

With US air war in 10th month, ISIS advances in Iraq and Syria

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With the US-led air war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) now in its 10th month, the Islamist militia continues to make territorial gains in both countries, inflicting serious losses on the military in Iraq as well as both government forces and rival Islamist “rebels” in Syria.

In its latest attack on Monday, ISIS launched a devastating suicide bombing against an army base just north of the Iraqi city of Fallujah, killing at least 45 members of the security forces and wounding scores more.

The attack was carried out using an armored Humvee fighting vehicle loaded with explosives. The attack detonated ammunition in a base depot, setting off explosions that continued for several hours.

The increasing use of US-made Humvees in such bombing attacks is the byproduct of the debacle suffered by the Iraqi regime and its US-armed and trained security forces with the fall of Mosul to ISIS last June. Iraqi army and police units fled the city abandoning massive stockpiles of US arms and ammunition that fell into the hands of the Islamist militia.

The scale of this debacle was underscored on Sunday with the admission by Iraq’s Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi that “We lost 2,300 Humvees in Mosul alone.”

As an indication of the scale of this loss, the *Guardian* newspaper reported that the cost of 1,000 armored Humvees approved for sale to Iraq last year was estimated at \$579 million.

In a separate attack Monday, ISIS ambushed an Iraqi army column in Seddiqiya in Anbar province, killing at least 33 troops and pro-Baghdad militia fighters.

The continued attacks come in the wake of last month’s fall of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, the most humiliating defeat for the US-backed

government since the rout of Iraqi forces in Mosul a year ago.

The bitter recriminations over the fall of Ramadi, with US officials blaming a lack of Iraqi “will” to fight and countercharges that the US has done little to combat ISIS, have extended to within the Iraqi regime itself.

Salim al-Jabouri, the speaker of Iraq’s parliament and most prominent Sunni politician within the Baghdad regime, told CNN that Iraqi troops abandoned Ramadi to ISIS as the result of “a clear decision to give the order to pull out -- and after that Ramadi fell.”

Al-Jabouri said that Prime Minister Abadi, installed last year with Washington’s backing, had not been informed of the order to retreat from the city. The collapse of the security forces in Ramadi occurred, he added, after the so-called Golden Division -- a US-trained Special Forces unit -- suddenly pulled out.

“We feel that there were other hands involved in this that played a role in military decisions,” he told the US news network.

Tensions continue between Abadi and the former US-installed prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, who has refused to move out of the prime minister’s palace in Baghdad’s heavily fortified “Green Zone” and is widely charged with seeking to undermine his successor. Maliki remains the leader of Abadi’s own Dawa party as well as the leader of the largest parliamentary bloc. He apparently continues to enjoy support from within top echelons of the security forces, as well as from Shia militias.

Following Ramadi’s fall, Abadi was compelled to allow Shia militias to take the leading role in a counter-offensive to retake the city. Washington, which had previously publicly opposed the participation of the militias, which are in most cases aligned with Iran, was

forced to accept their role in the face of the rout of the government's own forces.

In neighboring Syria, ISIS has also registered territorial gains against both the Syrian government and rival Islamist militias. According to an assessment by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, ISIS now controls half of Syria's land mass, while the French Syria analyst and geographer Fabrice Balanche estimated that between Iraq and Syria, the Islamist militia now controls 115,000 square miles, roughly equivalent to the size of Italy. It has also taken over all of the border crossings between the two countries.

The most recent ISIS gains have come in the north, in the province of Aleppo. It overran the village of Suran on May 31, bringing its forces to within barely six miles of the Turkish border. And on Monday, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, its forces inflicted losses on rival "rebels," advancing on the town of Marea, which controls a key supply route from Turkey, which has been the major source of arms for the forces backed by the West and the Sunni Gulf oil monarchies in their bid for regime change in Syria. These advances follow the May 21 ISIS overrunning of the ancient southern Syrian city of Palmyra in Homs province.

There has been no evident attempt by Washington to blunt the advance of ISIS in Syria or to dissuade its reactionary monarchical Arab allies from continuing to arm and fund the Islamist militias. ISIS, together with the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front, remains the principal fighting forces in the US-backed war to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The price paid by the peoples of both Syria and Iraq for a bloody war that is the direct outcome of US policies in the Middle East, from the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to the support of the Islamists in Syria a decade later, continues to grow.

May constituted the single bloodiest month since the outset of the Syrian conflict, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, with at least 6,657 killed. The largest single category of dead was that of Syrian government troops and other fighters supporting the Assad government, which accounted for 2,450 of those killed. This was followed by the Islamist militias, which reportedly lost 2,109 fighters and then civilians, 1,285 of whom lost their lives to the conflict last

month.

Meanwhile, in Iraq, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq counted the deaths of 1,031 Iraqis from the violence last month, with another 1,684 wounded.



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