



Spotlight on the Global Jihad (February 19-25, 2015)



Main events of the week¹

- This week, there were no significant changes in the various combat zones in Iraq and Syria. YPG's Kurdish forces continue to repel ISIS from the rural area of Kobani and this week it was reported that they were nearing the city of Tal al-Abyad, which is controlled by ISIS.
- As the fighting continued in the area of Kobani, this week, Turkey evacuated a Turkish enclave in Syrian territory located about 35 km south of the Turkish-Syrian border. Suleyman Shah, grandfather of the founder of the Ottoman Empire, was buried there. The evacuation, carried out by the Turkish Army and Turkish intelligence services, was accomplished without confrontation with ISIS.
- ISIS, which is establishing its presence in Libya, used social networks for recruiting foreign fighters to fight in the ranks of the organization in Libya. Suicide bombers from the ISIS branch in Libya carried out attacks against targets affiliated with the secular Libyan government, based in eastern Libya. ISIS operatives continue to threaten Italy and the entire Christian world ("to conquer Rome").

The international campaign against ISIS

US and coalition airstrikes

- During the week, there were several dozen airstrikes by US and coalition forces in Syria and Iraq. Following are the locations of the airstrikes (US Department of Defense website):

¹ The weekly publication Spotlight on Global Jihad monitors developments among ISIS and global jihad organizations in Syria and Iraq and in the Middle East as a whole. The publication also monitors terrorist activities around the world, directed, supported or inspired by the global jihad organizations in the Middle East.

- **In Syria**, airstrikes were carried out in the areas of Al-Hasakah, Deir al-Zor and Kobani (Ayn al-Arab). The airstrikes destroyed ISIS battle positions and damaged ISIS units and vehicles. An airstrike near Al-Hasakah damaged an oil drilling facility used by ISIS.
 - **In Iraq**, airstrikes were carried out in the areas of Baiji, Kirkuk, Mosul, Tal Afar, Al-Assad and Rutba. The airstrikes damaged battle positions, checkpoints, vehicles, buildings, weapons and heavy machinery, among other things.
- **The United Arab Emirates (UAE)** announced that a fighter plane squadron of its air force, based in Jordan, carried out airstrikes on ISIS positions and areas occupied by ISIS (apparently in Syria). The targets attacked included oil refining facilities controlled by ISIS. The squadron came to Jordan on the orders of UAE President **Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan** (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, February 17, 2015).
- The London-based **Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)** reported that **1,601 people were killed in coalition airstrikes in Syria** between September 23, 2014, when the airstrikes began, and February 23, 2015. Of those killed, **1,465 were ISIS operatives, most of whom were not Syrian**. The SOHR noted that in its assessment, the number of ISIS operatives killed in coalition airstrikes is even higher. This is because ISIS customarily conceals the number of its losses and because of the difficulty in documenting all the places where airstrikes were carried out (syriaahr.com, February 23, 2015).

According to American reports, the Iraqi Army is preparing to recapture Mosul

- According to statements by senior US Army officials, **the Iraqi Army is preparing to recapture the city of Mosul in the spring of 2015:**
- During a press briefing, a senior official at the US Army Central Command said that the US intends to set up a site for training troops in Saudi Arabia, and added that preparations for opening a training site in Turkey were nearly completed. **According to the official, preparing the forces to regain control of Mosul is underway and the operation is expected to begin in April-May 2015.** The operation will be carried out by **Iraqi Army forces, Kurdish Peshmerga forces, Iraqi police forces, and forces from local (Sunni) tribes.** The US will help the Iraqi Army regain control of Mosul by various means, including supplying military equipment, training, and sharing of intelligence. The

US spokesman did not rule out the possibility of American ground assistance (US Department of State website, February 19, 2015).

- A senior US military official said that 25,000 Iraqi soldiers will take part in the attack on Mosul, which is expected to take place in April-May 2015. He said that the city of Mosul had been held since June 2015 **by 1,000-2,000 jihadi operatives**. He added that it remained unclear whether it would be necessary to advance the American advisers in Iraq to the front in order to coordinate the attacks. According to the US military official, the high-quality core of the Iraqi Army is its five experienced brigades, consisting of around 10,000 soldiers. These brigades are currently engaged in training and coordination with the Kurdish force (The New York Times, February 19, 2015).

International summit on countering “violent extremism”

- The international White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism was held in Washington DC on February 18-19, 2015 (Note: for reasons of political correctness, there is no mention of the Islamic-jihadi nature of the terrorism in question). The summit was attended by senior representatives from over 60 countries worldwide. Addressing the summit, US President **Barack Obama** stressed that **the West is not at war with Islam**. President Obama detailed the efforts to deal with the threats of “violent extremism,” including rejecting the “twisted ideologies” of terrorist groups, addressing the economic and political grievances among disadvantaged population groups and mobilizing the local population to take part in the struggle. US Secretary of State John Kerry said that the US State Department will increase its support for Interpol in dealing with the phenomenon of foreign fighters (White House website, February 19, 2015).

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (GOOGLE EARTH)

Aleppo province

- In the area of Aleppo, battles took place between ISIS operatives and Shiite militias. According to Orient News TV, about 200 Shiite militia operatives, who came to Syria from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, have been killed fighting against ISIS in the northern part of the Aleppo province (Orient News, February 18, 2015).
- On February 19, 2015, the owner of an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account posted a photo showing around 35 people who were captured by ISIS. He noted that the prisoners belong to Hezbollah or to Shiite militias supported by it. The photo also shows three bodies in uniform (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 19, 2015). **At this stage, it is unclear whether the prisoners in question are Hezbollah operatives or operatives from the Shiite militias supported by Iran and Hezbollah.**



Left: The bodies of the three militia operatives killed in battles with ISIS in the Aleppo province (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 19, 2015) Right: Shiite prisoners captured by ISIS in Aleppo

Damascus province

- Near the town of Al-Set Zaynab, a car bomb attack was carried out at a checkpoint manned by the Troops for the Defense of the Homeland (a semi-military force of the Syrian regime) and Hezbollah operatives. The explosion killed six people and wounded more than 10. The town of Al-Set Zaynab is a center for Hezbollah operatives and Shiite militias who come from Iran, Iraq and Lebanon to fight in Syria. On several occasions in the past, jihadi organizations tried to attack the Al-Set Zaynab compound and the forces that protect it, including through the use of suicide bombers and car bombs.

There are dozens of sites in Syria that are sacred to the Shiites, the most prominent of which is the tomb of Al-Set Zaynab (or Al-Sayyida Zaynab), the daughter of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, the founder of Shiite Islam, and the granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad. The tomb is a pilgrimage site for Shiites from around the world, particularly from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, the Gulf States, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. In late 2012 - early 2013, a Shiite militia was established to defend the tomb of Al-Set Zaynab from attacks by elements affiliated with the global jihad. This militia includes Shiite fighters from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Al-Arabiya TV, April 5, 2013).

The area of Kobani (Ayn al-Arab)

■ It was recently reported that Kurdish units (YPG), aided by Peshmerga forces (who reached Syria) and the Free Syrian Army, in coordination with the international coalition forces, have managed to get close to the **city of Tal Abyad**, which is controlled by ISIS. They also took over areas between Kobani and Tal Abyad, in order to open the roads between the two cities (Al-Safir, February 21, 2015). ISIS, which is now concentrating its troops on this front, has begun to move operatives from the provinces of Deir al-Zor and Al-Raqqah to Tal Abyad (Al-Manar TV, February 23, 2015).

The Kurdish forces (YPG) **therefore continue to take advantage of their successful takeover of the city of Kobani, repelling ISIS from the surrounding countryside and expanding their control along the border with Turkey.** The ISIS-controlled city of Tal Abyad is located to the west of Kobani and near one of the border crossings leading from Syria to Turkey. If the Kurdish forces manage to take over Tal Abyad, they will establish a territorial control zone for themselves along the Turkish border, presenting a challenge to ISIS.

Evacuation of the tomb of Suleyman Shah enclave in Syria

■ On the night of February 21-22, 2015, following an advance by ISIS operatives, Turkey evacuated the tomb of Suleyman Shah, Turkish enclave of historic importance in Syria, located south of Kobani (around 35 km south of the border). The evacuation was carried out jointly by the Turkish Army and the Turkish intelligence services, **without a confrontation with ISIS operatives.** At the end of the operation, which involved UAVs, helicopters, armored vehicles and special forces, the forces blew up the compound. During the evacuation, a Turkish soldier was killed. According to the Turkish Prime Minister, the remains of the tomb are being held temporarily in Turkey and will be moved to another area controlled by the Turkish Army in northern Syria (Hürriyet, February 22, 2015).

The area of the tomb of Suleyman Shah, who was the grandfather of the founder of the Ottoman Empire, was recognized in 1921 as Turkish territory in an agreement signed with France, and it is of historical and symbolic significance for Turkey. Until recently, the compound was manned by around 40 Turkish soldiers. When ISIS reached the area, the Turks found it difficult to transfer supplies to their soldiers and send in replacements. **In March 2014, ISIS issued an ultimatum to Turkey,**

ordering it to evacuate the compound, otherwise they would take it over. Until recently, Turkey did not assent to this demand. Turkey's response to the demand to evacuate the compound, albeit after such a long time, **represents an achievement for ISIS**. However, evacuating the enclave may release Turkey from potential pressure from ISIS.



Left: The location of the tomb of Suleyman Shah (Zaman, February 22, 2015)
Right: The tomb of Suleyman Shah (www.odatv.com, February 22, 2015)

The area of Al-Qalamoun (the Syrian-Lebanese border)

- It was reported that **Abu Aisha al-Baniasi**, the “Emir” of ISIS in the Al-Qalamoun area, was liquidated following internal disagreements at the top of the organization (Al-Mayadeen, February 23, 2015). His liquidation is liable to weaken ISIS's position in the area of the Syrian-Lebanese border, which serves as a starting point for operations in Lebanon

Al-Hasakah province

- After clashes with ISIS, it was reported that Kurdish forces took over twenty villages in the Al-Hasakah province (Akhbar Al-Aan, February 23, 2015). On the other hand, it was reported that ISIS operatives took over **a number of Assyrian villages** in the province and that they are holding hostages (Al-Arabiya al-Hadath, February 23, 2015).

- The Assyrians in Syria are an ethnic group of Christians who speak Neo-Aramaic. They are the descendants of the ancient Assyrian people. If Assyrians have indeed

been taken prisoner by ISIS, their lives are in danger because ISIS is liable to treat them like “infidels” who must be put to death (as they did to the Yazidi population in Iraq).

Main developments in Iraq



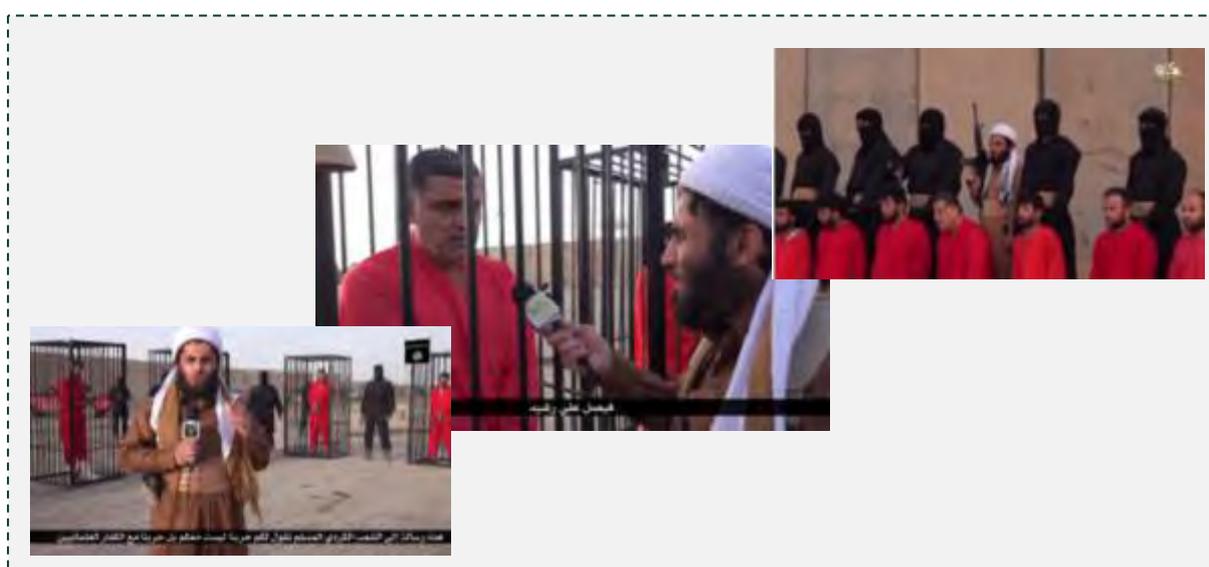
Map of Iraq (GOOGLE EARTH)

Al-Anbar province

■ As part of ISIS’s efforts to purge the Al-Anbar province from pockets of resistance, the siege of the city of al-Baghdadi, located near the Al-Assad airport, continued. According to people in the area, **around 90% of the city has fallen into the hands of ISIS and at least 1,000 ISIS operatives are taking part in the campaign.** An ISIS video about the fighting in al-Baghdadi shows ISIS operatives riding in American armored vehicles and making use of American weapons in their war against the Iraqi security forces and their allies, the Sunni tribes (Washington Post and Reuters, February 13, 2015).

Kirkuk province

- On February 22, 2015, the ISIS information office in the Kirkuk province published a video showing 21 prisoners, including 16 Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, three officers from the emergency police force in Kirkuk and two senior Iraqi Army officers. The video shows the prisoners dressed in orange jumpsuits, being led to cages and displayed in the streets to the cheers of the masses. Later they kneel, with an ISIS operative armed with a knife or a rifle standing behind each of them. The prisoners also include senior Iraqi Army officers (a brigadier general and a lieutenant colonel) (ISIS-affiliated forum, February 22, 2015).



Left: ISIS operative addressing the Kurdish people in Kurdish (ISIS-affiliated forum, February 22, 2015) Right and center: Peshmerga fighters captured by ISIS being led and displayed in cages

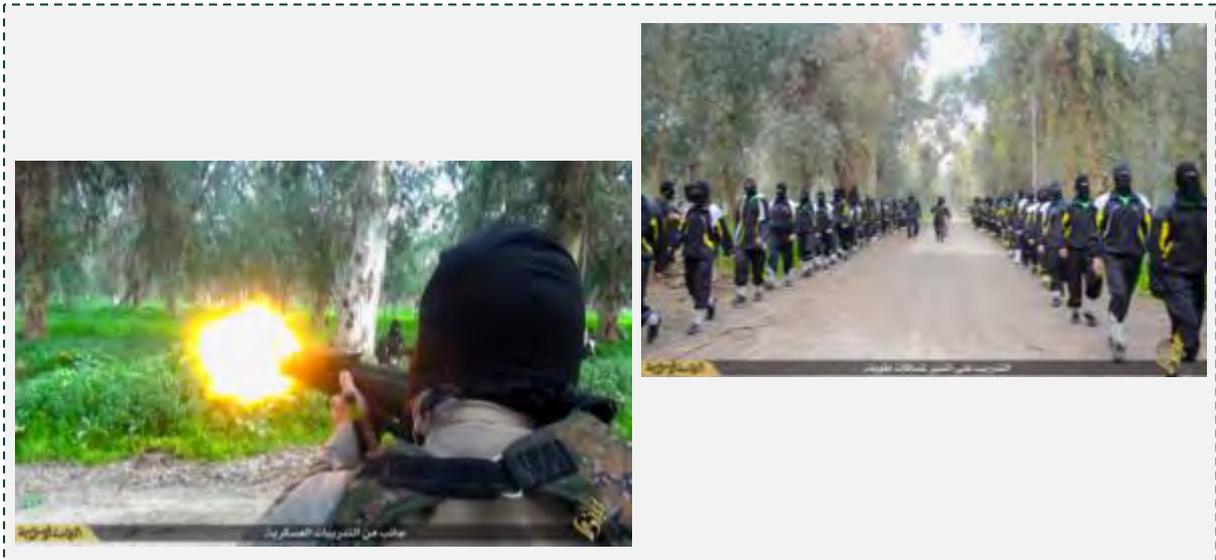
Salah al-Din province

- Iraqi security forces reported **the arrest of two relatives of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**, the leader of ISIS. According to Iraqi security forces, both hold senior positions in ISIS (PUK Media, February 15, 2015).

Nineveh province

- **ISIS has published photos from the graduation ceremony of a military course** in the Nineveh province, in which about 65 operatives took part. The course was held at the Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi training camp. The photos from the graduation ceremony show masked operatives marching, doing sports exercises and hand-to-

hand combat exercises and receiving weapons training (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account and website, February 19, 2015).



ISIS operatives at the graduation ceremony at the Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi camp in the Nineveh province (ISIS-affiliated website, February 19, 2015)

Diyala province

■ In the Diyala province, ISIS carried out two suicide bombing attacks against the Iraqi Army:

- On February 18, 2015, a suicide bombing attack against an Iraqi Army position was carried out **by means of a truck bomb**. The attack was carried out in a village located about 133 km northeast of Baghdad. The suicide bombing attack was carried out by an ISIS operative codenamed **Abu Ahmed the Tunisian** (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, January 17, 2015).



Photos from the suicide bombing attack against an Iraqi Army position (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, February 18, 2015)

- On February 16, 2015, a suicide bombing attack was carried out using a **captured Iraqi Army APC**. The attack was carried out against an Iraqi Army outpost by a suicide bomber codenamed **Abu al-Baraa al-Shami**. Photos uploaded to an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account show the preparations for the attack, the suicide bomber driving the APC, the APC exploding, the destruction of the outpost, the bodies of Iraqi Army soldiers, and the weapons captured by ISIS (ISIS-affiliated Facebook account, February 16, 2015).



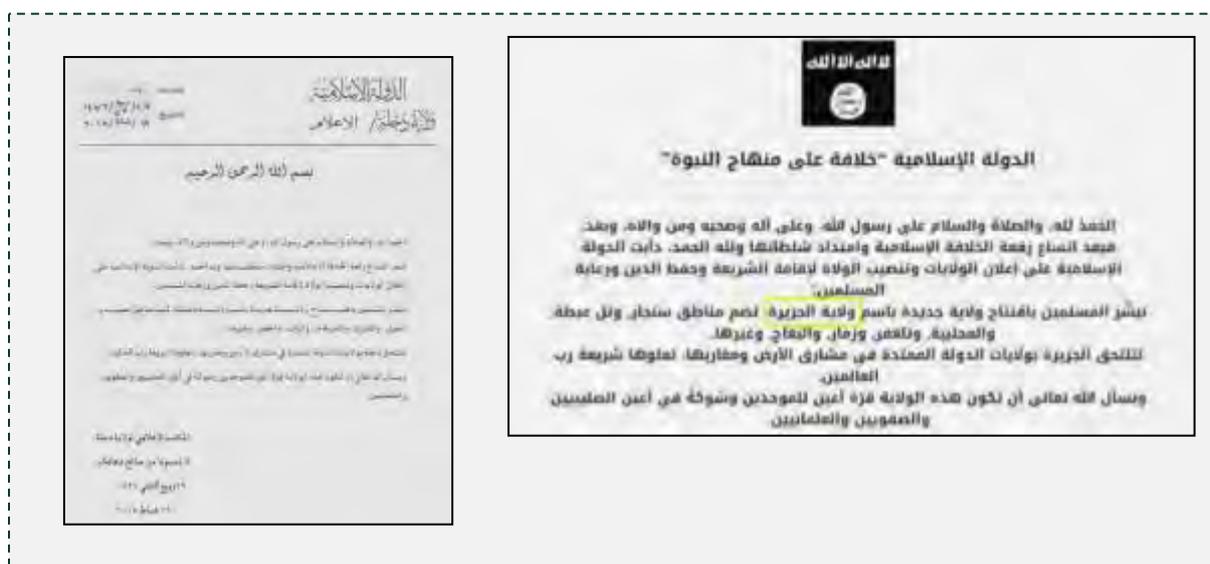
Left: The suicide bomber. Right: The APC used for the attack (ISIS-affiliated Facebook account, February 16, 2015)

The conduct of the Islamic State

ISIS's entrenchment in northern Iraq: the establishment of the Al-Jazeera and Dijla (Tigris River) provinces

■ On February 19, 2015, versions of two ISIS communiqués were published, stating that the organization has **established two new provinces in northern Iraq, near the Iraq-Syria border** (ISIS-affiliated website, February 19, 2015):

- **Al-Jazeera province** - including the **area of Sinjar** (located west of the city of Mosul, near the Syrian border), **Tal Abta** (a town southwest of the city of Mosul), **Al-Mahalabiya** (located east of the city of Mosul), **Tal Afar** (located west of the city of Mosul) and a number of other places.
- **Dijla (i.e., Tigris River) province** - including the area of **Hammam al-Alii** (located about 26 km southeast of Mosul), **Al-Qyara** (located around 68 km south of Mosul), **Al-Shirqat** (located 134 km west of Kirkuk), **Al-Zab** (located around 92 kilometers west of Kirkuk), and **Al-Khidhir** (located around 111 km south of Mosul).



Left: The announcement of the establishment of Dijla as a new ISIS province. Right: The text of the announcement of the establishment of the Al-Jazeera province (ISIS-affiliated website, February 19, 2015)

Criteria for turning a jihadi organization into a province of the Islamic State

■ In view of the pledges of allegiance to the Islamic State by various organizations, ISIS has published criteria for **turning a local organization into an official province of the Islamic State**. A local organization that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic

State will not be considered a province of the Islamic State unless these criteria are met. The criteria mentioned include the following (Dabiq, No. 7, p. 35):

- Public documentation of the pledge of allegiance to the leader of ISIS and the declaration of the establishment of the province.
- The appointment of a leader of the province and the establishment of a regional *Shura* Council.
- Formulation of a strategy for the establishment of the organization and the application of Islamic law.
- Obtaining confirmation from ISIS that the organization meets the criteria that were set.

In the ITIC's assessment, these criteria were established after a number of organizations lacking a significant force on the ground pledged allegiance to the leader of ISIS, and in view of the large number of new provinces joining the Islamic State. ISIS was apparently "burned" several times in the past by idle requests for membership in its ranks, and is now trying to "**establish order**" in its **expanding areas of influence**.

The opening of new schools in Al-Raqqah

■ It was recently reported that ISIS had opened two new schools in the Al-Raqqah province. The language of instruction at these schools is **English** and they are **intended for children of foreign fighters from Western countries**. The schools operate in the morning, five days a week, and are attended by children aged 6-14. The name of one of the schools is Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, and it is intended for boys. The name of the other school is Aisha, and it is intended for girls. At the schools, subjects such as ideology, the life of the Prophet Mohammad, Islamic law, and mathematics will be taught in English. Quran studies in Arabic will also be taught (all4syria, February 23, 2015).

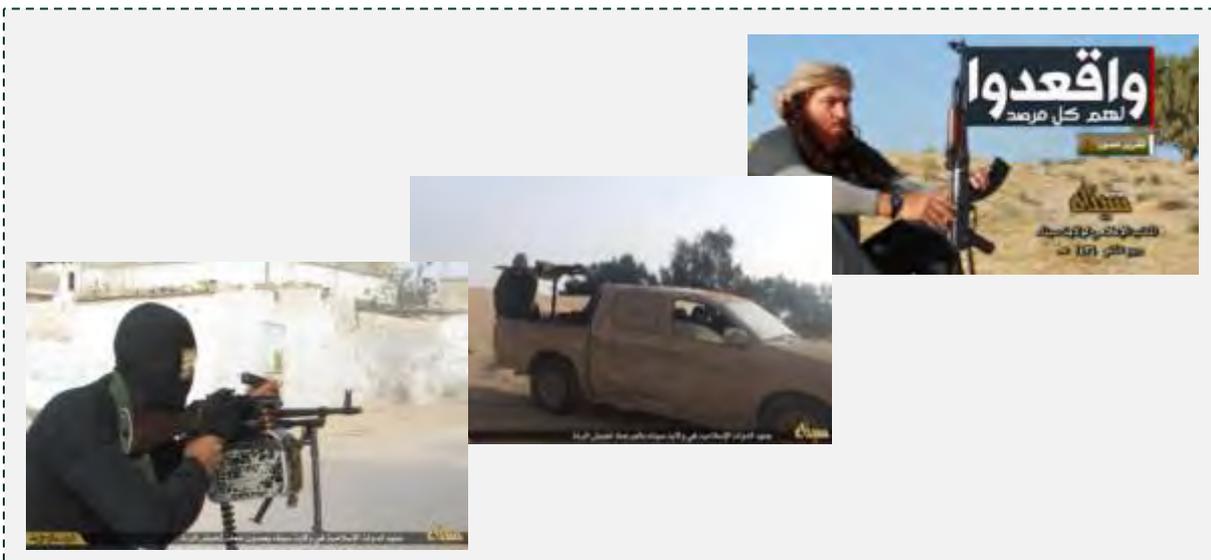
In the ITIC's assessment, the opening of these schools **reflects the importance that ISIS attaches to the educational system that it is establishing in the areas under its control**. This system is designed to train a younger generation of jihadists who will join the ranks of ISIS when the time comes. **The inclusion of the children of Western foreign fighters in the jihadi education system** (in English) carries potential risks for Western countries. When the time comes, these young people are

liable to return to their native countries (together with their families) and constitute a source of subversion and terrorism.

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

Show of strength by ISIS operatives in the Sinai province

- ISIS's Sinai province organized a procession of cars in southern Sheikh Zuweid, aimed at convincing the people to support them. Masked operatives armed with weapons and equipped with RPG launchers drove a convoy of about 15 vehicles. Leaflets were distributed to residents of the area, calling on them to side with the organization's operatives in their struggle against the Egyptian security forces (Al-Watan, February 23, 2015). According to eyewitness reports, residents of the area viewed the show of strength, which was an act of defiance against the Egyptian security forces, with relative indifference, for fear of angering the organization's operatives on the one hand, and the Egyptian security forces on the other (Arabi 21, February 24, 2015).
- On February 18, 2015, ISIS's Sinai province posted photos intended to show the level of military preparedness of ISIS operatives in Sinai in their struggle against the Egyptian Army (ISIS-affiliated website, February 18, 2015). The photos show local jihad operatives riding in SUVs equipped with machine guns (ISIS-affiliated website, February 18, 2015).



Photos showing the military capabilities of ISIS operatives in Sinai against the Egyptian Army (ISIS-affiliated website, February 18, 2015)

The global jihad in other countries



Map of Libya (Google Earth)

The establishment of ISIS in Libya

■ ISIS operatives in ISIS's provinces in Libya continue to carry out terrorist attacks against various targets:

- At least two suicide bombers carried out attacks **in the city of Qubba**, in eastern Libya. More than 40 people were killed and around 70 were injured. The suicide bombing attacks were carried out in the city, which is under the control of the (secular) Libyan government based in eastern Libya. According to a Libyan Army spokesman, one of the suicide bombing attacks was carried out at a gas station. Two other suicide bombing attacks were carried out near the home of the speaker of the House of Parliament and at the headquarters of the security forces. According to the ISIS branch in Libya, these attacks were carried out in response to Egyptian attacks against them in Derna (Yahoo News, February 20, 2015).



Two suicide bombers in the ranks of ISIS in Libya (ISIS's media arm in Libya)

- On February 22, 2015, ISIS claimed responsibility for an attack against the **home of the Iranian ambassador in Tripoli**. The Iranians said there were no casualties because Iran's embassy in Libya has been closed since the summer of 2014. ISIS's claim of responsibility was posted on Twitter, as follows: "Islamic Caliphate troops carried out a double attack against Iranian Embassy in Tripoli". The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman reported that the ambassador's residence sustained minor damage (Al-Arabiya TV, February 22, 2015).
- **ISIS is making efforts to establish and increase its influence in Libya.** To that end:
- ISIS in Libya recently launched a Twitter campaign **designed to recruit foreign fighters into its ranks**. The organization called on Muslims to come to Libya and join the fighting in its ranks.
 - On February 18, 2015, ISIS's media arm in the province of Barqa (eastern Libya) published a series of photos documenting the **activity of its Morality Police (Hisba)**. The photos show a group of masked operatives burning cigarettes and musical instruments.



Burning musical instruments (ISIS's media arm in Libya)

Egyptian appeal to the international community to act against ISIS in Libya

- Following the killing of the Egyptian Copts in Libya and the Egyptian attacks, Egypt has appealed to countries around the world to help Libya. Speaking before the UN Security Council, the Egyptian foreign minister said that the purpose of Egypt's appeal to the UN is to emphasize the need to **build a broader coalition than the one that was established in Syria and Iraq, in order to assist the Libyan government**. He said that the countries of the world must make "strong and real" decisions and take "practical steps" to remove the threat posed by ISIS and similar organizations (Al-Arabiya al-Hadath, February 18, 2015).
- On the other hand, the **US State Department spokesman** said that the **fight against ISIS is currently focused on Syria and Iraq** and that a decision to expand the operation to additional other locations such as Libya has not yet been made (US Department of State website, February 18, 2015). The meaning of this statement is unwillingness, at least at this stage, to broaden the scope of activities of the US-led international coalition, **leaving Egypt to operate outside the coalition**.

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

An ISIS operative who attempted to carry out an attack in Belgium managed to return to Syria

- Issue No. 7 of Dabiq (ISIS's English-language organ) published an interview with an ISIS operative codenamed **the Belgian Abu Omar** (Abdelhamid Abaaoud). In the interview, he talks about his journey from Syria to Belgium together with two friends of

his, codenamed **Abu Zubayr** and **the Belgian Abu Khaled**. The purpose of their trip was to **carry out an attack in Belgium in revenge for its participation in the coalition against ISIS**.

■ According to the Belgian Abu Omar, it took the three men a few months to get to Belgium. They obtained weapons and a safe house and planned to carry out an attack. Their intention was thwarted when Belgian security forces raided the house where they were staying and found explosives and weapons. The Belgian Abu Omar's two friends were killed in the raid by the security forces and he himself managed to escape and return to Syria (Dabiq, No. 7, p. 72).



Left: Abu Omar with his two friends, who went to Belgium to carry out an attack and were killed there. Right: the Belgian Abu Omar (Dabiq, No. 7)

The battle for hearts and minds conducted by ISIS

ISIS's threats "to conquer Rome"

■ ISIS-affiliated elements recently issued threats entitled "conquer Rome". On February 20, 2015, an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account published a poster showing the Colosseum in Rome. Alongside the photo it says in Arabic and Italian: "We will not stop fighting until we call 'Allah Akbar' and calls to prayer in Rome as conquerors, Allah willing." The writer emphasized the word Rome (ISIS-affiliated forum, February 20, 2015). **Rome is the symbol of Christianity, and conquering it, from ISIS's perspective, would symbolize the victory of jihadi Islam over the Christians.**



Call to conquer Rome. The word Rome (in the Arabic source) is marked in black (ISIS-affiliated forum, February 20, 2015)

The struggle between the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS on social networks

■ **The Al-Nusra Front**, Al-Qaeda’s branch in Syria, has set up a website called “The Islamic State, the Caliphate of Tyranny and Corruption”. The purpose of the website is to attack ISIS, whose presence on social networks, especially Twitter, is much broader than that of the Al-Nusra Front. A manifesto published on the website accuses ISIS of attacking Muslims in Syria with false propaganda, presenting themselves as Muslims acting in the name of Islam, and posing a real danger to Islamic society at the conceptual, military and political levels (<http://www.kfasad.ga2h.com/>, an official website of the Al-Nusra Front, February 18, 2015).



An Al-Nusra Front website, which attacks ISIS (an official Al-Nusra Front website, February 18, 2015)