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Iraqi Police Execute 44 Sunni Prisoners, Flee Baghdad Suburb

By Jason Ditz

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As the fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) continue to expand southward toward Baghdad, the next target seems to be Baqubah, the capital of the Diyala Province with over 460,000 people just 31 miles from Baghdad's city limits.

There've been reports of clashes there already, and some of the police fled last night, but not before executing 44 Sunni detainees who were being held without charges under the state's draconian anti-terror laws.

Police sources said the 44 were being held for "questioning" on suspicion of having ties to militant factions, and that "they were killed inside the jail by the policemen before they withdrew from the station last night."

Bizarrely, the Iraqi military tried to deny this, claiming all 44 were killed in a mortar attack on the police station, though the Baqubah morgue confirmed they were all shot to death at close range. ISIS has been using the executions to try to drum up support from Baqubah's Sunnis.

If Baqubah falls, it gives ISIS control of a highway into northeastern Baghdad, giving them three major thoroughfares through which to access the Iraqi capital. ISIS already controls the highway

through the western Anbar Province as well as much of the highway into the northwest of the city by way of Mosul and Tikrit.

It would also be the fourth provincial capital under ISIS control, after Ramadi (Anbar), Mosul (Nineveh), and Tikrit (Salahaddin). Portions of Baqubah's Diyala Province have also fallen to the Kurdish Peshmerga in recent days.