

## Iraq Situation Report: April 14-15, 2015

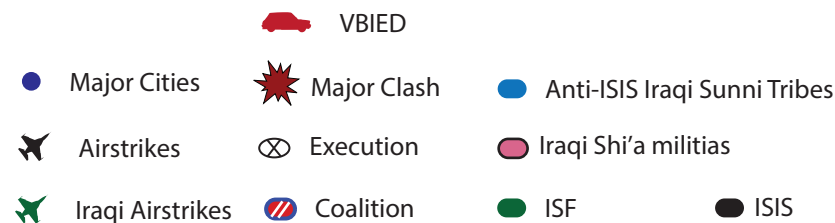
1 On April 14, Anbar Provincial Council member Athal al-Fahdawi stated that ISIS attacked an IA headquarters in the Thar Thar canal area, northeast of Ramadi, using three SVBIEDs. “Security forces” destroyed the SVBIEDs before they reached their targets. On April 14, an anonymous source in the 1st Division stated that an ISIS member targeted security forces using an SVBIED in the Nadhim al-Taqsam area, north of Fallujah. A 1st Division force killed the driver and destroyed the SVBIED.

**2** ISIS made significant gains around Ramadi. On April 15, Mayor of Ramadi Dalf al-Kubaisi stated that ISIS clashed with security forces and tribal fighters and took “complete” control over the Albu Ghanim area, northeast of Ramadi. He added that “security forces” withdrew “suddenly,” causing a gap and allowing ISIS to capture the area. A security source said that ISIS executed nine people and destroyed several houses belonging to Albu Ghanim tribal fighters while “hundreds” of families fled the Albu Ghanim area and Ramadi to Khalidiya, Habaniya, and Baghdad. Another source added that ISIS killed an Albu Ghanim tribal commander, Zamil al-Dulaimi, and three of his aides, on the outskirts of the area.

**3** An Ministry of Interior (MoI) source stated that four VBIEDs exploded in Baghdad. The first exploded in front of the Yarmuk Hospital in central Baghdad, killing three people and wounding 10 others. A second exploded in Muadhafin neighborhood of Mahmudiya, south of Baghdad, killing four people and wounding 15 others. An IED and a VBIED exploded simultaneously in a parking garage in Wihda neighborhood in eastern Baghdad, killing four people and wounding 11 others. Another VBIED exploded in Mashtal neighborhood in eastern Baghdad, killing three people and wounding 12 others.

4 On April 14, ISIS launched a major attack on the Baiji oil refinery, north of Baiji, using five “suicide attackers” and an unspecified number of SVBIEDs. The attack initiated intense clashes with the security forces at the facility reportedly killing 37 ISIS members, 11 guards, and the commander of security. ISIS burned oil tanks and tires to disrupt airstrikes, captured three buildings, and detonated an SVBIED inside of the refinery. The commander of Salah ad-Din Operations Command (SDOC) reported that military reinforcements arrived at the refinery. The U.S. Defense Department reported that seven coalition airstrikes targeted ISIS positions, forces, and equipment “near Baiji.” On April 15, the SDOC commander stated that an operation was launched to clear areas around Baiji “reaching the refinery,” although a spokesperson for the “Popular Mobilization” stated that five FP battalions, two CTS battalions, and two “Popular Mobilization” battalions, along with a force from Shi’a militia “Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah” were involved in the clearing operation and that it would extend further north into northern Salah ad-Din “reaching Shirqat.” He added that one ISOF company, one refinery protection company, and a battalion of the “Popular Mobilization” are currently at the refinery. In addition to the refinery area, ISF clearing operations also appear to be going on in Baiji district. The mayor of Baiji district stated that a “security force” supported by “Popular Mobilization” made advances in southern and central Baiji.

MoD later confirmed that ISIS penetrated the refinery but maintained that ISIS members are besieged in the facility and that most were killed. IA Aviation targeted ISIS in the main area of Baiji district and in Seneya and Albu Jwari to the west and north of Baiji killing "45" ISIS members and destroying five vehicles.



Content: Sinan Adnan, Patrick Martin, and Omar al-Dulimi  
Graphics: Evan Sterling

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Pressure against the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) has escalated in Iraq as Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi visits Washington to request more military and financial aid to curb the advances of anti-government militants. As the ISF and allied forces were preparing to launch an operation in Anbar, ISIS responded by launching strong counter attacks near Ramadi, resulting in the further isolation of an already besieged and contested city. ISIS also penetrated the defenses of the Baiji Oil Refinery in northern Iraq. Ramadi has been under a great deal of pressure since December of 2013, which is likely to increase with the fall of adjacent areas to the east and the north of the city. These areas are important for the defense of Ramadi because they lie close to supply routes and can be used to mount further attacks on the city. The fall of Ramadi would deal a major strategic and psychological blow to the Anbaris and to the government of PM Abadi. It would also undermine the relationships between Anbaris and Baghdad, as Iraqi Sunni leaders in Anbar have been calling for an increase in aid to the province as a whole and to Ramadi in particular. These leaders believe that Baghdad has failed to provide this aid and have previously sent a delegation to Washington to request it. ISW has previously focused on Ramadi as an area of concern, discussing ISF disposition in the area in “ISF Withdraws to Defensive Positions in Anbar Province” on October 29, 2014, and highlighting ISIS attacks in “ISIS Offensive in Ramadi City and Al-Asad Airbase in Al-Anbar, Iraq” on December 24, 2014. These publications are available at <http://www.understandingwar.org>. In the north, the participation of the group known as Firqat al-Abas al-Qitaliyah in the fight for Baiji sheds light on the command and control of the government over anti-ISIS forces, an important topic discussed between the PM and President Obama during the visit. The group was formed following an edict from Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani but unlike Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi’s militias, it expressed readiness to work under the command of the ISF during times where Iran-leaning militias have reduced their participation due to the role of U.S. airstrikes and the desire of the government to command their activities under an official chain of command. As the U.S. and PM Abadi support the narrative that all forces need to be under the chain of command, ultimately sidelining the militias, the militias and their Iranian supporters will likely attempt to push back reiterating their role as effective forces for the protection of Iraq. The leader of the Nujaba Movement, an Iranian-backed militia, stated today that only the “Resistance,” in reference to the militias, possess the required expertise to succeed in the fight. Such rhetoric is likely to increase and it is important to watch for further reactions especially if an agreement regarding the role of militias is not reached.