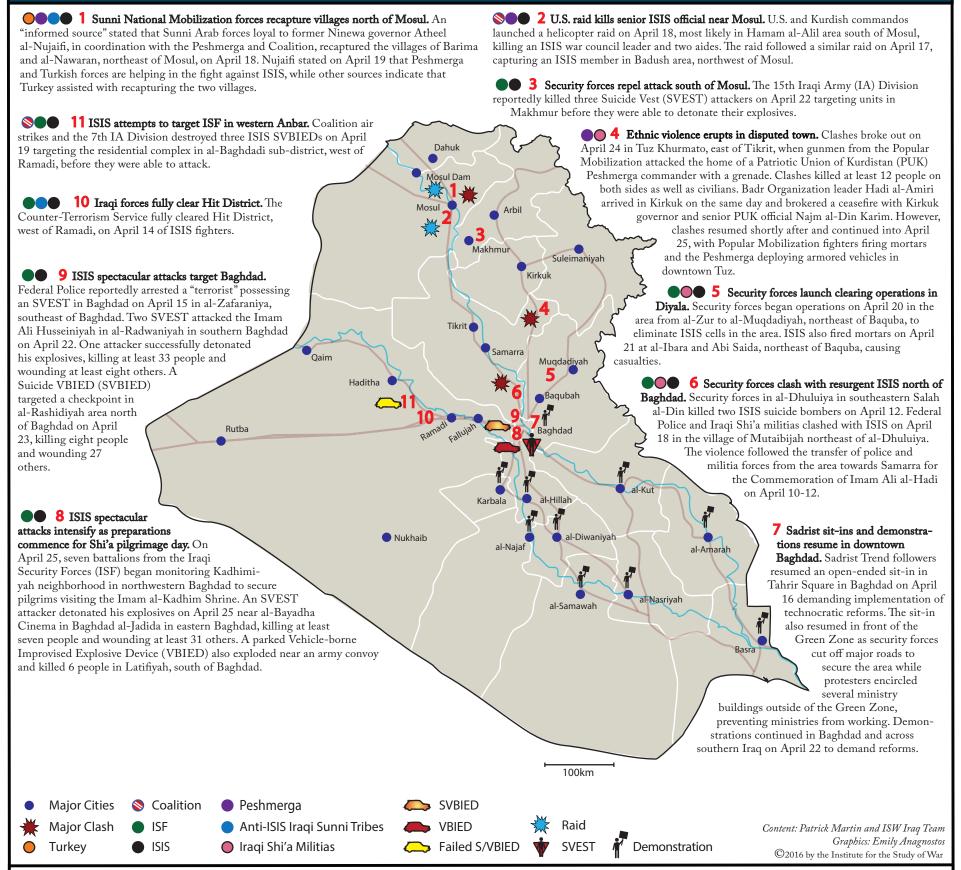


Iraq Situation Report: April 12 - 25, 2016



The U.S. announced additional "accelerants" in the fight against ISIS, reporting on April 18 that it would deploy 217 additional train-and-advise personnel to embed at the brigade and battalion levels with attack helicopters and an additional High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS). The limited increase in U.S. military support came in conjunction with an increased number of high-level U.S. military and diplomatic visits between April 8 and April 21 with Iraqi officials during its major political crisis. The Council of Representatives (CoR) split into two parallel parliaments on April 12 over a disagreement regarding Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi's cabinet reshuffle. Rebelling CoR members in the illegal rump parliament have attempted to oust CoR Speaker Salim al-Juburi as well as PM Abadi and President Fuad Masoum in a series of illegal CoR sessions over the past two weeks, unsuccessfully courting the Shi'a religious authorities to back them in effectively collapsing the government. However, the illegitimate parliament, which at its height reached around 150 CoR members, has suffered from defections, notably from members of the Sadrist Trend, and the rebelling CoR members have failed to reach quorum of 165 CoR members. The larger legitimate CoR, which will attempt to meet on April 26 without the members of the rump parliament, will struggle to accomplish much beyond renewing confidence in Speaker Juburi. The CoR remains divided on numerous political issues, including the cabinet reshuffle that sparked the crisis in the first place.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) recaptured Hit District, marking an important victory and clearing a major urban center of ISIS fighters, though the town likely remains laced with a large number of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The success was dampened by a spike in ISIS spectacular attacks both north of and in Baghdad during the lead-up to the commemoration of the death of Imam Musa al-Kadhim, the 7th Shi'a Imam, during which thousands of Shi'a pilgrims visit his shrine in Kadhimiyah in northwestern Baghdad. The attacks indicate that ISIS will likely continue targeting hard and soft targets in the vicinity of Baghdad with explosive attacks during religious holidays, likely foreshadowing its intentions to spike up attacks before and during Ramadan, which begins in June 2016.