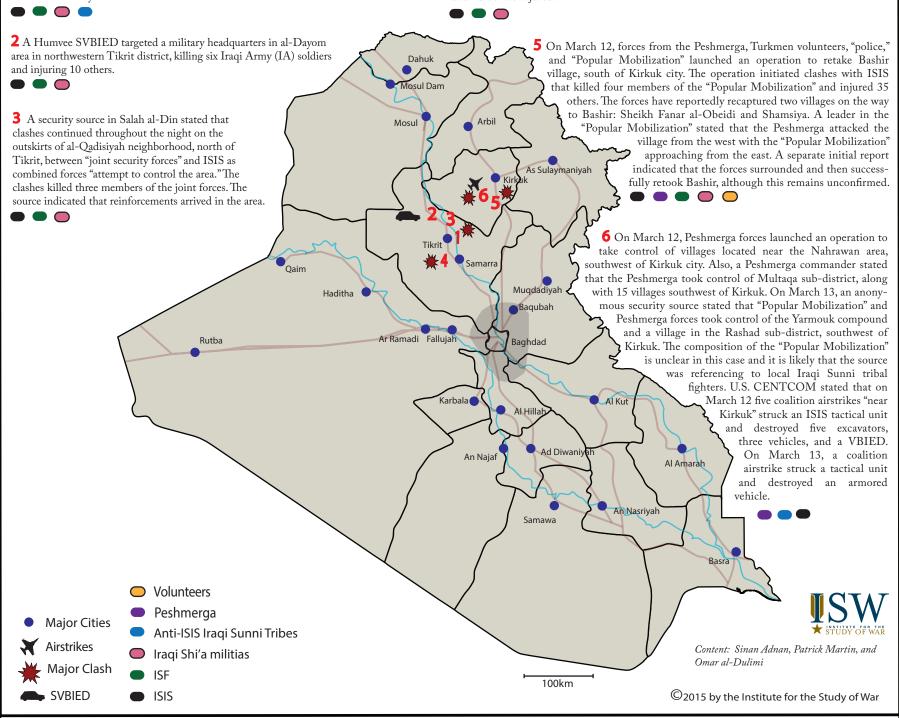
Iraq Situation Report: March 12-13, 2015

1 On March 12, an anonymous security source in Salah al-Din stated that Iraqi army (IA), police, and the "Popular Mobilization" had arrived in central Tikrit. On March 13, an anonymous military source stated that the operation would not advance until reinforcements arrived. Leader of Badr Organization Hadi al-Ameri expressed confidence in a positive outcome from the fight but maintained that the combined forces needed time. In a recent statement Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi claimed that security forces and the "Popular Mobilization" fully controlled Tikrit.

4 On March 13, a source in the command of the "Popular Mobilization" stated that ISIS launched an attack on al-Hwesh area, west of Samarra, that lasted throughout the night. ISIS initiated the attack by deploying what was reported to be over two dozen SVBIEDs that were foiled by members of the Nujaba Movement, although this report may be exaggerated. Clashes erupted after the initial attack with the Nujaba Movement and Federal Police battling ISIS leaving a reported 75 ISIS members and eight members of the "Popular Mobilization" dead and 10 others injured.



Various Iraqi forces are pressuring ISIS on three different fronts, all of which are of strategic importance to the organization. ISIS will therefore likely attempt to escalate its attacks elsewhere to divert the resources of these forces. In Salah ad-Din, which has been the main effort, the ISF and militias have been engaging ISIS since March 2, 2014 and the operation has been largely successful although the status of Tikrit remains unconfirmed at the current time. In the north, the Peshmerga with the likely support of local Iraqi Sunni tribal fighters from the Obeid tribe initiated a wide operation to dislodge ISIS from areas of southwestern Kirkuk. If this operation continues further toward the west, this would indicate that it aims at dislodging ISIS from the province rather than solely protecting Kirkuk city from ISIS attacks. Also, on March 12, Governor of Kirkuk Najm al-Din Karim stated that Hawija, an ISIS stronghold in southwestern Kirkuk, will be retaken by the "coordination" between the Peshmerga, "federal forces" and "Popular Mobilization" coming from Salah ad-Din, and local residents. This statement suggests that a deal may have been reached allowing Iraqi forces to enter the province for the purposes of this operation. This cooperation would be significant, as the Kirkuk government has previously expressed opposition to allowing federal forces to operate in the province. At the same time, Hawija has been a source of ISIS attacks against Kirkuk city, making it a priority for the Peshmerga to seek reinforcements to clear. Meanwhile, the previously mentioned operation to retake Garma, northwest of Fallujah, from ISIS is continuing, involving ISF, militas, and local fighters from Garma.