

Iraq Situation Report: May 4-6, 2015

1 On May 5, a security source stated that ISIS attacked al-Sufiya area northeast of Ramadi and the Zankura area northwest of Ramadi. The Golden Division (GD) with the support of the IA and Iraqi Police (IP) repelled the attack. A source stated that clashes erupted between “security forces” and ISIS fighters near Ramadi General Hospital, in northeastern Ramadi, that “security forces” have used as a base for the past three weeks, setting the fourth floor ablaze. The DoD stated that a coalition air strike targeted three ISIS tanks and a large ISIS tactical unit “near Ramadi.”



2 On May 6, Anbar provincial council member Mizhir Hassan stated that a joint committee of the local and central governments and “U.S. forces” was formed to oversee the arming and equipping of 1,000 Anbar tribal fighters from “various tribes” at Habaniya base, east of Ramadi, according to guidelines and conditions set by the committee.



3 On May 4, a Salah al-Din security source stated that ISIS attacked a “Popular Mobilization” checkpoint in Sayyid Gharib, south of Balad. “Popular Mobilization” members repelled the attack, destroying a vehicle outfitted with a heavy machine gun while suffering one member wounded. On May 5, an IED targeted a Popular Mobilization patrol “near Balad,” killing one patrol member and wounding four others.



4 On May 4, the Federal Police (FP) Media Director stated that a force of FP and Jund al-Imam, an Iraqi Shi’a militia, arrived at the Baiji oil refinery, northeast of Baiji, to assist security forces in Tel al-Jarad, near Baiji, and the road leading to the refinery. IA Aviation continued airstrikes near the refinery. On May 5, the commander of Salah ad-Din Operations Command (SDOC) stated that no “security forces” were besieged at the refinery. A security source stated that a joint force of IA, IP, “Popular Mobilization,” ISOF, and the “Presidential” Brigade cleared the road between the refinery and Mazraa, south of Baiji, killing 35 ISIS fighters. In addition, 150 members of Kata’ib al-Imam Ali reportedly broke a “siege” and reinforced the refinery. An FP force killed three ISIS attackers wearing SVETs and destroyed a VBIED near the refinery. The DoD stated that between May 4 and 6, 15 airstrikes targeted ISIS “near Baiji”. On May 6, however, a DoD spokesperson stated that the refinery situation was “fluid” but that it was “flowing in the wrong direction.”

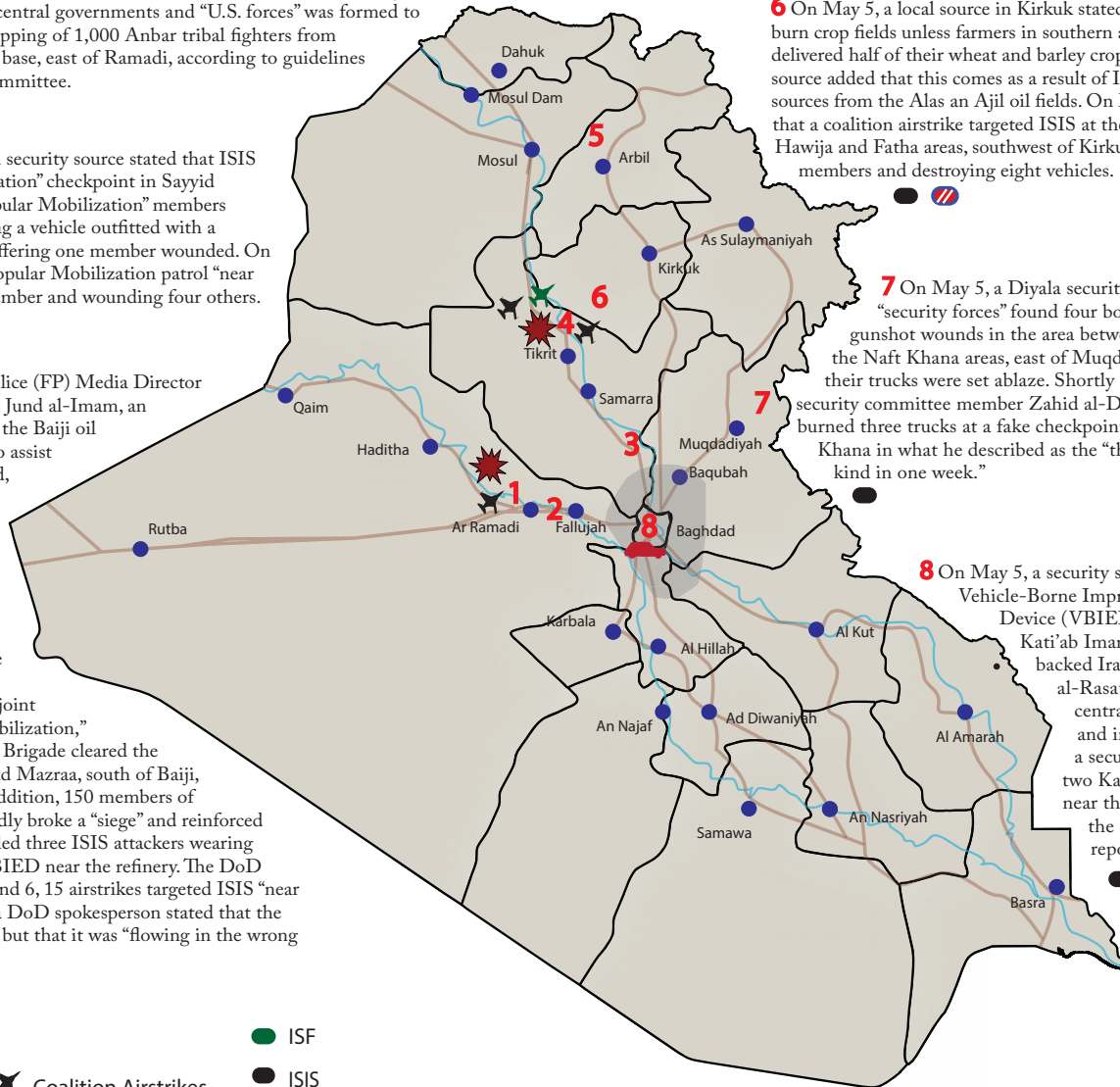


5 On May 4, media secretary of Iraqi Kurdistan’s parliament, Tariq Jawhar, stated that the committee tasked with editing the constitution of Iraqi Kurdistan was formed and that it is composed of 21 members from the parliament based on the allocations of seats. The KDP has seven members, Gorran [Change] has five, the PUK has three, and the remaining seats were distributed among other parties.

6 On May 5, a local source in Kirkuk stated that ISIS threatened to burn crop fields unless farmers in southern and western Kirkuk delivered half of their wheat and barley crops to finance ISIS. The source added that this comes as a result of ISIS’s loss of revenue sources from the Alas an Ajil oil fields. On May 6, a source stated that a coalition airstrike targeted ISIS at the Milih airport between Hawija and Fatha areas, southwest of Kirkuk City, killing 25 ISIS members and destroying eight vehicles.

7 On May 5, a Diyala security source stated that “security forces” found four bodies of truck drivers with gunshot wounds in the area between the Imam Wayes and the Naft Khana areas, east of Muqdadayah. He added that their trucks were set ablaze. Shortly after this report, Diyala security committee member Zahid al-Dalwi stated that ISIS burned three trucks at a fake checkpoint in Zalaw area near Naft Khana in what he described as the “the second attack of its kind in one week.”

8 On May 5, a security source stated that a Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) targeted the office of Kati’ab Imam Ali, an Iranian-backed Iraqi Shia militia, in al-Rasat neighborhood in central Baghdad, killing two and injuring six others. Later, a security source stated that two Katyusha rockets landed near the Celebrations Square in the Green Zone, without reporting any casualties.



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During his current visit to Washington, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani reiterated his desire for an independent Kurdistan. Similarly, the U.S. reiterated its desire for a “united, federal, and democratic Iraq,” signaling that it does not support Kurdish autonomy. The positions expressed by President Barzani and the U.S. are not new, but political competition inside in Iraqi Kurdistan is accelerating, given that Barzani’s term extension will expire on August 19, 2015. The prospect of a new presidential term is igniting political dissent from the opposition, especially from relatively new political players such as Gorran [Change] that performed well in the latest elections. The rise of the opposition now constrains the KDP and PUK, which had dominated Iraqi Kurdish politics in the past. Despite the fact that Kurdish political tension declined after the fall of Mosul to ISIS, threatening Kurdish security as a whole, Kurdish internal rivalries are manifesting again in 2015 through debates concerning the draft constitution and the Presidency. The constitution is not likely to be approved by Parliament and referred to a public vote before Barzani’s term expires. Intense political jockeying among the main political players in Iraqi Kurdistan will likely occur over the next few months. Moving south, ISIS has returned to heavily contest the Baiji Oil Refinery despite their recent expulsion by the ISF supported by coalition airstrikes. Kata’ib al-Imam Ali, an Iranian-backed Shi’a militia is reportedly playing a major role in the ISF defense of the refinery. If true, Kataib al-Imam Ali’s role would signal the return of Iranian-backed militias into Iraq’s military operations following a hiatus after the Tikrit operation, which sidelined Iranian proxy groups. It appears as of May 6 that ISIS has made more gains in its current assault on the refinery than it has in previous attempts. ISIS’s attacks on truck drivers in Diyala is reminiscent of ISIS’s activities in 2013 in eastern Iraq, suggesting that ISIS may try to reinvigorate its eastern front. ISIS’s attacks south of Balad also indicate that ISIS can still project force between Baghdad and Samarra, despite the fact that ISIS was cleared from this area in late 2014. The rocket attacks on the Green Zone in Baghdad may be the work of ISIS, but the same weapons are used by both Shi’a militias and Sunni armed groups known to be active in greater Baghdad. Shi’a militias are currently voicing direct opposition to the U.S. role in Iraq, and it is possible that a group other than ISIS was responsible for the attack upon the Green Zone.