

Iraq Situation Report: September 18 - 21, 2015

1 Turkish airstrikes continued against PKK targets in northern Baghdad.

The Turkish Air Force executed airstrikes on September 18, 19, and 20 on PKK positions in Dohuk Province and elsewhere in northern Iraq.



2 ISIS reportedly continued detentions in Hawija district. ISIS reportedly arrested a number of preachers and imams in Hawija, west of Kirkuk, for refusing to renew their pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

ISIS also detained "50 Salafis" for refusing to follow ISIS's orders and pledge allegiance to ISIS.



3 Security forces reinvigorated operations in Thar Thar. A Sunni "Popular Mobilization" tribal fighter leader stated that ISF and tribal fighters in the "Popular Mobilization" conducted operations in the Thar Thar area, northeast of Ramadi. The area had been the target of a major "Popular Mobilization" clearing operation in late May and June 2015.



4 ISF operations continued in the vicinity of Ramadi. ISF and tribal fighters conducted operations in the Ta'mim and Humaira neighborhoods in southern Ramadi and clashed with ISIS in the Khalidiya area, east of Ramadi, amid Coalition airstrikes on September 18. On September 21, a third 500-member battalion of tribal fighters graduated from training in Habaniya, east of Ramadi, while Sunni tribal leaders announced the formation of two separate 1,000-member fighter units in Habaniya and western Anbar.



5 ISIS continued attacks in Baiji. On September 19, two SVBIEDs targeted ISF in the Baiji Oil Refinery. The explosions triggered a large fire. Security forces also clashed with ISIS in the Qadisiya neighborhood in Baiji, killing two ISIS members wearing SVESTs, while five Coalition airstrikes targeted ISIS between September 18 and 21.



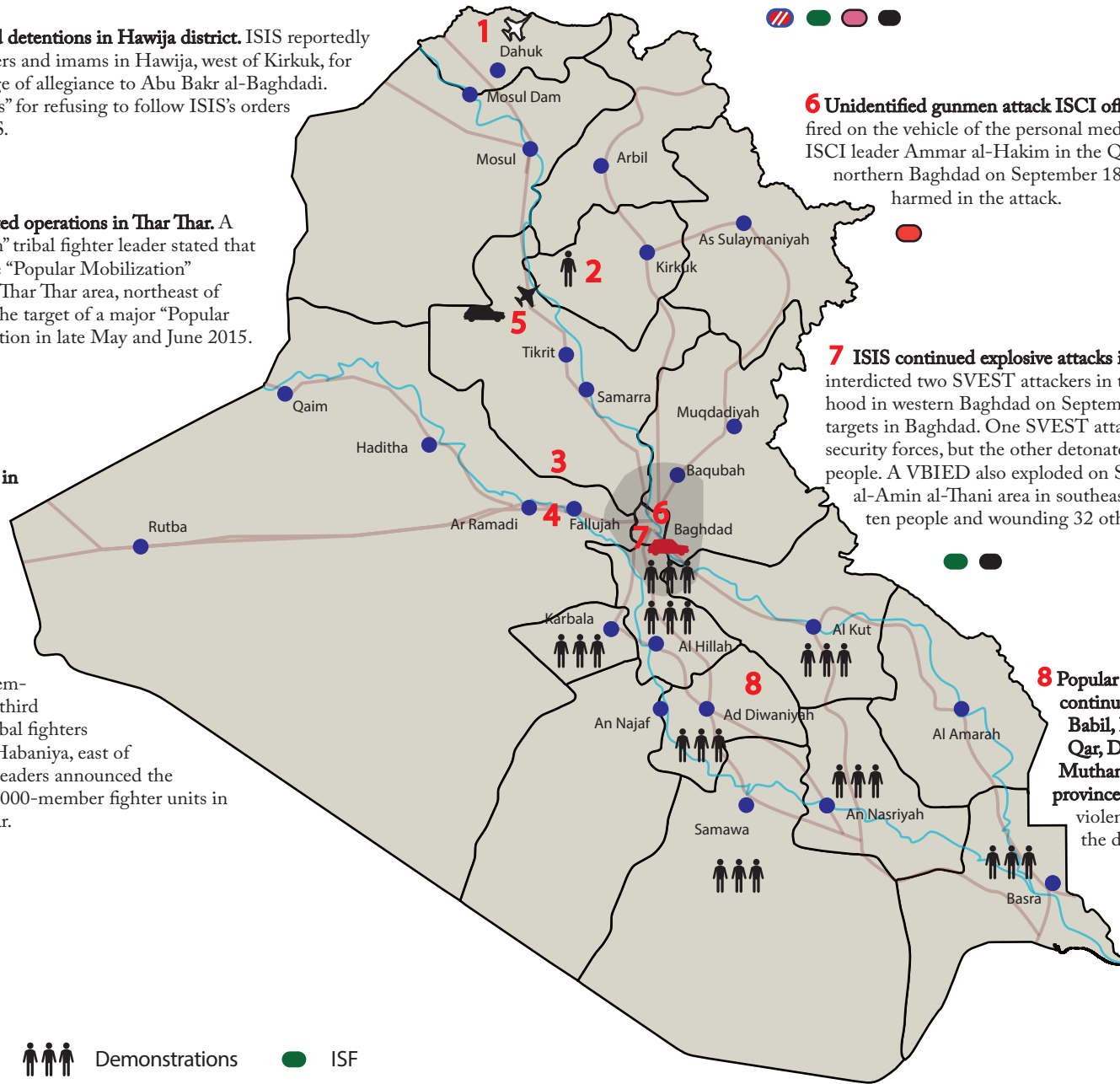
6 Unidentified gunmen attack ISCI official's vehicle. Gunmen fired on the vehicle of the personal media office manager for ISCI leader Ammar al-Hakim in the Qahira neighborhood in northern Baghdad on September 18. The official was not harmed in the attack.



7 ISIS continued explosive attacks in Baghdad. ISF interdicted two SVEST attackers in the Amiriya neighborhood in western Baghdad on September 19 en route to targets in Baghdad. One SVEST attacker was killed by security forces, but the other detonated his vest, wounding 5 people. A VBIED also exploded on September 21 in al-Amin al-Thani area in southeastern Baghdad, killing ten people and wounding 32 others.



8 Popular demonstrations continued on September 18 in Babil, Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar, Diwaniya, Karbala, Muthanna, and Wasit provinces. No significant violence was reported during the demonstrations.



● Major Cities



Demonstrations

● ISF

● SVBIED



Turkish Airstrikes

● Turkey

● ISIS

● VBIED



Airstrikes

● PKK

● Unknown Gunmen

● Kidnapping



Coalition

● Iraqi Shi'a militias

● Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes

Content: Patrick Martin and ISW Iraq Team
Graphics: Evan Sterling



©2015 by the Institute for the Study of War

ISF operations to recapture Ramadi remain stalled, but remain the ISF's main effort. Though limited in number, tribal fighters have steadily graduated from training courses in Habaniya, east of Ramadi, in preparation to participate in the Ramadi operation and in holding recaptured territory. Significant portions of the 16th Iraqi Army (IA) Division, one of two U.S.-trained and equipped units originally formed to participate in operations to recapture Ninewa, appears to have been committed to Ramadi's eastern axis. These forces combined will likely continue to pressure ISIS in Ramadi, securing limited but vital gains. The Ramadi operation is critical to Iraq's security not only to counter ISIS, but also to demonstrate the efficacy of ISF-led operations without the involvement of Iranian-backed Shi'a militias. This demonstration is particularly important given Iraq's current political climate in which Iranian-backed militias are openly challenging PM Abadi's government. An assassination attempt against an ISCI official in northern Baghdad may be part of an ongoing effort by the proxy militias to reassert themselves and challenge ISF authority in Baghdad; alternatively, it could have been the result of a political rivalry unconnected to PM Abadi's challengers. Meanwhile, ISIS continues to pressure the ISF elsewhere in Iraq, including in Baiji, Baghdad, and Thar Thar, southwest of Samarra. ISIS likely intends to divert the ISF from Ramadi, but also to secure new gains and position for future offensives.