

Iraq Situation Report: May 7-8, 2015

1 On May 7, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey stated that the U.S. conducted 26 airstrikes near the Baiji refinery since May 5, 2015 and provided an airdrop to pressured ISF units at the facility. However, an anonymous U.S. official stated that ISIS took control of the "majority of the refinery" and cut ISF supply routes. Meanwhile, the Salah ad-Din chairman stated that a "joint force" deployed to the refinery. Moreover, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and other senior figures from the Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a militia Kata'ib al-Imam Ali met with the commander of Salah ad-Din Operations Command (SDOC) in Camp Speicher. The militia claimed that it will participate in recapturing the refinery and proceeded to post videos allegedly showing its forces advancing in southern Baiji. In addition, the Badr Organization media arm stated that Hadi al-Ameri arrived in Baiji to "change the security equation." On May 8, an Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) spokesperson called for the formation of a joint operations room with the "Popular Mobilization" to recapture the refinery upon a request from residents or an order from the PM.

2 On May 8, a Habaniya police directorate source stated that ISIS attacked Habaniya sub-district, northwest of Fallujah, from Jazeera al-Khalidiya, west of Habaniya. Habaniya Directorate IP, tribal fighters, local IP, and "other security forces" repelled the attack, inflicting "heavy" ISIS losses.

3 On May 7, a SVBIED targeted the convoy of the new Salah al-Din Operations Commander (SDOC) near the Electricity Directorate building in Baiji as the convoy headed towards the Hyundai Bridge connecting Baiji district with Seneya to the west. The commander was unharmed, but his nephew was killed and three bodyguards were injured.

4 On May 7, a police source stated that unidentified gunmen wearing black military uniforms kidnapped five people from their home in Nereya area of eastern Baghdad. BOC stated that the Intelligence Directorate and MoI Counter-Terrorism with the 54th Brigade disarmed a VBIED in al-Mansur area in western Baghdad. Unidentified gunmen "decapitated" two men, two women, and two children from one family in their home in Radhwaniya, west of Baghdad. On May 8, a MoI source stated that IP found three bodies bearing gunshot wounds in al-Bakria area in western Baghdad.

5 On May 7, the media director for the Popular Mobilization in Diyala stated that in coordination with Diyala local government and the Popular Mobilization Directorate in Diyala will begin recruiting local fighters to close current "security gap" caused by the deployment of local forces to remote areas. On May 8, a MoI spokesperson stated that two VBIEDs detonated near a Shi'a mosque in Balad Ruz district, east of Baquba. At least 15 people were killed, including the Balad Ruz Emergency Battalion commander, and 35 others were wounded. A third VBIED exploded near the Imam Hussein Shi'a mosque in Kana'an sub-district, east of Baquba, killing two people and causing material damage. The exact nature of the attack remains unclear because a separate report stated that the Balad Ruz explosions were caused by a SVBIED and a Suicide Vest (SVEST), while the Kana'an explosion was caused by an SVBIED.

6 On May 7, a security source stated that an SVBIED and an armed attack targeted IP near the Ajil oil fields, northeast of Tikrit, killing 25 IP members and wounding 20 others. A SVBIED also targeted a FP checkpoint in the Hamrin Mountains, east of Tikrit, killing two FP members. A Dija Operations Command (TOC) source later stated that ISIS launched a "wide attack" on the Alas and Ajil oil fields and al-Hamil and al-Asfar villages east of Tikrit, from the direction of the Hamrin Mountains and Sheikh Anwar Asi village. Joint forces of "Popular Mobilization", FP, IA, and tribal fighters repelled the attack.

7 On May 7, DoD stated that one Coalition airstrike targeted an ISIS fighting position "near Fallujah." On May 8, a "Popular Mobilization" commander in Garma stated that IA and "Popular Mobilization," with supported by coalition air support, launched a "major" attack from three axes on central Garma sub-district, northeast of Fallujah, killing 13 ISIS fighters. The forces launched the attack from al-Subaihat, southeast of Garma, Abu Jasim area, northwest of Garma, and Jazeera al-Garma, near Garma.

8 On May 7, a local official stated that the "Kata'ib al-Imam Ali al-Akbar" (KIAA) group of the "Popular Mobilization" "stormed" a security checkpoint at the entrance of Amiriyat al-Fallujah sub-district, south of Fallujah, detaining security forces members and seizing their weapons. Security forces and tribal fighters confronted them, freeing the detainees and forcing KIAA to withdraw. On May 8, a security source stated that 1,000 Amiriyat al-Fallujah tribal fighters began their training in a newly built military base in the sub-district, supervised by a representative of the Prime Minister and a security envoy from MoD and MoI.

9 On May 7, an IP officer stated that a MoI committee arrived in Balad district to transport 60 detained IP officers to Baghdad to be investigated for the killing of 10 Saraya al-Khorasani members. However, the source stated that local residents blocked the roads and prevented the committee from leaving the district with the officers, forcing the committee to question the officers in an FP station in Balad. Interior Minister Muhammad al-Ghaban also arrived in Balad to inspect security operations and conditions inside the district.

10 On May 7, a Salah al-Din security source stated that a tanker Suicide Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED) targeted Shajarat al-Dur Palace in western Tikrit, killing four "security personnel" and wounding 16 others.



Major Cities	VBIED	Execution	ISF	Iraqi Shi'a militias
Major Clash	SVBIED	Kidnapping	ISIS	Peshmerga
Airstrikes			Unknown Gunmen	Coalition
			Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes	



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Graphics: Chris Kozak

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The contest for the Baiji Oil Refinery is accelerating as ISIS cut off supply routes previously used by the ISF and occupied positions within the facility. In response, the U.S.-led coalition has intensified its airstrikes around the facility to assist the ISF. Independently, the Iranian-backed militias are also messaging that they are moving in support of the ISF at the refinery. Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Hadi al-Ameri, allies of the Iranian government and leaders of proxy groups, have made appearances to signal their intent to support. Both were major figures in the second half of 2014 and early 2015 while their militias helped the ISF secure significant victories against ISIS; they have minimized public appearances since the failure of the militias to enter Tikrit prior to U.S. air support. Ameri's reemergence in particular would renew the challenge by Iranian proxy groups to the Iraqi government's leadership over Iraq's security. The success of ISIS against the refinery is adding to Ameri's and other proxies' narrative that their absence in the planning and execution of security operations is the reason for deteriorating security. If the refinery falls to ISIS, such groups will add more pressure on PM Abadi and the Defense Minister as they did recently after a successful ISIS attack of much smaller scale in eastern Anbar. Strategically, the significance of the refinery lies in its location and in its symbolism given that it did not fall despite numerous attacks by ISIS prior to this attack. The facility lacks the necessary staff and most likely suffered too much damage prior to this attack to be used by ISIS to generate revenue. Nevertheless, its capture would represent a psychological boost for ISIS following a recent defeat in Tikrit and would allow it to strengthen its posture in northern Iraq. Baiji is not the only area where ISIS activities are on the rise. SVBIED attacks in Diyala and other recent attacks by ISIS in the province signal a resurgence of ISIS in eastern Iraq. ISIS is also renewing attacks near Tikrit evident by a SVBIED attack on the palace in the city and a ground attack against the oil fields in eastern Salah ad-Din. The resurgence of ISIS on multiple fronts threatens the fall of areas previously recaptured from ISIS by joint operations by the militias and ISF between June 2014 and March 2015. Proxy groups rose through such operations and attained status that could undermine the sovereignty of the state. This new development may give the militias opportunities to leverage their dominance in the east. The Iraqi government is trying to alleviate the need for proxies by giving previously ISF deserters an opportunity to return and by moving toward involving more Anbaris in the fights against ISIS. Nevertheless, such measures do not necessarily match the threat of ISIS on multiple fronts, which may place the government under increasing pressure to call for proxies' support