



Spotlight on Global Jihad

(March 12-18, 2015)



Main events of the week¹

- The Iraqi Army and Shiite militias continued to attack the city of Tikrit and the entire Salah al-Din province (north of Baghdad). Media outlets affiliated with the Iraqi regime claim that the Iraqi Army managed to liberate most of the province. However, the fighting is still ongoing.
- ISIS continues its effort to capture pockets of resistance in the Al-Anbar province, west of Baghdad, a stronghold of its power. This week ISIS began an attack, with the aim of taking over the city of Ramadi, the provincial capital. During the attack, ISIS used a large number of suicide bombers, many of them foreigners (from Arab/Muslim and Western countries).
- This week ISIS officially accepted the pledge of allegiance by Boko Haram in Nigeria, and called on Muslims to come to West Africa to participate in jihad. However, ISIS has refrained from declaring Nigeria a new province of the Islamic Caliphate, as it has done in other countries.

The international campaign against ISIS

US and coalition airstrikes

- This week, the US and coalition forces continued their airstrikes against ISIS targets. Several dozen airstrikes were carried out in Syria and Iraq. Following are the locations of the main airstrikes (CENTCOM 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 centered mainly in the area of Al-Hasakah and in the area of Kobani (Ayn al-Arab). The airstrikes damaged ISIS's oil pumping facilities. Vehicles and battle positions belonging to ISIS were also damaged.

- **In Iraq**, airstrikes were carried out in the areas of Al-Qaim, Fallujah, Kirkuk, Mosul, Ramadi and Sinjar. These attacks destroyed or hit vehicles (including armored vehicles), armed operatives, tactical units, gathering places, weapons, heavy machinery, and car bombs.

■ Speaking before the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, at a session on approving the use of US military force against ISIS, two senior figures in the US administration discussed the fighting in Syria and Iraq (US Department of State website, March 11, 2015):

- **US Secretary of State John Kerry** said that an official statement by Congress backing the US military operation against ISIS would put an end to the existing doubts on this issue in the US. He said that authorization by Congress would encourage the partners of the US in the Middle East and the other members of the international coalition against ISIS and would show them that the US is determined to succeed in the offensive against ISIS. He said that despite a number of restrictions on the operation, which are included in the wording of the authorization by Congress, the authorization will enable the US government to wage the battle against ISIS successfully.

- **US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter** said that the authorization that was given [for the offensive against ISIS] **does not include any geographical restrictions**, because **ISIS shows signs of spreading beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq**. He said that the authorization takes into account possible changes in ISIS. The authorization provides great flexibility from the military aspect although it does not provide support for carrying out long-term ground-based attacks.

■ According to **CIA Director John Brennan**, progress made by ISIS in Syria is a worrisome development and a phenomenon that is gathering momentum. Brennan says Russia, the United States, the international coalition against ISIS and the countries in the region **are not interested in the collapse of the government and political institutions in Syria**, since this is liable to result in radical Islamic elements holding controlling positions [in the new regime]. He stresses that the US does not intend to allow ISIS [and other extremist elements] to reach Damascus, and therefore

it is important to strengthen non-extremist forces in Syria (AFP, March 13, 2015). It should be noted that US Secretary of State John Kerry said recently in an interview that Washington would eventually have to negotiate with Syrian President **Bashar Assad**, in order to ensure a political change in the country.

In the ITIC's assessment, the threat inherent in the strengthening of ISIS has, to a great extent, "softened" the US's position toward the Syrian regime and, to some extent, toward Iran as well. While in the past, Syria (and Iran which supports it) was presented as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, the top priority of the current approach, which is growing stronger, is the fight against ISIS, Al-Qaeda and jihadi Islam as a whole.²

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (Google Earth)

² See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from March 15, 2015: "The Iranian terrorist threat: the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for 2015 does not mention Iran and Hezbollah, which were previously presented as a major source of terrorism."

Al-Raqqah province

- North of the city of Al-Raqqah (Tal Abyad), there were battles between ISIS and a rebel network by the name of the Rebel Movement of Al-Raqqah, which is affiliated with the Free Syrian Army. According to the Rebel Movement of Al-Raqqah, dozens of ISIS operatives were killed in the fighting (Halab al-Youm channel, March 14, 2015).

Homs province

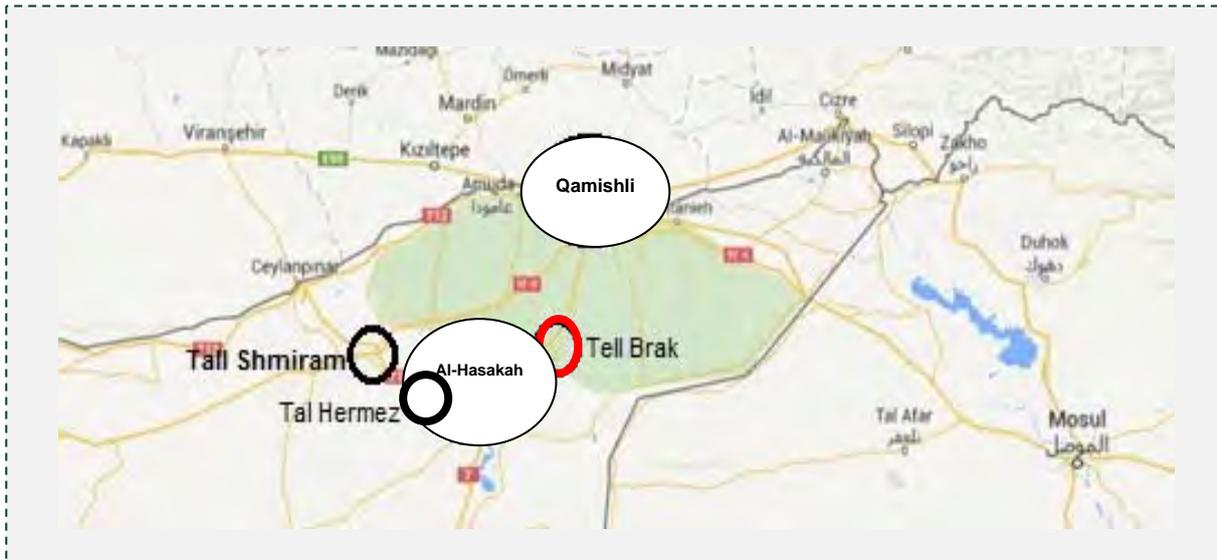
- The Syrian Army reportedly managed to take control of **the Jazal oil field, east of Homs, after fierce fighting**. According to **Talal al-Barazi**, governor of the province, the Army's takeover of the field, which is considered a valuable source of gas, represents an economic and moral victory for the regime (vestnikkavkaza.net, March 7, 2015).



The Jazal oil field, east of the city of Homs (Wikipedia)

Al-Hasakah province

- The YPG Kurdish forces reportedly liberated an extensive area around Tal Hamis and Tell Brak that had been under the control of ISIS. It was reported that in the clashes between Kurdish forces and ISIS, 245 ISIS operatives were killed and a very large quantity of weapons and equipment was seized (PUK Media, March 10, 2015).
- On their part, ISIS operatives reported that they had managed to take control of several villages on the Syrian-Turkish border (Amaq News Agency, Al-Mayadeen, March 10, 2015).



Al-Hasakah province, where fighting took place between ISIS and Kurdish forces (YPG). The black circles are Assyrian Christian towns that have fallen into the hands of ISIS. The red circle is the town of Tell Brak, which was reportedly liberated by the YPG forces.

Southern Syria

- The Druze have reportedly signed a prisoner exchange agreement with the Al-Nusra Front, in which local Sunni villages were apparently also involved. Under the agreement, Al-Nusra Front operatives handed over 32 bodies of members of the Druze community. In return, the Druze handed over a number of captive Al-Nusra Front operatives (Al-Nahar, March 14, 2015).

Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (Google Earth). The red circles are the areas of the fighting in Tikrit and Samarra.

Salah al-Din province

Tikrit

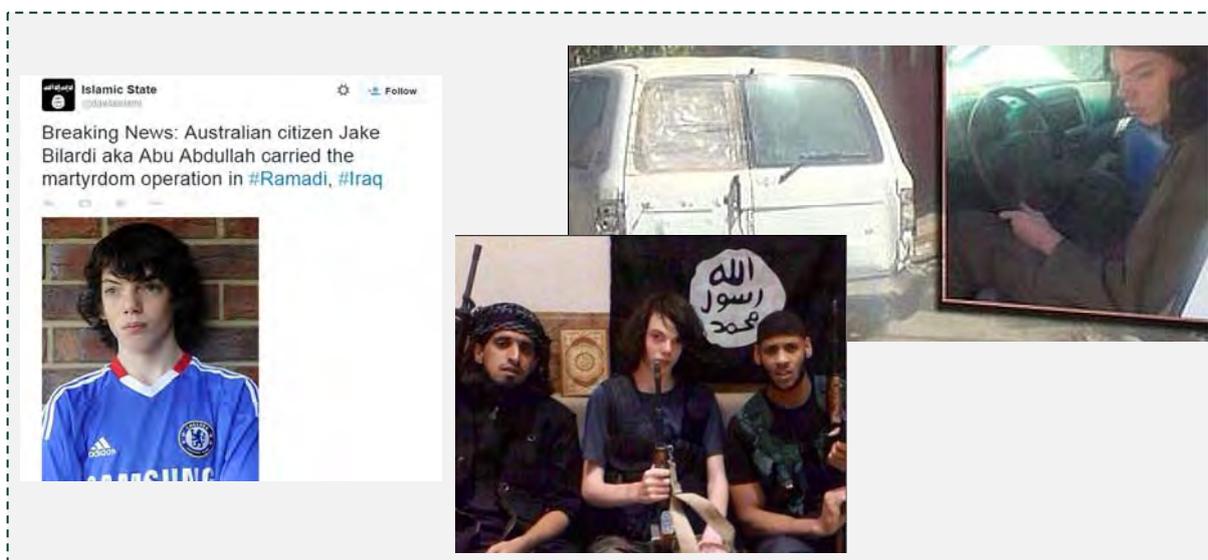
- **Fighting continues around the city of Tikrit** and the entire Salah al-Din province (north of Baghdad). On March 9, 2015, it was reported that the Iraqi Army managed to liberate one of the districts located in the northeastern part of the Salah al-Din province. According to an Iraqi report, the Iraqi Army has taken over most of the province and has liberated 90% of the cities there. Around seventy ISIS operatives were reportedly killed in the fighting (official Iraqi news network, March 14, 2015).
- ISIS operatives blew up a bridge in the eastern part of the city of Tikrit, in order to impede the Iraqi Army's progress. The bridge connects Tikrit with the cities in the east of the province and with the province of Kirkuk in northern Iraq (Al-Quds al-Arabi, March 10, 2015). ISIS also flooded one of the main roads in the eastern part of the Salah al-Din province (Al-Sumaria, March 11, 2015).

Al-Anbar province

- This week, ISIS began a massive offensive with the goal of taking over the city of Ramadi, one of the pockets of resistance of the Iraqi Army in the Al-Anbar province. During the offensive, on March 12, 2015, ISIS sent at least 13 suicide bombers to the northern part of the city of Ramadi. Many of these suicide bombers were foreigners, including a Belgian, an Australian, a Chechen, an Uzbek, a Moroccan, a Tunisian, an Egyptian and two Syrians. The media reported that at least 40 people were killed in this suicide bombing attack (ISIS-affiliated website, theshamnews.com, March 14, 2015; Sky News, March 12, 2015).
- One of the suicide bombers in Ramadi was an 18-year-old Australian from Melbourne named Jake Bilardi. Bilardi reportedly left improvised explosives at his family's home in Melbourne before fleeing to Iraq in August 2014. The British media has suggested that he planned to carry out an attack in Melbourne if he did not get to fight in the ranks of ISIS (Daily Mail, March 11, 2015).



Right: The Belgian Abu Bakr, one of the suicide bombers in the city of Ramadi (Al-Anbar Forum, March 12, 2015)



Jake Bilardi, an 18-year-old Australian and one of the perpetrators of the suicide bombing attack in Ramadi (Twitter, March 12, 2015)

Fallujah area

- On March 13, 2015, ISIS published photos which, so it claimed, indicated that operatives of the organization managed to take over the headquarters of the Iraqi Army 26th Brigade in Tharthar (north of Fallujah). The Iraqi Army reportedly withdrew, leaving behind vehicles and a large quantity of equipment (Al-Quds al-Arabi, March 15, 2015).



Weapons and equipment at the headquarters of the Iraqi Army 26th Brigade, seized by ISIS (Photos uploaded by ISIS operatives, March 15, 2015)

Kurdish report on attempted use of chemical weapons by ISIS

- According to Kurdish sources, in January 2015, ISIS operatives attempted to use chlorine gas in the war against them. A car bomb, activated by a suicide bomber,

blew up on the road connecting Mosul to the Syrian border after Kurdish forces fired at it. White smoke rose from the car after the explosion. Around 20 gas canisters were found inside it. According to reports, Kurdish fighters on the scene developed symptoms of nausea, vomiting, dizziness and weakness (www.cbc.ca, March 14, 2015).

- A spokesman for the US Department of Defense expressed the US government's concern over the report that ISIS had made use of chemical weapons against the Kurdish forces. **He said that at the moment they could not verify the findings of the Kurdish report, but they tend to believe these claims.** He said that the use of chemical weapons by ISIS is another example of the extent of the organization's brutality (AFP, March 16, 2015).

The ITIC cannot verify this report. However, this is not the first time that ISIS reportedly used chemical weapons against the Kurds. For example, in October 2014, Arab and Western media reported that ISIS used chemical weapons against the Kurdish militias during the fighting in Ayn al-Arab (Kobani). At the time, the various symptoms displayed by the victims suggested that ISIS had used chlorine gas or another chemical weapon.

Kirkuk province

- It was reported that the Peshmerga forces took control, without resistance, of the areas in the southern part of Kirkuk province, which were held by ISIS (PUK Media, March 14, 2015). It was reported that during battles with ISIS, some 30 km southwest of Kirkuk, the Kurdish Peshmerga forces managed to kill senior ISIS commander **Abu Hajer**. Abu Hajer was responsible for the attack on the oil fields in the area and is considered to be close to ISIS leader **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** (Al-Sumaria News, March 10, 2015).

The conduct of the Islamic State

The execution of a young man from East Jerusalem - additional information

- On March 10, 2015, ISIS published a video documenting the execution of **Muhammad Musallam**, a young man from East Jerusalem's Beit Hanina neighborhood. A few days later, it was reported that the two terrorists who executed Musallam were **French speakers**, one of whom is a boy of around 12, a French

citizen and a relative of **Mohamed Merah, the terrorist from Toulouse.**³ He left Toulouse about a year ago and was identified by his school principal according to a photo. Regarding the adult, it has been claimed that he is **Sabri Essaid, 31, Mohamed Merah's half-brother.** The French security services are now trying to verify the exact identity of the boy and the adult (Independent, March 14, 2015).



Two French nationals who reportedly executed Muhammad Musallam (YouTube, March 10, 2015)

The French boy (?) who participated in the execution of the youth from East Jerusalem and the young Australian suicide bomber in Ramadi (see above) indicate **ISIS's readiness to use children and youths for terrorist missions.** ISIS has a large pool of children and youths who are systematically receiving a Salafist-jihadi "education" and military training. Some of these youths and children are the children of foreign fighters who came from abroad to fight in Syria and Iraq, and some are local youths and children. According to the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir, ISIS has over seven training camps for children in Syria and Iraq (March 17, 2015).

Agreement between ISIS and the Syrian regime over the operation of a power plant

■ On March 15, 2015, an independent Syrian news channel reported that an agreement of understanding had been signed between the Syrian regime and ISIS over **the operation of the thermal power plant in Aleppo.** According to the report,

³On March 11, 2012, a French paratrooper was shot dead in Toulouse. On March 15, 2012, two uniformed soldiers were killed and another soldier was wounded at a shopping center in the city of Montauban by a person on a motorbike, who fired at them. On March 19, 2012, a terrorist fired at a group of schoolchildren at the entrance to the Ozar Hatorah Jewish school in the city of Toulouse, murdering a teacher and three students. These three attacks were apparently carried out by Mohamed Merah, a terrorist affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

the agreement includes understandings regarding the division of the power supply between the parties, whereby ISIS will receive 60% of the quota and the Syrian regime will receive 40%. According to the article, the agreement is designed to solve the power shortage in the Aleppo province (Orient News, March 15, 2015). **There have been reports in the past of such practical arrangements between ISIS and the Syrian regime, around the joint exploitation of resources and State-owned infrastructures in areas controlled by ISIS.**



The thermal power plant in Aleppo (Shabakat Halab Press, March 15, 2015)

Implementation of Sharia in the Al-Raqqah province

- On March 12, 2015, ISIS published a video documenting the activity of the morality police in the Al-Raqqah province. The video documented the destruction of cigarette packs, bottles of alcohol and bags of hashish.



Left: Seizing bottles of alcohol. Right: Collecting cigarette packs (ISIS video, March 12, 2015)

Destruction of antiquities by ISIS

■ According to an Iraqi report, ISIS is utilizing the antiquities that fell into its hands in the Mosul Museum **to reap financial gains**. In this context, it was reported that after ISIS operatives took control of the Antiquities Museum in Mosul, they destroyed the statues, but smuggled the ancient pottery and metal items out of Iraq. It was reported that these exhibits are now being offered for sale on the Internet (Al-Iraqiya, March 16, 2015).

Trading in antiquities is an additional source of income for ISIS, supplementing its revenues from the exploitation of oil and gas fields (in addition to its revenues from extortion, ransoms received for the release of hostages, donations and taxes collected from the population). These revenue sources are making it easier for ISIS to overcome the drop in its income in the wake of the airstrikes by the US and coalition forces.

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

Egypt's coping with jihadi terrorism

■ **Egyptian security forces have stepped up their counterterrorism and preventive activities against jihadi terrorism centers in the Sinai Peninsula.** The activity has been stepped up for fear that jihadi operatives will carry out attacks during the economic conference in Sharm al-Sheikh. Egyptian security forces reported that during the security operations, which also included the use of helicopters, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis operatives were killed, suspects were arrested, buildings were destroyed, and motorcycles and cars without license plates were confiscated (Al-Youm al-Sabea, March 11, 2015).

■ Egyptian security sources reported **that the Egyptian security forces foiled an attempted attack against the security forces guarding the economic summit in Sharm al-Sheikh.** According to the sources, it is evident from the interrogation of the operatives who were arrested that they were sent by senior figures in Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in northern Sinai, who ordered them to go to Sharm al-Sheikh using fake IDs, position themselves in the area near the city and obtain a large quantity of explosives in order to carry out a suicide bombing attack near the venue of the conference (Al-Rai, March 13, 2015).

■ **On March 10, 2015, a number of attacks were carried out simultaneously in the area of Al-Arish in northern Sinai.** Inter alia, a car bomb exploded at the

entrance to the security forces' camp in the west of the city, and an IED was activated against an armored vehicle in the south of the city. In addition, RPGs were fired at other forces in the city. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis claimed responsibility for the attacks.

- On March 13, 2015, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis posted a video on the organization's official Twitter account, entitled "Messages from the Land of Sinai." The video shows a uniformed operative without a mask, with an ISIS flag next to him. The landscape in the background is of trees and vegetation, **which are not typical of the Sinai Peninsula** (This may indicate that the video was filmed elsewhere). The speaker read out a series of messages directed at various parties. In his message directed at the residents of the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt, he says that the injustice and tyranny that they are experiencing will be terminated only through jihad for Allah. About 24 hours after the video was uploaded, the Twitter management closed the organization's account.



ISIS operative sending messages to the residents of the Sinai Peninsula (file sharing website used by ISIS operatives, among others, March 14, 2015). The speaker's face is not masked and it is clear that the green landscape in the background is not a typical landscape of the Sinai Peninsula.

The global jihad in other countries

ISIS's acceptance of Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance

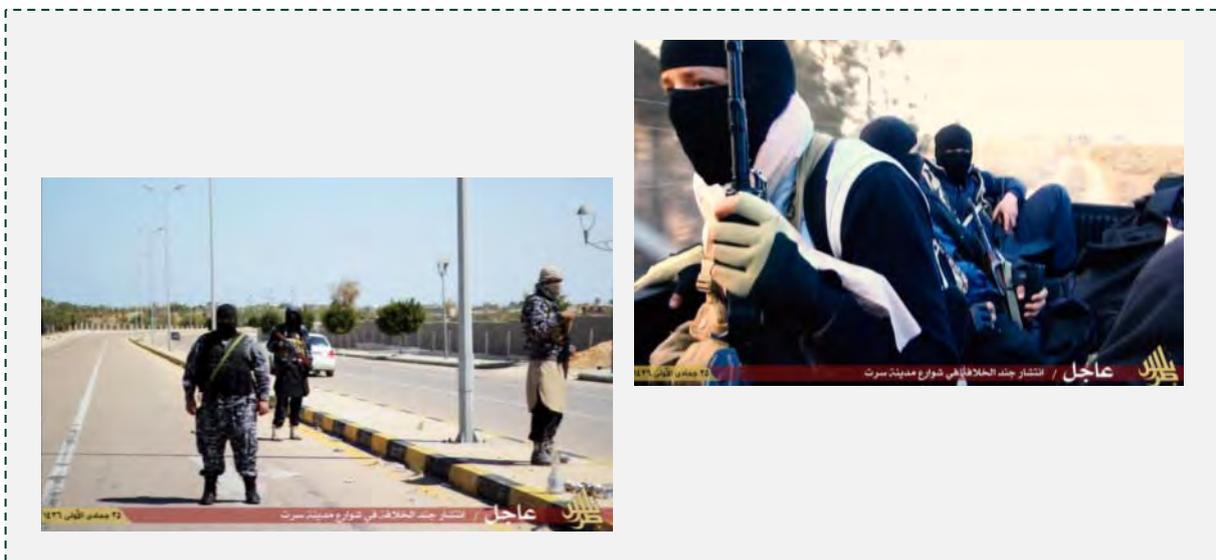
- On March 13, 2015, the Al-Furqan Media Foundation, ISIS's principal media entity, published a speech by its spokesman, **Abu Mohammad al-Adnani**, entitled "And they will Kill and be Killed". The ISIS spokesman declared that **ISIS accepts Boko Haram's ("the Brothers in West Africa") pledge of allegiance and called on Muslims to come to the caliphate in West Africa to participate in jihad. In his speech, Al-Adnani refrained from declaring the establishment of a new province**

of the Islamic State in Nigeria (as was done in the Sinai Peninsula, Libya and elsewhere).

■ Later in his speech, **Al-Adnani praised the stability of the Islamic Caliphate and downplayed the significance of the achievements of the coalition fighting against ISIS** (these achievements were called: “the occupation of only a few villages in Iraq”). Al-Adnani addressed the Jews and Christians (“the Crusaders”), saying that they have two options: the first and preferred option is to join Islam, and the second is to surrender to ISIS, withdraw their armies from the Arabian Peninsula and from Jerusalem and the rest of the lands of Islam, and pay *jizya* (poll tax) to ISIS (ISIS-affiliated forum, March 13, 2015).

Libya

■ On March 14, 2015, there were clashes in central Libya between ISIS operatives and forces loyal to the Libyan government with its Islamic character, in Tripoli. The clashes took place about 60 km east of the city of Sirte, the main city under the control of ISIS forces. The clashes began when a group of ISIS operatives took over a checkpoint on the coastal road and attacked a government force that arrived on the scene (Reuters, March 14, 2015).



Left: ISIS operatives setting up a checkpoint near the city of Sirte. Right: Armed ISIS operatives in a desert region on the periphery of the city of Sirte (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, March 16, 2015)

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Restrictions on the passage of foreign fighters via Turkey

■ **Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu** spoke about Turkey's efforts to curb the flow of operatives passing through Turkey on their way to Syria and Iraq. According to Çavuşoğlu, Turkey is being unjustly accused, since it is doing all it can to close its borders. Turkey is employing all the necessary measures and has even set up monitoring centers for this purpose. Çavuşoğlu stressed that this phenomenon could only be fought through cooperation and called on European countries to share more information about those who enlist in the ranks of radical jihadi organizations (Hürriyet, March 13, 2015).

■ In this context, it was reported that:

- Three British youths who planned to join the ranks of ISIS in Syria were arrested in Istanbul. The three were returned to Britain in coordination with the British authorities. The three were arrested after the British alerted the Turkish authorities that they were en route to Turkey. This enabled the Turkish authorities to prevent them from reaching Syria (Daily Sabah, March 17, 2015).

- An Iranian news agency reported that **Mehmet Rashid** was arrested near the Turkish border with Syria, on suspicion of helping British girls cross the border from Turkey into Syria. According to the report, in exchange for helping them cross the border he received money that was transferred to him from bank accounts in Britain (Fars News, March 14, 2015).

■ On the other hand, a **New York Times reporter** who accompanied Turkish smugglers in the Gaziantep region (near the border with Syria) reported that **although Turkey is taking preventative measures, the flow of operatives crossing from Turkey to Syria continues**. Smugglers living in the area who make a living from smuggling cigarettes and other goods claim that ISIS operatives are forcing them under threat to smuggle the foreign fighters (Zaman, March 11, 2015).

It appears that Turkey recently increased its security activity in order to reduce the number of jihadi operatives passing through the area on their way to Syria.

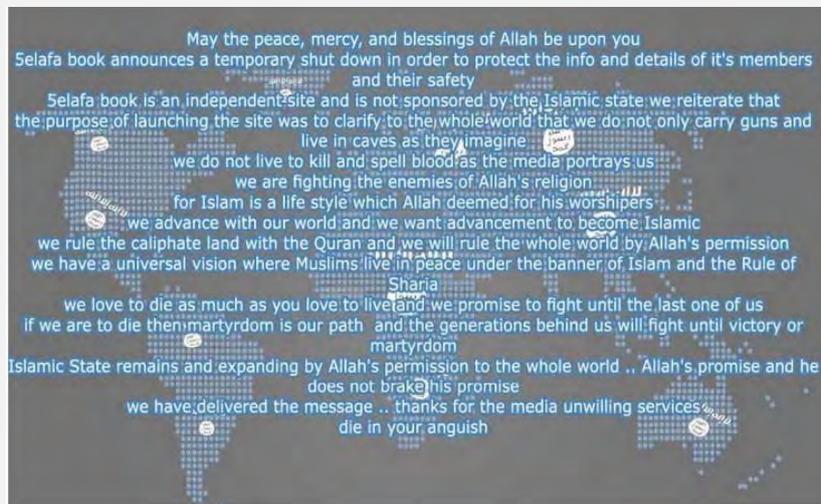
Turkey recently carried out raids and arrested suspects, increased the supervision at its border crossings, and carried out security activity at the Syrian refugee camps and in cities near the border with Syria and Iraq. **It seems, however, that these actions**

have not yet had a significant impact on the flow of foreign fighters who continue to make their way to Syria via Turkey.

The battle for hearts and minds conducted by ISIS

ISIS's propaganda by means of Twitter

- ISIS has set up a **social network** by the name of **Khilafa Book**, which is intended, from ISIS's perspective, to serve as an alternative to Facebook. The new social network will serve as a meeting place for supporters of ISIS and will be available in seven languages. The network managers have set a number of rules for using the site. Among other things, users are prohibited from posting photos of themselves or sharing their details or the details of other users (all4syria, March 8, 2015).
- **The site, which is very similar to Facebook, went live on March 8, 2015.** It also includes a link to a Twitter account. However, a message in English on the homepage says that **the site has been temporarily removed** in order to protect the information and details of the members of the network (Reuters, March 11, 2015).



A page in the new social network set up by ISIS

ISIS attaches great importance to the battle for hearts and minds, and invests considerable resources in this area (skilled personnel and large sums of money). The Internet, and social networks in particular, is the primary means for spreading ISIS's ideology and political messages in the Middle East and around the world, and an important tool for recruiting foreign fighters and for fundraising. On the other hand, in the campaign against ISIS, countries and organizations worldwide are **working to block and shut down websites and social networks in which ISIS operates and spreads its messages**. It seems that the establishment of the new social network is intended to address the difficulties encountered by ISIS on Facebook and other social networks.

Threats against the West in an ISIS audiotape

■ On March 12, 2015, ISIS's Al-Furqan Media Foundation published an **audiotape by ISIS Spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani**. The tape is around 27 minutes long. It states that its goal is to raise the morale of ISIS's operatives. Al-Adnani noted that ISIS continues to expand despite the attacks against it and that its operatives are fighting for a higher purpose than that of their enemies. Al-Adnani noted that ISIS aspires to reach Western cities and countries, and mentioned **Paris, Rome and Spain**. He also threatened to **blow up the White House, Big Ben, and the Eiffel Tower**.