

Iraq Situation Report: August 4 - 6, 2015

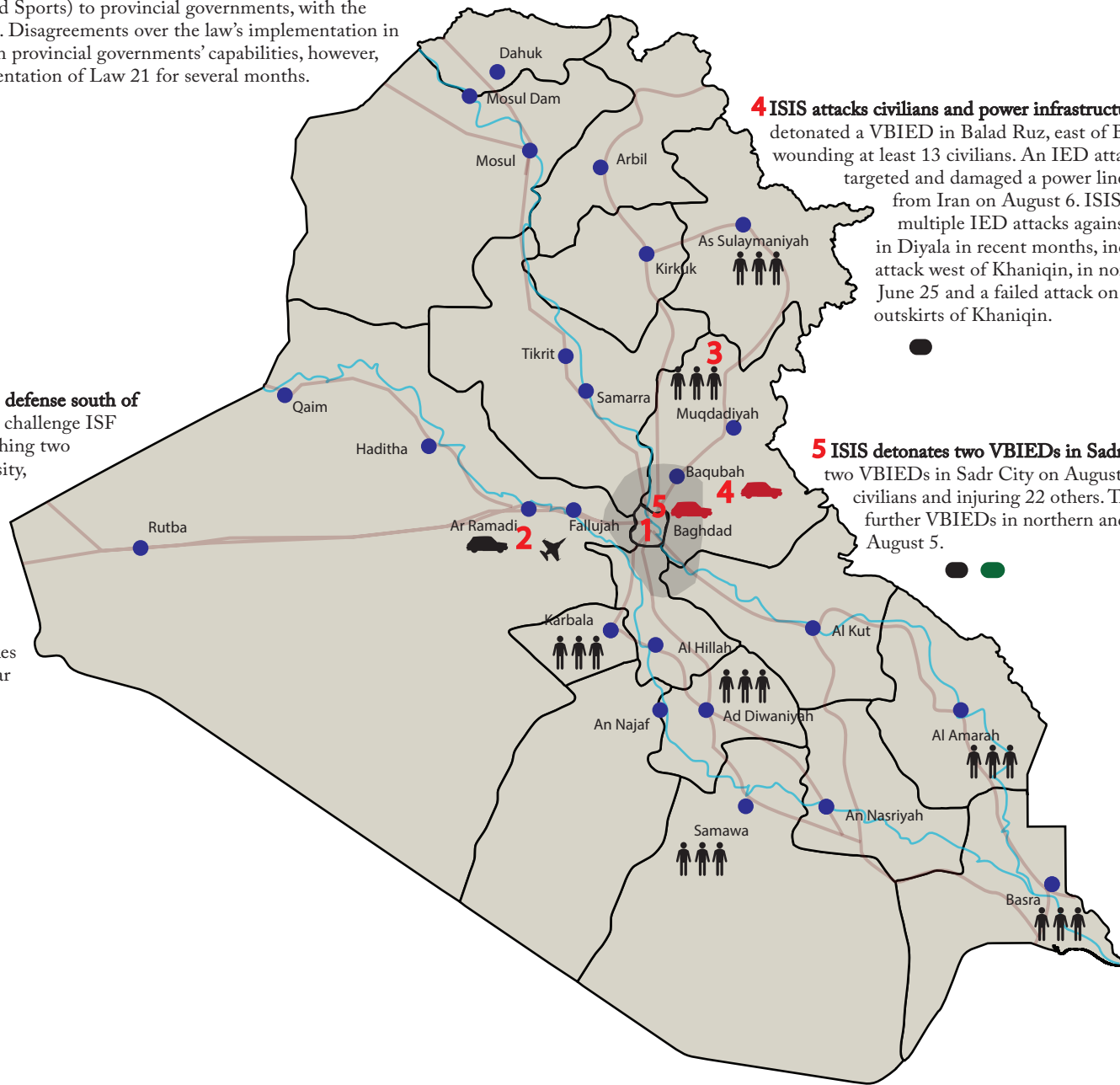
1 Implementation of Law 21. August 5, 2015 marked the Iraqi government's agreed-upon date for the implementation of Law 21, which devolves eight central ministries' powers (Agriculture, Education, Finance, Health, Housing and Construction, Labor and Social Affairs, Municipalities and Public Works, and Youth and Sports) to provincial governments, with the exception of Iraqi Kurdistan. Disagreements over the law's implementation in Baghdad and the disparity in provincial governments' capabilities, however, will likely delay the implementation of Law 21 for several months.

2 ISIS maintains its mobile defense south of Ramadi. ISIS attempted to challenge ISF gains near Ramadi by launching two SVBIEDs at Anbar University, southwest of Ramadi, which the ISF destroyed. The ISF cleared Anbar University on July 26 and established a command center on the campus. Between August 4 and 6, DoD announced six airstrikes "near Ramadi" and four "near Habaniya."

3 Popular protests spread. Demonstrations over poor power and water services erupted in Khaniqin, in northeastern Diyala, on August 3 and in Sulaymaniya, in Iraqi Kurdistan, between August 4-5. Demonstrations continued in Maysan, Basra, Muthanna, Diwaniya, and Karbala between August 4-6.

4 ISIS attacks civilians and power infrastructure in Diyala. ISIS detonated a VBIED in Balad Ruz, east of Baquba, on August 4, wounding at least 13 civilians. An IED attack east of Balad Ruz targeted and damaged a power line bringing electricity from Iran on August 6. ISIS has conducted multiple IED attacks against power infrastructure in Diyala in recent months, including a successful attack west of Khaniqin, in northeastern Diyala, on June 25 and a failed attack on June 26 on the outskirts of Khaniqin.

5 ISIS detonates two VBIEDs in Sadr City. ISIS detonated two VBIEDs in Sadr City on August 5, killing at least six civilians and injuring 22 others. The ISF defused two further VBIEDs in northern and western Baghdad on August 5.



- Major Cities
- VBIED
- ISF
- ★ Major Clash
- SVBIED
- Coalition
- ✈ Airstrikes
- 👤👤👤 Demonstration
- ISIS

Content: Theodore Bell and ISW Iraq Team

Graphics: Evan Sterling

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Popular demonstrations have continued and have spread in southern and northern Iraq in a development that may eventually threaten PM Abadi's political standing, the stability of southern Iraq, and challenge the Iraqi government's ability to dedicate national resources to the anti-ISIS campaign. As the Iraqi government attempts to devolve power to the provinces via Law 21, public discontent over service provisions may allow extra-governmental actors to raise their profiles in southern Iraq, challenging PM Abadi's legitimacy at a time when the Iraqi government and the ISF are focused on anti-ISIS operations in Anbar. There are not yet indications that protesters are coordinating marches or demands across different cities, a level of synchronization that could give the protests a national character and place greater political pressure on PM Abadi. Demonstrations have so far remained localized and focused on service provision and corruption at a local level. In Maysan and Basra, protesters have also demonstrated against unemployment, which appear to be local grievances. The implementation of a new customs tariff law at the Kuwait border on August 1 and the implementation of Law 21 on August 5 are two political developments whose coincidental timing may further exacerbate existing grievances and place greater strain on local authorities. The popular protests meanwhile may provide an opening for political actors seeking to undermine PM Abadi's government to leverage popular discontent for political gain. Public statements from prominent Shi'a parties and organizations have remained measured and have warned against escalation and politicization of protests, indicating a desire to remain relevant while not being seen to exploit popular anger. Dawa and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) officials have warned against the possibility of escalating security while the spokesman of the Iranian-backed Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia stated that its members would participate in protests planned for Friday. Leader of the Iranian-backed Badr Organization militia, Hadi al-Ameri, has called for demonstrations to remain peaceful and to not detract from the fight against ISIS, while Moqtada al-Sadr has warned against politicization of the demonstrations. While PM Abadi has so far publicly voiced support for the demonstrators, the emergence of intra-Shi'a political competition from the protests may force him to recalibrate the Iraqi government's response. It is likely that protests planned for Friday will grow in size and intensity, and the Ministry of Interior's statement on August 6 that protesters are required to obtain permits for demonstrations indicates that increased clashes between the ISF and protesters may occur on Friday. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's Friday sermon as well as demonstrators' and Iraqi political actors' responses to Ayatollah Sistani's statements on the protests will likely influence the protest movement in the near term.