ISIS intensified its attacks against the ISF and Iraqi Shi’a militias in northern and western Iraq. In Baiji, norther Salah ad-Din, ISIS launched a successful counter attack that reversed recent gains by Iranian proxy groups, along with a Shi’a armed groups affiliated with the religious establishment of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (Hawza), and the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) and the Federal Police (FP). Iranian proxy groups led the operation and a failure to hold their recent gains may provide the Iraqi government with an opportunity to bolster ISF support in Baiji and establish dominance over the militias in northern Salah ad-Din with the support of U.S. airstrikes. Allocation of resources to counter-offensives across multiple fronts is key for the ISF, however, as ISIS attacked on several other fronts over the last few days. Most notably, ISIS reportedly conducted a major ground attack on areas southwest of Kirkuk city, which is likely to generate a strong Kurdish reaction that may translate to a more offensive posture toward areas controlled by ISIS in southwestern Kirkuk province, from where ISIS likely launched the attack. A previous Kurdish attempt at such an offensive proved insufficient, partially because the area lies beyond Iraqi Kurdish majority territory, and likely because the Peshmerga has insufficient resources to deploy in Kirkuk without exposing other areas to attacks by ISIS. ISIS attacks and east of Mosul may have been probing attacks to test Kurdish response. In the west, the Anbar Operations Command declared a major offensive north of Falujah, which ISIS attempted to disrupt by deploying SVBIEDs. This comes following an increase in operational tempo over the last four days as militia and ISF members were killed and two ISF members and destroyed an ISIS “car bomb factory.” Between July 3 and July 6, the DoD reported 10 airstrikes “near Fallujah.”

On July 3, ISIS destroyed the house of Hawija police chief Col. Fattah Yassin al-Khalafai in Barzina village, between Kirkuk and Hawija. On July 5, Iraqi Air Force airstikes destroyed a VBEd factory containing “more than 100 vehicles” and killed a large number of ISIS members, including “explosives experts” in Riyadh sub-district, southwest of Kirkuk on the road linking Kirkuk and Hawija. Between July 3 and July 4, DoD reported two airstikes “near Hawija.”

On June 7, Kirkuk Peshmerga officials stated that ISIS attacked Peshmerga positions in al-Humayra and al-Murra villages, al-Nawaif, al-Shahid complex, the Rashad area, Maktab Khalid, and Miriam beg south of Kirkuk city. According to a Kirkuk Peshmerga official, 600 ISIS fighters participated in the attack and used multiple SVBIEDs, three of which the Peshmerga destroyed with anti-tank missiles before the SVBIEDs reached their targets. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Peshmerga counterterrorism forces of Tikrit, killing nine Iraqi Army (IA) soldiers and forcing the ISF and “Popular Mobilization” to withdraw southwest from the center of Baiji. ISIS then recaptured Asli and Tamim neighborhoods in Baiji. On June 7, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that IA Aviation strikes killed 10 ISIS fighters in the Albu Juwari area, north of Baiji, and an anonymous security source reported that ISF reinforcements are heading to Baiji from south of Tikrit. Between July 3 and 6, the DoD confirmed three airstikes “near Baiji.”

On July 3 and July 6, DoD confirmed six airstikes “near Makhmur,” south of Mosul. On July 5, ISIS attacked Peshmerga positions near Kasaf village in Gwer sub-district, south of Mosul, with mortars, resulting in no Peshmerga casualties. The U.S.-led Coalition reportedly conducted an airstrike in response to the attack, killing 40 ISIS fighters and destroying more than 10 vehicles.

On July 4, a VBEd exploded near the Kubaisi mosque on Shuhada Street in Bayaa in southern Baghdad, killing at least two people and wounding at least 15 others. On July 6, an Iraqi fighter jet suffered a technical malfunction, resulting in the release of a bomb on to the majority-Shi’a residential neighborhood in Nairiyah area in eastern Baghdad, killing 12 civilians and wounding 20 others. The Joint Operations Command announced the formation of a committee to investigate the incident.

On July 4, ISIS launched two SVBIEDs against the ISF and “Popular Mobilization” in Baiji district, north of Tikrit, killing nine Iraqi Army (IA) soldiers and forcing the ISF and “Popular Mobilization” to withdraw southwest from the center of Baiji. ISIS then recaptured Asir and Tamim neighborhoods in Baiji. On July 4, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that IA Aviation strikes killed 10 ISIS fighters in the Albu Juwari area, north of Baiji, and an anonymous security source reported that ISF reinforcements are heading to Baiji from south of Tikrit. Between July 3 and 6, the DoD confirmed three airstikes “near Baiji.”

On July 4, an ISIS SVBIED targeted Zervani forces, a Peshmerga paramilitary force dominated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party, in al-Nuran area, east of Mosul. The Zervani forces destroyed the vehicle, killing the driver, before it reached its target.

On July 4, an anonymous source stated that unknown gunmen killed a PUK official from Qarah Hanjar sub-district, northeast of Kirkuk, in his car in Souq al-Husayr, north of Kirkuk.

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