

Iraq Situation Report: March 26-27, 2015

1 On March 26, a Peshmerga source stated that “intense” coalition airstrikes targeted ISIS “strongholds and gatherings” in the al-Nuran, al-Shalalat, and Khursabad areas northeast of Mosul killing “dozens” of ISIS members.



2 On March 26, ISIS fighters attacked the Akha residential complex in Amiriyat al-Fallujah, southeast of Fallujah with Katyusha rockets and mortars, resulting in an unknown number of casualties.



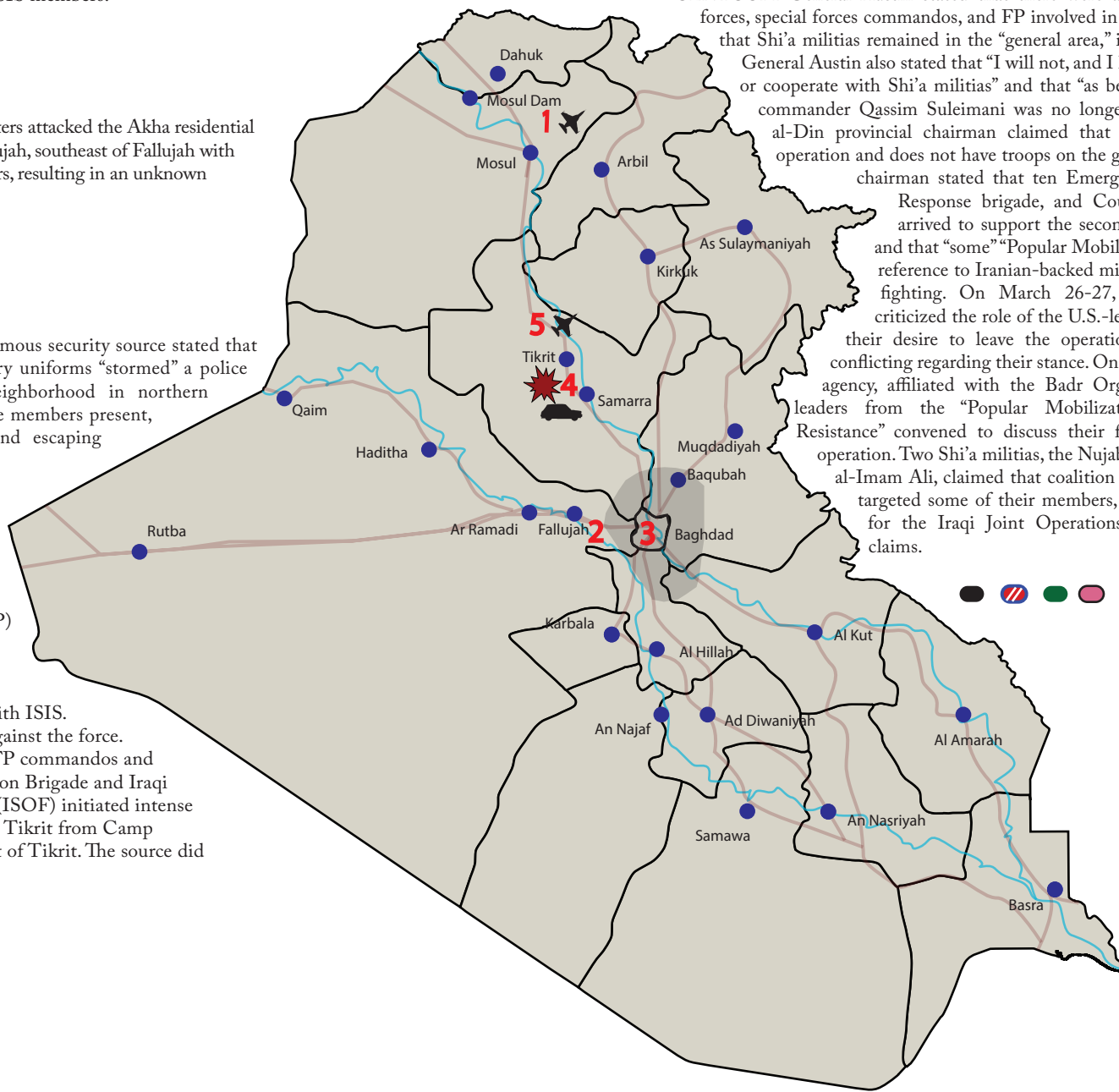
3 On March 26, an anonymous security source stated that 40 gunmen wearing military uniforms “stormed” a police station in the Qahira neighborhood in northern Baghdad, beating the police members present, taking their cellphones, and escaping with one of the prisoners.



4 On March 26, a source from the Federal Police (FP) stated that FP forces launched an attack against southern Tikrit from Ouja, initiating intense clashes with ISIS. ISIS used five SVBIEDs against the force. Also, a combined force of FP commandos and troops from a Rapid Reaction Brigade and Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) initiated intense clashes with ISIS attacking Tikrit from Camp Speicher, located northwest of Tikrit. The source did not report casualties.



5 On March 25, U.S. and coalition forces launched airstrikes in support of ISF in Tikrit at the request of the Iraqi government. On March 26, Commander of CENTCOM General Austin stated that there were about 4,000 Iraqi regular forces, special forces commandos, and FP involved in the Tikrit operation, and that Shi'a militias remained in the “general area,” including across the river. General Austin also stated that “I will not, and I hope we never, coordinate or cooperate with Shi'a militias” and that “as best he knew” Quds Force commander Qassim Suleimani was no longer in the area. The Salah al-Din provincial chairman claimed that Iran is not leading the operation and does not have troops on the ground. On March 26, the chairman stated that ten Emergency Battalions, a Rapid Response brigade, and Counter Terrorism Services arrived to support the second phase of the operation and that “some” “Popular Mobilization” groups, in a likely reference to Iranian-backed militias, withdrew from the fighting. On March 26-27, Iranian-backed militias criticized the role of the U.S.-led coalition and expressed their desire to leave the operation, although reports are conflicting regarding their stance. On March 27, Ghadeer news agency, affiliated with the Badr Organization, reported that leaders from the “Popular Mobilization” and the “Islamic Resistance” convened to discuss their future role in the Tikrit operation. Two Shi'a militias, the Nujaba Movement and Katai'b al-Imam Ali, claimed that coalition airstrikes near Tikrit had targeted some of their members, although a spokesperson for the Iraqi Joint Operations Command denied the claims.



-  Major Clash
-  Coalition
-  Major Cities
-  ISF
-  SVBIED
-  Airstrikes
-  Iraqi Shi'a militias
-  ISIS

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Iranian-backed militias have exhibited mixed reactions to the participation of the U.S.-led coalition in the Tikrit operation. Militia forces are posturing themselves as capable, independent forces that do not require U.S. support in order to succeed on the battlefield. They had previously maintained this reputation through military successes against ISIS in various areas of eastern and southern Iraq, but the stalling of operations in Tikrit dealt a blow to this narrative. An increased, successful role for the U.S. coalition also challenges this narrative, and the militias will likely therefore continue to reject such a role. Iranian-backed militias have also alleged that the coalition targeted their members, allegations similar to rumors that have spread that the U.S.-led coalition is in fact supporting ISIS, including through air-dropped supplies. Militias will likely maintain this negative narrative, rejecting U.S. participation; they may, however, resume their participation in the Tikrit operation once or if coalition airstrikes wind down.