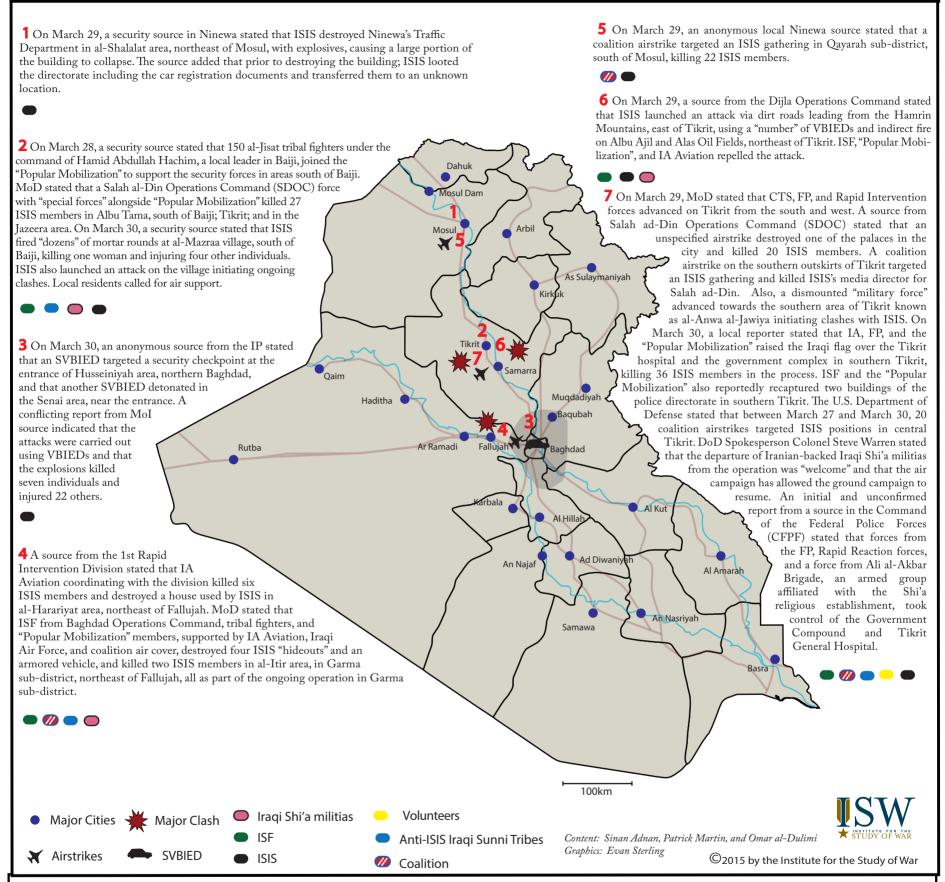
Iraq Situation Report: March 28-30, 2015



The contest for Tikrit is escalating. The ground offensive to retake the city has resumed following the U.S. airstrikes, although without the Iranian-backed militias that withdrew in opposition to U.S. coalition involvement. Despite initial reports of gains made by the ISF and allied forces in Tikrit, the operation will likely continue in the near future. Although the various armed groups allied with the government against ISIS have become collectively known as the "Popular Mobilization," there is no single "Popular Mobilization." These groups vary in particular in the degree to which they are influenced by Iran. The stance of various Shi'a armed groups regarding the role of the U.S. coalition has clarified the nature of some of these groups. Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a militias are not the only Iraqi Shi'a militias operating in Iraq. The rapid advance of ISIS and the subsequent religious ruling by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani mobilized Iraqi Shi'a communities in a significant way. Other armed groups affiliated with the Shi'a religious establishment include Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah, Liwa' Ansar al-Marjeia, and Liwa Ali al-Akbar. These groups have been engaged against ISIS since their formation following Sistani's ruling, although their role is not typically publicized by the media outlets of Iranian-backed militias. Unlike the previously established Iranian-backed militias, these other groups are likely to be more independent of Iranian influence. Firqat al-Abas al-Qitaliyah, for example, stated on March 28, 2015 that it had deployed forces to participate in the Tikrit operation. Liwa Ali al-Akbar made a similar statement the same day. Such participation, if true, sets these groups apart from the Iranian-backed militias and highlights the differences between the various anti-ISIS Iraqi Shi'a armed groups in Iraq. These group aligned with the religious establishment are most likely to be responsive to the Iraqi state, while Iranian-backed groups have the potential to undermine Iraq's sovereignty in the long