

Iraq Situation Report: August 21 - 24, 2015

1 Renewed Turkish airstrikes on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkish airstrikes targeted PKK sites outside the villages of Buli and Inza, near the Qandil Mountains northeast of Arbil, as well as the Amidiya sub-district in Dohuk, on August 20. Turkish airstrikes were last reported on August 1.

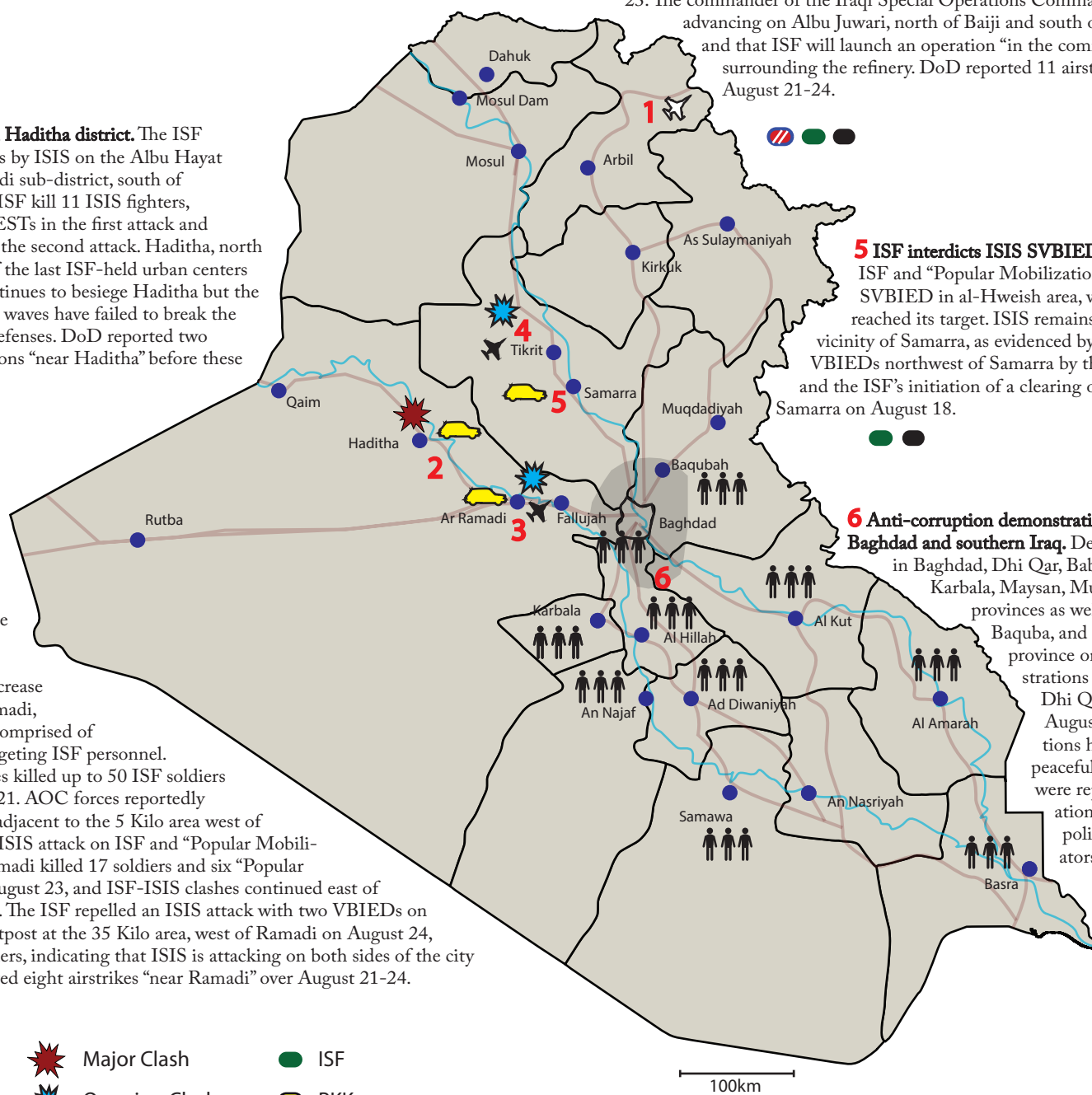
2 ISF repels ISIS attacks on Haditha district. The ISF repelled simultaneous attacks by ISIS on the Albu Hayat area of Haditha and Baghdadi sub-district, south of Haditha on August 24. The ISF kill 11 ISIS fighters, including three wearing SVESTs in the first attack and destroyed four SVBIEDs in the second attack. Haditha, north of al-Asad Airbase, is one of the last ISF-held urban centers in Anbar Province. ISIS continues to besiege Haditha but the siege and multiple SVBIED waves have failed to break the joint ISF and tribal forces' defenses. DoD reported two airstrikes against ISIS positions "near Haditha" before these attacks on August 21-22.

3 ISIS maintains a mobile defense around Ramadi and reacts to ISF gains west of Ramadi. The ISF reported advances in the 5 Kilo area of western Ramadi over the previous week, prompting ISIS to increase attacks east and west of Ramadi, including mobile defenses comprised of VBIEDs and ambushes targeting ISF personnel. Two separate ISIS ambushes killed up to 50 ISF soldiers west of Ramadi on August 21. AOC forces reportedly cleared the Zankoura area, adjacent to the 5 Kilo area west of Ramadi, on August 22. An ISIS attack on ISF and "Popular Mobilization" fighters north of Ramadi killed 17 soldiers and six "Popular Mobilization" fighters on August 23, and ISF-ISIS clashes continued east of Ramadi through August 24. The ISF repelled an ISIS attack with two VBIEDs on an ISF and tribal fighter outpost at the 35 Kilo area, west of Ramadi on August 24, which killed eight ISF soldiers, indicating that ISIS is attacking on both sides of the city simultaneously. DoD reported eight airstrikes "near Ramadi" over August 21-24.

4 Ongoing clashes in Baiji. Clashes between ISIS and the ISF continued on August 23. The commander of the Iraqi Special Operations Command stated that the ISF is advancing on Albu Juwari, north of Baiji and south of the Baiji Oil Refinery and that ISF will launch an operation "in the coming days" to liberate areas surrounding the refinery. DoD reported 11 airstrikes "near Baiji" over August 21-24.

5 ISF interdicts ISIS SVBIED west of Samarra. The ISF and "Popular Mobilization" destroyed a tanker SVBIED in al-Hweish area, west of Samarra before it reached its target. ISIS remains operational in the vicinity of Samarra, as evidenced by the interdiction of two VBIEDs northwest of Samarra by the ISF on August 11, and the ISF's initiation of a clearing operation south of Samarra on August 18.

6 Anti-corruption demonstrations continue in Baghdad and southern Iraq. Demonstrations took place in Baghdad, Dhi Qar, Babil, Basra, Diwaniya, Karbala, Maysan, Muthanna, Najaf, Wasit provinces as well as in Mandali, Baquba, and Khalis in Diyala province on August 21. Demonstrations continued in Karbala, Dhi Qar, and Muthanna on August 23. While demonstrations have remained largely peaceful, several isolated clashes were reported at demonstrations in Babil and Basra, and police dispersed demonstrators in Karbala.



- Major Cities
- ✈ Airstrikes
- ✈ Turkish Airstrikes
- 🚗 Failed S/VBIED
- ★ Major Clash
- ★ Ongoing Clashes
- 👤 Demonstration
- 🚩 Coalition
- ISF
- PKK
- Turkey
- Iraqi Shi'a militias
- ISIS

Content: Sinan Adnan, Theodore Bell, Patrick Martin and ISW Iraq Team
 Graphics: Evan Sterling

©2015 by the Institute for the Study of War



The government of PM Abadi is using its control over the ISF to protect anti-corruption demonstrators from local authorities south of Baghdad. The new dynamic emerged on the 21-22 of August when the SLA-led provincial government of Babil used anti-riot police to disperse demonstrators near the local government headquarters in Hilla, the capital of Babil province, and imposed a curfew on the city. PM Abadi subsequently ordered the Babil Operations Command to cancel the curfew and ordered the Iraqi Army (IA) to provide security for demonstrators in central Hilla. In addition, the mayor of Hindiya, a district east of Karbala claimed that a demonstration on August 23 was composed of supporters of Dawa Party leader Nouri al-Maliki, who attacked the mayor's building and angrily called for the removal of the Hindiya council and mayor. The claims of the mayor were not confirmed but it is important to watch for how inter-party politics affect the demonstrations. Potentially another indication of political competition undermining the movement at the provincial level, unidentified assailants attacked demonstrators in Basra on August 22 at a sit-in in front of the governor's building while security forces assigned to protect the building reportedly did not intervene, causing demonstrators to close the protest site for security concerns.

The ISF may face challenges in ensuring peaceful protests continue, especially in Baghdad. The leader of popular Shi'a religious group the Sadrist Trend, Moqtada al-Sadr, ordered his Baghdad-based followers to participate in the upcoming Friday demonstrations in central Baghdad, on August 28. The participation of the Sadrist Trend's large, active support base would likely cause the upcoming demonstrations to be the largest this summer. Al-Sadr claims that his supporters will participate for nationalist, rather than sectarian or political reasons. However, the sheer expected number of participants and their political affiliation raises concerns regarding ISF's ability to keep the demonstrations peaceful, especially if Sadrists rivals such as AAH attempt to cause instability. The Sadrists have so far been supportive of PM Abadi, and this call is most likely an effort by Sadr to maintain his reputation and stance as defender of the peoples' rights in the face of corruption. The demands of the Sadrists are unlikely to diverge from those of the majority of the demonstrators in Baghdad which are directed at corruption at all levels.

ISIS is defending in Ramadi, attacking in Baiji, and probing ISF defenses near Samarra and Haditha. Over the last week, ISIS has demonstrated its operational capability on each of these fronts, in addition to the reported use of mustard gas against Kurdish Peshmerga positions in northern Iraq in Makhmour and recent high casualty VBIED attacks in Diyala and Baghdad. ISIS's attacks near Ramadi are part of its main defenses to keep the ISF out of the city while ISIS builds static defenses inside. ISIS's attacks on other fronts are likely diversions to pull the ISF's attention away from Ramadi, as in the case of Haditha, and to split the attention of Iraqi Shi'a militias between their primary efforts in Fallujah and Baiji. However, some of them are also key terrain objectives for ISIS. ISIS likely seeks to control both Baiji and Haditha, for example, both prized because they are gaps in ISIS's consolidated control and because they are they house major infrastructure vital to the Iraqi state. ISIS will seize the opportunity to control them while the ISF is concentrated in Ramadi. ISIS has launched simultaneous attacks upon Baiji and Ramadi several times in the past since the beginning of 2015; it is an ISIS signature and a repeatable play. It is therefore essential that the ISF maintain its defenses on fronts away from Ramadi where ISIS is attacking while the ISF makes gains against ISIS's defenses in Ramadi.