

Iraq Situation Report: March 10-11, 2015

1 On March 10, reports emerged indicating that the ground assault on Tikrit city began from the northern, western, and southern axes. Initial reports indicated that ISF, "Popular Mobilization," and Iraqi Sunni tribal fighters made some gains inside the city. On March 11, the combined forces reportedly made significant gains in the Qadisiya area, located north of Tikrit city and south of Tikrit University; the Dayoum area, northwest of Tikrit; and the Shishan area, south of Tikrit. Also, the forces reportedly made significant gains in the city. Spokesperson of Salah ad-Din tribal council Sheikh Marwan al-Jbara stated that the combined forces took control of the Asri and Zohor neighborhoods, the buildings of the local council and the IP command, and Atiba Street. Jbara stated that the forces are working to take control of the Palaces Complex in central Tikrit.

2 On March 11, ISIS launched a major attack on Ramadi using mortars, SVBIEDs, SVESTs, and gunmen. Four attackers with SVESTs attempting to target the entrances of the city were reportedly killed by "security forces" as they approached. According to Deputy Commander of the Golden Division in Anbar Brigadier General Abdul-Amir al-Khazraji, two SVBIEDs attempted to target al-Warrar Bridge, north of Ramadi, but "security forces" destroyed the vehicles near the bridge. He added that clashes took place when ISIS gunmen attacked "security forces" in the city from the direction of Albu Itha, northeast of Ramadi; Albu Diab, northwest of Ramadi; and al-Tamim, southern Ramadi, which killed "dozens" of ISIS fighters. A security source contradicted Khazraji's report, indicating that it was a single non-suicide VBIED targeting al-Warrar bridge, but it is more likely that Khazraji's account is correct. The same source stated that another VBIED was detonated behind al-Dawla Mosque in Ramadi. An anonymous security official reported that the toll of the sum of the fighting in Ramadi was five individuals killed, among them three civilians and two police members, and 34 injuries. Anbar Operations Command implemented a full curfew over Ramadi, al-Khalidiya, and Habaniya, east of Ramadi.

3 On March 11, a VBIED detonated near a clinic in Hurriyah, northwestern Baghdad, killing 11 individuals and injuring 32 others.

4 On March 11, an anonymous security source in Ninewa stated that coalition airstrikes targeted ISIS gatherings in Tel al-Shair village, west of Qayarah sub-district, killing nine ISIS members who were intending to target areas in Makhmur district, southwest of Arbil. DoD stated that five coalition airstrikes "near Mosul" struck an ISIS tactical unit and an outpost and destroyed an armored vehicle.

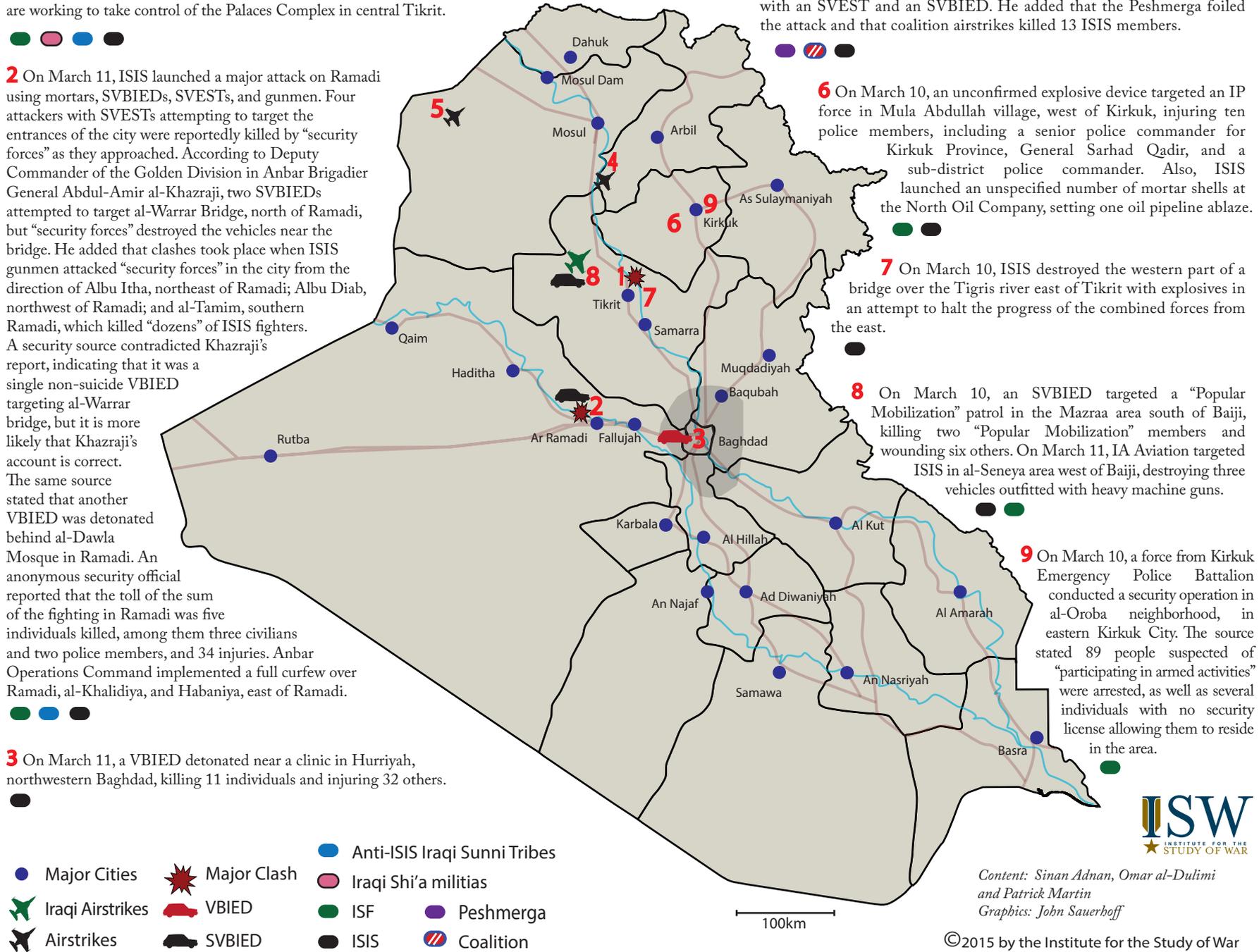
5 On March 10, a source from the Peshmerga stated that ISIS launched an attack on the Peshmerga in Sinjar, west of Mosul, using an attacker with an SVEST and an SVBIED. He added that the Peshmerga foiled the attack and that coalition airstrikes killed 13 ISIS members.

6 On March 10, an unconfirmed explosive device targeted an IP force in Mula Abdullah village, west of Kirkuk, injuring ten police members, including a senior police commander for Kirkuk Province, General Sarhad Qadir, and a sub-district police commander. Also, ISIS launched an unspecified number of mortar shells at the North Oil Company, setting one oil pipeline ablaze.

7 On March 10, ISIS destroyed the western part of a bridge over the Tigris river east of Tikrit with explosives in an attempt to halt the progress of the combined forces from the east.

8 On March 10, an SVBIED targeted a "Popular Mobilization" patrol in the Mazraa area south of Baiji, killing two "Popular Mobilization" members and wounding six others. On March 11, IA Aviation targeted ISIS in al-Seneya area west of Baiji, destroying three vehicles outfitted with heavy machine guns.

9 On March 10, a force from Kirkuk Emergency Police Battalion conducted a security operation in al-Oroba neighborhood, in eastern Kirkuk City. The source stated 89 people suspected of "participating in armed activities" were arrested, as well as several individuals with no security license allowing them to reside in the area.



Content: Sinan Adnan, Omar al-Dulimi and Patrick Martin
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The operation to retake Tikrit city appears to have begun. Forces positioned at the western, northern, and southern outskirts of the city initiated the assault on Tikrit city yesterday, pressing into the outskirts of the city. These forces held their positions for the first eight days of the operation until combined forces across the river expelled ISIS from its main strongholds in the east. This initial phase of the operation disrupted ISIS supplies lines out of the city, including to Baiji. The second phase, underway now, will attempt to clear the city itself. It is unclear at this time to what extent these forces hold ground inside the city but their entrance into the city alone, if correct, is significant given that previous operations to retake Tikrit have not resulted in similar advances. The Salah ad-Din operation of which Tikrit is a component are the first to combine the ISF, Iraqi Shi'a militias, and Iraqi Sunni tribal forces into a complex, multi-phase operation. A similar model is likely in future campaigns to retake major urban centers. Iraqi Shi'a militias have played a significant role in most major successful anti-ISIS operations. These forces have not typically had a strong interest in Anbar in western Iraq or Ninewa in the north. If this model of operation proves successful in Tikrit, it will be important to see if these militias aim to play a greater role in a national anti-ISIS campaign that extends into beyond their historic areas of interest.