

Iraq Situation Report: May 16-18, 2015

1 On May 15, a Nujaba Movement (NM) commander stated that the NM's "30th Brigade" was fighting to recapture the Harariat area of Garma sub-district, northeast of Fallujah. On May 17, a 1st Division source stated that security forces destroyed two ISIS SVBIEDs targeting a battalion headquarters in Harariat. Meanwhile, Baghdad Operations Command (BOC) announced continued operations in Garma on May 18 which dismantled several VBIEDs and killed seven ISIS members, while Iraqi Shi'a militia Saraya Ashura also claimed a presence in the area. On May 18, Military Intelligence stated that rocket strikes killed 37 ISIS members in Fallujah and Harariat. Meanwhile, DoD claimed four airstrikes targeting ISIS "near Fallujah" between May 15 and May 17.

2 The ISIS-initiated attack on central Ramadi launched on May 15, 2015, continued through May 16 and 17. The ISF withdrew from the Government Complex to Anbar Operations Command (AOC) on May 15 as ISIS captured several neighborhoods around the Complex after heavy clashes. On May 16, ISIS vacated the Government Complex and positioned itself in the surrounding neighborhoods following coalition airstrikes in a likely effort to avoid airstrikes by entrenching in civilian areas. ISF units in the Justice Palace and the Anbar Terrorism Directorate in central Ramadi remained under siege while ISF in the 8th Brigade Headquarters defended their position in the face of attacks by ISIS. On May 17, ISIS seized the AOC while the ISF withdrew to the "7km" area west of Ramadi. In the east, the ISF blocked the road between Ramadi and Habaniya base to prevent an ISIS attack on Habaniya while ISIS launched an indirect fire attack on the nearby Khaldiya sub-district. In the face of this deteriorating security situation, the PM directed the Popular Mobilization Commission to prepare for an operation in Anbar. The Joint Operations Command (JOC) confirmed that the PM directed the PMC and "all jihadi factions" - a likely reference to the various militia forces - to prepare to enter Ramadi. Militia groups including Kata'ib Hezbollah and the Nujaba Movement placed their members on high alert and ordered those on leave to return to duty in preparation for an operation in Anbar, while Badr Organization leader Hadi al-Ameri reportedly arrived in Habaniya airbase alongside the FP commander to oversee operations. On May 18, IA Aviation extracted 28 ISF personnel from the Malab neighborhood of Ramadi, confirming that the neighborhood fell to ISIS. An unconfirmed report later indicated that ISIS released 400 prisoners in Ramadi including several ISIS leaders.

3 On May 16, a Peshmerga source stated that coalition airstrikes targeted an ISIS gathering in Ashiq village west of Mosul while another airstrike targeted an ISIS convoy in the Badush area northwest of Mosul, killing "dozens" of ISIS members. Between May 16 and 17, DoD stated that five airstrikes targeted ISIS "near Mosul."

4 On May 16, MoD stated that security forces recaptured al-Buajji village, south of Baiji, while a CTS source stated that CTS forces cut off ISIS's supply lines running to Baiji from Siniya sub-district, west of the town. The Salah al-Din provincial council vice chairman stated that CTS, FP, local IP, and the "Popular Mobilization" secured the Sikak and Askari areas of southern Baiji as well as three villages south of Baiji in preparation for an advance on the Baiji oil refinery from two axes. Between May 15 and 17, DoD stated that 11 airstrikes targeted ISIS "near Baiji."

5 On May 16, a MoI source stated that unidentified gunmen killed two men and three women in a home in the Karrada area of central Baghdad. On May 17, a VBIED exploded near a market in the Shurta al-Khamsa neighborhood of southwestern Baghdad, killing at least one civilian and wounding two others.

6 On May 16, a source stated that IA forces withdrew from a military headquarters southeast of Fallujah after ISIS attacked the facility with VBIEDs. A Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) force recaptured the headquarters following clashes with ISIS. On May 17, a local reporter stated that Anbar Operations Command (AOC) blocked the bridge connecting Baghdad with the Amiriyat al-Fallujah sub-district southeast of Fallujah, preventing hundreds of IDPs from Ramadi from entering Baghdad. On the same day, KH stated that a KH force arrived at the 1st Division Headquarters in Camp Mazraa, east of Fallujah, to reinforce the base's defenses.

7 On May 16, MoD stated that Iraqi air force airstrikes targeted three bridges north of al-Baghdadi sub-district near Haditha that ISIS used to attack areas west of the Euphrates River. The strikes killed a "large number" of ISIS members.

8 On May 16, a security source stated that Iraqi airstrikes targeted an ISIS "camp" between Habaniya and Razaza lakes, southwest of Fallujah, killing 60 ISIS members and destroying 12 vehicles.



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Content: Sinan Adnan, Theo Bell, and Patrick Martin
 Graphics: Evan Sterling



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Ramadi, the birthplace of the Sunni tribal Awakening, has fallen out of government control after resisting ISIS for over a year. Although ISIS had seized southern neighborhoods in Ramadi in early 2014, joint ISF-Sunni tribal forces held the key terrain within the city including the Government Complex and Anbar Operations Command (AOC) until May 15-17. Ramadi therefore became a symbol of joint ISF-Sunni resistance to ISIS in Anbar. The fall of the city thus represents a major blow to the security of Iraq in general and of Anbar Province in particular. Ramadi strengthens ISIS's military posture in western Iraq and places ISIS in a position to dictate the terms of battle elsewhere in Anbar province. ISIS's presence in Ramadi severs supply lines connecting Baghdad to ISF-controlled districts in western Anbar, such as Haditha, the Haditha Dam, and al Asad Airbase, which houses U.S. personnel, making them more susceptible to attacks by ISIS. Furthermore, it reinforces the perception of Anbari political leaders of minimal government support from Baghdad. This grievance exists despite the fact that the ISF in Anbar remained intact after ISIS's aggressive 2014 campaign, which caused other ISF units to dissolve or succumb to the dominant influence of Shi'a militias. The PM's call for support from Iraqi Shi'a militias in Anbar thus represents a significant blow to efforts by the Iraqi government and U.S.-led coalition to sideline the Iranian-backed militias following their failure to clear Tikrit in March 2015. This announcement bolsters the narrative that the militias are the true defenders of Iraq and the U.S.-led coalition irrelevant. The fall of Ramadi, coupled with recent successes near the Baiji oil refinery, will likely generate momentum for ISIS that ameliorate its defeat in Tikrit. The risk of follow-on offensives by ISIS elsewhere in Iraq is high, particularly near Baiji, as the ISF determines how to confront the loss of Ramadi. ISIS may launch attacks to reclaim or contest territory in eastern Iraq and the Baghdad belts, which it lost to the ISF and militias in late 2014. ISIS may also seek to leverage its gains to launch an attack on Baghdad itself. ISIS's attack on the 1st IA Division base near the western Baghdad belt indicates that ISIS has reserve forces in eastern Anbar capable of challenging the ISF and militias near the capital, which will further challenge ISF operations to reclaim Ramadi.