

# Iraq Situation Report: March 18-20, 2015

**1** On March 20, a Bani Qais tribal leader stated that ISIS had surrounded the Zarea area, south of Baiji, on four sides, threatening 300 families. Nafus called for immediate help from the security forces. A security source stated that ISIS members were “1km” away from al-Zarea and threatened 200 families. ISIS had also taken “full control” of Malha village, south of Baiji.

**2** On March 18, security forces began an “intensive” artillery bombardment of ISIS positions in central Tikrit. An AAH spokesperson stated that the Tikrit operation had been delayed for tactical reasons. He added that security forces had prepared to conduct the operation without civilian casualties. However, he stated that the civilians that remained in ISIS-held areas had “refused” to leave their homes.

**3** On March 18, MoD stated that a force from the 5th Division and the “Popular Mobilization” cleared an unspecified number of villages “towards Tuz Khurmatu,” encountering “no resistance” from ISIS members. IA Aviation destroyed seven vehicles carrying weapons and an armored vehicle. The 5th Division’s Engineering Unit also cleared IEDs in the area. MoD added that “many” IDP families had returned to their recaptured villages.

**4** On March 19, the Golden Division supported by coalition air cover and IA conducted clearing operations in Haouz, 20th Street, Armil, Iskan, and “other” neighborhoods in Ramadi, killing 14 ISIS members. A security source coalition airstrike targeted an ISIS “den” in Tamim neighborhood in western Ramadi, killing seven ISIS members and destroying a vehicle. Coalition airstrikes also targeted ISIS in Albu Dhiab Island and Thar Thar, and destroyed a convoy of five vehicles near Salim Bridge, north of Ramadi.

**5** On March 19, the Anbar provincial chairman stated that “major” advances were made by “security forces” in recapturing the Jazeera and Mamal areas, west of Garma, and Rood and Hamria areas, north of Garma. On March 20, a security source in Salah al-Din stated that a force from the 1st Rapid Response Division, “Popular Mobilization,” and tribal fighters had surrounded ISIS fighters in Garma from all sides. MoD stated that a BOC force killed 16 ISIS fighters and dismantled 117 IEDs in central and eastern Garma.

**6** On March 19, MoD stated that an IA Aviation airstrike in Fallujah killed the ISIS “military planner” in Anbar province, Maher Ahsan, and two ISIS leaders in charge of rigging explosives in Fallujah. Another IA Aviation airstrike targeted an ISIS “rocket storage facility” in Saqlawiyah area, northwest of Fallujah, destroying 140 rockets and killing those inside.

**7** On March 20, ISIS members attacked on Dujila village, north of Samarra. The “Popular Mobilization” repelled the attack, killing “dozens” of ISIS members, but suffered three killed and seven wounded.

**8** On March 18, a security source in Diyala province stated that “unidentified individuals” killed the head of al-Khalis Appeals Court, Samer al-Anbaki and one of his body guards as they were leaving the court building, northwest of Baqubah district. However, another security source stated that al-Anbaki was targeted while he was inside a car on the road that connects al-Khalis and Baqubah. An Anbaki tribal leader warned that his tribe will no longer allow its 3,000 tribal fighters to participate in the “Popular Mobilization” if the government does not take “urgent action.”

**9** On March 19, an anonymous local source in Diyala stated that more than 40 families had been denied permission to return to their homes in villages north of Muqdadiyah district, northeast of Baqubah, on grounds that they collaborated with ISIS. More than 1,200 families have returned to 40 villages in the area north of Muqdadiyah district.

**10** On March 19, unidentified gunmen fired from a car on a checkpoint manned by police and Awakening members in Hur Rajab in southern Baghdad, killing three checkpoint personnel and wounding six others.



- Major Cities
- ⊗ Execution
- ✈ Airstrikes
- ★ Major Clash
- Iraqi Shi'a militias
- ISF
- ISIS
- Unknown Gunmen
- Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- Coalition

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Iraqi Security Forces and Iraqi Shi'a militias have begun to shell Tikrit. Shelling may disrupt ISIS within the city, making further advances to clear ISIS possible. Shelling will also likely inflict civilian casualties, which may have divisive consequences. Shelling alone will not destroy ISIS in Tikrit, nor remove its control of the city. The ISF shelled Fallujah heavily in the early months of 2014, and ISIS still remains in control of the town. ISIS attacked north and south of Tikrit on March 20, likely attempting to make gains or divert attention from ongoing operations in Tikrit. The ISIS attacks north of Tikrit were more substantial, with ISIS reportedly gaining control of new villages west of the river and immediately south of Baiji. These ISIS positions may allow ISIS to remain active in Salah ad-Din while the battle for Tikrit unfolds, possibly renewing attacks upon Baiji from the western desert. Meanwhile, in Anbar province, elements of the Iraqi Security Forces, Shi'a militias, and the “Popular Mobilization” attacked ISIS in Ramadi and north of Fallujah. The reporting about these operations suggest new gains by the ISF, but not definitive outcomes to clear ISIS from them. Both ISIS and anti-ISIS forces are active in Salah ad-Din and Anbar simultaneously.