

Iraqi officials report the fall of Ramadi

Our reporter
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Iraqi government sources said Sunday that the city of Ramadi, capital of Anbar province, has fallen to the forces of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Sunni insurgent force that has overrun nearly one-third of Iraq's territory, including most of the Sunni-populated region in the north and west.

ISIS militants launched their latest offensive in Ramadi on Thursday night, with a series of suicide bombers who blasted holes in government defenses and forced police and government troops to retreat. On Friday, ISIS raised its black flag over the government center in downtown Ramadi and then set it on fire, although fighting ebbed and flowed around that area for the next 48 hours.

Reuters news agency reported that a remnant of the Iraqi special forces "had retreated on Sunday to an area east of the city after suffering heavy casualties, security sources said, bringing Ramadi to the brink of falling to Islamic State. It would be the first major urban center to be seized by the insurgents in Iraq since security forces and paramilitary groups began pushing them back last year."

The news service quoted a call from an Iraqi officer to government officials in Baghdad saying it was too late to send reinforcements. "We are now surrounded inside the Operations Command," he said. "Mortars are raining down" and the ISIS fighters "are in almost every street. It's a chaotic situation and things are sliding out of control."

Anbar provincial council member Athal Fahdawi told Reuters that the situation in Ramadi was one of "total collapse," adding that local government officials had voted to invite Shiite paramilitary forces into the predominately Sunni city, a step they had previously resisted.

ISIS fighters first entered Ramadi nearly 18 months ago, at the beginning of an offensive that led them to control most of Anbar province as well as Nineveh

province to the north, where Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, is located.

Warplanes from the US-led coalition fighting ISIS in both Syria and Iraq carried out seven airstrikes around Ramadi on Saturday, but these had no apparent effect on the progress of the ISIS offensive.

US Vice President Joe Biden spoke to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi Friday and promised "continued and expedited US security assistance," i.e., weapons shipments, according to US official statements.

Marine General Thomas Weidley, deputy commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, as the US bombing campaign is officially titled, dismissed the significance of the fighting in Ramadi, telling reporters at the Pentagon, "We firmly believe [ISIS] is on the defensive throughout Iraq."



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