

Iraq Situation Report: March 2, 2015

1 A mortar round landed “near” the Askari Shrine in Samarra. The source did not report any casualties or damage to the shrine.

2 IP commander in Diyala General Jamil al-Shamari stated that “security forces” blocked the road between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan. He added that the road will be reopened after the areas between Salah ad-Din and Diyala are cleared.

3 A security source from Diyala stated that three Emergency Battalions from the “police” and three “special tasks” companies moved from Diyala toward Salah ad-Din to support the operation there. A “tribal” leader stated that “Iraqi forces” arrived on the outskirts of Alam, east of Tikrit, and that ISIS evacuated its casualties from Alam’s hospital in the area expecting shelling against the facility.

4 IA and FP from Samarra Operations Command (SOC) supported by the “Popular Mobilization” clashed with ISIS and took control of the residential compound in Dour, located two miles south of the main area of Dour sub-district, and freed 13 previously kidnapped IP members. A report later indicated that the forces took control of Dour supported by Iraqi aircraft and that 23,000 “security elements” are taking part in the operation. Also, an explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) unit from the FP reportedly dismantled “104” IEDs on the road between Samarra and Dour, “particularly” in the Sheikh Mohammed area northeast of Samarra. A tanker VBIED detonated in the Sheikh Mohammed area killing one individual and injuring four others.

5 “Security forces” and “Popular Mobilization” forces reportedly cleared a college campus located 2 km south of Tikrit. The source added that the forces will advance to clear the local government building in the city.

6 Three gunmen wearing Suicide Vests (SVESTs) reportedly clashed with a joint force from the IA and IP in Mitibja area, south of Samarra.

7 On March 1, IA aviation targeted “ISIS hideouts” in central Tikrit. On March 2, the combined forces reportedly made several advances. An anonymous security source stated that military reinforcements from the Iraqi Special Operations Forces and “Popular Mobilization” had arrived at Camp Speicher, west of Tikrit, and that forces positioned north and west of Tikrit are tasked with clearing the city itself and are “awaiting orders” to do so. A tribal leader from Salah ad-Din, Wanas Jbara, stated that 4,500 tribal fighters from the province are participating in the operation.

8 Commander of Jazeera and Badia Operations Command (JBOC) General Dhia Kadhum stated that forces from the IP, FP, IA, and the Golden Division, supported by the international coalition, launched an operation to clear the Juba area, north of Baghdadi. An anonymous security source stated that ISIS executed “dozens” of youth in Juba before “fleeing” to Hit, east of Baghdadi.

9 Spokesperson of the “Popular Mobilization” Ahmed al-Asadi stated that ISF and “Popular Mobilization” took control of Jalam, Rissasi, Banat al-Hasan, and Abu Shwarub Bridge, northeast of Samarra.

10 An anonymous security source stated that ISIS destroyed buildings in the Ghizalani camp, located south of Mosul, using IEDs. Also, a “local” source stated that ISIS destroyed the buildings of Ninewa Operations Command and the Anti-Terrorism Directorate in Mosul using IEDs.

11 “Security forces” supported by the “Popular Mobilization” reportedly entered Qadisiyah neighborhood, north of Tikrit, killing and injuring “dozens” of ISIS members and taking control of “some” areas in the neighborhood. The clashes also killed eight members of the “Popular Mobilization” and injured 42 others.



Content: Sinan Adnan and ISW Iraq Team
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Intense clashes erupted today as the ISF, Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a militias, and Iraqi Sunni anti-ISIS fighters advanced toward ISIS positions on the outskirts of the Tikrit and strategic areas south, north, and east of the city. Many reports emerged indicating that the combined forces had seized terrain from ISIS, but these reports remain preliminary and unconfirmed. Dour, southeast of Tikrit, appears to have witnessed the most intense clashes. A component of the operation appears to be the deployment of additional forces to areas northeast of Samarra where ISIS has previously enjoyed wide freedom of movement. This deployment likely seeks to prevent ISIS from launching a surprise attack on Samarra that would compel the combined forces to divert resources away from Tikrit and its environs. Samarra is a sensitive area that contains the Imam Askari Shrine. ISIS targeted the shrine using indirect fire, although the attack was reported to be unsuccessful. ISIS will likely attempt to conduct similar attacks as the operation continues. The operation does not currently have international coalition air support, as confirmed by a statement from Pentagon spokesperson Col. Steve Warren. With the exception of operations in Amerli and Baiji, international coalition air support of ISF and militia offensives has been absent during military operations where Iranian-backed militias play a major role. Meanwhile, pictures surfaced in Iranian news outlets showing Qassem Sulaimani, the commander of Iran's expeditionary Quds Force, in what was portrayed to be areas near Tikrit. This is not the first time Sulaimani has appeared during major operations, and his role as an “adviser” to the Iranian-backed militias has been publicized and confirmed by senior militia leaders like Hadi al-Ameri and Qassim al-Araji. He has also appeared in pictures alongside Qays al-Khazali, leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq; Shibl al-Zaidi, leader of Kata'ib al-Imam Ali; and others. It is unclear if the absence of the coalition airstrikes is at the request of the militias or because of a desire by the U.S.-led coalition to refrain from working with such militias. The presence of an Iranian general, other Iranian advisors, and Shi'a militias on the ground alongside Iraqi Sunni fighters to retake a major Sunni provincial capital will be a significant test case for the success of similar future anti-ISIS operations. The success of an operation of this importance would be a positive sign for the possibility of an operation to retake other major cities, including Mosul.