

# Iraq Situation Report: December 22, 2015 - January 6, 2016

**1 ISIS continues pressuring Peshmerga positions in northern Iraq.** Peshmerga sources stated that, with the support of Coalition airstrikes, the Peshmerga destroyed five Suicide Vehicle-borne IEDs (SVBIEDs) targeting Peshmerga positions in the Dumiz Fayidah area near Sinjar on December 30 and two "suicide attackers" in al-Ashiq village, northwest of Mosul, on December 31.

**2 ISIS launches major attack on Haditha district.** ISIS attacked Haditha from three directions on January 3 using up to 14 VBIEDs, killing at least 45 members of security forces and wounding at least 50 others over four days of fighting. ISIS briefly captured the villages of Barwana and al-Sha'i, south of Haditha, and al-Sakran, east of Haditha, before the ISF, supported by Coalition airstrikes, recaptured the areas.

**3 ISIS maintains attack capabilities in western Anbar.** Federal Police (FP) killed up to seven ISIS Suicide Vest (SVEST) attackers as they targeted a FP headquarters on December 24 in 110 Kilo area, west of Ramadi. ISIS later claimed that the attack was successful and involved five suicide bombers.

**4 ISF clear key complex in central Ramadi.** The ISF entered Ramadi from the south and began operations to recapture the city center with Coalition air support on December 22. ISF recaptured the government complex in the center of the city on December 28, but continue to clear the surrounding areas within the city center. The eastern suburbs have yet to be cleared. Local Anbar tribal fighters have deployed to the city's outskirts to secure recaptured areas.

**5 ISIS attacks military post near key juncture in southern Anbar desert.** ISIS detonated two SVBIEDs at a military post in Nukhaib near the Iraqi-Saudi border on January 5, killing eight Iraqi soldiers and destroying military vehicles.

**6 Unconfirmed reports of three additional SOF raids.** Anonymous security sources stated that U.S. SOF raids on December 26, 30, and January 2 targeted ISIS in Hawija district alongside Kurdish counter-terrorism forces. One report stated that Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) participated during operations on December 30. The MoD denied on January 5 any participation in raids, and the U.S. denied any operations without Iraqi government consent.

**7 ISIS targets military base near Tikrit.** Up to seven ISIS attackers wearing SVESTs attacked a Ninewa police camp at Camp Speicher, northwest of Tikrit, on January 3. At least two SVESTs detonated, killing 20 IP members and wounding ten others.

**8 IDPs return to Diyala province.** 155 families of Internally-displaced persons (IDPs) returned to al-Taliyah neighborhood in Jalula, northeast of Muqdadiah, on December 27, while 100 IDP families are set to return to Udhaim district, north of Baqubah in early January.

**9 ISIS retains attack capabilities in Diyala province.** Two VBIEDs detonated in the outskirts of Khalis, northwest of Baqubah, on December 23, killing two and wounding at least 23 others.

**10 Saudi Shi'a cleric's execution leads to mass condemnation in Iraq.** Iranian proxy militias massed the execution of Saudi Shi'a cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr on January 3, calling for mass demonstrations and issuing a series of demands including the execution of Saudi prisoners and the expulsion of the Saudi ambassador. The Iraqi government and Grand Ayatollahs Ali al-Sistani and Bashir al-Najafi also condemned the execution. Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr demonstrated on January 4 in front of the Saudi embassy in Baghdad. Smaller protests occurred in Diwaniyah, Dhi Qar, Karbala, Muthanna, Najaf, and Wasit. Iranian proxy groups and other "Popular Mobilization" groups staged a large protest in Baghdad, Karbala, and Basra on December 6 condemning Nimr's execution.

**11 IED attacks and targeted violence follow announcement of Saudi Shi'a cleric's execution.** IEDs exploded in two Sunni mosques in Babil and a third south of Baghdad on January 3. A Sunni cleric was killed by unspecified means south of Baghdad on January 4. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi blamed ISIS of taking advantage of the unrest to divide "Iraqi unity," though ISIS did not claim the attacks.



- Major Cities
- ★ Major Clash
- ✈ Airstrikes
- 🚗 SVBIED
- 🚚 VBIED
- 🚑 Failed S/VBIED
- 👤 SVEST
- 👥 Parade
- 🚩 Coalition
- 🟢 ISF
- 🟡 Peshmerga
- ⬤ ISIS
- 🟦 Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- 🟪 Iraqi Shi'a Militias

Content: Patrick Martin and ISW Iraq Team  
 Graphics: Emily Anagnostos  
 ©2015 by the Institute for the Study of War

The ISF made significant gains in Ramadi in December, clearing much of the city center and recapturing the government complex on December 28. ISIS launched a major attack on Haditha district, west of Ramadi, less than one week later, inflicting heavy casualties among the ISF and tribal fighters and briefly capturing three villages. The attack demonstrates ISIS's continued capability to conduct significant ground operations in Anbar, despite the group's loss of most of Ramadi. The ISF victory was also overshadowed by Saudi Arabia's execution of prominent Shi'a cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr on January 2, sparking outrage from Iran as well as Iraq's religious establishment. Anti-interventionist leader of the Sadrist Trend political movement, Muqtada al-Sadr, condemned the execution, and his supporters protested in large numbers across Baghdad and the southern provinces on January 5. Iranian proxy militias called for the expulsion of the Saudi ambassador and the closure of the Saudi embassy one week after its first reopening since 1990. Iranian proxy militia and Popular Mobilization members protested on January 6 for protests likely intended to pressure Prime Minister Abadi into cutting off ties with Saudi Arabia. The proxy militias seek to demonstrate the necessity of Iranian support and the Popular Mobilization in the fight against ISIS at the expense of the Coalition and Iran's regional opponents, such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey. They likely scheduled their demonstration to coincide with Iraq's Army Day military parade in the Green Zone, occurring less than a kilometer away from the Baghdad protest site, to spoil the celebration of the ISF's recent gains. The Prime Minister signaled an unwillingness to concede, and Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari suggested Iraq serve as a mediator between the two countries to mend relations while speaking in Tehran on January 6. However, Iranian proxy militias will continue pressuring PM Abadi to align more closely with Iran, and may be tempted to deploy targeted violence against Saudi assets or citizens, as they have done against Turkish and Qatari citizens in the past.