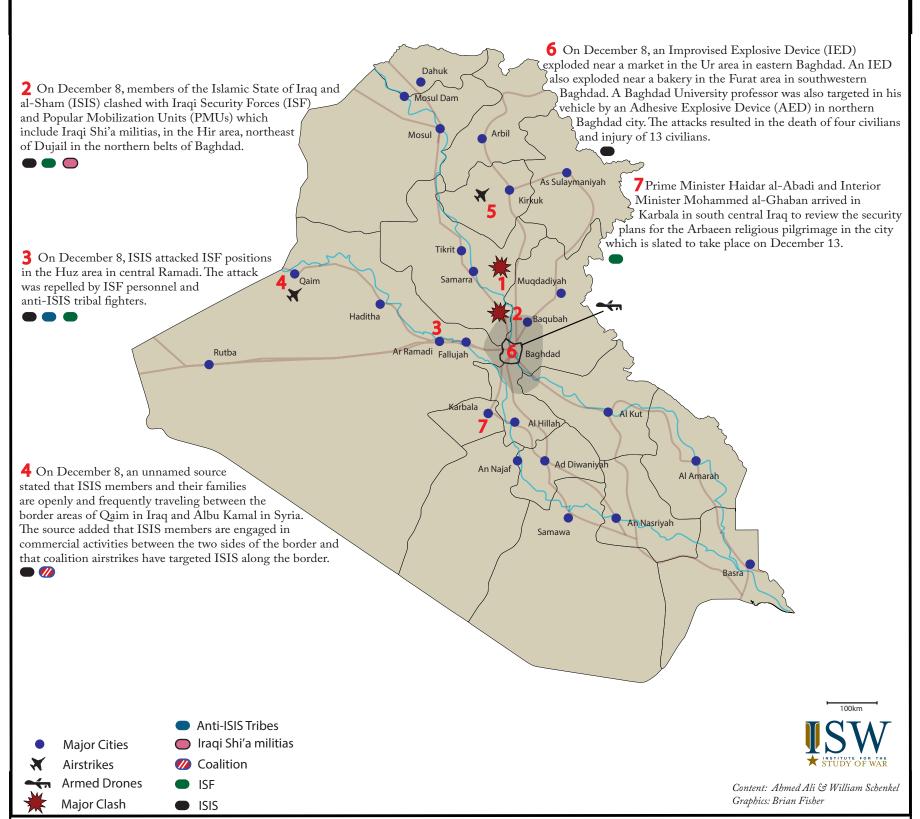
Iraq Situation Report: December 8, 2014

1 On December 8, ISIS clashed with the ISF in al-Mutasim sub-district, south of Samarra. The clashes resulted in the deaths of four Iraqi Police (IP) members and the injury of an additional five, while "dozens of ISIS fighters" were killed. ISIS reportedly still maintains control of central al-Mutasim and the ISF remain positioned on the outskirts of the sub-district.

5 On December 8, "intense" coalition airstrikes targeted ISIS positions in areas west and south of Kirkuk city in northern Iraq. The airstrikes targeted the positions of Mulla Abdullah, Maktab Khalid, and Maryam Beg in addition to a bridge near the village of Fakhir, and reportedly caused significant damage to ISIS in the area. The bridge is reported to be a significant supply point for ISIS in the area.





There is an ongoing and intensified push by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in areas north of Baghdad and near Samarra. ISIS is clashing with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Iraqi Shi'a militias within the Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) in areas close to Samarra in order to isolate the ISF and likely also to mount attacks on Samarra which is home to an important religious shrine. Samarra has been well-fortified since June of this year, but ISIS activities will likely force the deployment of further reinforcements by the ISF and PMUs. These ISIS activities are taking place as the ISF and Iraqi government are gearing up for the December 13 Arbaeen religious pilgrimage which will witness thousands of pilgrims walking to the city of Karbala in south central Iraq. In the past, the Arbaeen pilgrimage was targeted by ISIS and ISIS will likely seek to target it again this year. The pilgrimage will represent another test for the ISF and PMUs as ISIS continues to engage them on fronts elsewhere in Iraq. It will be important to watch if ISIS targets the pilgrimage with spectacular attacks including Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) in order to rejuvenate its base and also send a message that it is still able to operate in southern Iraq.