ISIS Attacks Ramadi & Seizes Fallujah, 3 Jan 2014

The above photo depicts an earlier harbinger of ISIS’s intent for Ramadi, when ISIS appeared publicly within Ramadi’s anti-government protest on October 28, 2013. ISIS launched simultaneous attacks upon Ramadi and Fallujah on January 3, 2014, seizing municipal buildings and police headquarters. ISIS captured Fallujah, which it still controls in May 2015. The ISF with local tribes drove ISIS from the city center in Ramadi in January 2014. ISIS has been contesting the ISF’s control of Ramadi since then.
ISIS has been attempting to control all of Anbar since the fall of Mosul in June 2014. ISIS did not succeed in capturing Haditha, al-Asad airbase, or Ramadi in 2014. The fall of Ramadi makes the remaining ISF positions vulnerable.
Assessed ISIS and ISF positions in Anbar in Oct. 2014

ISIS has tried to capture Ramadi as part of a strategy to take all of Anbar. In October 2014, ISIS captured the city of Hit to the West. Iraqi Army (IA) units largely withdrew to defensive positions at that time, leaving defense of urban areas to local Iraqi Police and pro-government Sunni tribes. In Ramadi, local tribal and police units were able to resist ISIS’s attacks despite the withdrawal of IA units to the Anbar Operations Command (AOC) headquarters on the northern edge of the city on October 5.
December 2014: ISIS conducted simultaneous offensives against ISF elements in Anbar province, launching attacks on Haditha, Ramadi, and areas close to Al-Asad Airbase, including Hit and Al-Baghdadi in preparation for a wide-scale ground offensive against Ramadi. ISIS likely attacked near Al-Asad to fix ISF forces there. They would have been the primary source of reinforcements to Ramadi, illustrating ISIS's operational design.
ISIS ATTACKS RAMADI’S CITY CENTER IN DEC. 2014

ISIS launched a series of attacks against the Anbar Operations Command (AOC) headquarters, the 8th Iraqi Army Brigade headquarters, and the government complex in the city of Ramadi, following the seizure of nearby neighborhoods in November 2014. However, Iraqi Security Forces have largely held the city’s primary defenses, maintaining critical ground lines of communication into the city’s center.
ISIS’s operational design in early 2015 reflected two strategic priorities: Ramadi and the Baiji Oil Refinery. ISIS attacked both of them simultaneously on multiple occasions including in mid-April. Beginning in May 2015, ISIS began to offset its attacks, focusing upon Baiji first, and then Ramadi. ISIS also conducted numerous shaping and diversionary attacks in the vicinity of these targets and also on other fronts. ISIS’s strategy to consolidate its control of terrain, part of its defense, includes deliberate efforts not only to prevent the ISF from massing on one front, but also to divert them in different directions to allow ISIS to make advances even while under fire.
ISIS resumed operations to take Ramadi in mid-April. It attacked Ramadi on April 10 and 14, and probed it again on May 5 and 9. On May 15, 2015 ISIS launched a major attack in central Ramadi targeting the Government Complex and Anbar Operations Command (AOC), both are focal and highly symbolic points in the city that withstood numerous attacks since January 2014. ISIS began the attack by seizing neighborhoods between the two facilities, circled above. The spokesperson of the governor of Anbar stated that Ramadi fell to ISIS on May 17, 2015.
On May 18, IA Aviation evacuated ISF members from al-Malab neighborhood in southwestern Ramadi, indicating that the neighborhood fell to ISIS. Meanwhile, ISIS is reportedly besieging IP members at the Justice Palace.
RAMADI IN CONTEXT OF ISIS’S BATTLE PLAN

ISIS relies on freedom of movement through Iraq’s Jazeera desert to support alternating operations in Anbar and Salah ad-Din provinces. Ramadi is part of ISIS’s battle plan to gain control of cities close to Baghdad. Ramadi is also a provincial capital on par with Tikrit, making up ISIS’s loss of the latter in April 2015.
Ramadi in context of ISIS’s defense

Control of Ramadi is also part of ISIS’s defense. ISIS has systematically designed battles since June 2015 to eliminate gaps in its control that can present future vulnerabilities. ISIS has worked to clear Ramadi multiple times since the fall of Mosul, particularly in December 2014.

ISIS’s “Pinch” Consolidation Maneuvers

1. Jun 14: ISIS attacked the Baiji Oil Refinery after seizing cities on multiple sides.
2. Jun 14: ISIS seized the al-Qaim/Albu-Kamal border crossing after seizing cities on either side.
3. Aug 14: ISIS seized Sinjar after seizing Tel Afar, closing the gap between Mosul and Sheddadi.
4. Oct 14: ISIS failed to seize Kobane between northern Aleppo and Raqqa, controlled by ISIS.
5. Dec 14: ISIS reinvigorated attacks upon Ramadi from “multiple axes” after controlling Hit.
ISIS SANCTUARY: MAY 18, 2015

CONTROL ZONE: An area where ISIS exerts physical/psychological pressure to assure that individuals/groups respond as directed.

ATTACK ZONE: An area where ISIS conducts offensive maneuvers.

SUPPORT ZONE: An area free of significant action against ISIS and which permits logistics and administrative support of ISIS's forces.
ISIS SANCTUARY: MAY 18, 2015

CONTROL ZONE: An area where ISIS exerts physical/psychological pressure to assure that individuals/groups respond as directed.

ATTACK ZONE: An area where ISIS conducts offensive maneuvers.

SUPPORT ZONE: An area free of significant action against ISIS and which permits logistics and administrative support of ISIS's forces.
Media and General Inquiries
John D. Lawrence
Director, External Relations
jlawrence@understandingwar.org/
press@understandingwar.org
202-293-5550, x205

Website: www.UnderstandingWar.org
Iraq Blog: www.UnderstandingWar.org/iraq-blog
Syria Blog: www.UnderstandingWar.org/syria-blog

Twitter: @TheStudyofWar
InstitutefortheStudyofWar
Institute for the Study of War