Iraq Situation Report: February 2 - 11, 2016

1 **ISIS continues probing for weaknesses near key oil fields.** Federal Police, the 5th IA Division, and the Popular Mobilization clashed with ISIS in the Alas and Ajil oil fields area east of Tikrit on February 4 and 5, destroying one VBIED.

2 **ISIS remains active west of Samarra.** Popular Mobilization and Federal police clashed with ISIS in the Jazeera area west of Samarra on February 4, destroying two VBIEDs. Samarra Operations Command forces also destroyed four VBIEDs in the same are on February 7.

3 **Clearing operations continue in Thar Thar area.** Anbar and Baghdad Operations forces as well as several Popular Mobilization militias continued clearing operations in the vicinity of Thar Thar and Albu Shajal, northwest of Fallujah through February 11.

4 **ISIS attacks Baghdadi sub-district with SVESTs.** ISIS attacked Douilia area, north of Baghdadi sub-district, on February 5, but were repelled by security forces. The 7th IA Division and tribal fighters also killed eight Suicide Vest (SVEST) attackers in Jubba sub-district, north of Baghdadi.

5 **ISF reopen road link between Baghdad and Ramadi.** Members of the 16th IA Division clashed with ISIS in Albu Risha and Zankura areas, west of Ramadi, on February 2, destroying one VBIED. The CTS, tribal fighters, Anbar police, and 8th and 9th IA Divisions cleared areas east of Ramadi and reopened the road between Ramadi and Baghdad on February 9. The 10th IA Division, supported by tribal fighters and Iraqi and Coalition airstrikes, also reportedly destroyed three SVBIEDs targeting a 10th IA Division headquarters north of Ramadi on February 6 and seven other SVBIEDs on February 7.

6 **Baghdad security wall stirs controversy.** Security forces began constructing blast walls, watchtowers, and trenches around the perimeter of Baghdad on February 2 to prevent infiltration into Baghdad, beginning construction in al-Subaihat area, west of Baghdad. Sunni politicians denounced the wall plan as converting Baghdad into a "big prison" but Shi'a politicians denied that there were any sectarian or political goals behind the security fence.

7 **Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani suspends political sermons.** The representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani announced the suspension of weekly political sermons on Fridays on February 5, adding that sermons would only be held as demanded by developments. Popular demonstrations against corruption and for government reform continued on February 5 in Baghdad and the southern provinces.

8 **Pro-PKK demonstration leads to injury of reporters.** Dozens of demonstrators protested in front of the UN building in Arbil on February 7 against Turkish airstrikes. Violence broke out between police and the demonstrators, who wounded two Rudaw reporters.

9 **ISF, tribal fighters, and Peshmerga launch operations southeast of Mosul.** Members of the 16th IA Division, Ninewa tribal fighters in the Popular Mobilization, and the Peshmerga captured Kudila village, southwest of Makhmur district, on February 2, destroying "at least" three VBIEDs. Makhmur base reportedly has three brigades and would eventually reach 4,500 soldiers, including from the Coalition-trained 15th and 16th IA Divisions.
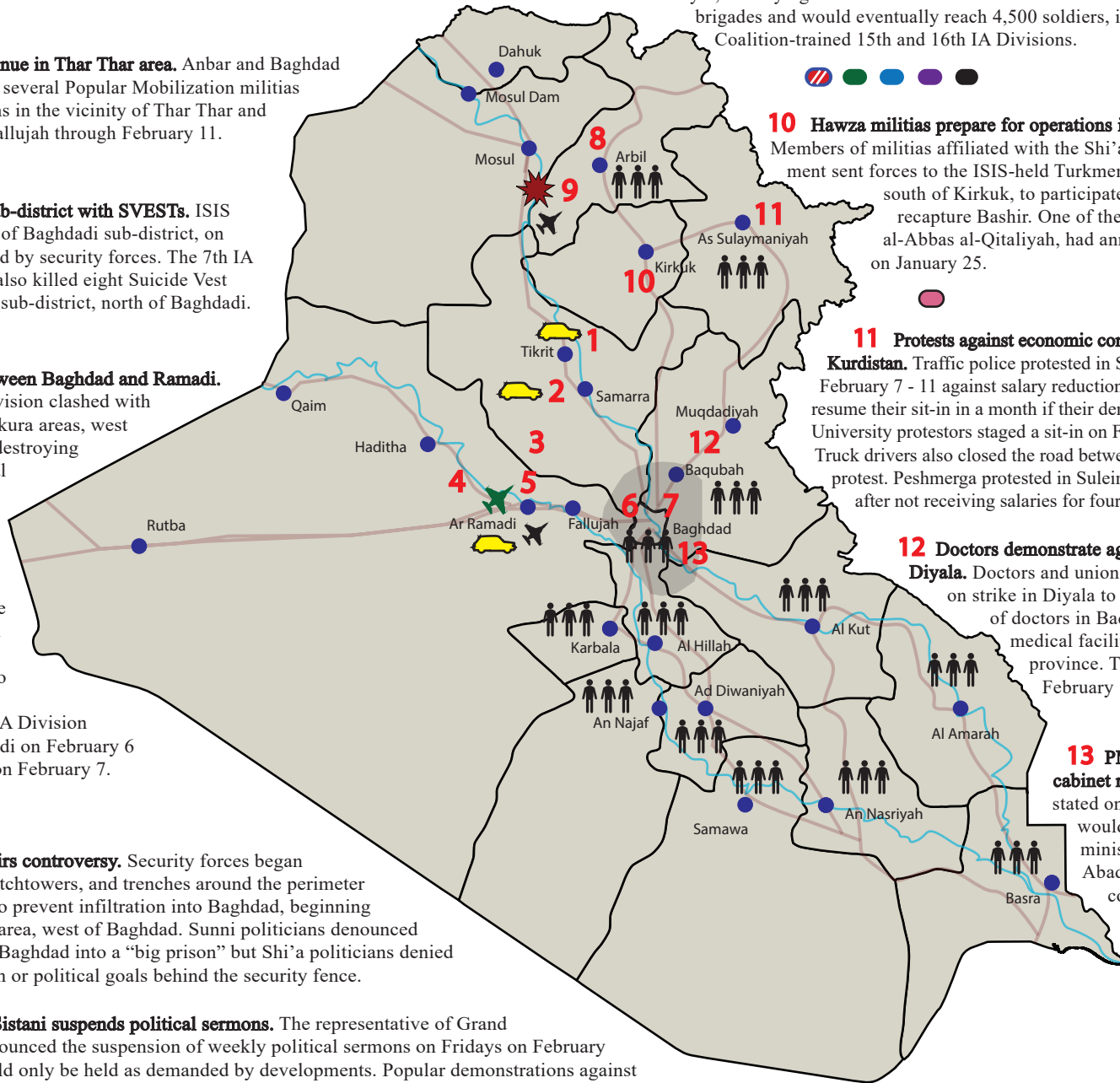
10 **Hawza militias prepare for operations in Kirkuk province.** Members of militias affiliated with the Shi'a religious establishment sent forces to the ISIS-held Turkmen village of Bashir, south of Kirkuk, to participate in operations to recapture Bashir. One of the militias, Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah, had announced the operation on January 25.

11 **Protests against economic conditions grow in Iraqi Kurdistan.** Traffic police protested in Suleimaniyah between February 7 - 11 against salary reductions, but promised to resume their sit-in in a month if their demands were not met. University protestors staged a sit-in on February 8 in Arbil. Truck drivers also closed the road between Dohuk and Arbil in protest. Peshmerga protested in Suleimaniyah on February 9 after not receiving salaries for four months.

12 **Doctors demonstrate against kidnappings in Diyala.** Doctors and unionized medical staff went on strike in Diyala to protest the kidnapping of doctors in Baquba and closed medical facilities across the province. The strike ended on February 8.

13 **PM Abadi announces cabinet reshuffle.** PM Abadi stated on February 9 that he would current replace ministers with technocrats. Abadi called for the cooperation of the CoR and all politics blocs in this endeavor.

Content: Patrick Martin and ISW Iraq Team
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100km

Legend

- ● Major Cities
- ✺ Major Clash
- ✈ Airstrikes
- ✈ Iraqi Airstrikes
- 🚗 Failed S/VBIED
- 🧍 Demonstration
- ◑ Coalition
- ● ISF
- ● ISIS
- ● Peshmerga
- ● Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- ◑ Iraqi Shi'a Militias

The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency Chief, Vincent Stewart, noted that a Mosul operation was unlikely to occur in 2016, underscoring that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have far to go before being ready to recapture the city. Coalition airstrikes have been successful in assisting the ISF recapture territory from ISIS, who were largely pushed out of Ramadi's eastern suburbs on February 9. Coalition-trained forces also opened a new front against ISIS south of Mosul. Members of the Coalition-trained 91st Iraqi Army (IA) Brigade, along with tribal fighters from Ninewa and Peshmerga forces, conducted operations southwest of Makhmur district towards Qayarrah to recapture villages from ISIS. The limited operation marks the first real operation under Ninewa Operations Command, the branch of the Defense Ministry responsible for recapturing Ninewa from ISIS. Additional Coalition-trained forces from the 15th and 16th IA Divisions are also being deployed to the area and away from other operations, indicating that the ISF has begun shifting a significant number of forces to the southern Mosul axis. However, any operation to recapture Mosul remains a long way off and will require intense Coalition assistance to recapture territory. Meanwhile, Iraqi Kurdistan is witnessing a large number of protests against reduced or undelivered salaries and the weak state of the economy, a situation that is exacerbating political differences between Kurdish political parties, while weekly demonstrations against corruption and for government reform continued across southern Iraq. In addition, PM Abadi announced a cabinet reshuffle on February 9, but such an initiative will depend on the support of political blocs to have any hope of succeeding. A unilateral attempt to remove ministers without the support of political blocs could increase support for a no-confidence vote against him, as major parties will not accept PM Abadi removing their senior members from the government. Ongoing political difficulties underscore the need to strengthen Iraq's central government and financial situation as part of any campaign to recapture territory from ISIS, as the Iraqi state and the Kurdistan Regional Government require increase Coalition and U.S. support to prevent from weakening further and fracturing.