



## Spotlight on Global Jihad

(April 2-15, 2015)



### Main events of the past two weeks<sup>1</sup>

- In early April 2015, an ISIS force comprising an estimated 1,000 operatives attacked the **Al-Yarmouk refugee camp** on the southern outskirts of Damascus (around 18,000 residents remained in the camp). In the ITIC's assessment, the attack was intended to garner an achievement that would divert attention from ISIS's failures in other combat zones. According to media reports, initially, ISIS managed to take over most of the area of the camp, but subsequently its operatives were repelled by other rebel organizations and armed Palestinian groups to the southern outskirts of the camp. Fighting still continues, and the campaign has not been decided.
- In the **city of Tikrit**, Iraq, ISIS suffered its worst defeat since its series of victories in June 2014. The Iraqi Army and the Shiite militias that are supported by Iran completed the takeover of the city after about a month of fighting and are now preparing for the future. ISIS, on its part, attacked the **refinery compound in the city of Baiji**, north of Tikrit, and reinforced its forces in Iraq in order to curb the progress of the Iraqi forces northward.
- The coalition of rebels headed by the Al-Nusra Front (*Jaysh al-Fatah*), which took over the city of Idlib in northwest Syria, is preparing to establish a governmental apparatus in the city. **Abu Mohammad al-Julani**, the organization's leader, called for fair treatment towards the citizens, but local residents complained that they were subject to harassment by the occupying organizations.

### The international campaign against ISIS

#### US and coalition airstrikes

- 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):

<sup>1</sup> 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.

- **Syria** - the airstrikes were concentrated in Al-Hasakah, Al-Raqqah, Kobani (Ayn al-Arab) and Aleppo. The airstrikes damaged tactical units, battle positions, a tunnel network, buildings and vehicles.
  - **Iraq** - the airstrikes were concentrated in Baiji, Mosul, Ramadi, Rutba, Fallujah, Tal Afar and Kirkuk. The airstrikes damaged tactical units, battle positions, a sniper position, and many weapons.
- On April 8, 2015, **Canada carried out its first airstrike in Syria**. Canadian Air Force aircraft attacked terrorist targets near the city of Al-Raqqah, together with the US. Up to now, Canadian airstrikes have been limited to the Iraqi arena. At the end of March 2015, Canada passed a law permitting its Air Force to attack targets in Syria as well (AFP, April 8, 2015).

## International activity against ISIS

- Speaking prior to the Iraqi president's visit to the US, US Vice President **Joe Biden** said that **ISIS's progress in Iraq had been curbed**. According to Biden, the war against ISIS has managed to unite Iraq against the common threat. In reference to Syria, Biden said that the activities of the US and its allies had demonstrated that ISIS can be defeated there too, even though the situation in Syria is worse. This is due to the lack of cooperation and coordination with the Syrian regime and the fact that operatives of "the moderate Syrian opposition" are not sufficiently trained (www.wsj.com, April 9, 2015)
- The first meetings of the coalition working group headed by **General John Allen** and known as the **Coalition Small Group** were held on April 8, 2015. The group was established in February 2015 to monitor the progress of coalition's operations against ISIS (US Department of State website, April 8, 2015). The following issues were discussed at the meeting:
- Military efforts to defeat ISIS
  - Preventing foreign fighters from reaching Syria to fight in the ranks of ISIS
  - Combating the financing of terrorism
  - Preventing the spread of ISIS's ideology
  - The expansion of ISIS's operations beyond Syria and Iraq

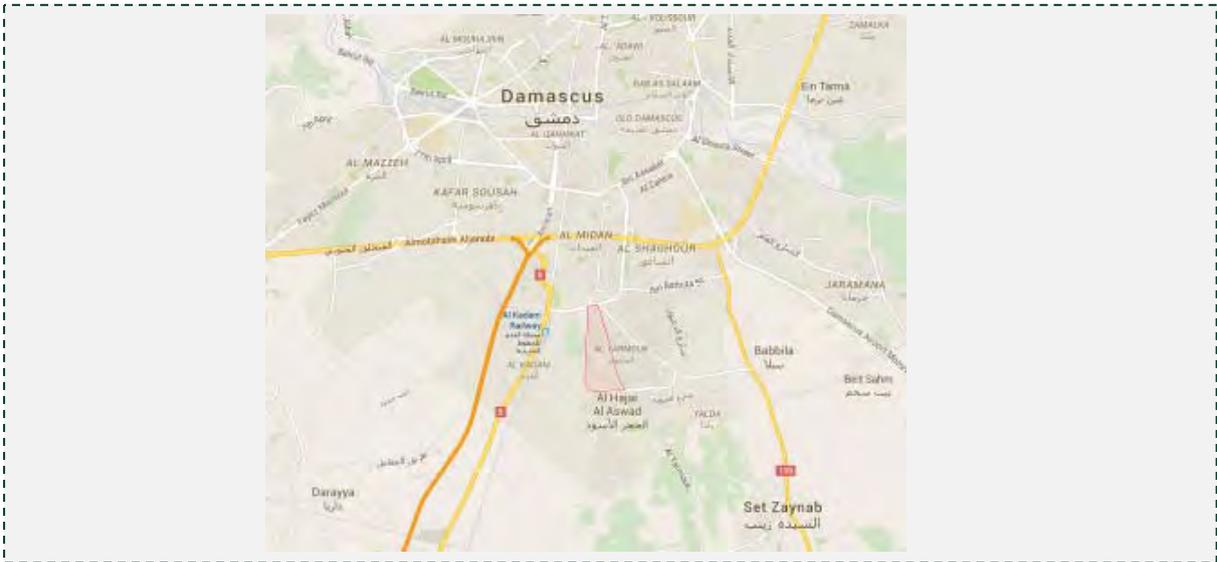
■ **Sweden** announced that in response to the request of the Iraqi government, it planned to send military troops to support the campaign against ISIS. According to the Swedish government, they will initially send 35 soldiers and more at a later date. These forces, which will form part of the international forces in northern Iraq, will help train the Iraqi Army and Kurdish forces (Reuters, April 9, 2015).

## Main developments in Syria



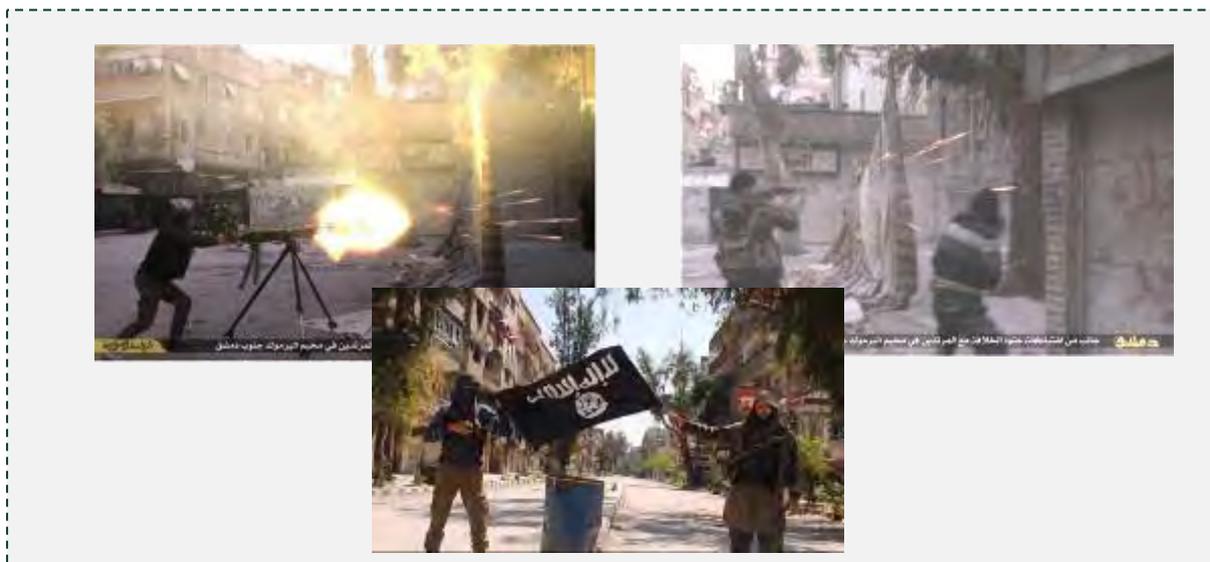
Map of Syria (Google Earth)

## Damascus area: The campaign over the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp

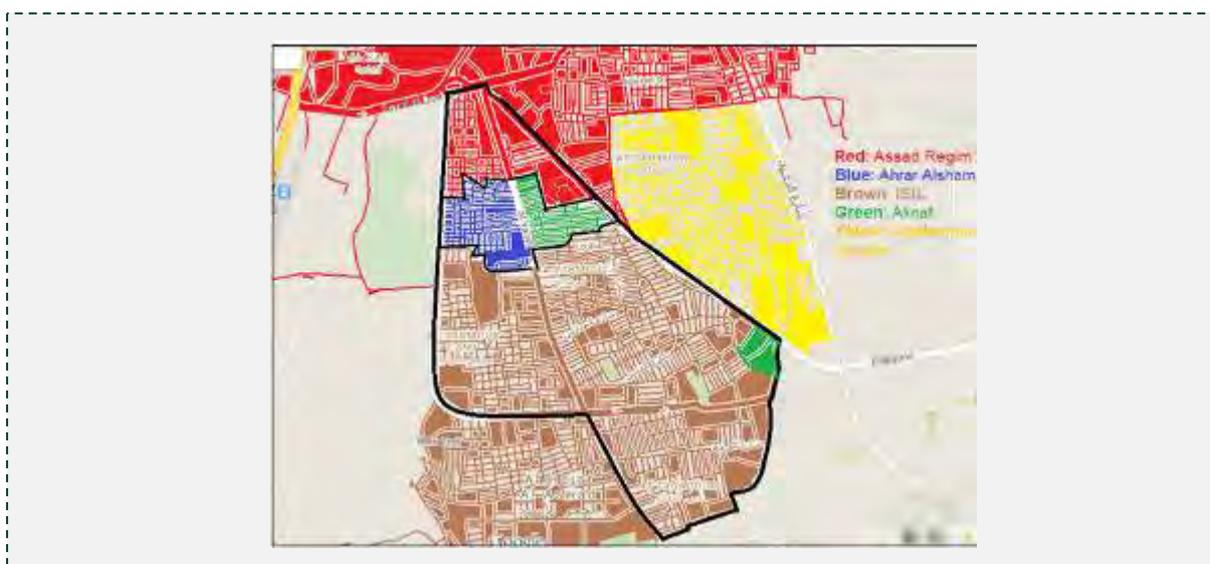


The Al-Yarmouk refugee camp, on the southern outskirts of Damascus (Google Earth)

- The Al-Yarmouk refugee camp on the southern outskirts of Damascus (about 10 km south of the city) is the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Syria. The camp once had a population of 160,000 Palestinians and Syrians. Today only around 18,000 Palestinians remain there, under the control of a number of armed groups (Palestinian groups, the Syrian Army, the Al-Nusra Front, and other rebel organizations).
- On the morning of **April 1, 2015**, around **1,000 ISIS-affiliated operatives** attacked the Al-Yarmouk camp and clashed with operatives of a Palestinian organization by the name of Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis (Al-Durar al-Shamiya, April 1, 2015). **In the first stage, ISIS operatives managed to take control of large parts of the refugee camp** (about 80%-90%).



Top: Photos of the fighting at the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp published by ISIS (April 5, 2015).  
Bottom: Two ISIS operatives in the Al-Yarmouk camp (Facebook, April 8, 2015).



Map showing the control of the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp as of April 7, 2015  
(<http://www.alzaytouna.net>)

■ After several days of fighting, the armed groups operating in the camp managed to repel the ISIS operatives from the center and western part of the camp. On April 8, 2015, **Anwar Abd al-Hadi**, chairman of the PLO Political Department in Syria, said that ISIS and Al-Nusra Front operatives controlled about 60% of the camp and that this meant that their control had been reduced to the southern and eastern neighborhoods (where the remaining Palestinians live). ISIS forces apparently subsequently withdrew to the southern outskirts of the camp, leaving the positions that they had captured to the Al-Nusra Front and Palestinian armed groups (Al-Mayadeen, April 10, 2015).

■ **On April 12, 2015**, the **Free Syrian Army (FSA)** rebel organization announced the start of a campaign designed to repel **ISIS from the refugee camp and its surroundings**. The name of the campaign is “Victory of the Camp Dwellers.” There have been reports of heavy fighting between Syrian opposition groups and ISIS around a city south of Damascus, **Al-Hajar al-Aswad**, from where ISIS mounted its attack on the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp.

■ **The PA and Hamas** are aware of the complexity of the events and the limits of their power and therefore have urged the Palestinians not to be involved in the military conflicts taking place between the sides. The PLO issued a statement saying that it opposes the armed struggle in the refugee camp and made it clear that it would act to stop the armed operations in cooperation with most of the interested parties and especially with UNRWA (Wafa News Agency, April 9, 2015). Demonstrations and rallies of solidarity with the Palestinians at the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp were held throughout Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip (for details of the Palestinian response, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from April 15, 2015, “News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”).

■ In the ITIC’s assessment, ISIS’s attack on the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp was designed to **make a dramatic achievement**, which would divert attention from ISIS’s failures in other combat zones (Kobani in Syria and Tikrit in Iraq). Control of the camp will **enable ISIS to hold a suburb of Damascus, near the core of the Syrian regime**. Such control also provides ISIS with **considerable political attention and media coverage**, due to the Arab and international sensitivity to the Palestinian issue. However, at this stage, ISIS’s operatives appear to have been repelled from areas in the camp that they occupied at the beginning of the attack, but they are still clinging to the south of the camp and the adjacent city of Al-Hajar al-Aswad, south of Damascus, and are controlling the besieged Palestinian population. **In any case, fighting at the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp continues and the campaign has not yet been decided.**

## Idlib province

- Al-Nusra Front leader **Abu Mohammad al-Julani** published a 15-minute speech directed at the organization's operatives in Idlib.<sup>2</sup> In his speech, Al-Julani congratulated the jihad fighters on the unity that they demonstrated and on the battle over the city. He expressed his appreciation of all the military personnel, administrators, physicians, ordnance operatives and PR people who participated in the fighting. Al-Julani promised residents that they would be treated well by the fighters and would enjoy justice based on Islamic law (Sharia), stressing that **the mission of protecting the civilians is harder than achieving the victory** (Twitter account of the Al-Nusra Front's media foundation, April 1, 2015).
- According to Al-Julani, **the Al-Nusra Front does not want to control Idlib, and its sole concern is for the city to be "in safe hands"**. He said that his operatives would apply the principle of *Shura* (i.e., consulting with other coalition organizations), which is the best principle of government. He also stressed the importance of securing public buildings and providing services to civilians, and called on the organizations to maintain their unity. Military commanders from other Islamic organizations that belong to the coalition that occupied Idlib made similar statements.



Abu Mohammad al-Julani's speech to the Al-Nusra Front operatives in Idlib

- In any case, it seems that **the situation on the ground is not in accordance with the principles stated in Al-Julani's speech**. A resident of Idlib told the Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar that Jaysh al-Fatah had established its headquarters in the local government buildings. According to him, **the citizens of the city are**

<sup>2</sup> The Al-Nusra Front is the dominant element in the coalition of Islamic organizations that took control over the city of Idlib (Jaysh al-Fatah).

**subject to harassment on the part of the occupying organizations** (break-ins, detentions, restrictions on movement, assassinations). He noted that the organizations did not coordinate their activities and that all of them, including the Al-Nusra Front, had hoisted their flags over the buildings that they took over (Al-Akhbar, March 14, 2015).

■ A Syrian Army source said that the Army was carrying out military operations around the town of Mastouma, south of Idlib. It was reported that preparations were being made for a counterattack which would restore the Syrian Army's control over the city of Idlib (Al-Akhbar, March 14, 2015).

■ Therefore, Al-Nusra Front leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani sent the message that the organization intended to manage the affairs of the city together with the coalition that captured the city. **The degree of seriousness of this statement will be put to the test.** Past experience shows that after the initial organization period, the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, is liable to assume sole control of the city rather than cooperate with the other organizations in the coalition, and to enforce stringent Islamic law on its residents (the way ISIS did in Al-Raqqah).

## Daraa province

■ After three weeks of fighting, it was reported that **Al-Nusra Front** operatives, along with other Islamic organizations, **had taken over the Al-Naseeb border crossing located on the border between Syria and Jordan** (Twitter account of the Al-Nusra Front's media foundation in southern Syria, April 1, 2015). Following the takeover of the border crossing, Syrian regime forces began to withdraw from some areas in the Daraa province (Akhbar al-Aan, April 6, 2015). In the wake of the takeover of the border crossing, **the Al-Nusra Front became a senior partner of the opposition forces in managing the Al-Naseeb border crossing.**

The Al-Naseeb border crossing is of **great economic importance**, since it is used for transferring goods and food to Syria, to areas controlled by the Syrian regime and to areas controlled by the rebel forces (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 6, 2015). In addition, in the ITIC's assessment, control of the border crossing **is liable to make it easier for the Al-Nusra Front operatives to absorb operatives who arrive from Jordan and to maintain contact with its supporters in Jordan.**



Al-Nusra Front operative waving the organization's flag at the Al-Naseeb border crossing between Syria and Jordan (Al-Arabiya TV, April 11, 2015)

## Homs province

■ ISIS's media platform in the Homs province has released a video showing the execution of a Syrian soldier by a shot to the head. Before the execution, a masked ISIS operative made statements threatening **Bashar Assad** and his army. The executioner was not filmed during the execution, but the masked operative said that the execution was carried out by the wife of "one of the Muslims who were killed". The woman in question is apparently the wife of an ISIS operative killed by the Syrian Army (onedrive.live.com file-sharing site, April 4, 2015).



The Syrian soldier before his execution (onedrive.live.com file-sharing site, April 4, 2015)

## Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (Google Earth). The city of Tikrit is marked in red.

### The campaign over Tikrit

- Iraqi Army and Shiite militia forces supported by Iran **completed their takeover of the city of Tikrit after about a month of fighting**. Their forces entered the city center and took over the government compound and the hospital. The Iraqi forces also liberated the southern and western parts of the city.
- **On April 9, 2015**, the owner of a Twitter account that supports the Iraqi Army posted photos entitled “The Return of Displaced Families to Tikrit, the Salah al-Din province”. The photos show families returning to the city with their belongings. Additional photos show life returning to normal in the city of Tikrit and the areas liberated by the Iraqi Army (Twitter account, April 8-9, 2015). However, around two weeks after the Iraqi government declared that it had fully liberated Tikrit, a senior official in the security committee of the Salah al-Din province said that **there were still ISIS pockets of resistance in the city and its environs** (Kitabat Iraqi website, April 11, 2015).



Families returning to the city of Tikrit (Twitter account, April 8-9, 2015)

■ Following the occupation of Tikrit, **ISIS reinforced its forces in Iraq**. In the ITIC's assessment, this was done to prevent the Iraqi forces from advancing from Tikrit northward, toward Mosul. It was reported that **around 500 ISIS operatives**, led by **Abu Jarrah al-Shami**, one of **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's** aides, came to the city of Hawija in northern Iraq, from Deir Al-Zor. The operatives were equipped with a large quantity of weapons and military equipment (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 4, 2015). It was also reported that two senior ISIS commanders were transferred from Syria to Iraq (All4Syria, April 7, 2015).

The takeover of the city of Tikrit by the Iraqi forces **is a military blow for ISIS, as well as a blow in terms of morale. From a military standpoint**, control of the city will enable the Iraqi Army and Shiite militias to use it as a **starting point for continuing the campaign to conquer the city of Mosul. From a domestic Iraqi political standpoint**, the reconstruction the city, with its Sunni population, is of major importance. This is because harassment of Sunni population returning to Tikrit by the Shiite militias supported by Iran (which was reported in the media), is liable to hamper the Iraqi regime's efforts to eliminate ISIS's support base among the Sunnis and reinforce its image as a sectarian Shiite regime affiliated with Iran.

## Al-Anbar province

■ **ISIS began a new offensive against the city of Ramadi, capital of the Al-Anbar province**, possibly in response to its defeat in Tikrit. According to reports, after fierce battles against the Iraqi Army, ISIS operatives managed to take control of the northern part of the city (Al-Jazeera, April 10, 2015). ISIS announced that it had carried out a widespread attack in Ramadi against the Shiite militias, by means of

suicide bombing attacks. It should be noted that until recently, the city of Ramadi, capital of the Al-Anbar province, and the surrounding area, were not under the complete control of ISIS. In the city and its surroundings, clashes continued between ISIS and the Iraqi Army.



ISIS suicide bombers in the city of Ramadi. Left: The terrorist codenamed the Uzbek Abu Hamad. Right: The terrorist codenamed Abu Talha al-Shami (ISIS news agency, April 10, 2015)



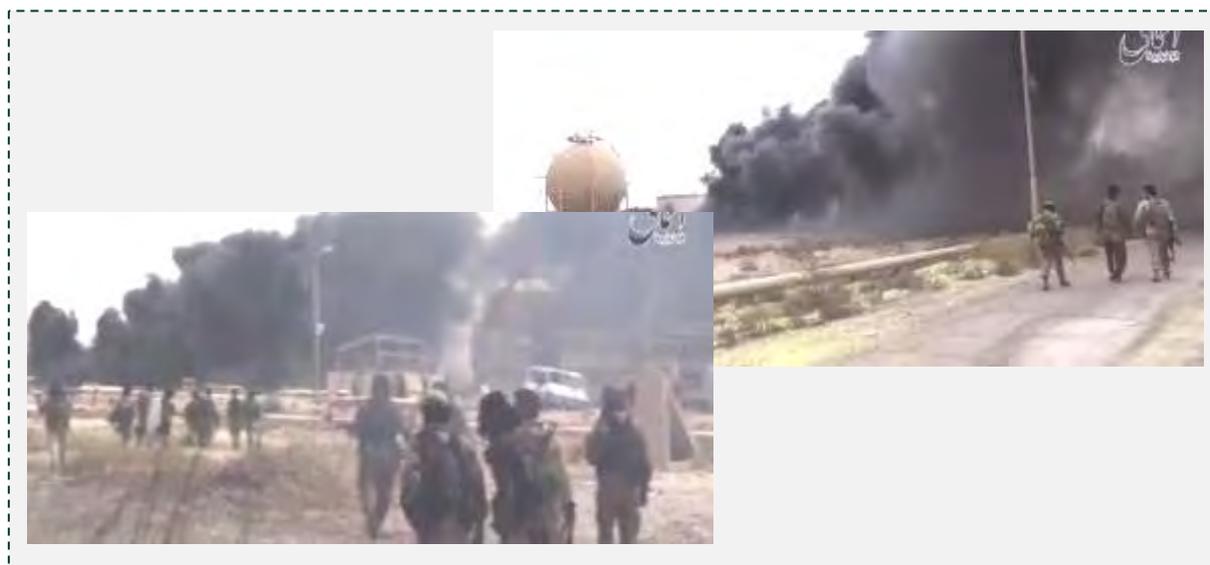
Left: ISIS operatives in the city of Ramadi. Right: Car bomb explosion in the city of Ramadi (ISIS news agency, April 10, 2015)

## Salah al-Din province

■ According to a statement by ISIS, signed by the Salah al-Din province information office, on April 11, 2015, **ISIS attacked the refinery complex in Baiji in order to take control of it.** According to ISIS, some of its operatives are in the refinery complex and are now in control of a few buildings there (ISIS-affiliated forum, April

11, 2015). Iraqi government officials **denied the announcement** and claimed that the Iraqi Army was in full control of the refineries (CNN, April 12, 2015).

- On April 12, 2015, the Aamaq News Agency (one of ISIS's media arms), published a video showing ISIS operatives with Kalashnikov rifles, RPG launchers and rockets inside the refinery complex in Baiji. The video notes that **they hold about half the area of the refineries** (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, April 12, 2015).



**ISIS operatives in the refineries in Baiji (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, April 12, 2015)**

The Baiji refinery compound is located halfway between Mosul and Baghdad. It includes refineries capable of producing 310,000 barrels per day, providing fuel to northern Iraq and another 11 provinces, including the city of Baghdad. There is also a power plant in the area that supplies electricity to most of northern Iraq. In the first half of 2014, these refineries accounted for 48% of the country's oil distillates (gulfnews.com, September 14, 2014). Although ISIS operatives managed to take over the region as long ago as June 2014, **control of the refineries remained in the hands of the Iraqi government, and ISIS continues its attempts to take over the refinery compound.** The latest attack on the refinery compound apparently took place in the wake of the fall of the city of Tikrit, in an attempt to curb the progress of the Iraqi forces to the north and in order to record an achievement of military and economic significance, as well as an achievement in the battle for hearts and minds.

## Kirkuk province

- ISIS's media arm in the Kirkuk province published a video documenting an attack by ISIS against the camp of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the province. The attack on the Peshmerga camp included massive mortar fire. The video also shows an

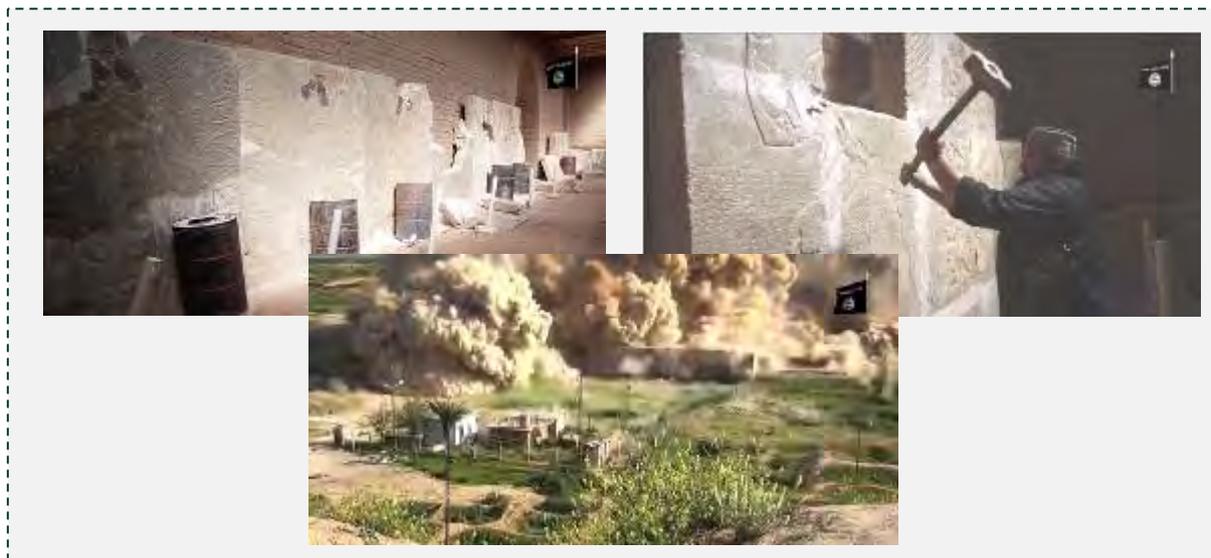
**Indonesian-born ISIS operative, speaking in Indonesian, calling on Muslims in Indonesia to migrate to the Islamic State (YouTube, April 11, 2015).**



**Left: An Indonesian-born ISIS operative, speaking in Indonesian, calling on Muslims in Indonesia to migrate to the Islamic State. Right: ISIS operatives gathering before leaving for the attack. They included dozens of operatives, many of them foreign fighters, possibly from the Caucasus region (YouTube, April 11, 2015).**

## Nineveh province

■ **ISIS continues to destroy historic sites and rare archaeological items from the beginning of human civilization.** ISIS recently published a video documenting the destruction of the Assyrian city of Tell Nimrud, carried out by ISIS operatives on March 6, 2015. The video shows ISIS operatives destroying statues and gravestones using hammers, jackhammers, axes and barrels of explosives. Iraqi Antiquities Ministry officials confirmed that the antiquities shown in the video are authentic. In the video, an ISIS operative says that Allah helps them destroy everything that was used for idol-worship in ancient times. He added that ISIS would destroy all the Shiite graves (Daily Mail, April 12, 2015).



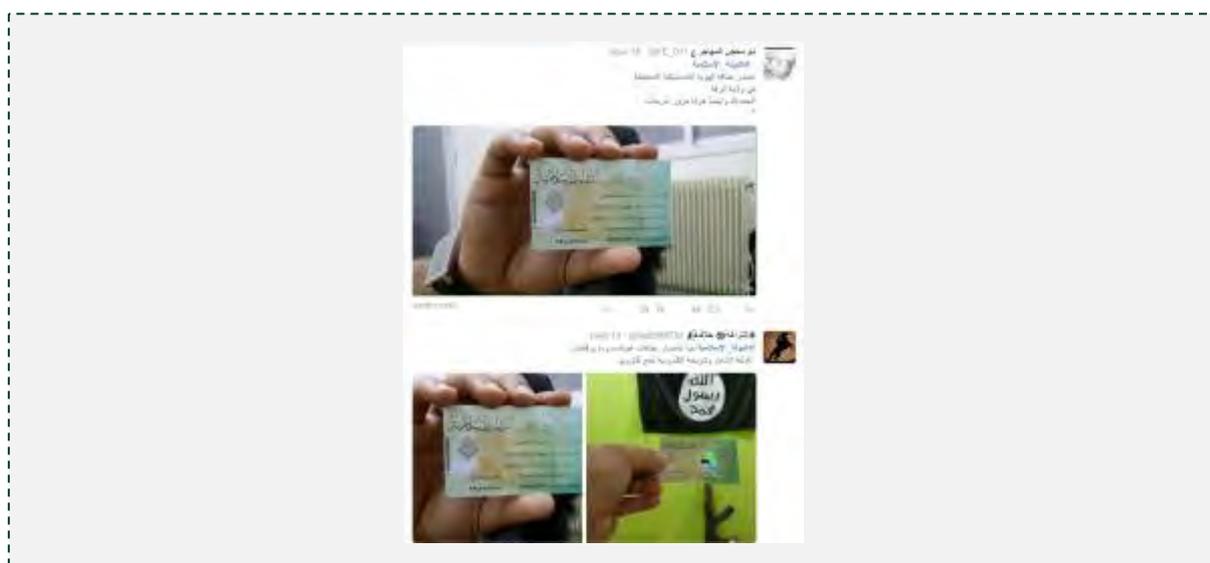
**Photos from a video distributed by ISIS showing the destruction of historical artifacts in the ancient city of Nimrud (YouTube, April 12, 2015)**

The city of Nimrud was built in the 13th century BC by Shalmaneser I. The city survived approximately a thousand years, served as the capital of Assyria, and was one of the most important cities in the world. The city contains the remains of many palaces and temples. This is not the first time that ISIS has destroyed historic sites and rare archaeological items from the beginning of human civilization. This is due to its perception that this is an infidel culture of idol worshippers. ISIS also trades in antiquities, via the Internet, for the purpose of financial gain (Al-Iraqiya, March 16, 2015).

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### ISIS began to issue “smart” identity cards

- On April 11, 2015, ISIS-affiliated Twitter accounts posted tweets stating that ISIS has begun to issue “smart” identity cards in the areas under its control, containing chips to prevent forgeries (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, April 11, 2015).



The “smart” identity cards that ISIS has begun to issue (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, April 11, 2015)

## Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

### The Egyptian campaign against ISIS’s branch in the Sinai Peninsula

■ **Egyptian security forces find it difficult to suppress the Sinai province of ISIS, which continues to carry out a sequence of terrorist attacks against the Egyptian security forces in the Sinai Peninsula.** Following are a number of key incidents; ISIS’s Sinai province has claimed responsibility for most of them:

- **On April 2, 2015**, RPG rockets and heavy machine guns were fired at two Egyptian Army positions in the Sheikh Zuweid area (northern Sinai). The attacks killed 32 people: 15 soldiers, 15 terrorists and two civilians (Ynet, Israel, April 2, 2015).
- **On April 9, 2015**, two soldiers serving in the Egyptian security forces were killed and three were wounded when terrorist operatives blew up an armored car in western Al-Arish (Al-Youm al-Sabea, April 9, 2015). ISIS’s Sinai province claimed responsibility for the attack (the organization’s official Twitter account, April 9, 2015).
- **On April 10, 2015**, ISIS’s Sinai province issued a video showing ISIS operatives taking an Egyptian soldier prisoner. The Egyptian soldier said that he is a prisoner ISIS’s Sinai province soldiers who carried out a raid on an Egyptian Army post on April 2, 2015. According to the soldier, the Sinai province operatives killed the soldiers and took him prisoner, and also seized two tanks

that were at the post. The captive soldier called on Egyptian soldiers to desert the army and join the ranks of ISIS. Later in the video he is shown being shot to death, along with another man who was beheaded (Twitter account, April 11, 2015).



**Left: ISIS operative next to an Egyptian armored personnel carrier which fell into the hands of ISIS. Right: Egyptian soldier being shot to death by an ISIS operative (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, April 11, 2015)**

- **On April 12, 2015**, an armored personnel carrier belonging to the Egyptian security forces in Sheikh Zuweid was damaged by an explosion of roadside IED. The explosion killed an Egyptian soldier and an officer and wounded two soldiers. ISIS's Sinai province posted a tweet on its official Twitter account claiming responsibility for the incident.
- **On April 12, 2015**, a car bomb exploded near the entrance to a police station in Al-Arish; eight people were killed and 45 were wounded. ISIS's Sinai province claimed responsibility for the incident (the organization's official Twitter account, April 12, 2015). The Egyptian Interior Ministry spokesman said the car bomb contained two tons of TNT. In his opinion, the TNT was imported from abroad because it is unobtainable in Egypt (Aswat Masriya, April 13, 2015).

## The global jihad in other countries

### Attacks on foreign embassies in Libya

- On April 12, 2015, an armed man attacked the South Korean Embassy in Tripoli, Libya. Two local security guards were killed and another security guard was wounded. On the following day, an IED exploded at the gate to the Moroccan

Embassy in the city. There were no casualties. Slight damage was caused. An ISIS-affiliated group claimed responsibility for both incidents in a tweet posted on its Twitter page ([www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), April 13, 2014).

## Tunisia

- A video distributed by ISIS's information office in the province of Tripoli, Libya, shows a Tunisian operative codenamed **Abu Yahya al-Tunisi** calling on Muslims in Tunisia to join the jihad and ISIS. He also threatens the "tyrannical" rulers of Tunisia and states that ISIS operatives will reach them and will behead them (ISIS-affiliated forum, April 8, 2015).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### The United States

- Security authorities in Philadelphia arrested **Keonna Thomas**, 30, AKA Fatayat Al Khilafah and Young Lioness. She was arrested on suspicion of attempting to send aid to ISIS and planning to join the ranks of the organization. According to the security authorities, an ISIS operative asked her to take part in a suicide bombing attack and she expressed her consent. She used the Internet to search for ways of getting to Turkey, obtained a visa and purchased a plane ticket online (Reuters, April 4, 2015).

- **Joshua Ray Van Haften**, 34, was arrested at the airport in Chicago on charges of **attempting to help ISIS**. Van Heften was detained in Turkey since October 2014 and was sent back to the United States. According to the FBI, he wanted to go to Syria via Turkey to join the ranks of ISIS. He left the United States in August 2014. His contact on the Syrian border abandoned him because he couldn't pay him. He returned to Turkey, where he was arrested (The Investigative Project on Terrorism, April 9, 2015).

- **John T. Booker Jr.**, a 20-year-old US citizen, was arrested in the US. He told an undercover FBI agent that he and two partners had planned to carry out a suicide bombing attack by means of a truck bomb against US soldiers at Fort Riley. He also made a video in which he pledged allegiance to ISIS (AFP, April 10, 2015).

### Russia

- **General Sergei Smirnov**, deputy head of the Russian Federation's Federal Security Service (FSB), warned of the potential impact of ISIS in Russian territory, **mainly among the Muslim residents in North Caucasus. In his estimate, about 1,700 Russian citizens have joined jihadi groups fighting in Syria and Iraq.** He

said that the actual figure might be even higher. Speaking before senior FSB officials, **Russian President Vladimir Putin** said that monitoring Russian citizens who left Russia to fight in the ranks of ISIS should be one of the top priorities of the Russian intelligence services (www.aina.org, April 11, 2015).

General Smirnov's assessment reflects a **significant increase in the number of foreign fighters with Russian citizenship who joined the fighting in Syria and Iraq** (in 2014, the ITIC estimated that around 200-250 Russians were operating in Syria, mainly of Chechen origin, some of whom affiliated with the Caucasian Emirate, a Caucasian framework that maintains ties with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad). The operatives in Syria and Iraq include highly motivated fighters with combat experience who participated in the uprising against Russia in the 1990s. Several of them attained senior command ranks in jihadi organizations and some senior commanders were killed in battle.

## Morocco

■ According to Morocco's minister of the interior, **a cell comprising six ISIS operatives** who planned to carry out attacks in Morocco and the Netherlands **was exposed**. The cell operated near the city of Nador, in the north of the country. The interrogation of the cell operatives revealed that they held secret meetings and carried out paramilitary training in a forest near the city. One of the cell operatives lives in the Netherlands.

■ According to security experts in Morocco, hundreds of fighters from the Maghreb countries are taking part in the fighting alongside jihadi organizations in Syria and Iraq. Some of them have returned to their homes in order to set up cells in their home countries (Reuters, April 13, 2015).

## Spain

■ **In Catalonia, Spain, a cell numbering 11 operatives was arrested, including a woman and a boy of 17 suspected of being in contact with ISIS.** The cell operatives planned to carry out terrorist attacks, **including attacks on Jewish stores and public buildings**, and to abduct a bank manager and hold him for ransom. The cell operatives also planned to broadcast an ISIS-style video showing the beheading of a Spanish hostage dressed in orange (AFP, April 10, 2015).

## Turkey

■ Further to Turkey's efforts to block the flow of foreign fighters passing through its territory on their way to Syria, the Turkish foreign minister said that since Turkey tightened its supervision in January 2015, **it had banned the entry of at least 12,500 suspected foreign fighters**. Turkey has also **deported an additional 1,200 people** and added around 5,000 people to its blacklist. According to the Turkish foreign minister, most of the information about the detainees originates from the Turkish intelligence services and not from other countries (Hürriyet, April 13, 2015).

## Palestinians and Israeli Arabs

### Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem who joined ISIS

■ **On March 1, 2015**, Israeli security forces detained **Khalil Adel Khalil**, born in 1990, a resident of A-Tur in East Jerusalem, **who went to Syria to join the ranks of ISIS**. The detainee holds an Israeli identity card. He said that after watching ISIS videos online, he and his friend **Muhammad Sami al-Aziz Abu Sneina** decided to go to Syria in August 2014 and join the ranks of ISIS.

■ In **January 2015**, he told his friends, family and employer that he wanted to take a vacation of a few weeks to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. He and his friend actually purchased **one-way plane tickets** to Greece and from there they flew to Istanbul. In Turkey, they made contact with an ISIS operative via the Internet. The operative directed them to a **safe house in the city of Urfa**, in southern Turkey, near the Syrian border. In the safe house, they joined other recruits from around the world, including two Israeli Arabs. They were divided into cells of around 4-5 people each and were smuggled into Syria by Turkish smugglers working for ISIS. After several weeks, Khalil returned to Israel and was detained for questioning (ISA website, April 1, 2015).

The interrogation of the detainee sheds light on how foreign fighters are recruited into the ranks of ISIS and how they reach Syria. The methods of operation disclosed by Khalil Adel Khalil **are largely consistent with the instructions given to recruits in the English-language manual entitled "Hijrah to the Islamic State, 2015"**. The manual includes many tips and operational recommendations about the preferred ways to travel from European countries to Turkey, and from there to Syria (including detailed maps of the border crossings between Syria and Turkey). The recommendations deal with behavior vis-à-vis the Turkish authorities at airports and border crossings and delve into detail, such as what to pack and bring. In the ITIC's assessment, these

recommendations were issued in light of the recently increased security and preventive measures on the part of Western European countries and Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

### Israeli Arab killed in Iraq

■ An Israeli Arab resident of northern Israel, around 30 years old, was killed in Iraq while fighting in the ranks of ISIS. The young man, whose family refused to give his name, joined ISIS some two years ago. The family was notified by other Israeli Arabs in Iraq (Ynet, Israel, April 9, 2015).

## The battle for hearts and minds conducted by ISIS

### Publication of another issue of the ISIS organ

■ On April 1, 2015, ISIS published the eighth issue of **Dabiq**, its online English-language organ intended for supporters of the organization in the West. The organ includes a series of articles describing the **expansion of ISIS's activities in Africa**, including an article about Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to ISIS. It also includes an article **encouraging foreign fighters to go to Libya and an interview with a Tunisian operative**. In an article by abducted British journalist John Cantlie, **he warns of additional terrorist attacks that will be carried out in the future against Western countries**. The issue also includes criticism of the Al-Nusra Front, claiming that the organization is adopting an ideology with Syrian nationalistic characteristics and is collaborating with the Syrian rebel groups.

### New news format on the ISIS radio station

■ ISIS has issued a **new format of news summaries on its radio network Al-Bayan, in Arabic, Russian and English**. The first news broadcast included updates on Iraq, Syria and Libya, including the death of an ISIS commander in the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp, a suicide bombing attack in Iraq, and ISIS's military activity in Libya (Daily Telegraph, April 7, 2015).

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from March 22, 2015: ["Updated security recommendations issued by ISIS to operatives traveling to Syria are designed to address preventive measures by European countries and Turkey. However, the flow of foreign fighters still continues."](#)



Left: Logo of ISIS's radio network Al-Bayan. Right: Issue 8 of the organ Dabiq, which came out in April 2015.

## Encouraging young people to sacrifice their lives for ISIS as suicide bombers

- On April 11, 2015, ISIS's media arm in Al-Raqqah published a video showing an ISIS operative lecturing to young boys in uniform about the “Crusaders” who operate against the Sunnis (i.e., the Christians, the US-led coalition). The speaker notes that the Islamic State has provinces in many parts of Africa and Asia, and with the help of Allah it will soon have them in Europe as well: **“Allah willing, we will return Andalusia [i.e., modern-day Spain] [to the fold of Islam].”**
- The speaker tells the boys **that any of them who becomes a suicide bomber against the “Crusaders” will have the privilege of being faithful to the path of Allah and will even see Allah in heaven. He called on the boys to pledge allegiance to death.** Following his statements, the boys stand up and shout **“we pledge allegiance to death!”** (ISIS's media arm in the Al-Raqqah province, as it appeared on YouTube, April 11, 2015).



**ISIS preacher encouraging young people to sacrifice themselves on behalf of ISIS as suicide bombers (ISIS's media arm in the Al-Raqqah province, YouTube, April 11, 2015)**