

Iraq Situation Report: September 15 - 17, 2015

1 On September 15, the Council of Ministers attempted to pass legislation to dislodge VP Maliki and other VPs from their posts. This move confirms the success of PM Abadi's rivals in blocking this part of his reforms from going into effect. During its regular Tuesday meeting, the Council of Ministers (CoM) passed a bill to eliminate the three vice presidencies, sending the measure to the Council of Representatives (CoR) for approval. The bill cites Articles 61 and 80 of the Iraqi Constitution, which respectively give the CoR the right to legislate and the CoM the right to introduce legislation.

2 ISF and government authorities in Baghdad under increasing pressure from Shi'a militias. On September 15, gunmen likely affiliated with an Iranian-backed militia kidnapped the former Anbar governor's former advisor on Abu Nuwas Street in central Baghdad, an area known for its stable security conditions. PM Abadi sent a message to militias in the capital by criticizing "those who try to challenge the state through kidnapping, armed robbery, and crime." Still, the PM has not ordered tangible measures to limit militia activity in Baghdad.

3 Two of the 18 Turkish hostages were released and found in an area near Basra city. On September 16, two construction workers abducted in Baghdad were released in Basra, highlighting the kidnappers' freedom of movement. The release may indicate that negotiations between Iran and Turkey are underway. Alternatively, the kidnappers may seek to demonstrate that the workers remain alive to leverage the Turkish government to change its Syria policy in exchange for the workers' release.

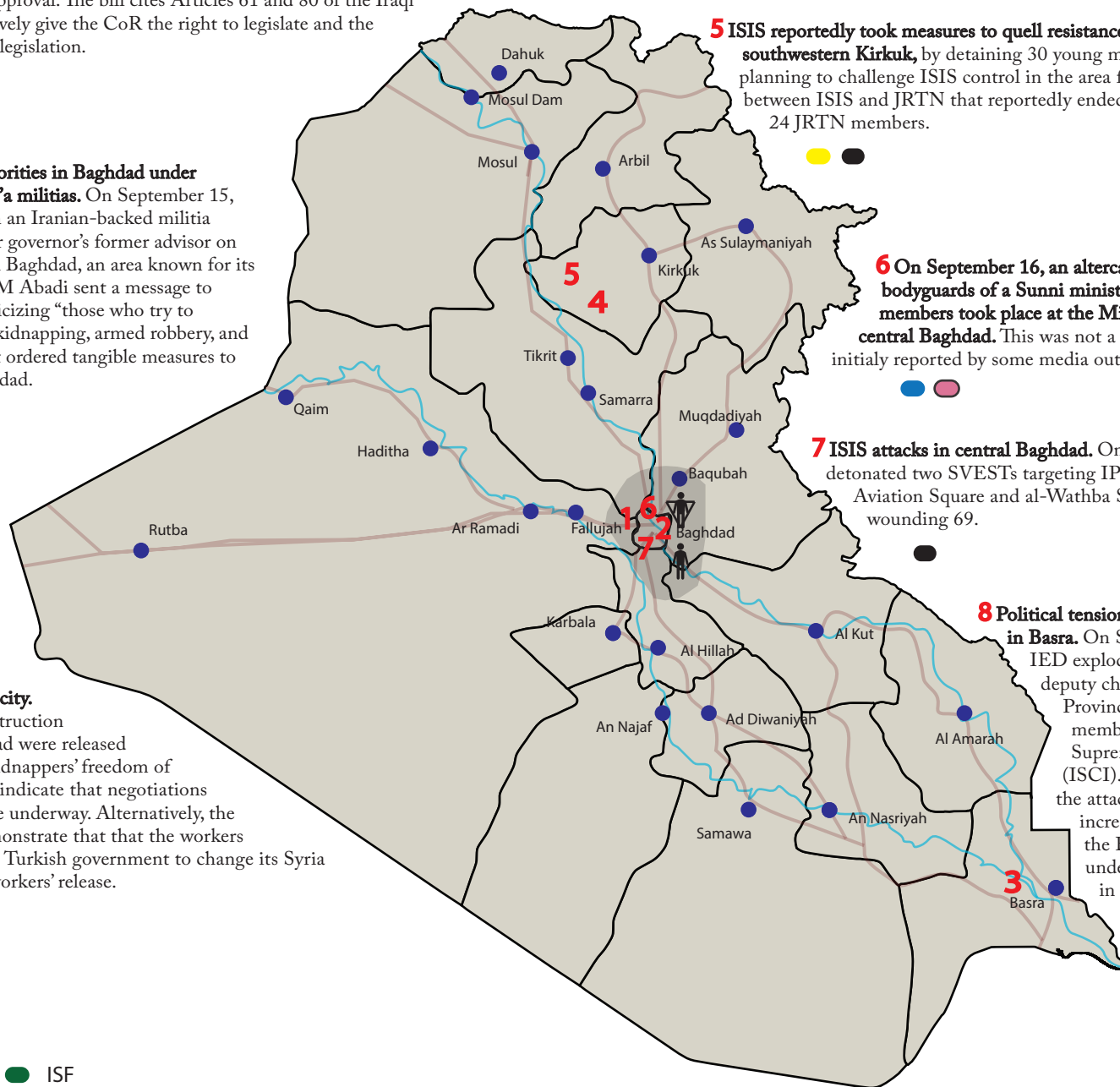
4 ISIS maybe preparing for a major attack to challenge the Peshmerga south of Kirkuk city. On September 16, ISIS moved 500 fighters to Rashad, an ISIS stronghold in southwestern Kirkuk, in preparation for an attack near Daquq, south of Kirkuk city.

5 ISIS reportedly took measures to quell resistance in Hawija, in southwestern Kirkuk, by detaining 30 young males allegedly planning to challenge ISIS control in the area following clashes between ISIS and JRTN that reportedly ended with the execution of 24 JRTN members.

6 On September 16, an altercation between bodyguards of a Sunni minister and two Shi'a CoR members took place at the Ministry of Education in central Baghdad. This was not a kidnapping attempt as initially reported by some media outlets.

7 ISIS attacks in central Baghdad. On September 17, ISIS detonated two SVESTs targeting IP checkpoints in Aviation Square and al-Wathba Square, killing 23 and wounding 69.

8 Political tension escalates to violence in Basra. On September 15, a small IED exploded targeting the deputy chairman of Basra Provincial Council, who is a member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). The official survived the attack. This comes amid increasing tension between the Badr Organization under the SLA and ISCI in Basra, as the former attempts to dislodge the ISCI governor.



Content: ISW Iraq Team
Graphics: Evan Sterling

©2015 by the Institute for the Study of War



Challenges are mounting against PM Abadi's government and the ISF in Baghdad. Following the kidnapping of the 18 Turkish workers last week, likely by Iranian-backed Shi'a militias, this week witnessed the kidnapping of a former Sunni advisor from Anbar. The location of the abduction was a neighborhood in which Shi'a militias have limited freedom of movement, which dealt a particular blow to the government by indicating their expanding impunity in Baghdad. This new kidnapping incident, along with the release of two kidnapped Turkish workers near Basra city, shows the geographic reach of militias and their connection to Baghdad and Basra. As Iranian proxies challenge the Iraqi government, ISIS remains a threat in the capital. Two deadly suicide attacks targeting mixed demographic areas in central Baghdad on September 16 demonstrate ISIS's ability to attack within the most heavily secured parts of the city. These attacks demonstrate ISIS's desire to exploit the present vulnerability of the Iraqi government created by Iranian-backed militias by igniting sectarian tension in Baghdad.