

Iraq Situation Report: July 24 - 27, 2015

1 ISIS executes accused spies. ISIS executed seven individuals in Sharqat on charges of spying on ISIS positions in Sharqat and Hawija, west of Kirkuk, on July 26.

2 IDPs return to Saadiya. 250 IDP families returned to Saadiya sub-district, south of Khaniqin, on July 25. The Saadiya sub-district director stated that Diyala governor and Badr Organization member Muthanna al-Tamimi and Badr Organization commander Hadi al-Amiri presided over the IDPs' return. The commander of the Diyala Operations Command stated that a further 500 IDP families will return to Saadiya on August 1.

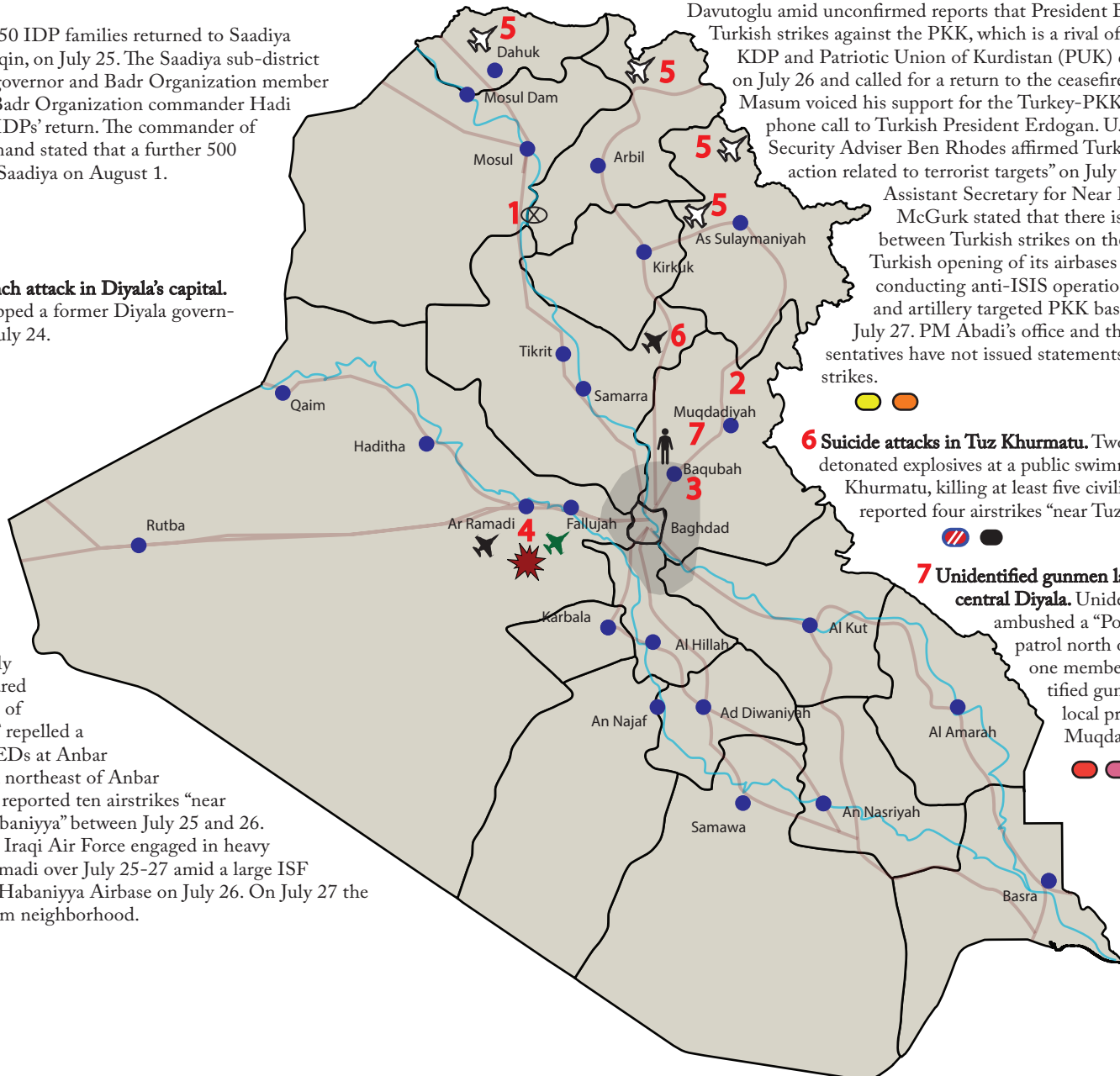
3 Unidentified gunmen launch attack in Diyala's capital. Unidentified gunmen kidnapped a former Diyala government official in Baquba on July 24.

4 Iraqi Security Forces hold positions east of Ramadi and advance south of Ramadi. The Counter Terrorism Service's (CTS's) Golden Division, the Iraqi Army (IA), and Iraqi Air Force clashed with ISIS south of Ramadi on July 25, and CTS reportedly cleared Anbar University, southwest of Ramadi, on July 26. The ISF repelled a wave of SVESTs and SVBIEDs at Anbar University and in al-Tamim, northeast of Anbar University, on July 26. DoD reported ten airstrikes "near Ramadi" and three "near Habaniyya" between July 25 and 26. The Federal Police (FP) and Iraqi Air Force engaged in heavy clashes with ISIS east of Ramadi over July 25-27 amid a large ISF deployment westward from Habaniyya Airbase on July 26. On July 27 the ISF cleared parts of al-Tamim neighborhood.

5 Turkish airstrikes target the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Iraq. Turkish airstrikes targeted PKK bases throughout Dohuk, Arbil, and Sulaymaniya provinces in Iraqi Kurdistan over July 24-26. A PKK spokesman stated that Turkey had unilaterally ended the Turkey-PKK ceasefire. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) stated that President Massoud Barzani had "expressed his displeasure" to Turkish PM Davutoglu amid unconfirmed reports that President Barzani supported Turkish strikes against the PKK, which is a rival of Barzani's KDP. The KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) denounced the strikes on July 26 and called for a return to the ceasefire. Iraqi President Fuad Masum voiced his support for the Turkey-PKK peace process in a phone call to Turkish President Erdogan. U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes affirmed Turkey's right "to take action related to terrorist targets" on July 26 while Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Brett McGurk stated that there is no connection between Turkish strikes on the PKK and the recent Turkish opening of its airbases to U.S. forces conducting anti-ISIS operations. Turkish airstrikes and artillery targeted PKK bases in Arbil province on July 27. PM Abadi's office and the Council of Representatives have not issued statements on the Turkish strikes.

6 Suicide attacks in Tuz Khurmatu. Two suicide attackers detonated explosives at a public swimming pool in Tuz Khurmatu, killing at least five civilians, on July 25. DoD reported four airstrikes "near Tuz" on July 26.

7 Unidentified gunmen launch attacks in central Diyala. Unidentified gunmen ambushed a "Popular Mobilization" patrol north of Muqadadiya, killing one member, on July 25. Unidentified gunmen assassinated a local preacher north of Muqadadiya on July 26.



- Major Cities
- ✈ Turkish Airstrikes
- ✈ Iraqi Airstrikes
- ✈ Airstrikes
- ☀ Major Clash
- 🚗 SVBIED
- 👤 Kidnapping
- ⊗ Execution
- ISF
- 🚩 Coalition
- PKK
- Turkey
- ISIS
- Unknown Gunmen
- Iraqi Shi'a militias

100km

Content: Theodore Bell, Jessica Lewis-McFate, and ISW Iraq Team
 Graphics: Evan Sterling
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The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), including the Counter Terrorism Service, U.S.-trained Iraqi Army units, Iraqi Police, Federal Police, supported by Iraqi Air Force and U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes, have advanced east and south of Ramadi amid the high-profile operation that was publicly discussed during Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter's visit to Iraq last week. ISIS has deployed multiple SVESTs and SVBIEDs south of Ramadi in what was likely an attempted mobile defense, which it also tried with VBIEDS east of Tikrit to stall advancing forces earlier this year. Iranian-proxy led operations around Fallujah have not reported similar advances. If Iranian proxy militias redeploy to Diyala, where ISIS attacks persist amid deteriorating security, anti-ISIS operations around Fallujah may lose further momentum. Meanwhile Turkish airstrikes on Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) bases in Iraqi Kurdistan have elicited varied responses from Iraqi officials. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani and his Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have publicly criticized the attacks amid unconfirmed reports of his tacit approval of the Turkish strikes on the PKK, which is a KDP rival. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) also voiced support for the Turkey-PKK ceasefire, as did Iraqi President Fuad Masum. Iranian Foreign Minister Muhammad Zarif, on a state visit to Iraq, did not address the Turkish airstrikes, but stated that Iran approves of "any step to combat the [ISIS] threat to Iraq and Turkey."

Turkey commenced airstrikes on ISIS in Syria and on the PKK in Iraq within hours of each other on July 24 following U.S.-Turkey talks and the opening of select Turkish airbases to U.S. forces in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. The U.S. has long sought to convince the Turkish government to adopt a more active role in anti-ISIS operations and it appears that Turkey is pairing its increased support to U.S.-led Coalition anti-ISIS operations with increased aggression against the PKK. Both escalations by Turkey follow a recent increase in domestic attacks by ISIS and the PKK respectively. While the U.S. appears to support Turkish strikes against the PKK, the PKK's relationship to the Kurdish YPG forces fighting ISIS in northern Syria raises the question of how Turkish interests will balance against the anti-ISIS fight on the ground within Iraq and Syria going forward. Turkish strikes within Iraq do not appear to have incurred aggressive responses from Iraqi Kurds, even though the PKK has been helping Iraqi Kurds defend locations such as Sinjar in northern Iraq from ISIS. It is possible that all parties fighting ISIS in Iraq recognize the potential for Turkey to help cut ISIS's foreign fighter flows into Iraq through Syria, such that they will tolerate Turkish strikes against the PKK within Iraq. The traditional rivalry between the KDP and PKK is also a factor, but in the context of an active ground war against ISIS, KRG President Barzani faces a complicated position. Aside from the potential loss of PKK manpower to help the KRG fight ISIS, Turkish strikes also ultimately express a message of regional disapproval of Kurdish autonomy. Moreover, Iran appears to be tolerating Turkish airstrikes against the PKK close to its own border, belying a mutual position on Kurdish expansion, and reflecting Iran's own challenges with a PKK sister organization operating within Iran.

If Turkish strikes in Iraqi Kurdistan distract ground forces from the anti-ISIS fight near Mosul and Kirkuk, it will undermine the anti-ISIS fight there. It is nevertheless possible that Iraqi Kurds will choose not to support the PKK against Turkish strikes, accepting Turkey as the greater anti-ISIS contributor. A significant diminishment in the PKK's regional posture may also shift the Kurdish regional alignment back in favor of the KDP, if the loss of PKK manpower fighting ISIS in Iraq does not jeopardize the KRG's ability to guard Iraqi Kurdistan against ISIS.