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**Insider's View Bulletin:** Data analysis of IS attacks in the disputed territories east of Kirkuk

Sept. 12, 2016

**Key points:**

- Number of IS perpetrated attacks in May-Aug. far surpasses attacks Jan-April
- Attacks can be divided into three geographic theaters – northern Diyala, Kirkuk, and Tuz Khurmato
- IS attacks in August shifted focus from security forces to civilians fleeing from Hawija area

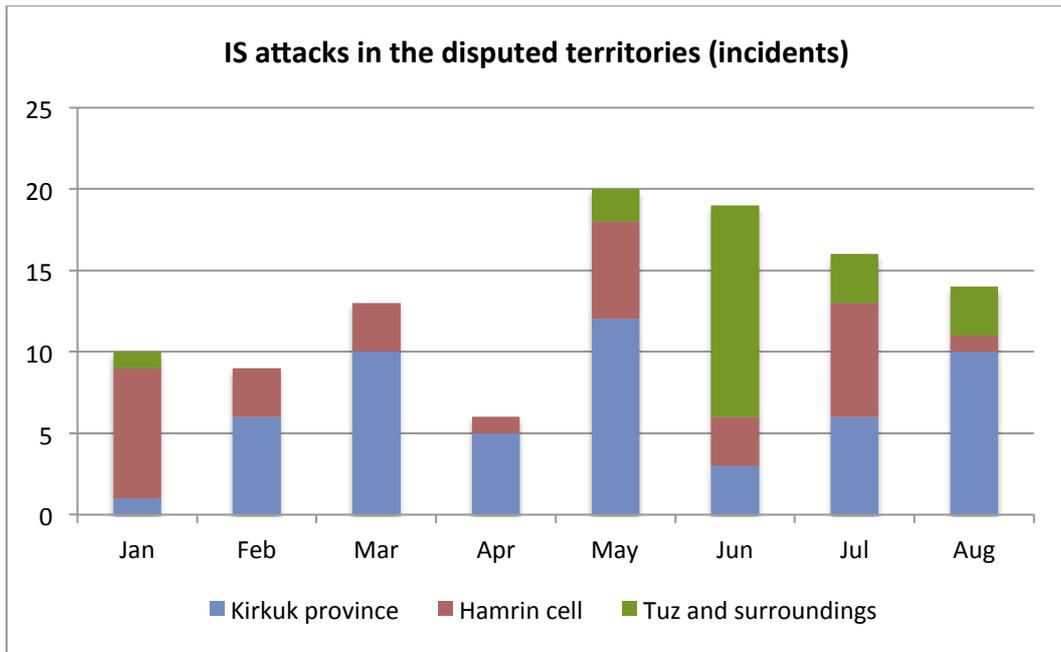
**Operational impact:** Individuals and entities with business interests in Iraq should note the apparent shift in IS tactics towards the end of the summer, with an increase in attacks on civilians in Hawija and the push for IS cells to attack deeper in the Kurdistan region (for more on the latter see BULLETINS "*Security official goes into detail on IS cells near Chamchamal,*" from Aug. 29 and "*Security forces kill four IS southeast of Chamchamal,*" from Aug. 18). These seem to indicate a return to more guerrilla-like tactics, and may lead to an increased focus on asymmetric attacks by the group in the near future.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Data collected in the disputed territories of Kirkuk province and northern Diyala and Salahaddin provinces indicate that militant attacks in the area have decreased slightly in August as compared to the three months prior, though they remain well above monthly figures for the first four months of the year. Broadly speaking, incidents since January have been most common in southwest Kirkuk, though militants in the Hamrin Mountain area have also launched repeated attacks, and Tuz saw a spike of IS violence in June.

*Data collected by in-house staff based in Diyala, Salahaddin, Kirkuk and Sulimaniyah provinces.*

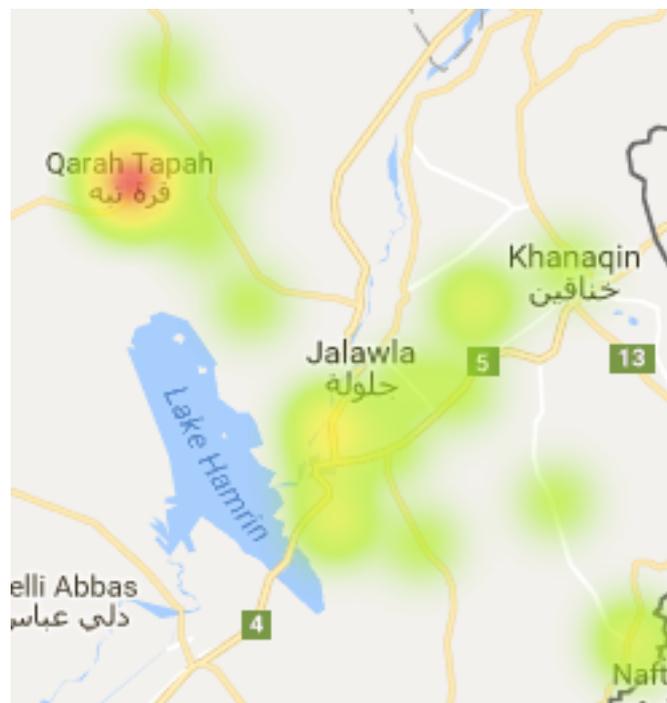
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**Details:** Attacks by IS militants in the disputed territories spiked in May, and have decreased slightly every month since, according to data collected in the region. However, figures for June, July and Aug. still exceed those for the first four months of the year. The attacks can be categorized in three geographic areas: – Kirkuk province, the area south southwest of Tuz Khurmato, and further east in northern Diyala province. The attacks in northern Diyala province have been carried out by an IS cell operating out of the Hamrin Mountains and the marshes surrounding Hamrin Lake. Other attacks have been carried out by IS militants attacking from the area the group controls in and around Hawija, located southwest of Kirkuk, as well as sleeper cells in Tuz and points south of Tuz.



#### Analysis

**Hamrin cell:** The IS cell operating out of the Hamrin Mountains has been a source of consternation for security forces. Repeated operations have been launched in an attempt to clear the cell from the area, but with little success. The cell has an operational area that centers in the triangle between Sadiyah, Jalula, and Qara Tapah, though they have also launched attacks along the Iranian border and as far northwest as Khanaqin.



Hamrin cell attacks Jan-Aug 2016

*The cell was most active in January, May, and July, based on the number of reported incidents. However, local residents have expressed concern over the group's presence nearly continuously. This is likely due to the type of attack launched, which has shifted from a focus on IEDs early in year to more kidnappings and shootings during the summer months. This shift has contributed to the impression that the group is able to move with relative impunity, entering towns to kill and kidnap even once they are ostensibly under the control of the Iraqi Army or Peshmerga forces.*

*The uptick in attacks in July was attributed, by locals, to several IS militants from the area returning after fleeing Hawija. In addition, while the group launched far fewer attacks in the disputed territories in August, there were several confrontations during that period between IS militants and security forces in Sulimaniyah province (for background on IS in Sulimaniyah province, see BULLETINS, "Security official goes into detail on IS cells near Chamchamal," dated Aug. 29, "Asayesh launch security operation northeast of Kalar," dated Aug. 22, "Security forces kill four IS southeast of Chamchamal," dated Aug. 18, and "Suspected IS member detonates suicide vest south of Chamchamal," dated Aug. 15).*

*While those incidents all ended in IS militant deaths rather than successful attacks, they may represent an effort by IS to send militants to their areas of origin to wage low-scale insurgencies, according to an Asayesh official interviewed on the subject.*

**Kirkuk:** *The nature of IS violence perpetrated in Kirkuk province has evolved over time. In the first five months of the year, violence levels were driven by IS attacks (largely small arms and IDF) on Peshmerga and al-Hashid al-Shabi positions near Taza, Bashir and Daquq. By August – with IS driven out of much of its territory near those three localities – that violence has evolved to primarily entail attacks on civilians fleeing Hawija.*

**Tuz:** *IS violence in and around Tuz surged in June, as the militant group launched a number of attacks on Peshmerga and al-Hashid al-Shabi forces north of the Zarga bridge at Bir Ahmed and other towns. Though the volume of attacks in and around Tuz dropped off after June, it remains well above levels from the first five months of the year.*

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