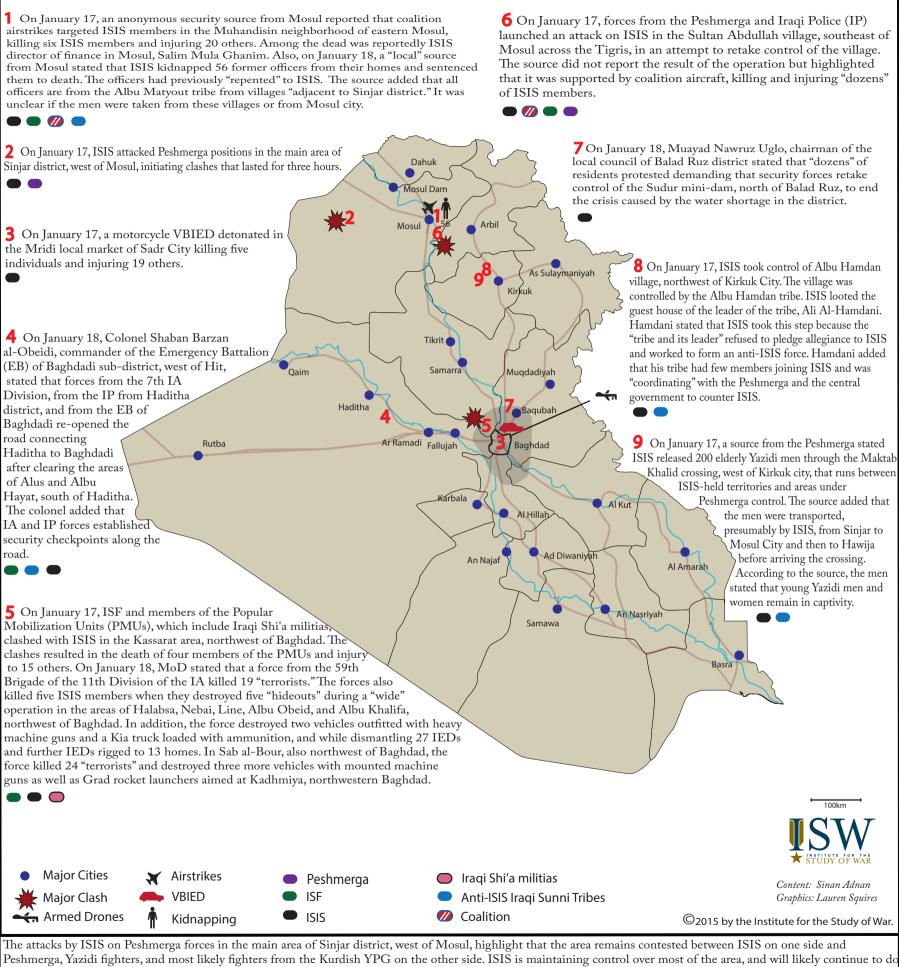
Iraq Situation Report: January 17-18, 2015



The attacks by ISIS on Peshmerga forces in the main area of Sinjar district, west of Mosul, highlight that the area remains contested between ISIS on one side and Peshmerga, Yazidi fighters, and most likely fighters from the Kurdish YPG on the other side. ISIS is maintaining control over most of the area, and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future. It is notable that the level of conflict has remained relatively static since December 21, 2014, indicating that the Peshmerga has not yet identified Sinjar as a main effort. This is likely because the KRG is prioritizing the defense of Arbil over the clearing of Sinjar, especially after the recent attack by ISIS on Gwer sub-district, southwest of Arbil, which prompted the KRG to deploy additional Peshmerga forces to the area on January 14, 2015. Meanwhile, the motive behind the ISIS release of older Yazidi men remains unclear, but it is notable that ISIS transported the men from Sinjar to Mosul and then to Hawija indicating that ISIS enjoys freedom of movement along that route despite the presence of anti-ISIS forces in the vicinity of those three fronts, particularly Sinjar. The battle for the area northwest of Baghdad remains ongoing as the ISF and Iraqi Shi'a militias aim to deny ISIS freedom of movement between northern Baghdad, eastern Anbar, and southern Salah ad-Din.