



# Iraqi Security Forces Gain Ground Against ISIS

By Kris Osborn  
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Iraqi soldiers and Kurdish peshmerga fighters have made progress retaking territory in the ongoing ground fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, Pentagon officials said.

Ground movements against the militant Islamic group of fighters, referred to by Pentagon officials as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, have succeeded in capitalizing upon ongoing U.S. coalition airstrikes aimed at destroying the group from the sky, officials said.

In central Iraq, Iraqi Security Forces, or ISF, fighters are expanding their control of territory beyond the Baiji oil refinery and advancing against ISIS positions in Amiriyah, Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby said.

"ISF is also advancing against ISIL, in Amiriyah, with the assistance of coalition airstrikes, and we've seen ISF achieve success in countering ISIL fighters southwest Baghdad as well," he added.

Also, persmerga forces have regained control of Zumar, a town about 60 kilometers southwest of Mosul, he added. The operation, which had been planned for over a week, wound up achieving its objectives in a number of days.

"This is the fourth offensive operation in which peshmerga forces have been able to regain control of ground from ISIL, including Mosul Dam, Sardek Mountain, and Rabia Gate," Kirby added.

Finally, ISF, Kurdish, and coalition forces have targeted specific ISIS locations to impede its ability to shoot, maneuver, communicate, and move near Mosul Dam, Zumar, Baiji, and Baghdad, Kirby said.

"This has included the destruction of multiple fighting positions, at least eight ISIL vehicles, to include an ISIL tank, a staging area, and a logistics base," he explained.

Calling these gains encouraging, Kirby said the progress highlights the Iraqi Security Forces' determination to attack ISIS, something which observers have questioned.

At the same time, analysts and Pentagon officials recognize that the gains on the ground are heavily bolstered by coalition air strikes targeting ISIS positions, forces, assets and installations from the air above Iraq and Syria.

CentCom officials said the ongoing attacks are using bombers, fighter aircraft and drones to destroy ISIS targets.

"In Syria, eight airstrikes near Kobani destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, a small ISIL unit, six ISIL vehicles, an ISIL-occupied building and an ISIL command and control node. In Iraq, three airstrikes in the vicinity of Fallujah destroyed three small ISIL units. Three airstrikes near Sinjar destroyed one small ISIL unit and two ISIL vehicles," a Centcom statement said.

One analyst said airstrikes are giving new life to the embattled ISF.

"The Iraqi Security forces remain generally inept but some units are likely to be more effective than others. With the support of airstrikes it is not altogether surprising that some of the ISF can function. Tactical air support is quite helpful in these sorts of fights," said Benjamin Friedman, research fellow in defense studies at the Cato Institute, a D.C.-based think tank.

At the same time, Friedman cautioned that there are limits to how effective the ISF can be in the absence of a strong and coherent Iraqi state. Friedman also pointed out that ISIS does not have the military prowess of a disciplined, well-trained army.

"They are motivated and they have been effective against relatively weak forces. ISIL has pockets of disciplined forces, but at the end of the day they are a group of militias without the discipline you would expect of a well-trained military. They are putting people into battle after a limited or small amount of training," Friedman said.

Meanwhile, despite the progress on the ground in many areas, the situation in Kobani, Syria, remains tenuous, Kirby said. Kurdish fighters from Irbil, Iraq are now heading to Kobani to reinforce efforts against ISIS there, the associated press reports.

"It's important to point out that ISIL remains a very determined enemy. They continue to reinforce areas where they've been losing ground, such as in Kobani, Anbar province, and in the vicinity of Mosul Dam, and they continue to threaten innocent civilians wherever they are," Kirby said.

Kirby also said U.S. C-130 aircraft air dropped humanitarian aid to members of Iraq's Abu Nimer tribe, at the request of the Iraqi government.

"U.S. aircraft delivered more than 7,000 Halal meals which were retrieved by the ISF and then delivered to the tribe, which had been recently relocated from their homes near Hit, Iraq, to flee ISIL aggression," he added.