

Iraq Situation Report: July 31-August 3, 2015

1 ISIS recaptures territory in central Baiji. ISIS reportedly recaptured the Asri neighborhood of central Baiji and the area known as the “600” north of Baiji on August 3, though the seizure is not confirmed. ISIS made the gains after the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) reportedly recaptured the headquarters of the “Korean Company” in the Baiji Oil Refinery, north of Baiji on August 1.

2 Protests in Baghdad escalate amid high temperatures and limited electricity. Demonstrators assembled near the Green Zone in Baghdad on July 31, staging peaceful demonstrations protesting poor provision of services and corruption. The protests are still ongoing as of August 3. The ISF in Baghdad have responded without violence, obeying PM Abadi’s orders to be “gentle” with the demonstrators. The protests in Baghdad primarily are directed at the Council of Representatives (CoR) and the Electricity Minister. Protests in southern provinces, specifically in Hila, Nasiriya, Karbala, Muthana, Najaf and Diwaniya, are primarily directed toward local governments.

3 ISF operations ongoing in Ramadi. The ISF made no substantial advances between August 1 and 3. Operations continued east of the city supported by U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi airstrikes.

4 Moqtada al-Sadr seeks reforms within the Sadrist Trend. A security source stated on July 29 that the Najaf Brigade arrested the brother of Abu Dira, a notorious leader in the Trend’s armed wing previously known as Jaysh al-Mahdi. The arrest was part of Moqtada al-Sadr’s campaign against corruption within the Sadrist Trend, announced on July 23.

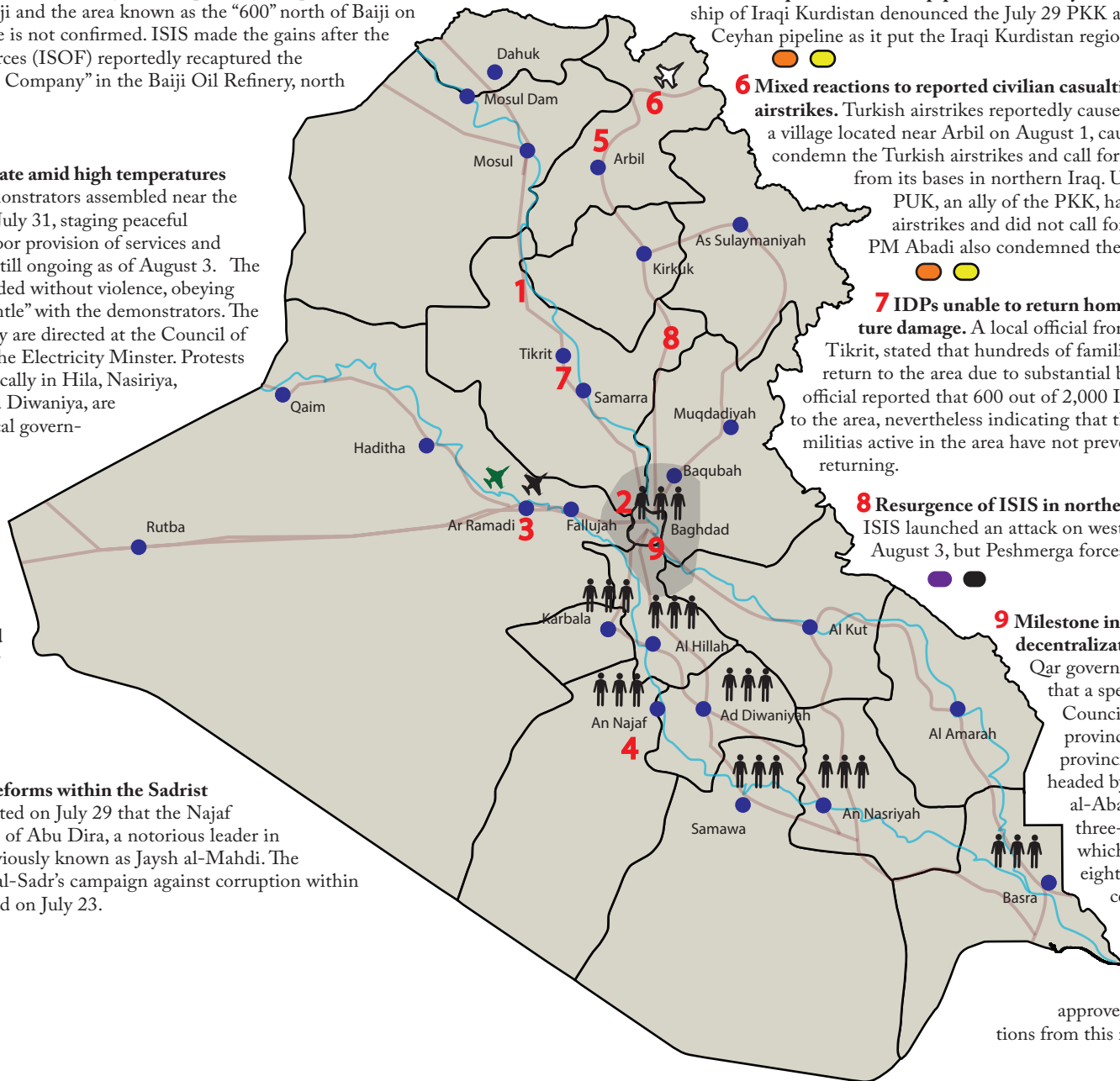
5 PKK attacks Iraqi Kurdistan’s oil pipeline to Turkey. On July 31, the Premiership of Iraqi Kurdistan denounced the July 29 PKK attack on Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline as it put the Iraqi Kurdistan regional economy at risk.

6 Mixed reactions to reported civilian casualties from Turkish airstrikes. Turkish airstrikes reportedly caused civilian casualties in a village located near Arbil on August 1, causing the KDP to condemn the Turkish airstrikes and call for the PKK to withdraw from its bases in northern Iraq. Unlike the KDP, the PUK, an ally of the PKK, harshly criticized the airstrikes and did not call for a PKK withdrawal. PM Abadi also condemned the Turkish strikes.

7 IDPs unable to return home due to infrastructure damage. A local official from Mkishifa, south of Tikrit, stated that hundreds of families are unable to return to the area due to substantial battle damage. The official reported that 600 out of 2,000 IDP families returned to the area, nevertheless indicating that the multiple Iraqi Shi’a militias active in the area have not prevented IDPs from returning.

8 Resurgence of ISIS in northern Salah ad-Din. ISIS launched an attack on western Tuz Khurmatu on August 3, but Peshmerga forces repelled the attack.

9 Milestone in PM Abadi’s decentralization efforts. The Dhi Qar governor stated on August 2 that a special meeting of the Council of Ministers (CoM), provincial governors, and provincial council chairmen, headed by PM Haidar al-Abadi, agreed on a three-month timeframe in which to transfer powers of eight ministries from the central to the provincial governments, as is provided for in Law 21. The CoR voted on and approved the recommendations from this meeting on August 3.



- Major Cities
- ✈ Airstrikes
- 👤 Demonstration
- ✈ Turkish Airstrikes
- ✈ Iraqi Airstrikes
- 👤 Turkey
- 🚩 Coalition
- ISF
- ISIS
- PKK
- Iraqi Shi’a militias
- Peshmerga

Content: Sinan Adnan and ISW Iraq Team
Graphics: Patrick Martin



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The government of Prime Minister (PM) Haidar al-Abadi is taking active steps toward decentralization by allowing approval of the Provincial Powers Act, also known as Law 21, which transfers powers from the central to the provincial governments. Although not immediate, this step will most likely decrease tension between the central government and the provinces and contribute to an improved political climate overall. PM Abadi voiced his desire to devolve powers to the provinces at the time of his appointment as the PM in August 2014 and reiterated them again in April 2015 during a speech in Washington D.C. where he said “if we don’t decentralize, the country will disintegrate.” He also took active steps in December 2014 to repeal measures by former PM Nouri al-Maliki to block the law through the Supreme Court. The decentralization of authority to provincial governments is a long standing political debate, and it is unconnected to the weekend protests against the Council of Representatives, Ministry of Energy, and local governments in southern Iraq. The southern provinces, where security is much more stable, will most likely capitalize on the decentralization readily; however, the majority Sunni provinces in western and northern Iraq where ISIS retains significant urban control have less of an opportunity to capitalize on decentralization, let alone to prioritize it over security and reconstruction. In the long-term, however, this process will likely decrease calls for the division of Iraq into regions. In Iraqi Kurdistan, reports about civilians casualties caused by Turkish airstrikes near Arbil likely created pressure on KDP leader and Kurdish President Masoud Barzani to adopt a more assertive tone in public statements, calling for the PKK to withdraw its bases from northern Iraq. Ahead of elections for his possible replacement, President Barzani is in a position where he must tread carefully. However, the same reports of civilian deaths from Turkish airstrikes garnered an opposite reaction from the KDP’s rival party in Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which is a PKK ally. The PUK condemned Turkish airstrikes, along with Iraqi PM Abadi, indicating heightened political tension within Iraqi Kurdistan as the major parties reach a critical political juncture with the expiration of President Barzani’s term on August 20, 2015. As these intra-Kurdish dynamics and popular demonstrations against poor services unfold, ISIS remains a serious enemy. The reported recapture by ISIS of areas in Baiji, if true, along with fresh attacks by ISIS in Tuz Khurmatu, shed light on ISIS’ ability to adapt and regenerate combat power on multiple fronts while it continues to defend Ramadi.