

Iraq Situation Report: March 21-23, 2015

1 On March 21, an anonymous Ninewa local source stated that ISIS executed five Peshmerga members in Hamam al-Alil area, south of Mosul. On March 23, ISIS executed a television station journalist in “southern Ninewa.”



2 On March 21, an anonymous security source in Baiji stated that three ISIS members with SVESTs attempted to enter al-Mazraa village, south of Baiji, but were killed by tribal fighters from the Qaysi tribe. On March 23, security forces and the “Popular Mobilization” killed an ISIS member wearing an SVEST in Malha village, south of Baiji. “Clashes” also broke out between ISIS and “Popular Mobilization” members in the Fatha area, northeast of Baiji, resulting in three “Popular Mobilization” members killed. On March 22 tribal leader of the Qaysi tribe, Sheik Ghalib al-Nafous, called on Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi and the Shi’a religious authority to intervene to save 300 families in al-Mazraa village as it has been surrounded by ISIS for the past five days.



3 On March 21, three ISIS members wearing SVESTs attempted to target “security forces” on the International Road north of Fallujah but were killed before detonating their explosives.



4 On March 21, ISIS launched an unspecified number of Katyusha rockets and mortars at the al-Baghdadi housing complex, west of Hit district, killing two civilians and wounding five others.



5 On March 22, an anonymous security source in Anbar stated that ISIS attacked the Anbar anti-terrorism directorate headquarters in central Ramadi, and fired “several” mortar shells at the adjacent Palace of Justice which houses a prison and a court. IA, police, and tribal fighters repelled the attack, killing and wounding a “large number” of ISIS members. Clashes reportedly occurred in Andalus, Haouz, Albu Dhiab, and Jazirat al-Khalidiya in and near Ramadi, killing 22 ISIS members.



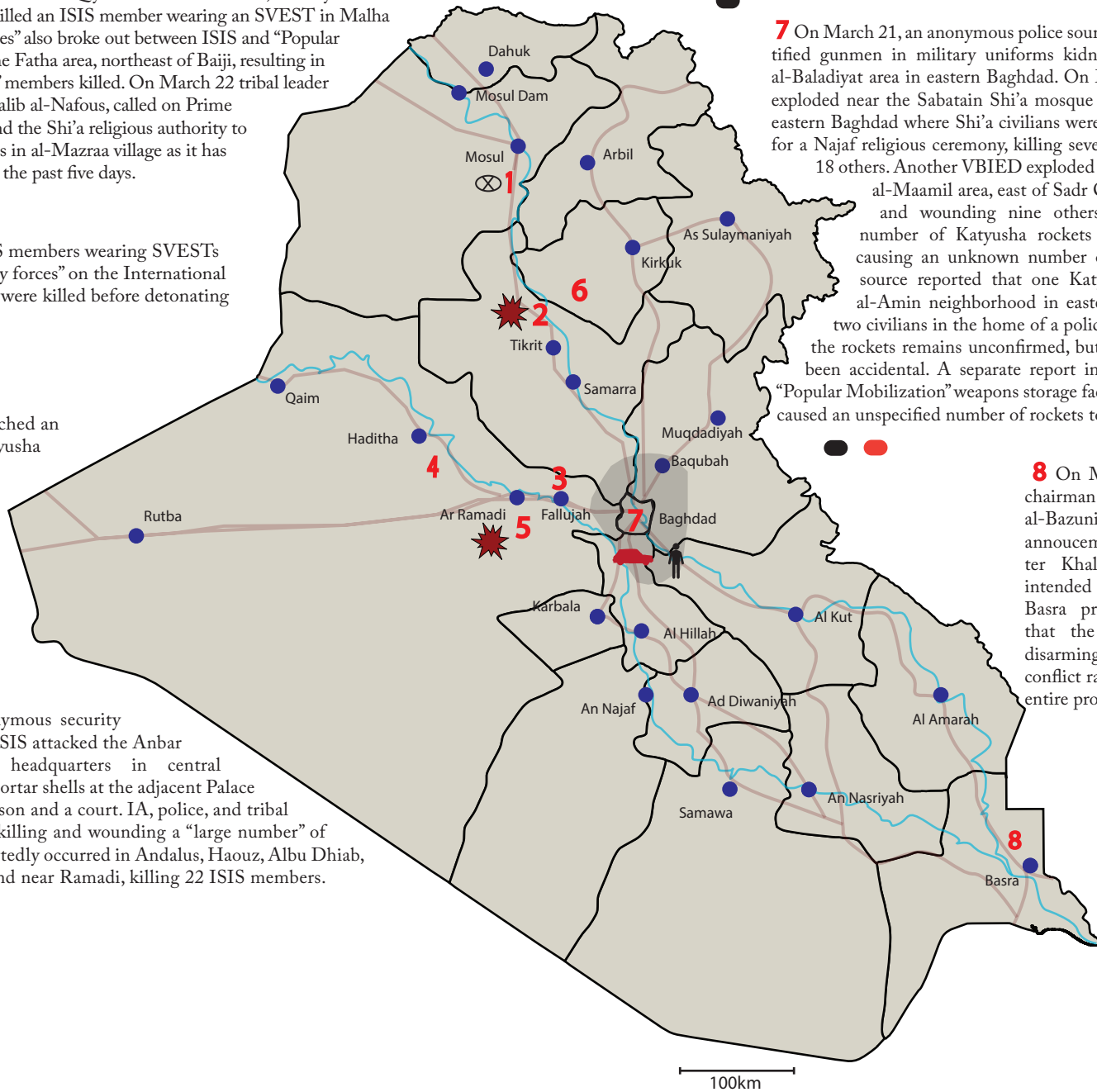
6 On March 21, anonymous “local” sources in Hawija stated that ISIS brought “dozens” of trucks to Riyadh sub-district, southwest of Kirkuk, and took “tens of thousands” of tons of wheat to Mosul to sell or transfer to Syria. The sources stated that the wheat sales were to make up for the loss of oil revenue from the Tikrit area oil fields. On March 23, an anonymous local Kirkuk source stated that ISIS had transferred members in “a large convoy” from Mosul to Hawija and appointed a Chechen member to be the new administrator of Hawija.



7 On March 21, an anonymous police source reported that unidentified gunmen in military uniforms kidnapped a civilian in the al-Baladiyat area in eastern Baghdad. On March 23, two VBIEDs exploded near the Sabatain Shi’a mosque in the Habibiya area of eastern Baghdad where Shi’a civilians were registering their names for a Najaf religious ceremony, killing seven people and wounding 18 others. Another VBIED exploded near a popular market in al-Maamil area, east of Sadr City, killing three people and wounding nine others. Also, an unspecified number of Katyusha rockets landed in al-Baladiyat causing an unknown number of casualties. A second source reported that one Katyusha rocket landed in al-Amin neighborhood in eastern Baghdad, wounding two civilians in the home of a police member. The origin of the rockets remains unconfirmed, but the launches may have been accidental. A separate report indicated that a fire at a “Popular Mobilization” weapons storage facility in eastern Baghdad caused an unspecified number of rockets to fire.



8 On March 22, Basra council chairman Sabah Hassan al-Bazuni objected to a recent announcement by Defense Minister Khalid al-Obeidi that he intended to disarm “all parts” of Basra province. Bazuni argued that the focus should be on disarming tribes and reducing conflict rather than disarming the entire province.



- Major Clash
- Major Cities
- VBIED
- Iraqi Shi’a militias
- ISF
- Execution
- Kidnapping
- ISIS
- Unknown Gunmen
- Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- Peshmerga

Content: Sinan Adnan, Patrick Martin, and Omar al-Dulimi
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The deployments of ISF units from the south to various fronts in western and northern Iraq between December 2013 and the present has caused a security vacuum in the southern provinces. This is especially true in Basra, where tribal rivalries have resulted recently in continued armed confrontations with security forces unable to contain them. On March 17, Commander of Basra Operations Command (BaOC) General Bassim al-Taei announced the formation of a new battalion to operate under the BaOC. The battalion is composed of members of private security companies, illustrating the lack of manpower available under the BaOC. Faced with these challenges, Defense Minister Khalid al-Obeidi announced his intention on March 21 to disarm “all parts” of Basra. This decision is unlikely to be successfully implemented given the limited resources available. Also, this decision has faced opposition from local officials closely affiliated with Iraqi Shi’a militias. Ahmed al-Sultani, a leader of the Badr Organization in the local government, and Karim Nouri, a spokesperson for the “Popular Mobilization,” both rejected the notion of disarming the entire province. Basra was the site of intense clashes between the ISF and militias in 2008 when former PM Nouri al-Maliki ordered an operation after the growing size and influence of the militias threatened the state. The central government will likely be faced with similar challenges in the future if the threat of ISIS is successfully addressed. Other factors have also had a destabilizing influence. Basra is home to the vital Um Qasir port, where different business and political rivalries sometimes manifest in violent ways. Additionally, many Basrawis are supportive of an independent Basra region citing weak political representation and poor service provision given the province’s relative economic vibrancy. Politically, the local government of Basra may see changes to its political representation. Although currently headed by a member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the State of Law Alliance of former PM Maliki is looking to make changes. On March 19, 2015, Hussam Abu al-Hil, a spokesperson for the State of Law Alliance (SLA) in Basra, noted that three members from other blocs have joined the Badr Organization, a component of the SLA. He claimed that this gives the SLA 19 out of 35 seats, sufficient to enact changes in the local government.