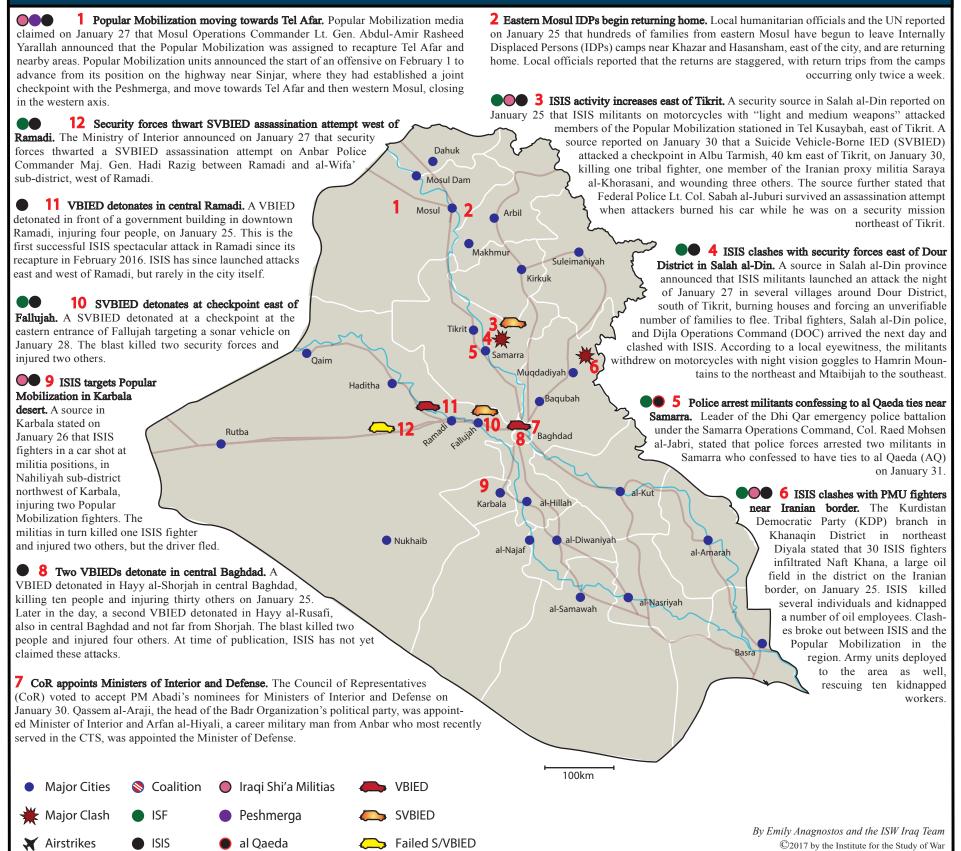


Iraq Situation Report: January 25 - February 1, 2017



ISIS continued to reestablish its presence in its historic support zones around Tikrit, Diyala, and the Euphrates River Valley from January 25 to February 1. ISIS launched several attacks against security forces between Tikrit and the Hamrin Mountains as part of a developing trend of ISIS rebuilding its capabilities in the area to launch attacks and to penetrate high levels of security. ISIS launched a major attack against an oil facility on the Diyala-Iran border. Its continued encroachment on Iran's doorstep could prompt Iran to more aggressively intervene in Iraq, as it did when ISIS neared its borders in 2014. Meanwhile, ISIS demonstrated that it has advanced its capabilities in the Euphrates River Valley, carrying out the first successful spectacular attack in Ramadi since the city's recapture in February 2016. ISIS attempted an attack in the city in November 2016, but it was thwarted. The January 25 attack, though it produced limited casualties, underscores that ISIS has reestablished significant capabilities and a network in Ramadi, likely by infiltrating the city through returning refugee flows.

Other Sunni insurgent groups may form in Iraq as ISIS focuses on shifting from a governing to guerilla style terrorist organization. A police officer reported on January 31 that his forces arrested two militants in Samarra who confessed to having ties to al Qaeda (AQ). AQ will likely work through refugee camps and alongside local insurgent groups, such as the neo-Baathist group Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandiya (JRTN), in order to establish a local affiliate in Iraq as it has in Syria. The anti-ISIS Coalition will need to broaden the anti-ISIS fight to include all Salafi-jihadi groups in Iraq lest it inadvertently produces the conditions in which AQ can resurge in Iraq.