

Iraq Situation Report: January 17-18, 2015

1 On January 17, an anonymous security source from Mosul reported that coalition airstrikes targeted ISIS members in the Muhandisin neighborhood of eastern Mosul, killing six ISIS members and injuring 20 others. Among the dead was reportedly ISIS director of finance in Mosul, Salim Mula Ghanim. Also, on January 18, a "local" source from Mosul stated that ISIS kidnapped 56 former officers from their homes and sentenced them to death. The officers had previously "repented" to ISIS. The source added that all officers are from the Albu Matyout tribe from villages "adjacent to Sinjar district." It was unclear if the men were taken from these villages or from Mosul city.



2 On January 17, ISIS attacked Peshmerga positions in the main area of Sinjar district, west of Mosul, initiating clashes that lasted for three hours.



3 On January 17, a motorcycle VBIED detonated in the Mridi local market of Sadr City killing five individuals and injuring 19 others.



4 On January 18, Colonel Shaban Barzan al-Obeidi, commander of the Emergency Battalion (EB) of Baghdad sub-district, west of Hit, stated that forces from the 7th IA Division, from the IP from Haditha district, and from the EB of Baghdad re-opened the road connecting Haditha to Baghdad after clearing the areas of Alus and Albu Hayat, south of Haditha. The colonel added that IA and IP forces established security checkpoints along the road.



5 On January 17, ISF and members of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs), which include Iraqi Shi'a militias, clashed with ISIS in the Kassarat area, northwest of Baghdad. The clashes resulted in the death of four members of the PMUs and injury to 15 others. On January 18, MoD stated that a force from the 59th Brigade of the 11th Division of the IA killed 19 "terrorists." The forces also killed five ISIS members when they destroyed five "hideouts" during a "wide" operation in the areas of Halabsa, Nebai, Line, Albu Obeid, and Albu Khalifa, northwest of Baghdad. In addition, the force destroyed two vehicles outfitted with heavy machine guns and a Kia truck loaded with ammunition, and while dismantling 27 IEDs and further IEDs rigged to 13 homes. In Sab al-Bour, also northwest of Baghdad, the force killed 24 "terrorists" and destroyed three more vehicles with mounted machine guns as well as Grad rocket launchers aimed at Kadhmiya, northwestern Baghdad.



6 On January 17, forces from the Peshmerga and Iraqi Police (IP) launched an attack on ISIS in the Sultan Abdullah village, southeast of Mosul across the Tigris, in an attempt to retake control of the village. The source did not report the result of the operation but highlighted that it was supported by coalition aircraft, killing and injuring "dozens" of ISIS members.



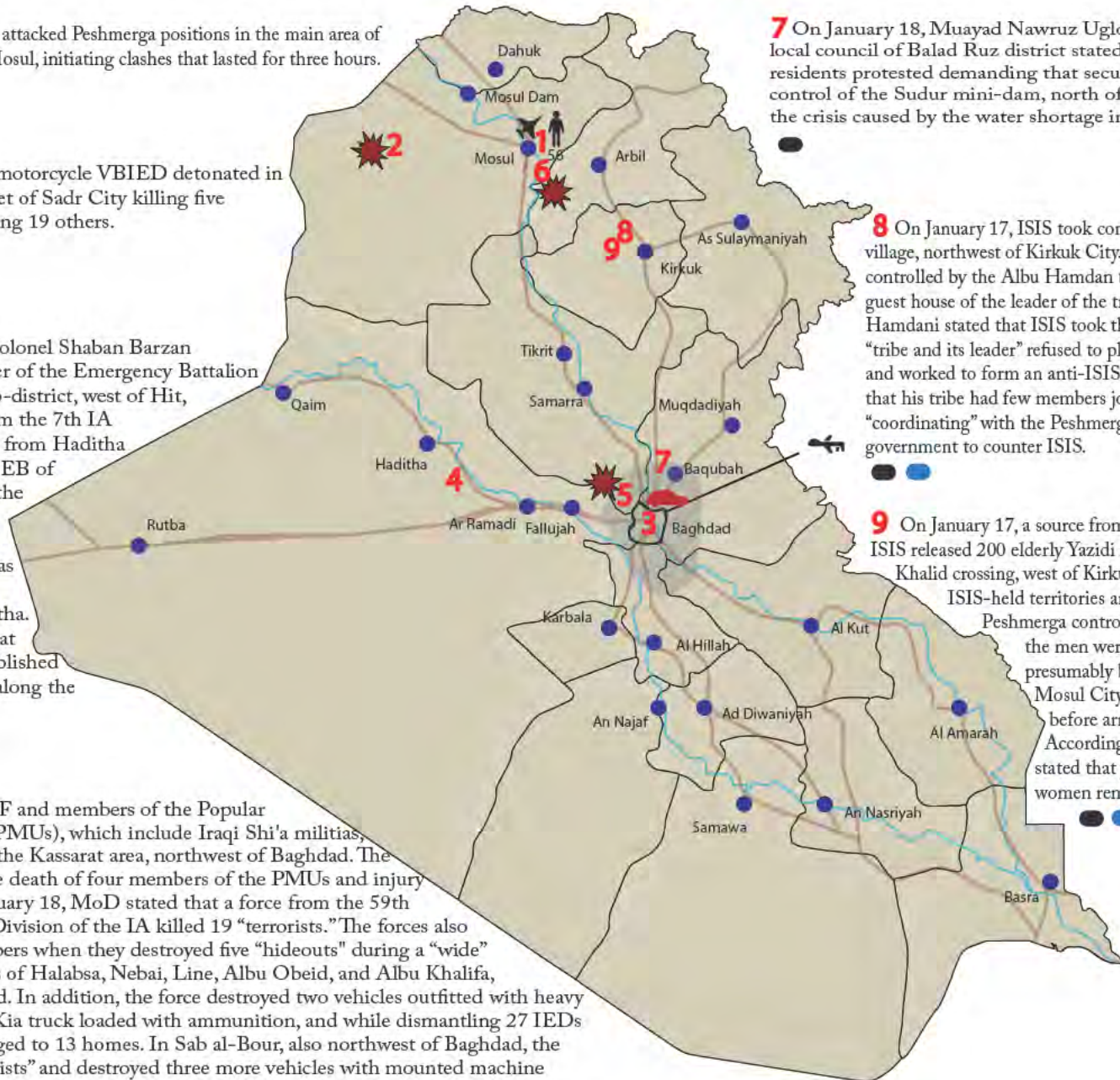
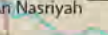
7 On January 18, Muayad Nawruz Uglo, chairman of the local council of Balad Ruz district stated that "dozens" of residents protested demanding that security forces retake control of the Sudur mini-dam, north of Balad Ruz, to end the crisis caused by the water shortage in the district.



8 On January 17, ISIS took control of Albu Hamdan village, northwest of Kirkuk City. The village was controlled by the Albu Hamdan tribe. ISIS looted the guest house of the leader of the tribe, Ali Al-Hamdani. Hamdani stated that ISIS took this step because the "tribe and its leader" refused to pledge allegiance to ISIS and worked to form an anti-ISIS force. Hamdani added that his tribe had few members joining ISIS and was "coordinating" with the Peshmerga and the central government to counter ISIS.



9 On January 17, a source from the Peshmerga stated ISIS released 200 elderly Yazidi men through the Maktab Khalid crossing, west of Kirkuk city, that runs between ISIS-held territories and areas under Peshmerga control. The source added that the men were transported, presumably by ISIS, from Sinjar to Mosul City and then to Hawija before arriving the crossing. According to the source, the men stated that young Yazidi men and women remain in captivity.



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Content: Sinan Adnan
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The attacks by ISIS on Peshmerga forces in the main area of Sinjar district, west of Mosul, highlight that the area remains contested between ISIS on one side and Peshmerga, Yazidi fighters, and most likely fighters from the Kurdish YPG on the other side. ISIS is maintaining control over most of the area, and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future. It is notable that the level of conflict has remained relatively static since December 21, 2014, indicating that the Peshmerga has not yet identified Sinjar as a main effort. This is likely because the KRG is prioritizing the defense of Arbil over the clearing of Sinjar, especially after the recent attack by ISIS on Gwer sub-district, southwest of Arbil, which prompted the KRG to deploy additional Peshmerga forces to the area on January 14, 2015. Meanwhile, the motive behind the ISIS release of older Yazidi men remains unclear, but it is notable that ISIS transported the men from Sinjar to Mosul and then to Hawija indicating that ISIS enjoys freedom of movement along that route despite the presence of anti-ISIS forces in the vicinity of those three fronts, particularly Sinjar. The battle for the area northwest of Baghdad remains ongoing as the ISF and Iraqi Shi'a militias aim to deny ISIS freedom of movement between northern Baghdad, eastern Anbar, and southern Salah ad-Din.