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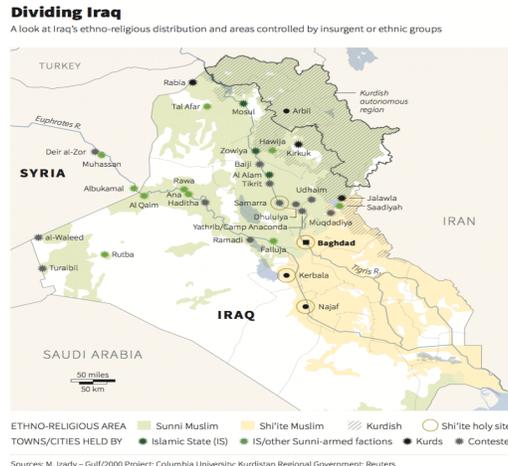
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ISIS Has Punched A Hole Through Kurdish Defenses In Iraq

8/4/2014

ISIS fighters punched through the defenses of the Kurds in northern Iraq on Sunday, displacing thousands while seizing key pieces on infrastructure.

After a lightning advance over the weekend, ISIS fighters pushed back Kurdish Peshmerga forces in several towns throughout the Sinjar and Tal Afar districts of Iraq that had previously been held by the Kurds. ISIS' advance included the seizure of oil fields that border Iraqi Kurdistan.



ISIS has seized a number of towns which had previously been under Peshmerga protection around Tal Afar in northern Iraq.

Crucially, there have been reports that ISIS seized the Mosul Dam from the Peshmerga on Sunday. The dam is the largest in Iraq, and it could allow ISIS to hypothetically unleash torrential floods upon Baghdad 280 miles to the south.

The Kurds have been warning for weeks that they were under-equipped for the task of sustaining defenses along the 650-mile border they now share with ISIS. The Peshmerga have proven to be reliable fighters, but the group has not received munitions or salaries from the Baghdad government.

The U.S. has also proven unwilling to arm the Kurds, out of fear that supplying the group could lead to further divisions — and an eventual partitioning — of Iraq.

ISIS, meanwhile, has been able to arm itself with looted military equipment from several Iraqi army bases — much of which was provided to the Iraqi military by the United States.

The sudden success of ISIS against the Peshmerga, who had been seen as a possible bulwark against the jihadist group's expansion, might be bringing the Kurds and the Iraqi central government closer together. The Maliki-led Baghdad government, which has been at loggerheads with the Kurds over oil revenues and other issues, has ordered the Iraqi Air Force to provide cover for the Peshmerga in future operations against ISIS.

A Kurdish colonel has stressed that the withdrawal from Sinjar and Tal Afar was tactical. Within the next 48 to 72 hours, the colonel told Reuters, the Kurds would press back against ISIS and retake the lost territory.

Nickolay Mladenov, the United Nations representative in Baghdad, issued a statement Sunday warning of an impending humanitarian crisis. Almost 200,000 civilians have fled this latest round of fighting began — the majority of them coming from the minority Yazidi community, considered heretics by ISIS.

There have already been reports that ISIS has executed dozens of Yazidis since the offensive started.