

Iraq Situation Report: August 18 - 20, 2015

1 ISIS sustains offensive in Baiji. ISIS detonated an SVBIED in central Baiji on August 18, killing 21 “Popular Mobilization” fighters. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) supported by the “Popular Mobilization” destroyed two VBIEDs west of Baiji on August 19, while a third SVBIED detonated and killed two “Popular Mobilization” fighters. These VBIEDs constitute part of a renewed ISIS offensive against Baiji initiated on August 14. DoD reported four airstrikes “near Baiji” between August 18 and 20.

2 Ongoing clashes in and around Ramadi. The ISF and supporting “Popular Mobilization” forces clashed with ISIS east, west, and south of Ramadi, repelling five armored VBIEDs south of Ramadi on August 18. The ISF later reported advances in nearby areas on August 19, following advances east of Ramadi earlier in the week. DoD reported six airstrikes “near Ramadi” between August 18 and 20.

3 PM Abadi visits Basra. PM Abadi met with provincial government officials in Basra on August 18 to discuss recent and ongoing popular demonstrations. PM Abadi also met with Lukoil officials and denounced demonstrators’ violent attacks on oil fields, prompted by longstanding unemployment concerns in the province, as an attack on the wealth of the Iraqi people. PM Abadi did not meet with demonstrators in Basra, and on August 19 protesters demonstrated against the perceived prioritization of foreign oil companies over the demonstrators’ demands.

4 Last-minute effort to resolve the Iraqi Kurdistan presidency fails. The five main Kurdish political parties in the parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan held an emergency session over August 18-19 but failed to resolve the final status of the Iraqi Kurdistan presidency. The two-year extension to the term of current Iraqi Kurdistan President Masoud Barzani expired on August 20. The main Kurdish parties will meet again on August 21; in the meantime, Barzani has continued in his role as president.

5 ISF launches operation south of Samarra. The Samarra Operations Command launched a clearing operation southwest of Samarra in the direction of Ramadi on August 18. Iranian proxy militias claimed to have cleared the area of ISIS in the aftermath of the fall of Ramadi in May, but the ISF operations indicates that ISIS retains a presence in the region.

6 IDPs return to Diyala. The Tigris Operations Command (TOC) supervised the return of 142 IDP families to Saadia northeast of Baquba on August 20. Many residents of Diyala Province were displaced by Iranian proxy militia during clearing operations against ISIS over 2014-2015 and the persistence of the IDP issue remains a primary grievance of local Sunnis.



- Major Cities
- ✈ Airstrikes
- 🚗 Failed S/VBIED
- 🌟 Ongoing Clashes
- 🚩 Coalition
- 🟢 ISF
- 🟡 Iraqi Shi'a militias
- ⬤ ISIS

Content: Theodore Bell and ISW Iraq Team
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The five major Kurdish political parties - the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Gorran (Change) Movement, the Kurdistan Islamic Union, and the Kurdistan Islamic Group - failed to resolve the status of the Iraqi Kurdistan presidency before the expiration of President Massoud Barzani’s term on August 20. President Barzani received a two-year extension to his term in 2013 after the passage of a joint measure by the KDP and the PUK despite objections from the other three political parties. Kurdish opposition parties and in particular the Gorran Movement are now reasserting objections to the KDP’s political dominance. On August 19, the senior Gorran member serving as Speaker of the Parliament convened a parliamentary session to discuss the presidency despite a previous agreement to postpone the meeting to August 23. The session failed to achieve quorum due to a boycott by the KDP and by some members of the Kurdistan Islamic Union. Gorran then stated that the Speaker of Parliament will assume the presidency for sixty days until the election of a new president despite a nonbinding ruling from the Kurdistan Shura Council, an advisory body attached to the Ministry of Justice, which stated that President Barzani will remain in power until the parliamentary elections of 2017. The Parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan is scheduled to convene on August 23 to discuss the issue, but the dominance of the KDP and the PUK in the parliament will likely prevent legal opposition to the KDP. Despite the historic animosity of the two parties, the PUK has supported the KDP in its claim to the presidency due to the rise of Gorran as a PUK splinter faction and political rival in eastern Iraqi Kurdistan. In this context, the Iraqi Kurdistan parliament will most likely provide legal cover for the extension of President Barzani’s term until the 2017 parliamentary elections.

In Baiji, ISIS has maintained pressure on the ISF and “Popular Mobilization” since the major assault it launched on August 14. While ISIS regularly deploys VBIEDs in Baiji, the increased frequency and numbers deployed since August 14 indicate a renewed ISIS push to retake Baiji district. The ISF operation south of Samarra on August 18 is further indication that ISIS remains operational in Salah ad-Din. ISW has assessed that the recent increase in ISIS’s VBIEDs in Diyala and Baghdad seeks to divert the ISF from Anbar; ISIS VBIEDs in Baiji may have similar objectives. However, it is also likely that ISIS wishes to retake territory in Salah ad Din, given that ISIS has controlled both Baiji and Tikrit over the last year. As the ISF focuses on Anbar, ISIS therefore remains likely to launch attacks in eastern and northern Iraq. In Baghdad, PM Abadi has continued to implement reforms to eliminate administrative redundancies and financial corruption, and to retain dominance over political rivals. PM Abadi has imposed limits on the numbers of advisers and bodyguards for senior officials, formed a committee to reform government officials’ salaries, and has reportedly initiated the reallocation of the vice presidents’ and deputy prime ministers’ salaries to the public treasury. While PM Abadi continues to receive support for his reform initiative, it will remain increasingly important to monitor how senior officials affected, such as Nouri al-Maliki, will respond. PM Abadi’s response to demonstrations in Basra and to Lukoil’s interests there do not appear to have been in response to political attack against PM Abadi, though Basra will continue to represent key political terrain for both PM Abadi and his rivals going forward.