



January 4, 2016

The Liberation of Ramadi: The situation on the ground and significance



"Victory pictures" of the Iraqi army's liberation of the city of Ramadi from ISIS. Left: Iraqi soldiers raise the Iraqi flag near a governmental building in the center of the city. Right: The Iraqi flag on the police station in Ramadi (Al-Sumaria TV, December 28, 2015)

Overview

1. On December 28, 2015, after seven days of fighting against ISIS operatives, the Iraqi army, with air support from the United States and the coalition, **took over the center of the city of Ramadi** where the governmental buildings are located. So far the Iraqi army has apparently taken control most of the city (about 70%-80%). **However, there are still pockets of resistance both in the city and the surrounding areas** where **ISIS operatives** continue waging guerilla warfare. It is too early to estimate how much time will be needed to expel the ISIS operatives from the city and surrounding areas, but the Iraqi army, with the support of the Sunni militias, **still has a long road ahead.**



Map of the control of Ramadi, updated to December 28, 2015: 55% of the city has been cleared of ISIS operatives (green), about 20% is still controlled by ISIS (black), and about 25% has been designated as confrontation zones (pink) (Al-Sumaria TV, December 28, 2015).

2. Between **500 and 700 ISIS operatives** defended Ramadi against an **Iraqi army order of battle of about 10,000 soldiers**, including an elite counter-terrorism task force (**with the support of about 5,000 Sunni militia fighters**). According to the Iraqi and Western media, about 250 ISIS fighters (including senior officers) were killed in the fighting, several dozen operatives fled the city, and several hundred are still entrenched in the city and its outskirts. The fighting caused considerable damage to the city, including buildings blown up by ISIS and aerial attacks carried out by the United States and its coalition allies.



Houses destroyed in Ramadi (Al-Jazeera, December 26, 2015)

3. After the conquest of the city center **Iraqi army forces gradually advanced to neighborhoods where ISIS operatives remained barricaded**. ISIS's guerilla warfare

and the booby traps its operatives left in various structures in the city **have delayed the Iraqi army's complete takeover of the city. ISIS continues waging guerilla warfare against the Iraqi army in and around the city, especially to the north and northeast.** ISIS attacks convoys, sends suicide bombers to military facilities and uses car bombs to attack the Iraqi army. It also attempts to exert pressure on the army in other locations in Anbar Province (such as the areas of Haditha and Al-Sarsar Lake).

4. **Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi** was quick to go to Ramadi for a victory visit. He praised the Iraqi security forces, **called the conquest of Mosul the next strategic goal, and declared that the end of 2016 would see ISIS completely removed from Iraq.** The United States and the Western and Arab countries in the anti-ISIS coalition congratulated the Iraqi prime minister on his army's achievement. **Iran** also congratulated the Iraqi government, but was apparently **annoyed that the Shi'ite militias has not had a significant role in liberating the city.**

5. **The expulsion from Ramadi and the surrounding areas of the presence of ISIS operatives, and the physical reconstruction of the city and the return of the Iraqis who fled, are liable to take a considerable amount of time,** as a great deal of damage was done to both the city and its residents.¹ ISIS left many IEDs and booby traps behind. For example, according to an American intelligence officer, Iraqi forces found about **three hundred IEDs** planted along 150 meters in **the region of the administration buildings in the center of the city.** Once they had been neutralized and removed, more were found. The officer estimated it would take a long time for the Iraqi forces to complete cleansing the city (Indianexpress, December 31, 2015).

Significance of the Liberation of Ramadi

6. **Ramadi**, located about 120 kilometers (about 75 miles) due west of Baghdad, is the **capital of Anbar Province.** Lying on the Euphrates, it is a strategic junction on the roads west to Jordan and Syria, and an important commercial center. When the American army was in Iraq, and later, Ramadi turned into a jihadist stronghold. In 2004 about half a million Iraqis lived in Ramadi, but most of them fled the fighting, some of them to the areas outside Baghdad.

¹ According to initial media reports, more than 3,000 buildings were destroyed, thousands of others were damaged, and the infrastructure (electricity, water, sewage facilities) was destroyed.



Refugees from Ramadi in a tent city on the outskirts of Baghdad (Al-Jazeera, January 1, 2015).

7. ISIS captured Ramadi from the Iraqi army on May 15, 2015, in what **retrospectively was its greatest territorial gain in Iraq after the conquest of Mosul (in June 2014).**² The Iraqi army was subsequently forced out of most of Anbar Province, but a few enclaves remained under its control, subject to ongoing guerilla warfare (see below).

8. From a military perspective, the balance of force during the liberation of Ramadi was clearly in Iraqi army favor. That was because only a relatively small force of [hundreds of] ISIS operatives was in the city, and the Iraqi army order of battle was about 10,000 soldiers, with support from the Sunni militias American and close coalition air support. The lesson that repeated itself in Ramadi was that **most of ISIS's strength has been in mobile fighting, guerilla warfare, and surprise attacks**, exploiting governmental vacuums and the low morale of its opponents. However, **when ISIS has been forced to defend itself against a larger, better equipped military power with high morale and support from the local population, it has suffered defeats, as happened in both Iraq (Ramadi, Baiji and Tikrit) and Syria (Kobanî and Tel al-Abiad).**

² Ramadi was conquered on May 15, 2015, when ISIS operatives took over the government buildings and most of the rest of the city. The attack began with the detonation of a car bomb near the headquarters of the Iraqi forces, after which ISIS operatives broke into the compound. ISIS also attacked a military base in the western part of the city and then took over all of Ramadi. The Iraqi army defense of the city collapsed and the Iraqi forces withdrew from the region.

9. The liberation of Ramadi from ISIS (assuming it is completed) is **an important achievement for the prestige and military capabilities of the Iraqi army and the American-led Western coalition**. It is the first time since the fall of Mosul in June 2014 that **the Iraqi army has conquered and occupied an important strategic city**, the same city from which Iraqi soldiers fled seven and a half months ago. The fighting against ISIS in Ramadi included the use of tactics of the war on terrorism provided by the United States, accompanied by close coalition air support.

10. **For ISIS, the loss of Ramadi is a military and media blow that increases the pressure exerted on it and joins the series of failures that began in Iraq and Syria in 2015:**

1) **In Iraq several key Sunni cities were captured from ISIS** by the Iraqi army with support from the Shi'ite and Sunni militias. They include **Ramadi** (still a work in progress), and **Baiji** and **Tikrit** to the north of Baghdad. In northwestern Iraq the city of **Sinjar** and its surroundings fell to Kurdish forces (the Peshmerga). **Fallujah**, a jihadist stronghold, is currently encircled by the Iraqi army and cut off from ISIS's other forces and backup. **Mosul**, the core of ISIS's presence in Iraq, is as yet untouched, but the other defeats may erode ISIS's power there.

2) **In Syria ISIS lost important regions near the Turkish border** (Kobani and Tel al-Abiad), allowing the Kurdish forces (the YPG) to control a territorial continuum along most of the Syrian-Turkish border. The Kurds also recently conquered the important **Tishrin Dam and nearby power plant on the banks of the Euphrates**, south of the city of Kobani. ISIS suffered defeats in other locations: **east and northeast of Aleppo** (where the Syrian army, with support from Iran, broke through the blockade of the **Kweyris military air base**); **south of Aleppo and southeast of Homs**, where the Syrian army established control of the rural regions; the **southern Golan Heights** (where the ISIS-affiliated brigade of the Martyrs of al-Yarmuk Forces was weakened); and in the area **south of Damascus** (from where, under UN protection, ISIS operatives and their families are to be evacuated).

What Next?

11. The liberation of Ramadi, assuming it is fully completed, **is a milestone in the campaign against ISIS and at the same time a test case for the Iraqi government and the American-led coalition.** If implemented correctly, it is likely to serve as a step towards retaking other cities and regions in Anbar Province and seriously erode the support ISIS gets from the Sunni population in western Iraq. On the other hand, **the failure of the Iraqi regime to quickly complete the conquest of Ramadi and its surrounding areas and to turn it into a role model for reconstruction and rehabilitation is liable to have negative consequences for the future of the campaign against ISIS.**

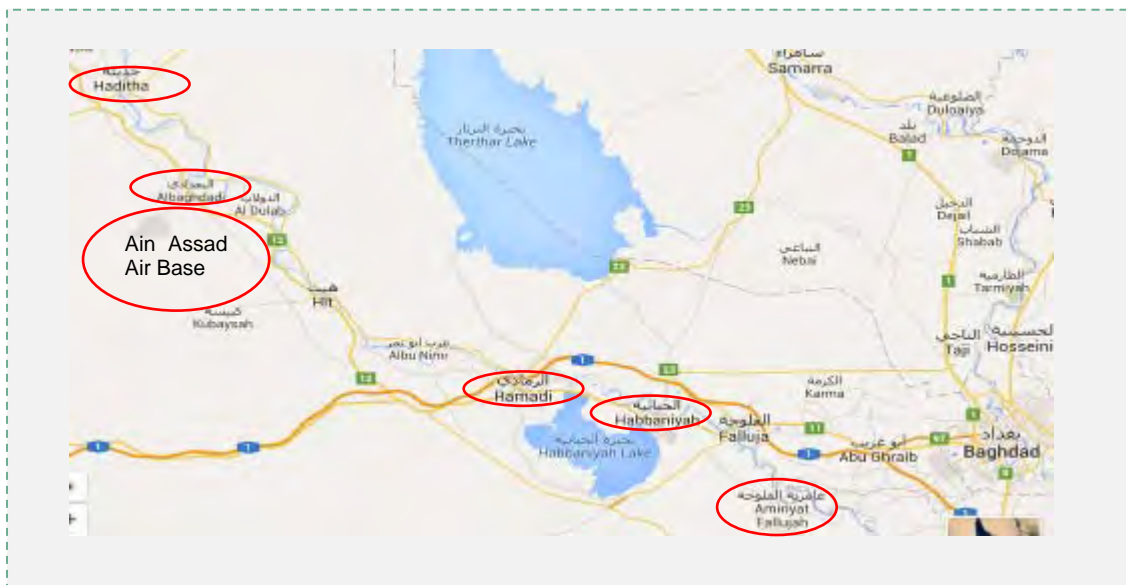
12. To profit from its success in Ramadi the Iraqi regime (supported by the United States) must work intensively at the following levels:

1) **The local level: Locally the challenge for the Iraqi regime will be to complete the liberation of Ramadi, return its population, rebuild the infrastructure and turn it into a model city of reconstruction for its Sunni population.** However, ISIS can be expected to attempt terrorist attacks and wage guerilla warfare **to prevent the normalization of life in Ramadi and to foster tensions between the Iraqi regime and the local population.** The Iraqi army will have to completely remove the remaining ISIS operatives from the city and its surroundings but with sensitivity and exact intelligence, **to prevent unnecessary harm from coming to the local population and to enable it to rehabilitate itself.** The Iraqi regime, with the support of the United States, will also have to **allot funds** to repair the infrastructure and return the city's residents. The regime will have to do that while attempting to overcome its Shi'ite character (which in the past made it difficult to deal with the Sunni population which was liberated from ISIS, as in Tikrit).

2) **The regional level: The Iraqi security forces, with American support, will have to use the liberation of Ramadi as leverage to restore its control over all of Anbar Province:**

A. The hold of the Iraqi army and the Sunni tribes that support it is limited to a number of cities and military bases in Anbar Province, among them Habanniyah, Al-Baghdadi, Ain Assad air base, Haditha, Amiriyat Fallujah and Al-Nakhib (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, May 18, 2015). **The Iraqi army will have to systematically clean out Anbar Province, push out the remaining ISIS operatives and create a territorial continuum between the areas under its control.** The regime will then have to **establish its**

control over the main route along the Euphrates which serves as ISIS's logistic lifeline and cut off its connection to Syria.



Map of the presence of the Iraqi army supported by Sunni tribes in Anbar Province (Google Maps).

B. ISIS is still strongly entrenched throughout most of Anbar Province and it will be difficult to uproot it. It is still supported by some of the Sunni tribes that regard the Iraqi regime as Shi'ite and hostile to the Sunni population. Militarily, ISIS's control of Mosul and eastern Syria enables it to bring reinforcements to Anbar Province to protect its strongholds and initiate attacks on the Iraqi army.

C. The Iraqi army's top priority will now have to be the city of Fallujah, which lies between Ramadi and Baghdad (about 56 kilometers, or 35 miles, east of Baghdad), now cut off from the core of ISIS control. Senior figures in the Iraqi administration and army have already stated that **the Iraqi army will focus its efforts on liberating Fallujah** once the takeover of Ramadi has been completed. Even during the liberation of Ramadi the Iraqi army increased its encirclement of Fallujah, which has become a symbol of jihadist presence in Iraq, to prevent reinforcements arriving for ISIS from there.



The city of Fallujah, cut off from ISIS's core by the takeover of Ramadi (Google Maps).

3) **At the governmental level:** Anbar Province is Sunni, and most of its inhabitants are still hostile to the Shi'ite regime in Baghdad (with the result that it became a base for ISIS supporters). The Baghdad regime will have to make **an effort to placate the Sunni population by reconstructing Ramadi and turning it into a role model for other Sunni cities.** It will also have to allocate local authority to the Sunni tribal population and **avoid the mistakes of former Prime Minister Adnan al-Maliki regarding the Sunni population** (with overall importance for Iraq that goes beyond the interests of the Sunni population in Anbar Province³).

³ See the article by Zalmay Khalilzad, who served in the American Department of Defense and was the American ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq and the UN, "Ramadi is an important test case as Baghdad looks to recover Fallujah and Mosul," nationalinterest.org, January 1, 2011).

13. The Iraqi prime minister and other spokesmen have stated that after the conquest of Ramadi **the next strategic objective will be Mosul**, and that **ridding Iraq of ISIS will be completed by the end of 2016**. Such statements are probably too **optimistic** and the result of the euphoria of the liberation of most of Ramadi. However, **while ISIS has in fact suffered blows, it is still firmly entrenched in Iraq, not only in Anbar Province but in other Sunni provinces as well**. In the territories it controls it has the support of some of the Sunni population, which regards the Iraqi regime as Shi'ite and hostile to Sunnis. ISIS can therefore be expected to offer **determined resistance to Iraqi army attempts to expel it from its strongholds in Anbar Province and in Iraq in general**. It is also extremely doubtful that the Iraqi army has the capability to rid all Iraq of ISIS presence or that the regime can enlist the support of the general Sunni population.

Appendix

14. The following appendix contains an **initial summary** of the campaign for Ramadi (as of January 3, 2016):

1) **The opposing forces**

- A. The Iraqi army
- B. The Sunni militias
- C. The American-led coalition forces
- D. ISIS

2) **The fighting on the ground – update**

3) **ISIS's tactics**

4) **Continued fighting to rid the city and surrounding areas of ISIS's presence**

5) **Initial reactions to the liberation of Ramadi**

- A. The United States and the coalition
- B. Iran

Appendix

The Campaign for Ramadi – Initial Summary (Updated to January 3, 2016)

The Opposing Forces

The Iraqi Army

1. The campaign for the city of Ramadi was waged mainly by the Iraqi army, which had **an order of battle estimated at between 10,000 and 11,000 regular army soldiers**. Prominent among them were soldiers of the American-supported counter-terrorism task force **spearheading the forces that took control of the center of the city**. Iraqi army soldiers did not lead the battle but served as auxiliaries (for example marking ISIS posts for aerial strikes and securing streets leading to the center of the city⁴).



Left: Counter-terrorism task force soldiers liberate the Al-Bakr neighborhood in the southeastern part of Ramadi. Right: Iraq forces during the siege of ISIS operatives in the Ramadi (Twitter account of [معا ضد داعش الارهاب](#), @marsadirag, December 23, 2015).

The Sunni Militias

2. Learning from past lessons, when the Shi'ite militias harassed the Sunnis they "liberated," **this time the Iraqi army was careful ascertain the support of the Sunnis militias**, which were recruited from among the local tribes in Anbar Province. They had auxiliary roles but **in fact their support of the Iraqi army was politically important**. In the future their role will be to preserve the Iraqi army's control of Ramadi and the roads leading to it, and to oversee the reconstruction of the city.

⁴ David French, "How Did Iraqi Forces Really Retake Ramadi From ISIS?" Nationalreview.com, December 31, 2015.

3. **An estimated 5,000 Sunni tribesmen** supported the Iraqi army in the campaign for Ramadi, according to an Iraqi source (Al-Sumaria TV, December 28, 2015). An additional **500 Sunni operatives** were apparently sent to Ramadi as reinforcements after the center of the city had been taken. They arrived in the northern part of the city to help secure neighborhoods liberated from ISIS (World Bulletin, December 29, 2015).

4. This time, the **Iranian-supported Shi'ite militias**, which in the past supported the Iraqi army in its conquest of the Sunni cities of Tikrit and Baiji, **were kept away from the final effort to take control of the city** (to the displeasure of Iran – see below). After Ramadi was taken the Iraqi administration decided that Sunni tribesmen and not Shi'ite militiamen would take control in order to prevent sectarian strife (Indianexpress, December 31, 2015). However, **the Shi'ite militias were given other tasks in Anbar Province**, such as maintaining a presence in the region of Habanniyah (controlled by the Iraqi army) and securing the road between Ramadi and Fallujah (Reuters, December 27, 2015).

The American-Led Coalition Forces

5. The American-led coalition forces provided close aerial support for the campaign for Ramadi. Since July 2015 the **coalition forces have carried out more than 600 aerial sorties in the Ramadi region, 150 of them during the week before the city was liberated** (Daily Mail and Thedailybeast.com, December 30, 2015). According to an American army spokesman, during the 24 critical hours of the fighting there were five aerial strikes. They hit two tactical ISIS units, fighting positions, command and control positions, artillery positions, vehicles, etc. (Website of the Department of Defense, December 24, 2015).



Air strikes in Ramadi (Al-Jazeera, December 26, 2015).

6. **The liberation of Ramadi was the first successful campaign in which there was full collaboration between the Iraqi army ground forces and the coalition forces, which provided aerial support.** This time the Iraqi army with its American-trained counter-terrorism task force led the fighting (as opposed to previous occasions, when the Shi'ite militias or Kurdish forces led the fighting).

ISIS

7. In all probability, **between 500 and 700 ISIS operatives** defended Ramadi. There are various estimates of its order of battle: on December 21, 2014, **Steve Warren, spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve**, said that between 500 and 1,000 jihad operatives were defending the city and that at least 350 of them had been killed in aerial strikes (MSNBC, December 21, 2015). On December 26, 2015, an Iraqi intelligence officer claimed that 500 ISIS operatives had left Ramadi and only several dozen remained in the city (Wall Street Journal, December 23, 2015). During an intelligence briefing of coalition forces in Baghdad, an officer estimated the number of ISIS operatives at **about 700 and about 400 in the center of the city** (VOA News, December 30, 2015).

8. **The ISIS forces defending the city were far less numerous than the Iraqi army forces. They established a defensive array and waged guerilla warfare.** They carried out surprise attacks on the Iraqi army, placed IEDs at the side of the roads leading to Ramadi and dispatched suicide bombers. Their objective was to disrupt the Iraqi army's preparations to take over the city, prevent the city from being encircled and make it difficult for Iraqi army forces to move along the main roads. ISIS accompanied

its combat with **media warfare**, including a video of civilians allegedly killed in coalition airstrikes (Aamaq, December 25, 2015).

The Fighting on the Ground – Updated to January 3, 2016

9. For a number of months the **Iraqi army** concentrated around Ramadi and **gradually tightened the cordon around the city**. The United States and the coalition forces systematically attacked ISIS from the air, both inside Ramadi and in the surrounding areas, in preparation for a ground offensive. On **December 22, 2015**, when military conditions were considered appropriate, Iraqi army ground forces, with Western air support, attacked the ISIS operatives in Ramadi.

10. The Iraqi army overcame pockets of ISIS resistance in the city and its outskirts, while **the counter-terrorism force moved forward to the area of the administration building in the city center where ISIS had concentrated most of its forces**. ISIS employed its tunnel network, sent suicide bombers to attack the soldiers, employed snipers, IEDs, mines and booby-trapped wagons, and used the local population as human shields.

11. **The turning point came on December 28, 2015**, when after a week of fighting the Iraqi army's counter-terrorism task force took control of the administration buildings and raised the Iraqi flag to symbolize victory. However, the city has not yet been completely rid of ISIS operatives and fighting continues both within the city and in the surrounding areas (see below).



Left: Iraqi army soldiers and Iraqi civilians who fled from ISIS in Ramadi (Facebook page of Ramadi, January 3, 2016). Right: Iraqi army forces enter the government compound in the center of the city (Aljazeera.net, January 3, 2016).

12. The events of the last days of the fighting in **Ramadi** were the following (Al-Sumaria TV and BBC in Arabic, December 26, 2015; Al-Jazeera and RT, December 27, 2015):

- 1) On **December 26, 2015**, the Iraqi army took control of the **Ramadi Dam**, located west of the city, and the **Albu Faraj** region to the north.
- 2) On **December 27, 2015**, Iraqi army sources reported an attempt to open a new front in the north to respond to strong ISIS guerilla warfare. The Iraqi army also took control of the **Al-Huz neighborhood in the center of the city** to the south of the government buildings, which was ISIS's main stronghold.



Iraqi security forces in Ramadi (Al-Jazeera, January 1, Al-Arabiya, January 3, 2016).

- 3) On **December 28, 2016**, according to reports, the Iraqi army took over the government buildings in the center of the city, and pictures were published of the Iraq flag raised over the buildings to prove victory.

13. According to initial estimates, **more than 3,000 buildings were completely destroyed and thousands more were damaged**. The number is expected to grow because there are several neighborhoods which cannot yet be entered and where the damage has yet to be evaluated. The city's entire infrastructure was damaged to a certain extent, including electricity, water and sewage facilities. Five bridges over the Euphrates were also damaged (Daily Mail, December 30, 2015).

ISIS's Tactics

14. **ISIS used familiar tactics to oppose the Iraqi army**. The city was covered with a previously-prepared network of IEDs and booby-trapped buildings. Concentrations of Iraqi army forces were attacked with hit-and-run raids. On one

occasion, ISIS claimed police headquarters were attacked and Iraqi security forces were killed. On another occasion ISIS operatives attacked a building in the eastern part of Ramadi where Iraqi security forces were billeted (Amaq, December 24, 2015).

15. **Hundreds of ISIS operatives were reported killed** in the fighting in Ramadi. Dozens of operatives, including commanders, fled towards the Syrian border (Sky News, December 23, 2015). **Ummar Badawi al-Issawi**, a senior ISIS commander, was also reported killed (Twitter account of Hussein Murtada, December 26, 2015). In addition, the Iraqi security forces reportedly caught **Abu Safa al-Dimashqi**, a Syrian operative in Ramadi at the time, called ISIS's "finance minister" (Twitter account of Hussein Murtada, December 29, 2015).

Continued Fighting to Rid the City and Surrounding Areas of ISIS's Presence

16. Despite the declared liberation of Ramadi, **apparently efforts are still being made to rid the city of ISIS operatives, and will continue for some time**. The security advisor of Anbar Province said Iraqi government control of the city was not complete and there were still pockets of resistance (Al-Youm Al-Sabaa, December 30, 2015). ISIS still reportedly holds about 20% of Ramadi, and there are Iraqi army clashes with ISIS in about 25% of the city. Steve Warren, spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, said **it would take time to achieve full control** despite the Iraqi government's claim it had liberated Ramadi (Global Security, December 29, 2015).

17. After the takeover of the center of Ramadi the Iraqi army began dealing with the neighborhoods still under ISIS control in both the city and surrounding areas, especially to the north and east (see below). ISIS attacked the Iraqi army in other locations in Anbar Province. For example:

1) ISIS operatives clashed with the Iraqi army in the region of **Al-Jraishi**, north of Ramadi (Al-Jazeera, January 1, 2016). An Iraqi army spokesman reported that **on January 1, 2016, ISIS operatives attacked an Iraqi army base with suicide bombers wearing explosive belts and with car bombs** (BBC, December 30, 2015)

2) According to Iraqi army sources, on January 1, 2016, ISIS operatives **detonated a car bomb at Iraqi army headquarters in the northern part of Ramadi**, located between **Albu Aath** and **Hamidhiyah** (see map below). The attack killed 60 Iraqi security force operatives and wounded at least 70 (Al-Jazeera, January 1, 2016).

3) On January 3, 2016, an Iraqi security source reported that **Iraqi security forces were besieging ISIS operatives in the northeastern part of the city in the regions of Al-Sjaria and Al-Sufia** (Al-Jazeera, January 3, 2016).

4) On January 1, 2016, the Iraqi army attacked ISIS positions in the western part of the city and suffered losses (Al-Jazeera, January 1, 2016). ISIS announced it **had ambushed and destroyed an Iraqi army convoy south of the city** (Amaq, January 1, 2016).

5) In **the region of Fallujah** an ISIS car bomb killed 23 Iraqi soldiers. In the region of Haditha 18 Iraqi soldiers were killed when car bombs exploded (Al-Jazeera, January 3, 2016).



Locations of combat between the Iraqi army and ISIS in the northern and eastern suburbs of Ramadi, updated to January 3, 2016 (Google Maps).

18. While liberating Ramadi, **the Iraqi army also encircled the city of Fallujah** (located 56 kilometers, or 35 miles east of Ramadi and under ISIS control for the past two years). That was done to prevent military support from reaching ISIS operatives in Ramadi and to increase the pressure on Fallujah in preparation for future action. The Iraqi army reported that 44 ISIS operatives had been killed and 12 booby-trapped buildings had been blown up south of Fallujah (Shafaq News, December 27, 2015). On December 27, 2015, it was reported that Iraqi security forces broke into the Al-Ni'aimmiyah neighborhoods in the southern suburbs of Fallujah and killed 300 ISIS operatives (Al-Arabiya TV, December 27, 2015).

Initial Reactions to the Liberation of Ramadi

The United States and the Coalition

19. **American Secretary of State John Kerry** congratulated the Iraqi army on the liberation of Ramadi, noting the United States and coalition support for Iraq's struggle. **Steve Warren**, spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, congratulated Iraq, saying the coalition would help the Iraq government reconstruct the city (Twitter account of the coalition spokesman, December 28, 2015). **The German and French prime ministers** also congratulated the Iraqi prime minister. The British prime minister said that Britain would continue providing Iraq with support (Website of the British government, December 30, 2015).

Iran

20. **Iran also praised the Iraqi army for liberating Ramadi from ISIS.** **Hassan Firouzabadi**, head of the Iranian armed forces, called it a great victory for the Iraqi army and Sunni and Shi'ite popular militias, and said it promised future victories. Iranian Foreign Minister **Mohammad Javad Zarif** congratulated Iraqi Foreign Minister **Ibrahim al-Ja'fari** on the liberation of Ramadi from ISIS (IRNA, December 29, 2015). On December 28, 2015 Mohammad Javad Zarif met in Tehran with **Ammar Hakim**, chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. He told Hakim that the ethnic tribes and groups in Iraq had to unite in the struggle against extremism and terrorism (Press TV, December 28, 2015).

21. However, despite the public displays of congratulation, **the Iranians are apparently disturbed that the Shi'ite forces in Iraq did not play a significant role in the liberation of Ramadi. Therefore Iran news sites and social networks posted a picture of Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force in the eastern part of Anbar Province.** The picture was not recent because one of the Shi'ite militia officers with Soleimani was killed in July 2015. **However, its posting during the fighting in Ramadi was meant to indicate that Iran was also participating in the liberation of the city.**



Archive picture of Qasem Soleimani in the eastern part of Anbar Province: a deliberate attempt to involve Iran in the liberation of Ramadi (Entekhab, December 26, 2015).