

# Iraq Situation Report: April 7-8, 2015

**1** On April 8, the official spokesperson of the PUK stated that ISIS launched an attack on the Nasr neighborhood in northwestern Sinjar. However, Peshmerga, YPG, and PKK forces assisted by coalition air support foiled the attack. On April 7, a force from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) arrested a Yazidi military leader in Sinjar for allegedly refusing to fall under the control of the Peshmerga. A PUK leader criticized the arrest.

**2** On April 7, the central government with local government approval appointed former 12th Division Commander Maj. Gen. Muhammad al-Fahdawi to lead the "Popular Mobilization" in Anbar. On April 8, an MoD spokesperson stated that MoD would arm "more than 10,000" tribal and "Popular Mobilization" fighters under four brigades, but that distributing arms would "not be easy" due to MoI and MoD regulations. Local fighters under the local government would secure recaptured areas. A council member stated that MoD distributed light weapons to 1,500 "Popular Mobilization" fighters from Amiriyat al-Fallujah at the Habbaniyah base. PM Haidar al-Abadi arrived at Habbaniyah base to meet with local and security leaders about Anbar operations. The Office of the PM distributed images of the PM handing weapons to local fighters affirming reports about arming the Anbari tribes.

**3** On April 7, an Anbar Operations Command (AOC) source stated that IA, tanks, and armored vehicles arrived in Ramadi as reinforcements. An IP member stated that a curfew has been imposed over Ramadi after the launch of a major security operation to clear the Sijariya area, east of Ramadi, from the east, south, and west. On April 8, the Anbar provincial chairman announced the start of operations to retake Anbar. A security source stated that the operation targeted areas east of Ramadi, including Sijariya, Jazirat al-Ramadi, Albu Ghanim, and Albu Suda. Further, a security source stated that 30 transport vehicles carrying Abrams tanks, IA, and Federal Police forces arrived the areas east of Ramadi. A Golden Division source stated that the Golden Division and tribal fighters cleared "80 percent" of Sijariya, killing 14 ISIS members and destroying four VBIEDs and nine vehicles outfitted with medium and heavy weapons. The Anbar security advisor stated that the Iraqi Air Force targeted boats carrying "dozens" of "fleeing" ISIS members from Sijariya and Albu Ghanim. A tribal leader stated that security forces, tribal fighters, and coalition airstrikes targeted the Hamdhiya area from the north and east. KH claimed that it is participating in the operation providing indirect fire support, although this remains unconfirmed.

**4** On April 6, ISIS members captured the Alas oil field, northeast of Tikrit, after "violent clashes" with security forces, who recaptured the area "hours later." Also, an ISIS sniper killed the commander of the 8th Diyala Emergency Battalion in Alas Oil Field, northeast of Tikrit. However, another report stated that the commander was killed in the Mutibija area, between Diyala and Salah ad-Din. On April 8, an MoD spokesperson stated that ISIS members hiding among civilians in recaptured areas attacked the oil field while security forces were busy securing roads and assisting civilians.

**5** On April 7, a Peshmerga source stated that a coalition airstrike targeted an ISIS convoy of "several" vehicles in Mahuz village, west of Kirkuk, destroying seven vehicles, killing 36 ISIS members, and wounding 16 others. Coalition airstrikes also targeted unspecified villages and a weapons cache in Hawija district, southwest of Kirkuk, killing 22 ISIS members.













**6** On April 7, MoD stated that a joint force consisting of the 66th Infantry Brigade, Special Operations, and "Popular Mobilization" conducted a security operation in the Qadisiya neighborhood, north of Tikrit, killing 20 "terrorists" inside a house who were intending to operate in the area. A security source in Salah al-Din stated that an ISIS member threw a grenade at and killed the Salah al-Din "explosives director" as he was inspecting houses for IEDs in Shuhada neighborhood, north of Tikrit. However, another report stated that the director was killed by a House-borne IED (HBIED).

**7** On April 6, a Dhi Qar council member stated that 70 "Popular Mobilization" members from Dhi Qar were "killed, wounded, and missing" in an ISIS ambush in the Hamrin Mountains in Diyala province, including a former Dhi Qar council member. On April 7, security forces and the "Popular Mobilization" launched a "wide operation" in the Hamrin Mountains against ISIS. On April 8, a security source in Diyala stated that ISIS launched an attack on al-Faka area, located north of Udhaim on the border between Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala. "Security forces" repelled the attack, killing "more than" 60 ISIS fighters and destroying 20 vehicles.

However, ten "security forces" were killed and ten were injured.

**8** On April 7, a source in the External Roads Directorate, under Anbar Police Command, stated that ISIS launched an attack from three axes on the headquarters of the External Roads Directorate located in the "70 km" area, west of Ramadi. A joint force from the Directorate, local Iraqi Police (IP), and Federal Police (FP), assisted by the Iraqi Air Force, repelled the attack, destroying five ISIS vehicles outfitted with heavy machine guns.



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The Government of PM Abadi and the local Anbari Government are embarking on a major undertaking to recapture areas of Anbar Province that fell out of government control in early 2014. Despite media reports indicating that the operations in Anbar were launched in all of the province, reports of kinetic engagements and statements from local tribal leaders indicate otherwise. Nevertheless, the initiation of a government effort to provide further arms to Anbari tribes and the appointment of a military leader for the Anbaris indicate the seriousness of the government in pursuing its next objective, and that major operations are likely nearing. ISIS controls six out of eight districts centers across Anbar and heavily contests the provincial capital, Ramadi. Therefore, the timeline for Anbar operations is most likely to be much longer than the other anti-ISIS operations that have been launched since June of 2014. Given the vast extent of areas to be recaptured, the operations will also require much more manpower. Therefore, the support and arming of local tribes will play a crucial role. In other provinces, anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni tribes have mostly played a minor role in operations to recapture territories from ISIS and other insurgent groups. In contrast, the strong tribal nature of Anbar as well as the history of the province as the birthplace of the anti-Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) "Awakening" in 2005 will likely provide for a larger tribal role in the upcoming operations. The tribal nature of the area can at times pose an obstacle, as various tribes pursue their own interests. This can be seen in reports that emerged yesterday of intra-tribal conflict between the Dulaim and Albu Fahad tribes over leadership of the Anbari anti-ISIS efforts. Tribal dynamics will thus play an important role as the situation unfolds. There are no clear signs regarding the future role of Iranian-backed militias in Anbar operations. The claim from KH regarding its participation in Sijariya is not representative of the other militias as this is not the first time KH has claimed to launch indirect fire on Sijariya. Additionally, we have not seen announcements from militias regarding Anbar or reports of their participation on the ground. In the north, meanwhile, the KDP arrest of the Yazidi leader near Sinjar sheds light on KDP concerns of other groups challenging it for control of areas they have historically believed to be rightfully theirs.