

Iraq Situation Report: February 23 - 29, 2016

1 U.S. Embassy and Iraqi Government issue warnings over Mosul Dam. Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi issued a statement on February 28 detailing preparations for maintenance on the Mosul Dam and calling for residents of Mosul to move six kilometers away from the Tigris River. The U.S. Embassy issued a call on February 29 for people to evacuate the Tigris flood plain area.

2 Turkish forces shell ISIS from base near Mosul. A National Mobilization source stated that Turkish forces at the Zaylkan Camp, northeast of Mosul, fired eight Grad rockets at ISIS gatherings in Bashiqa sub-district, northeast of Mosul.

3 Ninewa politicians reject participation of the Popular Mobilization in future Ninewa operation. A majority of the Ninewa Provincial Council voted on February 29 to reject any participation of the Popular Mobilization in Ninewa operations.

4 ISIS claims SVEST attack on ISF stronghold in western Anbar. The War Media Cell stated on February 29 that the 19th Emergency Battalion killed six ISIS members wearing SVESTs attempting to attack a headquarters in al-Haqaniyah, south of Haditha. ISIS claimed that the attack involved five Suicide Vest (SVEST) attackers targeting a police checkpoint, and that all of them successfully detonated their explosives.

5 Security forces mass amid reported future assault on Hit District. Tribal fighters reportedly clashed with ISIS in Hit District, west of Ramadi, on February 23. The Hit District mayor also stated that security forces identified a date for Iraqi Army (IA), tribal fighters, Federal Police (FP), Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), and Emergency Police to recapture the ISIS-held town, and an Emergency Police commander stated on February 28 that all civilians needed to leave Hit District within 48 hours in preparation for an upcoming attack.

6 Ramadi continues to target FP base west of Ramadi. FP reported that the 18th FP Brigade destroyed two Suicide Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Devices (SVBIEDs) in al-Saljiyah village, west of Ramadi, on February 26.

7 Security forces recapture village south of Fallujah. Security forces cleared Abu Daij, north of Amiriyat al-Fallujah on February 25. ISIS later fired rockets and mortar shells at Amiriyat al-Fallujah, south of Fallujah, killing two civilians and wounding seven others. On February 28, security forces killed two SVEST attackers attempting to target security forces in al-Abadi and Hitawin areas, east of Fallujah.

8 ISIS attacks key town west of Baghdad. Five groups of ISIS attackers attacked the Abu Ghraib area, west of Baghdad, on February 28 using five SVESTs as well as light and medium weapons. The attackers burned the Abu Ghraib Customs building and captured the Khan Dhari grain silos area, north of Abu Ghraib. IA, Iraqi Police (IP), IA Aviation, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq killed the attackers and recaptured all areas.

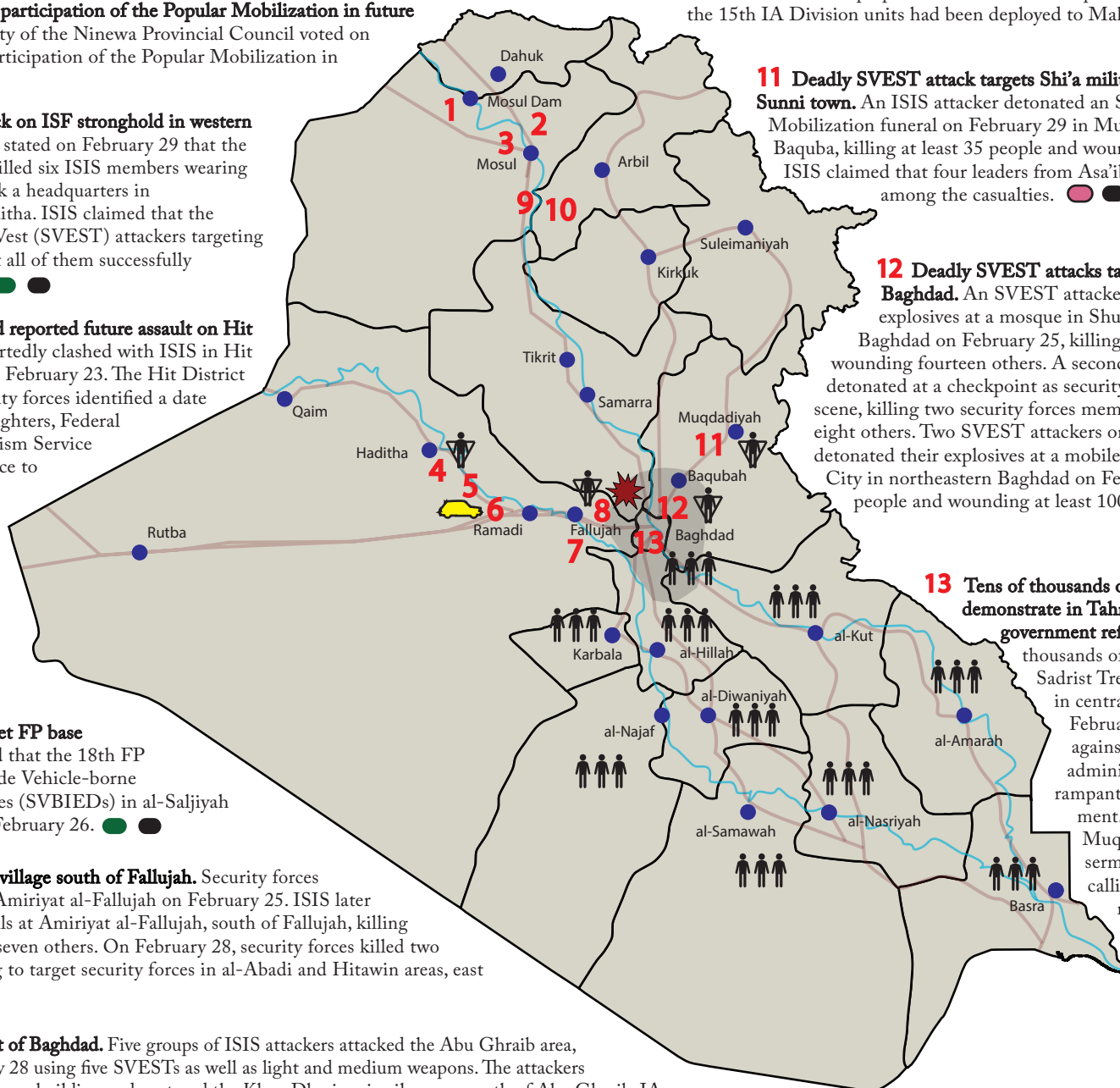
9 ISIS represses internal resistance from Sunni tribes in Ninewa. A security source in Ninewa province stated on February 24 that ISIS destroyed 20 houses and arrested an unspecified number of people in al-Shura and al-Qayyara sub-districts, south of Mosul. An anonymous source stated that unidentified gunmen shot and killed four ISIS members at a checkpoint in Yarmouk neighborhood in Mosul on February 28.

10 "Most" of 15th IA Division deployed to Mosul operations area. The Ninewa Operations Commander stated on February 23 that the 71st Brigade of the 15th IA Division arrived in Makhmour in preparation for the Mosul operation, and that "most" of the 15th IA Division units had been deployed to Makhmour.

11 Deadly SVEST attack targets Shi'a militia funeral in majority Sunni town. An ISIS attacker detonated an SVEST at a Popular Mobilization funeral on February 29 in Muqdadiah, northeast of Baquba, killing at least 35 people and wounding at least 50 others. ISIS claimed that four leaders from Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq were among the casualties.

12 Deadly SVEST attacks target civilians in Baghdad. An SVEST attacker detonated his explosives at a mosque in Shuala in northwestern Baghdad on February 25, killing seven people and wounding fourteen others. A second SVEST attacker detonated at a checkpoint as security forces rushed to the scene, killing two security forces members and wounding eight others. Two SVEST attackers on motorcycles detonated their explosives at a mobile phone market in Sadr City in northeastern Baghdad on February 28, killing 70 people and wounding at least 100 others.

13 Tens of thousands of Sadrist supporters demonstrate in Tahrir Square in favor of government reforms. Tens of thousands of supporters of the Sadrist Trend filled Tahrir Square in central Baghdad on February 26 to demonstrate against the financial and administrative corruption rampant in the Iraqi government. Sadrist Trend leader Muqtada al-Sadr gave a sermon in Tahrir Square calling for comprehensive reforms. Weekly protests also occurred across southern Iraq.



- Major Cities
- Coalition
- Unknown Gunmen
- Failed S/VBIED
- ★ Major Clash
- ISF
- Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- SVEST
- Turkey
- ISIS
- Iraqi Shi'a Militias
- Demonstration

Content: Patrick Martin and ISW Iraq Team
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ISIS conducted a large-scale campaign against civilian and military targets across Iraq between February 25 and February 29. Two ISIS attackers detonated their Suicide Vests (SVESTs) at a mosque in Shuala in northwestern Baghdad on February 25, setting off a series of SVEST attacks across Iraq. Deadly SVEST attacks targeted Sadr City on February 27 and the Abu Ghraib area west of Baghdad on February 28, as well as Haditha in western Anbar and Muqdadiah in central Diyala Province on February 29. The series constitutes the deadliest wave of ISIS attacks in 2016. The large increase in the use of SVESTs as opposed to the Suicide Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED), a signature ISIS attack type, may be in response to the Iraqi Security Forces' (ISF) increased ability to counter SVBIEDs using Russian Kornet and American AT4 anti-tank rockets; deliveries of these weapons began in early June 2015 and were followed by an increase in the number of failed SVBIED attacks on security forces in Iraq. The attacks may come in response to recent forward deployments by the ISF to prepare for operations to recapture Hit District, west of Ramadi, and areas of Ninewa Province. Deadly attacks may force the ISF to focus on securing ISF-held areas instead of on recapturing areas from ISIS; the attack on Haditha may have been an attempt to shift forces who are preparing for an assault on Hit District northwards to defend Haditha. The attacks also likely intend to stoke sectarian violence, similar to how a VBIED and SVEST attack in Muqdadiah on January 11, 2015 led Iraqi Shi'a militias to rampage in the predominantly Sunni district. Sectarian backlash will be particularly damaging at a time when PM Abadi's government is unstable and going through a cabinet reshuffle. Iraqi Shi'a militias are likely to retaliate against Sunni civilians, particularly since several leaders among Popular Mobilization groups, reportedly including the Iranian proxy militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, were among the casualties in the February 29 attack in Muqdadiah. Significant violence or unrest may compromise the ability of PM Abadi and conciliatory political blocs to compose a new cabinet as part of ongoing reforms, and sufficiently destabilize the political situation to delay or collapse efforts to complete the reform process.