

Iraq Situation Report: July 18 - 20, 2015

1 Iraqi and U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes near Baiji. DoD confirmed three airstrikes “near Baiji” on July 17. Iraqi Army (IA) Aviation airstrikes destroyed ISIS positions used to fire rockets at the ISF in Baiji and the Baiji Refinery on July 20, killing six ISIS fighters.



2 Iraqi Air Force strikes in western Anbar. The Iraqi Air Force (IAF) conducted airstrikes on ISIS positions in Kubaysa and Rawa east of Qa'im on July 18, killing 25 ISIS fighters. IA Aviation airstrikes on the outskirts of Hit district also killed 15 ISIS fighters.



3 U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes support the ISF around Ramadi. The U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition continued to prioritize air support to Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)-led operations in Ramadi over militia-dominated operations ongoing near Fallujah. DoD confirmed 15 airstrikes “near Ramadi” between July 17-20. Iraqi Special Operations Forces (SOF) and “Popular Mobilization” forces clashed with ISIS on the outskirts of Anbar University south of Ramadi on July 18, killing 12 ISIS fighters. IA, Iraqi Police (IP), and tribal fighters later attacked ISIS in al-Tash south of Ramadi and Husayba east of Ramadi on July 19, killing 35 ISIS fighters. The ISF also advanced toward the 8th Brigade base on the western outskirts of Ramadi on July 20 while Federal Police (FP) intelligence and IA Aviation conducted a strike on an ISIS headquarters in Ramadi, killing 30 ISIS fighters.



4 Popular Mobilization Commission (PMC) changes tone regarding Fallujah. A PMC spokesperson stated on July 17 that a push into Fallujah requires “more time and a political decision.” This change in tone likely comes in response to the significant resistance encountered by the ISF and “Popular Mobilization” forces in Saqlawiya, northwest of Fallujah. DoD reported two airstrikes “near Fallujah” on July 18 and one “near Fallujah” on July 20. IA, IP, and “Popular Mobilization” forces later launched renewed operations against the highway connecting Fallujah and Ramadi on July 20, attacking areas around the Japanese Bridge north of Saqlawiya as well as Hamidhiya and its environs northeast of Ramadi.



5 VBIEDs foiled in Baghdad. FP forces arrested the driver of an SVBIED attempting to target an IP and IA checkpoint in the al-Jihad neighborhood of southwestern Baghdad on July 18 and safely detonated the vehicle. MoI intelligence safely detonated a second VBIED in al-Amil neighborhood of southwestern Baghdad. The Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) later safely detonated a motorcycle-borne IED near a Shi'a religious building in the al-Bunuk neighborhood of northern Baghdad on July 19. MoI intelligence stated that it arrested a 41-member ISIS cell responsible for carrying out SVEST and VBIED attacks in Baghdad on July 20, capturing several SVESTs and VBIEDs.



6 ISIS truck bomb kills over 120. ISIS detonated an SVBIED in the majority-Shi'a town of Khan Bani Saad southwest of Baquba on July 17, killing over 120 individuals and injuring 140 others. Speaker of the Council of Representatives (CoR) Salim al-Jubouri, a Sunni native of Diyala Province, condemned the attack on July 18, and Badr Organization commander Hadi al-Amiri visited Khan Bani Saad on July 19. The Khan Bani Saad police chief was reportedly fired, while the Tigris Operations Command (TOC) arrested “several” suspects involved in the attack. The head of the Diyala provincial security committee stated that “half” of Diyala Province's resident security forces are currently fighting in Anbar and Salah ad-Din Provinces, creating a security gap. Thirteen men including a Sunni tribal leader were later kidnapped in Khan Bani Saad on July 20.



7 ISIS targets Diyala civilians with mortars. ISIS shelled the Hadid area south of Khalis with mortars on July 20, killing five civilians. A Diyala provincial council member stated that these attacks are designed to stir sectarian tensions, while another provincial official stated that the attack comes amid increased security incidents in Diyala “over the past few weeks.”



8 Unrest in Basra. Demonstrators protested persistent electricity shortages, blocked a road to the Mjnun Oil Fields in northern Basra, and set fire to a local government building in northern Basra on July 17. Security forces fired on the demonstrators, killing at least one demonstrator. The Basra governor announced an investigation into the demonstrations on July 18, accusing “saboteurs” of orchestrating the protests. Most Basra-based ISF units are deployed forward against ISIS, generating a shortage of local security forces similar to Diyala Province, and such demonstrations have become common in Basra over the summer.



- Major Cities 🚗 SVBIED 🟦 Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- 💣 Major Clash 🚚 Failed S/VBIED 🟪 Iraqi Shi'a militias
- ✈️ Iraqi Airstrikes 🟢 ISF 🟠 Unknown Gunmen
- ✈️ Airstrikes 🟡 Coalition ⬛ ISIS

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Graphics: Evan Sterling

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The Iraqi government is experiencing competing pressures from dispersed ISIS attacks which have strained the capacity of both the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the “Popular Mobilization.” In the aftermath of the ISIS SVBIED attack on Khan Bani Saad on July 17, which incurred extremely high casualties, the head of the Diyala provincial security committee stated that half of Diyala's resident security forces have been forward-deployed to priority fronts against ISIS in Anbar and Salah ad-Din Provinces, leaving vast areas close to Baghdad unprotected. This security gap may have enabled ISIS to expand in Diyala Province, not only in northern Diyala, but also in historic support zones such as Baquba and towns like Khan Bani Saad situated northeast of Baghdad. The Khan Bani Saad attack may have been intended to divert ISF resources toward eastern Baghdad and away from other fronts, such as Anbar Province, where ISIS is on the defensive; ISIS may also be attempting to divert attention from other targets, such as western Baghdad, where the ISF interdicted multiple SVBIEDs over the reporting period. Nevertheless, ISIS is also likely aiming to seize territory in Diyala Province ultimately. ISW has consistently reported on the escalating warnings from Diyala provincial officials describing ISIS's resurgence in the province, including the most recent statement from a Diyala provincial council member on July 20 following the shelling of civilians with mortars north of Khan Bani Saad. Nonetheless, Diyala is not the only Iraqi province experiencing security gaps. The Babil provincial government recently requested that the MoI excuse the province from contributing further ISF units to operations in Anbar Province, cautioning that additional deployments would undermine the security of the province. Violent demonstrations unrelated to ISIS in Basra Province over the reporting period also indicate a tense security situation left untended by the forward-deployment of many Basra-based ISF units. ISIS will likely continue to orchestrate attacks throughout widespread regions of Iraq in order to further stretch the footprint of the ISF, open exploitable opportunities for future expansion, and alleviate recent pressure on ISIS in Fallujah and Baiji.