

# Iraq Situation Report: March 15-21, 2016

**1 ISIS targets security forces on key Jazeera highway.** ISIS claimed on March 21 that four Suicide Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Devices (SVBIEDs) detonated at gatherings of IA and Popular Mobilization on the Baiji-Haditha highway in Salah al-Din, northeast of Haditha.



**2 ISIS attacks security forces near western Anbar town.** ISIS claimed that five suicide attackers targeted an IA barracks on March 21 near al-Baghdadi sub-district, northwest of Hit district, detonating their explosives. Other ISIS members reportedly then clashed with security forces and seized two sites. However, a security source stated that the ISIS attack involved four SVBIEDs and three Suicide Vest (SVEST) attackers, and was repelled.



**3 Coalition-trained forces continue push towards Hit District.** Security forces backed by Iraqi Army (IA) Aviation and Coalition airstrikes began operations to recapture al-Muhammadi sub-district, southeast of Hit, on March 16, recapturing it on March 17 after clashing with ISIS. Security forces reportedly recaptured the gas plant southeast of Hit on March 19, as well as the Kubaisa cement plant, west of Hit. Security forces and tribal fighters cleared al-Mashtal and al-Mutahinna areas, south of Hit, on March 20 and were preparing to storm the town. However, ISIS claimed that two attackers detonated SVBIEDs near an IA convoy west of Kubaisa, killing and wounding "35" soldiers.



**4 CTS forces repel ISIS attack in al-Hayakil, south of Fallujah.** War Media Cell reported that ISIS attacked Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) on March 17 in al-Hayakil area, southeast of Fallujah, using five VBIEDs, but the attack failed.



**5 Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr begin sit-in.** Security forces deployed heavily to Baghdad, especially near government buildings in central Iraq on March 16. The Council of Ministers (CoM) announced that sit-ins are not legally permitted under present security conditions, which Sadr rejected. Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr began their sit-in in front of the Green Zone on March 18 amid tight security. The Baghdad Operations Commander (BOC) also ordered security forces to open sealed-off routes to the Green Zone to give Sadrist supporters access to the site, contradicting PM Abadi's orders. In response, PM Abadi transferred the Baghdad security file from BOC to the Joint Operations Command.

**6 Smaller Sadrist demonstrations occur in southern Iraq.** The Sadrist sit-in in Baghdad on March 18 was accompanied by thousands of Sadr's followers protesting across the southern provinces. A smaller sit-in began in Hilla in Babil Province, and security forces broke up a sit-in in Karbala, beating demonstrators with batons. Meanwhile, civil demonstrators against corruption and in favor of government reform continued across southern Iraq.

**7 Baghdad halts oil exports through Iraqi Kurdistan.** Oil Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi stated that the central government halted oil exports through Iraqi Kurdistan on March 18 to put pressure on Kurdish authorities to resume talks on oil revenue sharing.

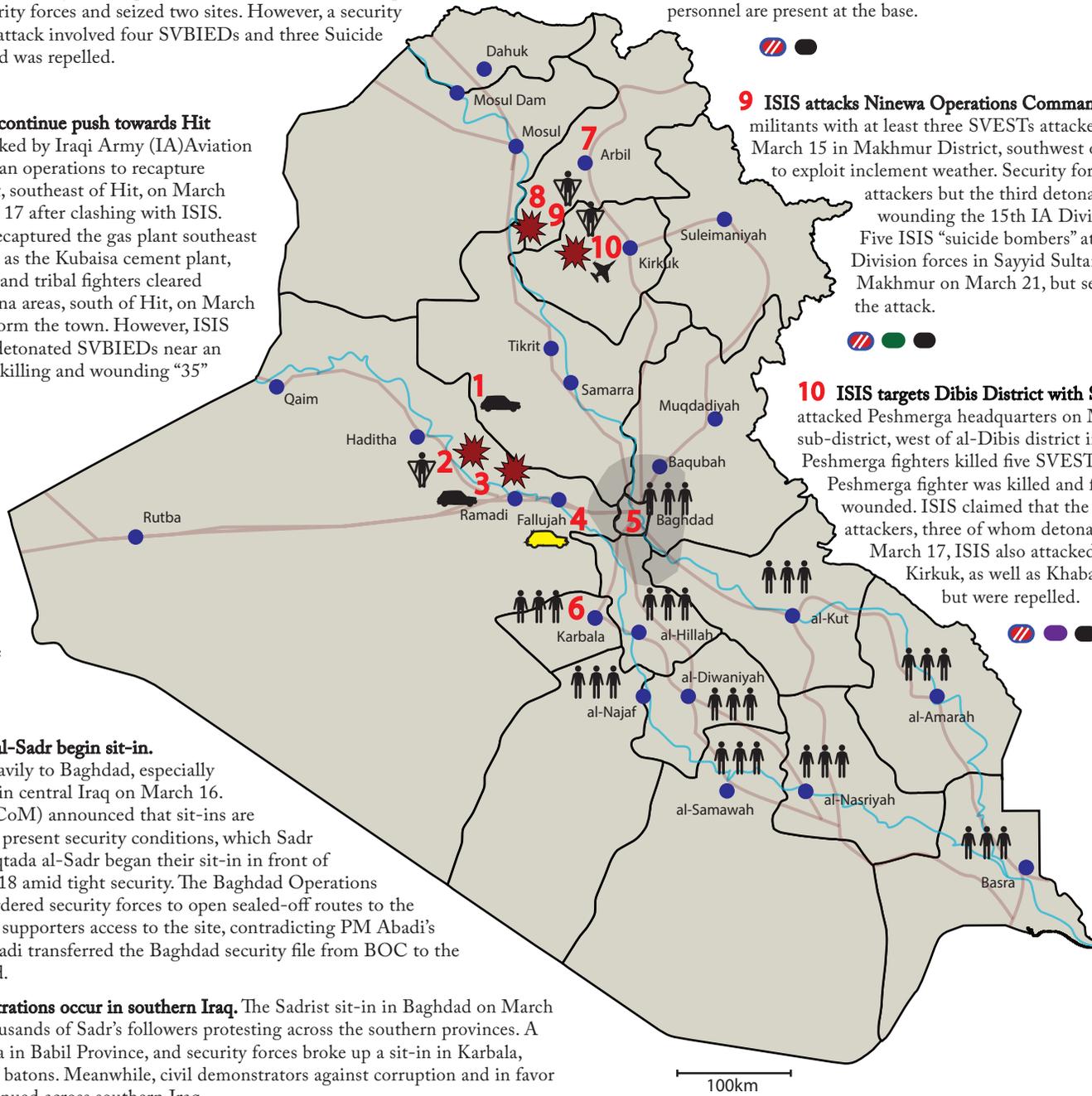
**8 U.S. Marine dies in indirect fire near Makhmur.** ISIS fired two rockets on March 19 at a firebase set up by U.S. Marines near Makhmur District, southwest of Arbil, killing one Marine and "less than five" others. The firebase holds "a couple of hundred" Marines and had moved into the area "two weeks ago" to test and set up artillery at the firebase. Only U.S. personnel are present at the base.



**9 ISIS attacks Ninewa Operations Command position.** ISIS militants with at least three SVESTs attacked a military post on March 15 in Makhmur District, southwest of Arbil, in an attempt to exploit inclement weather. Security forces killed two of the attackers but the third detonated his explosives, wounding the 15th IA Division's Chief of Staff. Five ISIS "suicide bombers" attacked 15th IA Division forces in Sayyid Sultan village near Makhmur on March 21, but security forces repelled the attack.



**10 ISIS targets Dibis District with SVEST attackers.** ISIS attacked Peshmerga headquarters on March 15 in Saraklan sub-district, west of al-Dibis district in northwestern Kirkuk. Peshmerga fighters killed five SVEST attackers. One Peshmerga fighter was killed and five others were wounded. ISIS claimed that the attack involved four attackers, three of whom detonated SVESTs. On March 17, ISIS also attacked three villages west of Kirkuk, as well as Khabaroot Village in Dibis, but were repelled.



- Major Cities
- Major Clash
- ✈ Airstrikes
- 🚚 Coalition
- ISF
- ISIS
- Peshmerga
- Anti-ISIS Iraqi Sunni Tribes
- Iraqi Shi'a Militias
- 🚗 SVBIED
- 🚚 Failed S/VBIED
- 👤 SVEST
- 👤 Demonstration

Content: Patrick Martin and ISW Iraq Team  
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Supporters of Sadrist Trend leader Muqtada al-Sadr began a large sit-in in front of the entrance to the Green Zone on March 18. The sit-in escalates pressure on Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi to follow Sadr's reform agenda. PM Abadi, along with Council of Representatives Speaker Salim al-Juburi and President Fuad Masoum, met with the leaders of major political blocs on March 20 to discuss the cabinet reshuffle, but the assembled leaders could not form an agreement on the final shape of the cabinet. PM Abadi blamed unspecified individuals for blocking the reshuffle process for fear of losing their positions and privileges, indicating that political blocs are unwilling to lose control over ministries and the patronage that follows. Further disagreement over the cabinet cannot continue for much longer without provoking a response from an increasingly bold Sadr. He ordered the sit-in to continue on March 18 in defiance of orders from the Council of Ministers and the Interior Ministry banning the sit-in, and repeated calls for a full overhaul of the government, while a senior member of the Sadrist Trend, Sabah al-Ta'i, warned that protesters could "storm the Green Zone" if a technocratic government was not in place by March 29. PM Abadi thus faces no good options for completing the cabinet reshuffle process. Political blocs could obstruct PM Abadi if he attempts to impose a technocratic government that deprives political blocs of their ministerial positions. However, Sadr could incite further demonstrations or even violence if PM Abadi decides to conduct a partial reform that preserves political blocs' power within the cabinet. Sadr could attempt to force PM Abadi's hand through some bold action by the March 29 deadline that threatens to destabilize the government and end PM Abadi's tenure.