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1 U.S., KRG calls for PKK to exit Sinjar. Spokesman for the U.S. Department of State John Kirby stated in a press conference on December 15 that the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, should have no role in Sinjar, adding that their presence there is "a major obstacle to a reconciliation and to the return of internally displaced people." Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani warned the same day that the PKK must leave Sinjar, stating that the PKK's presence "has created instability in the region and deterred the people from rebuilding their town."

9 Shi'a militias advance in western Ninewa desert, connecting parallel lines of effort. Iraqi Shi'a militias continued advancing in the desert in western Ninewa Province, recapturing several significant waypoints from December 8 to 13, including Tel Abtah and Ashwa, south of Tel Afar. The militias also cleared the north-south road between the Tel Afar airbase, in the northern desert, and Tel Abtah, in the southern desert, thereby connecting their two lines of efforts. Kata'ib Hezbollah stated that the militias would clear a strip along the Syrian border in order to prevent ISIS from regrouping in and launching counterattacks from the desert.

8 ISIS detonates VBIEDs in Fallujah. Security sources in Anbar province reported that ISIS militants detonated a SVBIED in Albu Alwan in western Fallujah and a VBIED in central Fallujah, targeting checkpoints, on December 11. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. On December 18, another VBIED detonated in Halabsa, west of Fallujah, though ISIS has not yet claimed the attack.

7 ISIS detonates VBIED in southwestern Baghdad with minimal casualties. The Ministry of Interior stated that a Vehicle Borne IED (VBIED) detonated in the 4th Police District in southwestern Baghdad, injuring eight people, on December 7. ISIS claimed the attack.

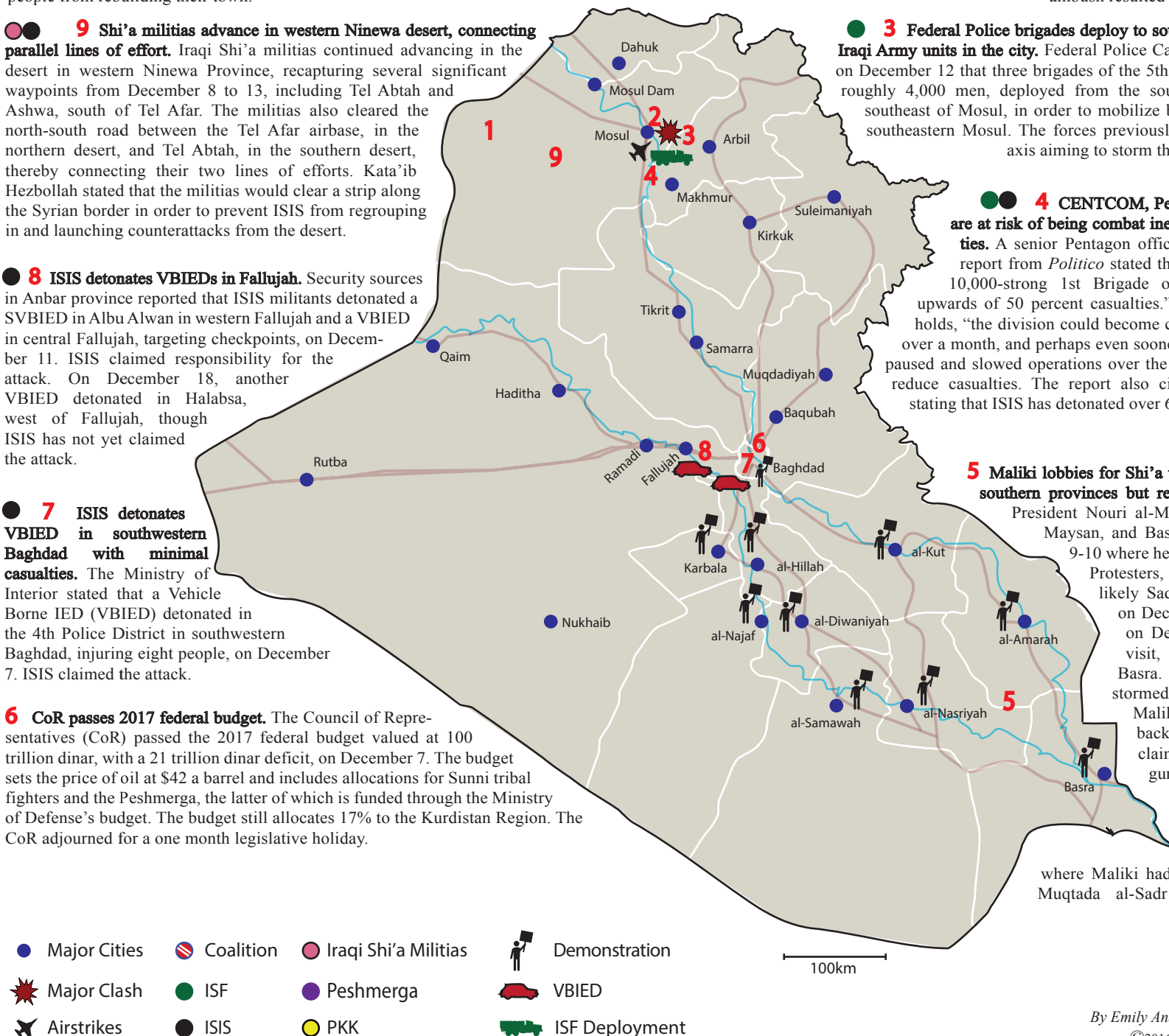
6 CoR passes 2017 federal budget. The Council of Representatives (CoR) passed the 2017 federal budget valued at 100 trillion dinar, with a 21 trillion dinar deficit, on December 7. The budget sets the price of oil at \$42 a barrel and includes allocations for Sunni tribal fighters and the Peshmerga, the latter of which is funded through the Ministry of Defense's budget. The budget still allocates 17% to the Kurdistan Region. The CoR adjourned for a one month legislative holiday.

2 Iraqi Army advances in southeastern Mosul, deadly ISIS ambush forces their retreat. The 9th Iraqi Army (IA) Armored Division advanced rapidly to seize the Salaam Hospital near the eastern bank of the Tigris River on December 6, reportedly going behind enemy lines. The move was part of the new "surprise tactic" announced on December 4 as an alternative to block-by-block clearing operations. ISIS ambushed the army units, however, trapping them in the hospital with Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs (SVBIEDs) and heavy fire. The ISF retreated from the area on December 7 with support from the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) and Coalition airstrikes. The ambush resulted in a reported 100 casualties.

3 Federal Police brigades deploy to southeastern Mosul to support Iraqi Army units in the city. Federal Police Captain Raed Jawdat reported on December 12 that three brigades of the 5th Federal Police Division, or roughly 4,000 men, deployed from the southern axis to Hamdaniya, southeast of Mosul, in order to mobilize before joining operations in southeastern Mosul. The forces previously operated on the southern axis aiming to storm the airport in southern Mosul.

4 CENTCOM, Pentagon officials report CTS are at risk of being combat ineffective due to high casualties. A senior Pentagon officer cited in a December 15 report from *Politico* stated that the Golden Division, the 10,000-strong 1st Brigade of the CTS, is "suffering upwards of 50 percent casualties." He added that if this rate holds, "the division could become combat ineffective in a little over a month, and perhaps even sooner." The CTS has reportedly paused and slowed operations over the past two weeks in order to reduce casualties. The report also cited a CENTCOM official stating that ISIS has detonated over 600 SVBIEDs since the start of the operation.

5 Maliki lobbies for Shi'a tribal and militia support in southern provinces but receives cold shoulder. Vice President Nouri al-Maliki travelled to Dhi Qar, Maysan, and Basra provinces on December 9-10 where he spoke at tribal conferences. Protesters, the majority of whom were likely Sadrists, in Dhi Qar Province on December 8 and 9 and Maysan on December 10 condemned his visit, forcing him to reroute to Basra. There, however, protesters stormed the conference hall, forcing Maliki to reportedly flee out the back. Unconfirmed reports claimed that unidentified gunmen fired shots towards a State of Law Alliance member's home in Basra, though it was unclear if that was where Maliki had fled. Sadrist Trend leader Muqtada al-Sadr praised the anti-Maliki protests on December 13.



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Local and regional actors are maneuvering to secure their position in 2017 and for a post-ISIS Mosul. Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki travelled to the southern provinces on December 9 and 10 to attend several tribal conferences where he has typically looked to secure electoral support, suggesting the he is positioning for upcoming 2017 provincial and 2018 parliamentary elections with an eye on the premiership. Large anti-Maliki protests, which were likely Sadrist, however, forced him to cut his visits short, indicating that Maliki may be facing stronger competition from other Shi'a parties in southern Iraq than before. Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is moving to extend its boundaries while anti-ISIS operations in the region are ongoing and before the complete recapture of Mosul cements the current control of terrain. The KRG used operations around Mosul, including those prior to October 17 when the operation launched, to claim territory that will remain under its jurisdiction after operations end. The KRG will do so similarly around Sinjar. The U.S. and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) separately warned on December 15 that the continued presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated terrorist group, in Sinjar is a detriment to the area's stability and resettlement. The PKK recaptured western Sinjar during anti-ISIS operations in November 2015; the KRG occupies the eastern half. The KRG will move to expel the PKK from Sinjar while the power dynamics are still shifting lest the PKK gain a permanent presence in northern Iraq, contrary to the KRG's interests. ISIS, however, is also positioning for the upcoming year and for the possible loss of Mosul. The group is reconstituting networks and capabilities in recaptured areas, such as Fallujah despite its recapture by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in June 2016, from where it can continue to launch attacks, particularly into Baghdad and the southern belts. ISIS's position in the Euphrates River Valley could also maintain a connection with its affiliates in Syria which can provide support as ISIS reconstitutes in Iraq.