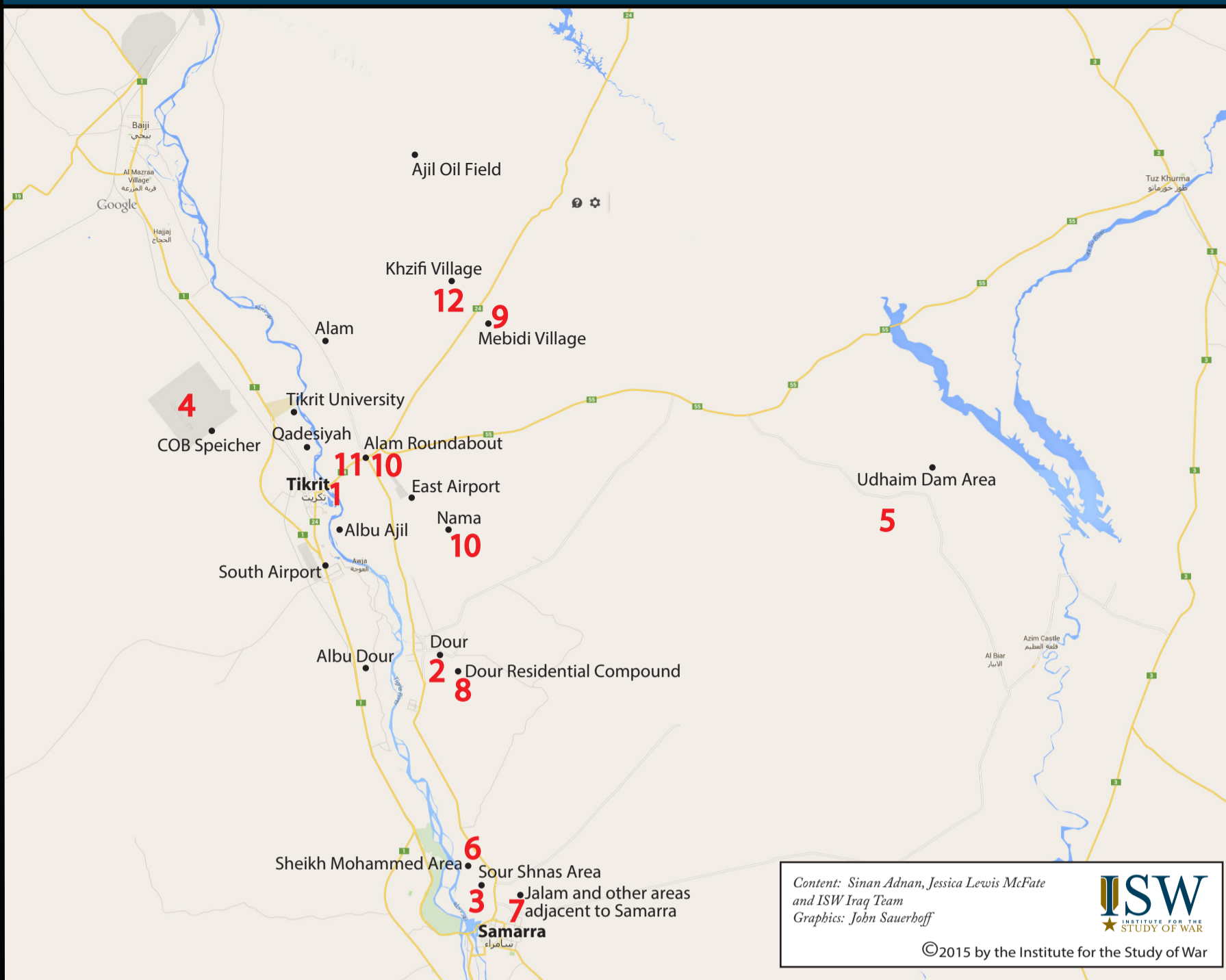


# Tikrit Situation Report: March 4, 2015



- 1** On February 26, a source in the Joint Operations Command stated that a joint force that consisted of Iraqi Army (IA), Federal Police (IP), and “Popular Mobilization” launched rockets from Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) and fired “heavy artillery” targeting “selected” areas of Tikrit. On March 1, IA aviation targeted “ISIS hideouts” in central Tikrit. IA artillery at Camp Speicher also reportedly targeted “ISIS hideouts” in Tikrit killing 23 “ISIS members” and destroying three vehicles.
- 2** On February 28, the IA targeted Dour with artillery. On March 4, clashes erupted as “security forces” launched an attack on the main area of Dour.
- 3** On February 28, ISIS launched an attack on a Federal Police (FP) headquarters in the Sour Shnas area, north of Samarra, using three SVBIEDs and gunmen attempting to storm the headquarters. The attackers reportedly killed one FP member and injured eight others but failed to storm the headquarters. The source did not indicate if the SVBIEDs were detonated during the attack. A report later indicated that “security forces” launched an attack on ISIS in the area killing 22 ISIS members.
- 4** On March 1, an anonymous security source stated that military reinforcements from the Iraqi Special Operations Forces and “Popular Mobilization” arrived at Camp Speicher, west of Tikrit, and that forces positioned north and west of Tikrit were “awaiting orders” to clear the city. On March 4, clashes erupted as “security forces” launched an attack on the main area of Dour.
- 5** On March 2, three Emergency Battalions from the “police” and three “special tasks” companies reportedly moved from Diyala toward Salah ad-Din to support wider operations in Salah ad-Din. On March 3, a source from Salah ad-Din Operations Command stated that IA, IP, and “Popular Mobilization” clashed with ISIS in the Hamrin area, east of Dour; in southeast of Tikrit; and in Abu Rayash village, east of Tikrit and near al-Udhaim Dam, killing three ISIS fighters and injuring five soldiers. The source added “security forces” were able to take control of the areas after the clashes. The source further added that ISIS launched an attack using a Humvee Suicide Vehicle-Borne IED (SVBIED) and a tanker SVBIED around the same area but that “security forces” destroyed the SVBIEDs before they reached their target.
- 6** On March 2, an Explosive Ordinance Disposal 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 Sheikh Mohammed area killing one individual and injuring four others.
- 7** On March 2, 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.
- 8** On March 2, IA and FP from Samarra Operations Command (SOC) “supported by the “Popular Mobilization” clashed with ISIS and occupied the residential compound of Dour. Also, a force from the “Popular Mobilization” freed 16 IP members previously kidnapped by ISIS and killed 10 of the “kidnappers.” On March 4, a source from SOC stated that the combined forces had begun to “clear” the compound.
- 9** On March 3, forces from OJB and DOC reportedly took control of the Mibidi village, northeast of Alam, and blocked the road between Tikrit and Kirkuk. On March 4, the combined forces reportedly also took control of two IP stations near the road.
- 10** On March 3, Iraqi Sunni tribal leader from Salah ad-Din Wanas Jbara who is also the leader of an Iraqi Sunni military formation known as Omaya al-Jbara Battalion (OJB) stated that Sunni fighters under the OJB along with Dijla Operations Command (DOC) forces cleared Nama village, located southeast of Alam. He added that the forces “held” the area and another force moved toward the Alam Roundabout. Another Sunni tribal leader stated that forces from the DOC and the OJB cleared a route from Nama toward Albu Ajil village.
- 11** On March 4, “security forces” reportedly cleared the Zabhat al-Milh village and Nayel al-Rahim farm in the Alam area. Sunni tribal leader Marwan Jbara stated that the forces entered the outskirts of Alam. Another report indicated that IA artillery targeted two ISIS vehicles near the roundabout killing 12 ISIS members.
- 12** On March 4, forces from DOC and OJB reportedly took control of Khzifi Village.

The operation to re-capture Tikrit, prosecuted by the ISF, Shi’a militias, and Sunni tribal forces, has begun with main efforts targeting two areas east of the city, Alam and Dour. Both are controlled by ISIS and represent positions from which ISIS may stage attacks into Diyala or Samarra, which are defensive priorities for the ISF. These ISF-aligned forces are proceeding toward Alam and Dour from two axes: one from the east and one from the south. Despite early reports about clashes on the northern outskirts of the city, it does not appear that Tikrit itself has yet been designated as a main effort for these forces. Clearing Alam and Dour appear to be their current priorities, from which these forces will likely launch further operations toward Tikrit after clearing the areas of ISIS.

The assault force from the east includes ISF elements under Dijla Operations Command, comprised of Iraqi Army and likely also Federal Police, fighting alongside Shi’a militias and Sunni tribal forces. This force moved first in two columns toward Alam and Nama, east of the Tigris. They reportedly cleared Nama on March 4. The forces that cleared Nama may either join in the fight to clear Alam or proceed to the next village, Albu Ajil, also under ISIS’s control. This tactical decision will indicate whether the Tikrit offensive, dominated by Shi’a militias, will spark a sectarian situation within Sunni majority Salah ad-Din. Alam is a rallying cry for Sunnis fighting ISIS. Sunnis in the area were among the first reported to resist ISIS’s control in 2014. Sunni tribal fighters are working to reclaim their homes in a battle for Alam alongside the ISF and Shi’a militias, a battle which bodes extremely well for future cross-sectarian operations. However, Albu Ajil village holds the opposite potential. Some within the ISF, Shi’a militias, and Sunni communities perceive that Sunni tribes from Albu Ajil were complicit in the 2014 execution by ISIS of hundreds of ISF personnel at COB Speicher. If the ISF, Shi’a militias, and Sunni tribal forces from the east instead move to clear Albu Ajil, it could generate sectarian reprisal attacks that cause these forces to fracture. Sectarianism in the heart of Salah ad-Din is therefore a valid concern posed by this Tikrit offensive, while Sunni infighting is also a possibility in the Albu Ajil case.

The greater question is one of Iran’s involvement in the operation. The presence of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps - Quds Force (IRGC-QF) commander Qassim Suleimani raises larger concerns about how the war against ISIS in Iraq will proceed. It raises questions about the independent capability and operational leadership of the ISF, despite the fact that Iraqi leaders clearly wish to re-establish Iraq’s independent security. Iran’s involvement at Tikrit, preceded by numerous other operations to clear ISIS from northern Diyala, eastern Salah ad-Din, Jurf al-Sakhar, and Baiji, calls attention to next steps, and where Iran’s battle plans will stop. The ISF will need to develop a coherent strategy from what appear to be separate developing plans to clear ISIS from Salah ad-Din, Anbar, and Ninewa. The development of disconnected strategies for these areas does not bode well for a unified effort to defeat ISIS in Iraq. This highlights an important and timely opportunity for the US to assist Iraq in developing such a strategy ultimately to defeat ISIS by bolstering Iraq’s sovereignty.