Spotlight on Global Jihad
(August 20-26, 2015)

Main events of the week

■ According to Turkish and Western media reports, the US and Turkey are planning to establish an "ISIS-free" buffer zone north of Aleppo, near the Turkish-Syrian border, in the area between the Jarabulus crossing and the town of Marea. **This is an area of great importance to both ISIS and Turkey:** ISIS's vital logistics routes between Turkey and Syria pass through it. From a Turkish perspective, it serves as a buffer of sorts between the Kurdish-controlled areas to its east and west. It is now a battle zone between ISIS and several rebel organizations (some of which are apparently supported by Turkey and the United States). This week, according to Syrian sources, ISIS made use of mustard gas in the town of Marea. These reports require verification.

■ ISIS has called for a **general mobilization of operatives to travel to Libya and carry out jihad** in order to "defend Islam" in Libya. According to this call for jihad, Libya is the key to Rome. In the ITIC's assessment, the call was made after the Tobruk government in eastern Libya asked the Arab countries to carry out airstrikes against ISIS targets and asked the UN Security Council to lift the arms embargo imposed on it. In the meantime, **ISIS continues to establish its presence in the important city of Sirte**, in north-central Libya, which has become its major stronghold in Libya and in North Africa in general.

The international campaign against ISIS

US and coalition airstrikes

■ This week, the US and coalition forces continued their airstrikes against ISIS targets. During the week, many dozens of airstrikes were carried out in Syria and Iraq by means of fighter planes, attack aircraft and UAVs.

■ Following are the main airstrikes (CENTCOM website):

- **Syria** - this week the airstrikes were concentrated mainly in the area of Al-Hasakah, Aleppo, Al-Raqqah, Kobani and Ain Issa. The airstrikes damaged ISIS tactical units, battle positions, vehicles and checkpoints, among other things.

- **Iraq** - the airstrikes were concentrated in the areas of Baiji, Fallujah, Kisik, Habbaniyah, Mokhtar, Mosul, Ramadi, Sinjar, Tal Afar, Rutba, Makhmur and Baghdadi. The airstrikes damaged ISIS tactical units, rocket launching positions, tunnels, weapons, vehicles, buildings and bunkers, among other things.

■ According to the US Air Forces Central Command, during the month of July 2015, in the campaign against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the United States carried out a record number of airstrikes. During the month, the Air Force carried out 2,828 airstrikes. The airstrikes in July 2015 represent a 66% increase compared to June (www.afcent.af.mil, July 31, 2015).

The killing of a senior ISIS operative

■ According to an announcement by the White House spokeswoman, **Fadhil Ahmad al-Hiyali**, aka **Hajji Mutazz** or **Abu Muslem the Turkmen**, was killed in a US airstrike on August 18, 2015. Al-Hiyali served as the **senior deputy** of ISIS leader **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**. Fadhil Ahmad al-Hiyali was killed while driving his car near Mosul, along with a senior operative in ISIS's media arm, codenamed **Abu Abdullah**.

■ According to the White House spokeswoman, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hiyali was a member of ISIS's Shura Council and the **"number 2" ISIS official**. In this capacity, he coordinated the transfer of weapons, explosives, vehicles and operatives between Iraq and Syria. For over two years, he was also in charge of ISIS's operations in Iraq, including the takeover of the city of Mosul in June 2014 (White House website, August 21, 2015)

■ Fadhil al-Hiyali, originally from the city of Tal Afar, **was an officer with the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Iraqi Republican Guard in the time of Saddam Hussein.** He subsequently became an operative in Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and remained in the organization after it became ISIS (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 22, 2015). According to the ITIC's information, he served at the time as coordinator for the provinces of the Emirate of Iraq. According to the American announcement, Al-Hiyali's importance in ISIS's senior command apparently increased over the past year.[1]

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[1] The death of Al-Hiyali requires additional verification. According to previous Arab media reports, he was killed in an airstrike on Mosul on November 7, 2014.

Left: Fadhil Ahmad al-Hiyali, whose death in an American airstrike in Iraq was announced by the White House spokeswoman (Filastin al-Aan Facebook page, August 19, 2015). Right: Another photo of Fadhil al-Hiyali (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 22, 2015).

Fadhil al-Hiyali's past as an officer in the Iraqi Army at the time of Saddam Hussein is **characteristic of a widespread phenomenon**. Many members of ISIS's senior command, including members of the Advisory Council (*Majlis al-Shura*) and the Military Council, **were Iraqi Army officers or Ba'ath Party officials at the time of Saddam Hussein**. The cooperation between the members of Saddam Hussein's regime and ISIS began during the fighting against the US Army in Iraq, at the time of ISIS's previous incarnation (while it was still Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq). As part of their cooperation, which is still ongoing, ISIS makes use of the military and bureaucratic skills of the former Army officers and party officials, skills that it sorely lacks.
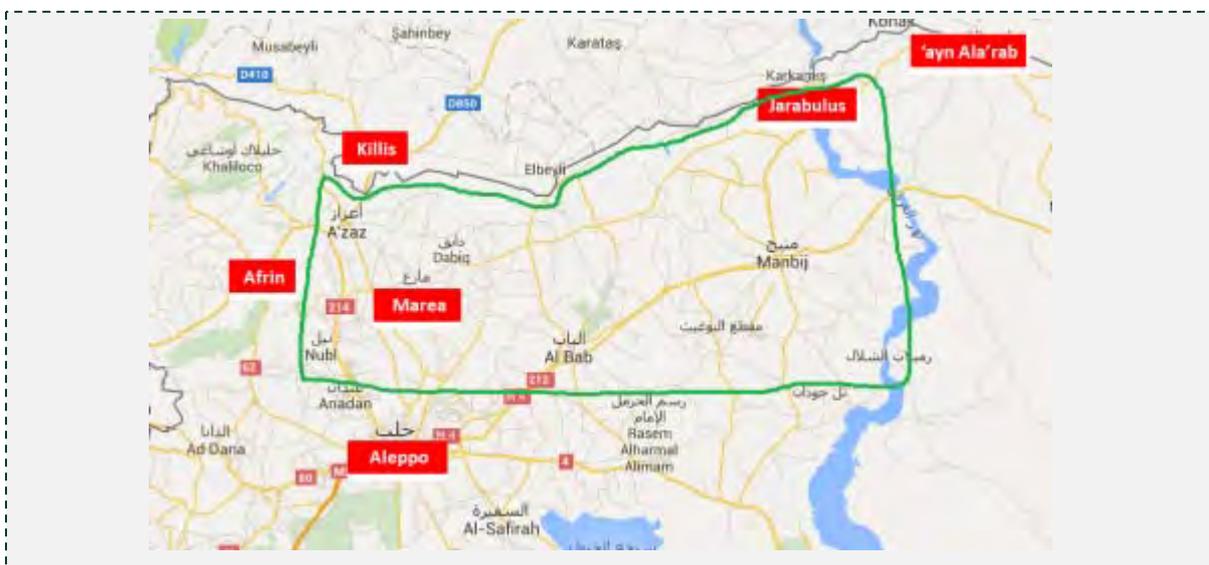
Training Syrian combatants to fight against ISIS

■ According to US officials, **a second group of Syrian fighters,** currently being trained in Turkey by instructors from the US Army and Britain, may be sent to Syria in the coming weeks. The US and Turkey are now cooperating in a new program, which should ensure that the new group of trainees will demonstrate far better capability than the first group. The two countries have pledged to provide air support to this group during combat. The United States refused to comment on the report and only confirmed the US's commitment to the training program for Syrian combatants (Reuters, August 21, 2015).

The first group of fighters, numbering several dozen combatants, entered Syria from the training facility in Jordan in mid-July 2015. Shortly after entering the country, some of them were captured during clashes with the Al-Nusra Front in northern Syria. Some of them were released by their captors. The US has announced its intention to set up a force numbering about a thousand fighters but, judging by its slow progress, **has apparently encountered major difficulties**. The number of Syrian fighters who have participated in the training program to date is negligible in the Syrian arena. In addition, their professional level and motivation are also low.

An intention to establish a buffer zone in northern Syria

■ According to media reports, **the US and Turkey have signed a memorandum of understanding under which the two countries will plan a military operation to take control of the region between Jarabulus and Marea (see map).** After the area, which is approximately 98 km wide and 45 km deep, has been taken over, **it will be "cleansed" of the presence of ISIS and handed over to the Free Syrian Army** (World Bulletin, August 20, 2015). The agreement emphasizes **that the areas that are "cleansed" of the presence of ISIS will be known as an ISIS-free zone and will not be transferred to the control of the Kurds under any circumstances** (Hürriyet, August 20, 2015).

The planned ISIS-free buffer zone, delineated in green, in the ITIC's assessment. The areas to the west and east of the zone, along the border between Syria and Turkey, are controlled by the Kurds (Google Maps)

The buffer zone is situated in northern Syria, west of the Euphrates, south of Jarabulus and Kilis, where there have been battles in recent weeks between ISIS and rebel organizations (some of which are apparently supported by Turkey and the United States).[2] This is an area of great importance to ISIS, **since its main logistics routes between Syria and Turkey pass through it. From ISIS's perspective, this area became even more important after other border crossings** (Kobani, Tell Abyad) fell into the hands of the Kurdish forces. **From a Turkish perspective,** this region is of **great importance**, since it constitutes **a kind of buffer between the Kurdish territorial contiguity along the eastern part of the Syrian-Turkish border and the Kurdish province of Afrin, in northwest Syria.**

Australia joining in the airstrikes in Syria

■ **Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott** said that his country was favorably considering the official request by the United States to participate in airstrikes against ISIS in Syria as part of the international coalition. Australia is a member of the coalition, and its air force was involved in airstrikes. However, until now, its airstrikes have been confined to Iraq (Reuters, August 21, 2015).

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[2] The most prominent organization among them is the **Ahrar al-Sham Islamic movement**, an umbrella framework of Salafist-jihadi organizations that do not belong to ISIS or Al-Qaeda. Turkey reportedly intends to deploy the Islamic Ahrar al-Sham movement in northern Syria to create an ISIS-free zone in the region north of Aleppo (and south of the Turkish city of Kilis).

Main developments in Syria

Map of Syria (Google Maps)

Aleppo province

■ **In the rural area north of Aleppo, fighting continues between ISIS and the rebel organizations.** ISIS fired mortars at **the town of Marea**, which is controlled by the rebel organizations.

■ The director of the hospital in Marea said that ten casualties who arrived at the hospital were suffering from the effects of asphyxiation, red eyes, flushed skin and edema, **all symptoms that are characteristic of chemical weapons attacks** (Al-Durar al-Shamiya, August 22, 2015). Brig. Gen. **Zaher al-Saket**, who formerly served in the Syrian Army's chemical warfare administration and subsequently defected from Syria, said that **ISIS used mustard gas in its attack on the town of Marea on August 22, 2015.** According to Al-Saket, the photos of the shells, the injuries and the fact that the symptoms are slow to appear all prove that chemical weapons were used, apparently from Iraqi Army warehouses (SNN, August 22, 2015).

Rocket parts containing mustard gas, allegedly used by ISIS in the town of Marea in northern Syria (Twitter account of Eliot Higgins, August 23, 2015)

■ **At the same time, fighting continues in the area of the Kuweyres military airbase east of Aleppo:** ISIS operatives detonated a car bomb by means of a suicide bomber at the Kuweyres military airbase (Aks al-Sir, August 24, 2015). An ISIS-affiliated Twitter account posted a claim of responsibility by ISIS's Aleppo province for the suicide bombing attack carried out on August 21, 2015. According to the posting, the suicide bomber, codenamed **Abu Bakr the Turkestani**, was driving a **booby-trapped APC**, which he detonated in a concentration of Syrian Army forces at the airbase. The explosion killed and injured dozens of Syrian soldiers and officers (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 22, 2015).

Idlib province

■ On August 24, 2015, clashes were reported near **the Abu ad-Duhur military airbase south of Aleppo**, between rebel forces led by the Al-Nusra Front and the Syrian Army. The Al-Nusra Front reportedly tried to take control of the airbase under cover of mortar fire. During the clashes, the Syrian Air Force attacked the Al-Nusra Front force (www.syriahr.com, August 24, 2015). Neither side apparently has the upper hand in the battle over the airbase.

The Abu ad-Duhur military airbase southeast of Idlib (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 20, 2015)
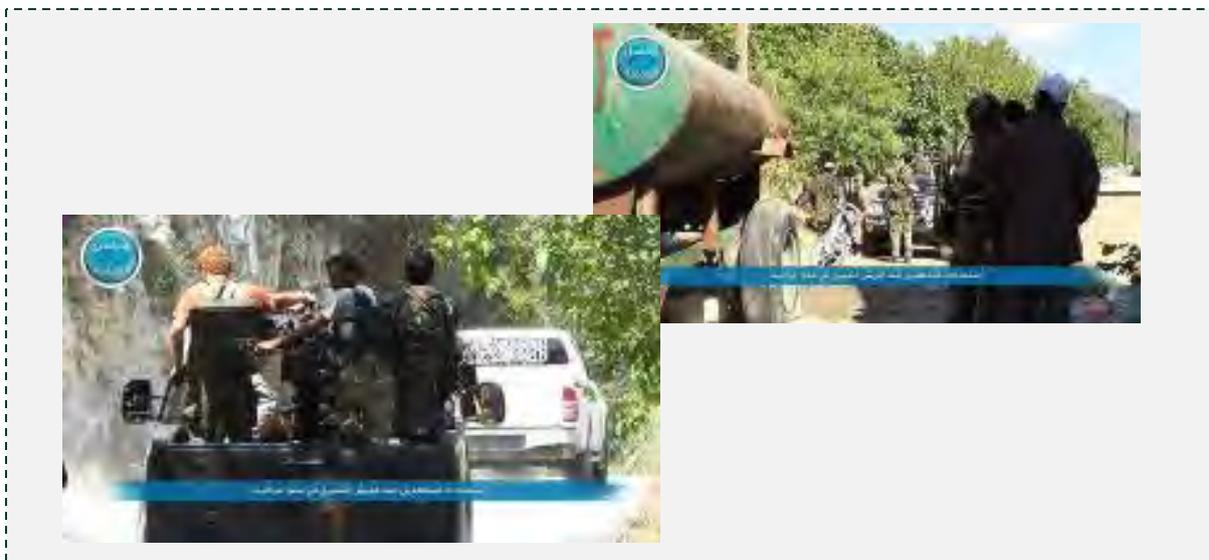

Left: Mortar bombs being launched at the Abu al-Duhur military airbase (the YouTube channel of the Al-Nusra Front's media arm, August 23, 2015). Right: Dozens of mortar bombs prepared by the Al-Nusra Front for launching at the Abu al-Duhur military airbase (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 20, 2015).

In the ITIC's assessment, **ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front are trying to exert pressure from the ground on the Syrian regime's military airbases in northern Syria**. This may be in response to airstrikes carried out against them by the Syrian Army. The fighting is now concentrated **east** (Kuweyres military airbase) **and south of Aleppo** (Abu al-Duhur military airbase).

Latakia province

■ On August 23, 2015, a Twitter account affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front posted photos of its armed operatives **making preparations to block Syrian forces along**

the Arafit-Latakia route, about 42 km northeast of Latakia (Twitter account affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front, August 23, 2015).

Al-Nusra Front operatives making preparations to block Syrian forces along the Arafit-Latakia route (Twitter account affiliated with the Al-Nusra Front, August 23, 2015)

The town of Arafit lies next to the main highway from Latakia to the north, to the Syrian-Turkish border. Until now, the Al-Nusra Front and its allies have put pressure on the Latakia region from the northeast, from the Jisr al-Shughur area of the Idlib province. In the ITIC's assessment, they are now trying **to increase this pressure and exert it from the north as well**.

The town of Arafit (Google Maps)

The Syrian-Lebanese border

■ Battles are reportedly taking place between ISIS and Hezbollah at the **Jusia border crossing on the Lebanese-Syrian border** (www.syriahr.com, August 18, 2015).

The Jusia border crossing on the Lebanese-Syrian border (Google Maps)

The Jusia (Al-Qaa) border crossing is one of the five official border crossings **between Syria and Lebanon**. The border crossing is controlled by the Syrian regime and has not been taken over by rebel organizations up to now. Before the fighting in Qusayr (2013),[3] there were many routes through the area, which were used by the jihadi organizations for sending supplies to Lebanon. After they were defeated in Qusayr, the supply lines were moved to other areas bordering on Lebanon (ISW, March 26, 2014).
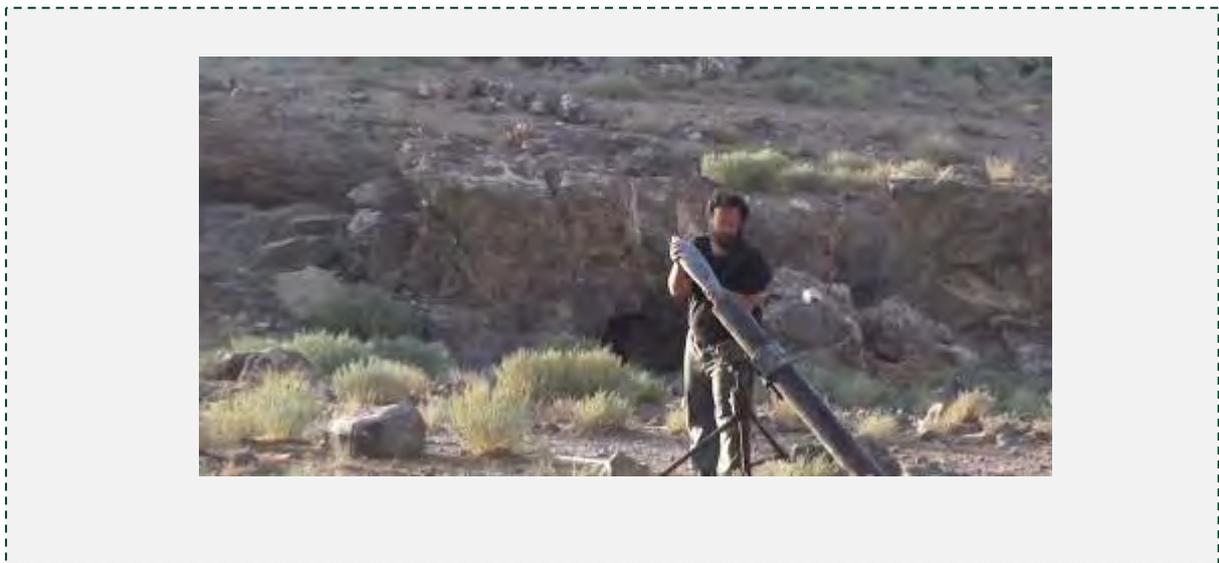
As-Suwayda province

■ On August 22, 2015, the owner of an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account posted photos showing ISIS operatives launching mortar shells at a Syrian Army training ground near the village of Al-Huquf (located around 35 km northeast of the city of As-Suwayda) (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 22, 2015). According to recent evidence, there is a presence of ISIS operatives in the area, which has a large Druze population.

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[3] On May 19, 2013, Hezbollah began an attack on the **Syrian city of Qusayr**, which ended on June 5. During the fierce battles, Qusayr was cleansed of the presence of jihadi organizations. Following the takeover of Qusayr, Hezbollah established its security control in the northern Bekaa Valley and in the Qusayr area (in Syria), thereby enabling the Syrian Army to take control of the Jusia border crossing.

The village of Al-Huquf, northeast of As-Suwayda (Google Maps)

ISIS operative launching a mortar shell at a Syrian Army training ground near the village of Al-Huquf (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 22, 2015)

Main developments in Iraq
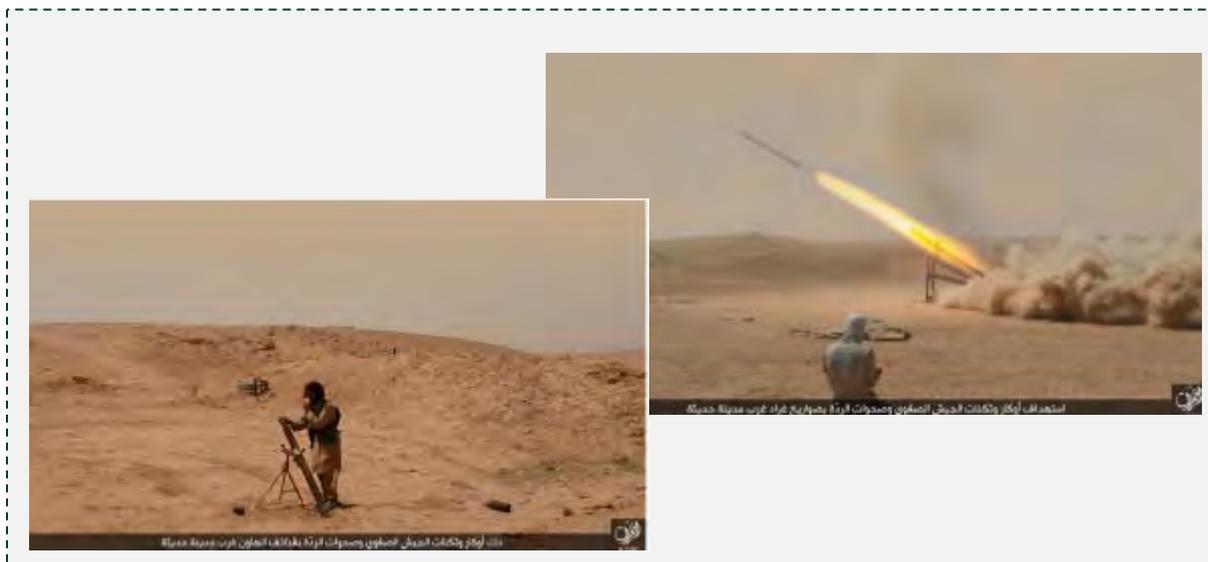

Map of Iraq (Google Maps)

Al-Anbar province

Ramadi

■ **Clashes between ISIS and the Iraqi Army in the city of Ramadi continue.** This week the Iraqi Army reportedly suffered heavy losses in these clashes:

● **On August 23, 2015**, the Iraqi security forces confirmed that 17 Iraqi Army soldiers and six other fighters were killed in an attack carried out by ISIS suicide bombers in rural Jaramshah, near Ramadi (Daily Mail, August 23, 2015).

● **On August 21, 2015**, 50 Iraqi Army soldiers were killed in two ambushes set by ISIS operatives in the Ramadi area. In consequence, according to British media reports, the Iraqi Defense Minister dismissed the Iraqi Army commander in the area (Daily Mail, August 23, 2015).

Haditha

■ **On August 20, 2015**, ISIS released photos documenting the firing of rockets and mortars at an Iraqi Army base near the city of Haditha (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, August 20, 2015).

Rockets and mortar shells being fired at an Iraqi Army base (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, August 20, 2015)

Fallujah

■ ISIS posted a video documenting an attack carried out by its operatives against an Iraqi Army base in the area of Fallujah. ISIS reported that some soldiers from the base were killed while the rest fled for their lives, and that ISIS seized a large quantity of weapons (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, August 20, 2015).
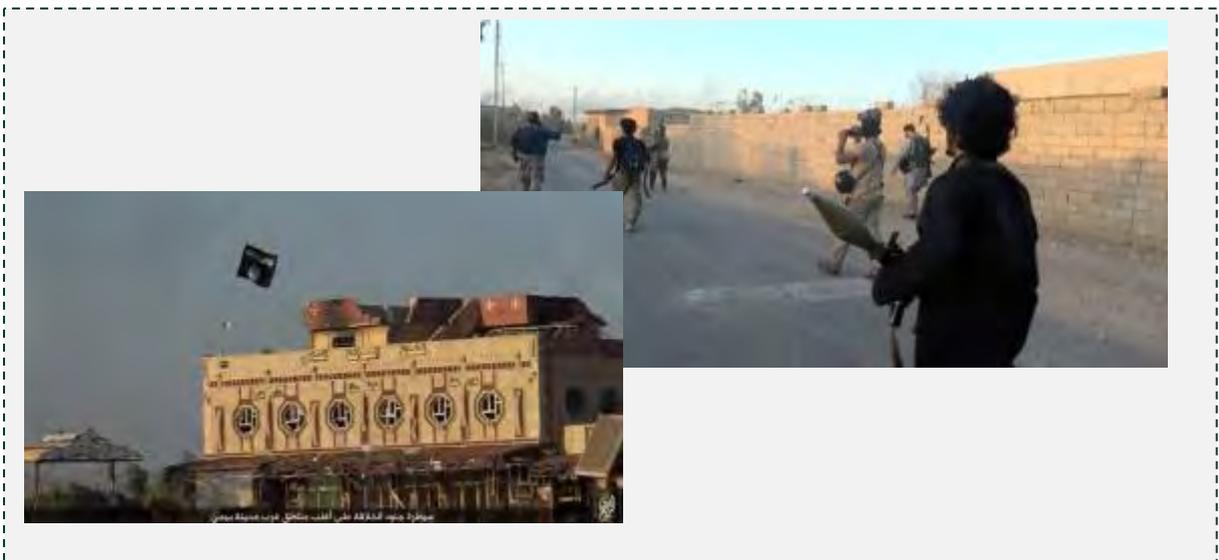
Left: ISIS operative next to an ISIS flag in the middle of the base. Right: Mortar shells being fired at an Iraqi Army base (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, August 20, 2015)
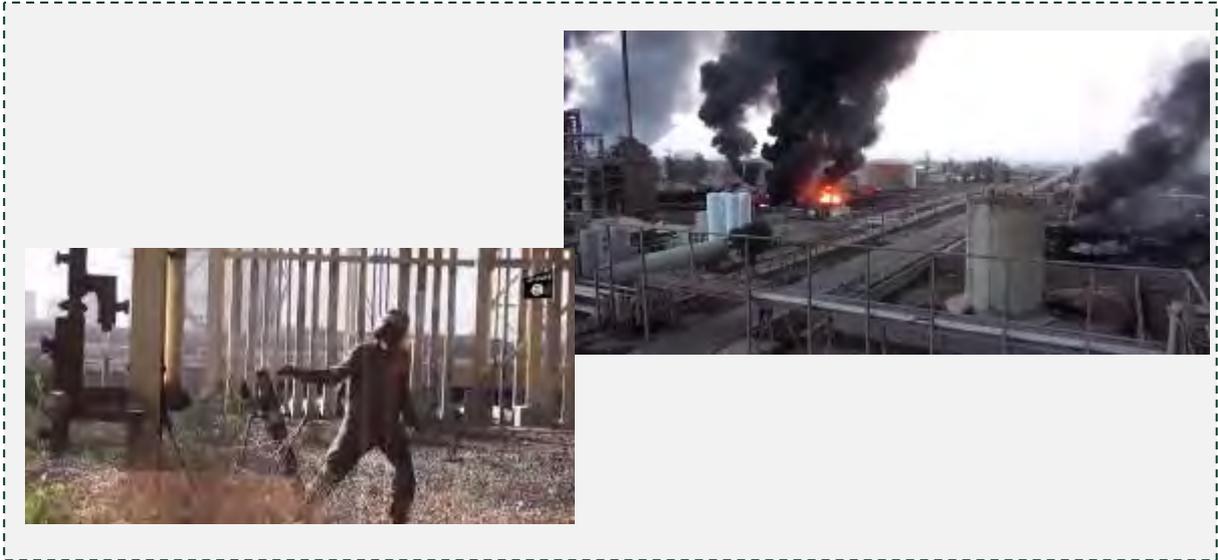
Salah al-Din province

Baiji

■ **The struggle over control of the city of Baiji continues.** According to a report by ISIS, on August 21, 2015, its operatives took over most of the western part of the city. ISIS has released photos indicating its control over the area (Justpaste.it file-sharing website, August 22, 2015). In a video posted on August 22, 2015, ISIS claims to have control over the refinery compound near the city as well.

Left: ISIS flag waving on the Al-Baraka Hotel in Baiji (Justpaste.it file-sharing website, August 22, 2015). Right: ISIS operatives on a street in the city.

Left: Mortar shell being fired from the oil refinery compound at Iraqi Army forces. Right: The oil refinery compound near the city of Baiji (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, August 22, 2015)

■ An American suicide bomber codenamed **Abu Abdullah the American** carried out a suicide bombing attack during an attack on an Iraqi Army checkpoint in the city of Baiji. The suicide bomber's photo was posted on social networks. According to ISIS's announcement, **the American suicide bomber was driving a car loaded with explosives** and blew himself up at a checkpoint in southwestern Baiji. Two other suicide bombers (one Tajik and one Iraqi) carried out simultaneous suicide bombing attacks against Iraqi Army checkpoints. This is not the first time that an American ISIS operative has been involved in a suicide bombing attack. In early 2015, ISIS announced that a terrorist codenamed **Abu Daoud the American** had carried out a suicide bombing attack near the city of Samarra, north of Baghdad (Al-Arabiya TV, August 19, 2015).

Abu Abdullah, the American suicide bomber who carried out a suicide bombing attack for ISIS in the city of Baiji (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 20, 2015)

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

ISIS's Sinai province's campaign against the Egyptian security forces

■ During the week, the Egyptian security forces continued their intensive counterterrorism activities against operatives of the Sinai province of the Islamic State. As part of the operation, the Egyptian security forces have carried out numerous airstrikes, mainly against terrorist bases in the area of Al-Arish, Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid. The Egyptian forces hit car bombs and motorcycles, blew up several houses, neutralized IEDs, killed several dozen operatives and detained several dozen suspects.

■ On August 19, 2015, ISIS's Sinai branch issued a statement claiming responsibility for attacks carried out during the past month. These attacks included, among others, attacks against the homes of Egyptian policemen in the area of Al-Arish; detonating IEDs against Egyptian Army tanks and vehicles in the area of Sheikh Zuweid and Al-Arish; an attack on an Egyptian Army checkpoint on the Sheikh Zuweid-Rafah highway; and the execution of the Croatian citizen who was abducted in Egypt (www.archive.org file-sharing website, August 19, 2015). In addition, on August 19, 2015, ISIS's Sinai province claimed responsibility for a bomb blast against an Egyptian Army APC near the police station in Sheikh Zuweid (ISIS's Twitter account, August 19, 2015).

Attacks in Egypt

■ **ISIS's branch in Egypt claimed responsibility for blowing up two government buildings in Cairo on August 20, 2015.** According to preliminary reports, around thirty people were wounded in the explosions. The two buildings that were attacked were the courthouse and the National Security building. According to ISIS, the attack was carried out in retaliation for the execution of six people who, according to the Egyptian authorities, were members of a terrorist cell charged with killing a number of Egyptian soldiers in 2014 (The Guardian, August 20, 2015).
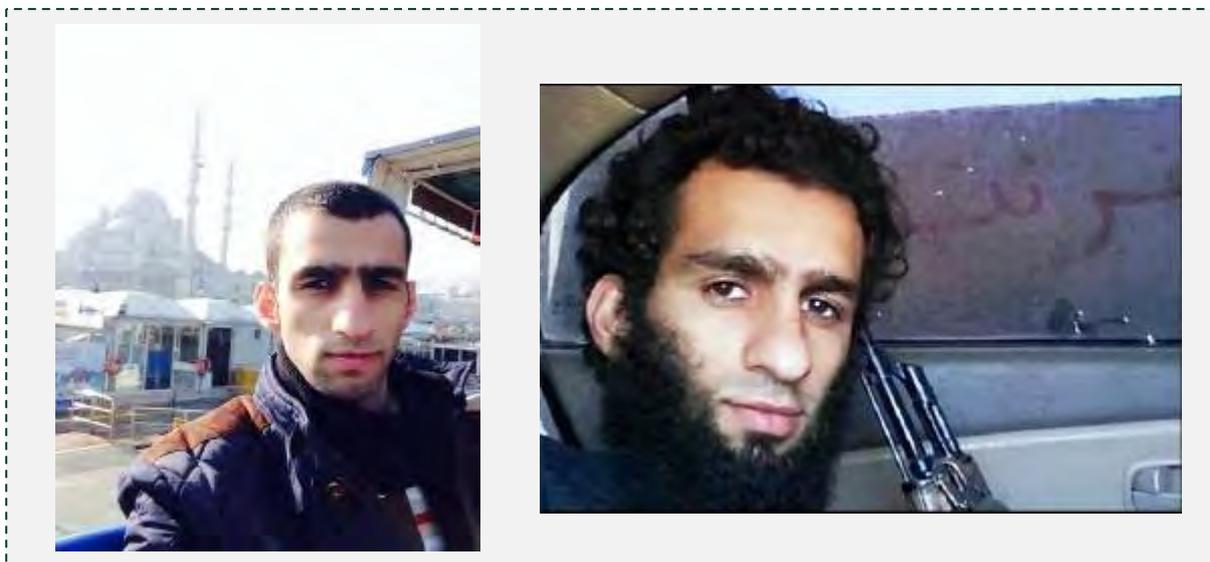

Claim of responsibility for the attack in Cairo

Palestinians and Israeli Arabs

Jenin resident killed fighting in the ranks of ISIS in Syria

■ The Palestinian media reported the death of **Sa'id Mohammad Yahya from Jenin**, while fighting in the ranks of ISIS in Syria. He was killed on August 17, 2015, near Aleppo, in an airstrike against one of ISIS's strongholds. Sa'id Mohammad Yahya left Jenin seven months ago, on completion of his undergraduate studies, claiming that he intended to work in Sweden (where his brother was staying). He went to Turkey in order to enter Syria and join ISIS. According to reports by Palestinian sources, Sa'id Yahya made contact with his family through Facebook and told them that he had joined the fighting in the ranks of ISIS (Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, Kufiya Press, August 19 and 20, 2015).

■ Mixed reactions to the news of Yahya's death in Syria were posted on a local Facebook page in Jenin. Some posters congratulated him on his action. Others asked why he went to fight in the ranks of ISIS, as Jerusalem is closer than Syria (Jenin al-Hadath Facebook page, August 19, 2015).

Sa'id Mohammad Yahya from Jenin, who was killed in Syria in the ranks of ISIS, in a photo taken during his stay in Turkey (Jenin al-Hadath Facebook page, August 19, 2015)

The conduct of the Islamic State

Murder of an archaeologist and destruction of antiquities in Palmyra

■ According to a report by a Syrian human rights organization, **ISIS operatives beheaded a well-known archaeologist in the city of Palmyra and hung his body on a pole in the city square.** The reason for his execution was apparently his refusal to reveal to his ISIS captors the location of the antiquities that were smuggled to safety before ISIS took over the city. Archaeologist **Khaled al-Asaad**, 82, was in charge of the antiquities of Palmyra for over 50 years. He was held by ISIS for over a month. He was initially interrogated and tortured and, after refusing to cooperate, he was executed (www.syriahr.com, August 23, 2015)

■ **ISIS operatives blew up an ancient temple in the old city of Palmyra.** They placed a large quantity of explosives in the Baal Shamin Temple, one of the largest well-preserved temples in the city, causing very serious damage (www.syriahr.com, August 24, 2015).

This is not the first time that ISIS has destroyed historic sites and rare archaeological items from the beginning of human civilization. The destruction of antiquities is due to ISIS's perception that this is an infidel culture of idol worshippers. Nevertheless, ISIS trades in antiquities, including via the Internet, for the purpose of accumulating financial gains. To this end, ISIS has even set up an office of antiquities, whose activity is designed to maximize ISIS's profits from the sale of antiquities that were seized by it in the territories that it has taken over in Syria and Iraq.

Stopping the flow of the Euphrates River to Iraq

■ According to reports by Iraqi sources, **ISIS has dammed a large quantity of water of the Euphrates River in the Tabqa Dam in the city of Raqqa**, which is under its control. The Iraqis say that they have asked Turkey to increase the flow of the Euphrates to Iraq. Turkey assented to the request and released large quantities of water, **but ISIS stopped the flow of water to Iraq in the Tabqa Dam.** According to the Iraqis, a delegation from the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources is currently in Syria in order to settle the issue (Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed, August 18, 2015).

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

Overview

■ The Tobruk government in eastern Libya, which is recognized by the international community, **called on Arab countries to carry out airstrikes against ISIS targets in Libya.** At the same time, the government asked the UN Security Council to lift the arms embargo imposed on it because ISIS continues to take over large parts of it. According to the Libyan minister of information, if the embargo is lifted, ISIS could be defeated by the end of the year (The Guardian; Sputnik, August 21, 2015).

■ In response, ISIS called for a **"general mobilization" of operatives for jihad in Libya.** ISIS-affiliated Twitter accounts recently **called for migration to Libya in order to "defend Islam in Libya". On August 23, 2015, ISIS's branch in Libya – the Tripoli province** posted a video showing a senior ISIS operative codenamed **Abu Ali al-Jazrawi.** The senior operative called for a "general mobilization" of ISIS operatives to fight in Libya. He called the "general mobilization" "jihad" against the Tobruk government which is supported by the West. He noted that the call for jihad in
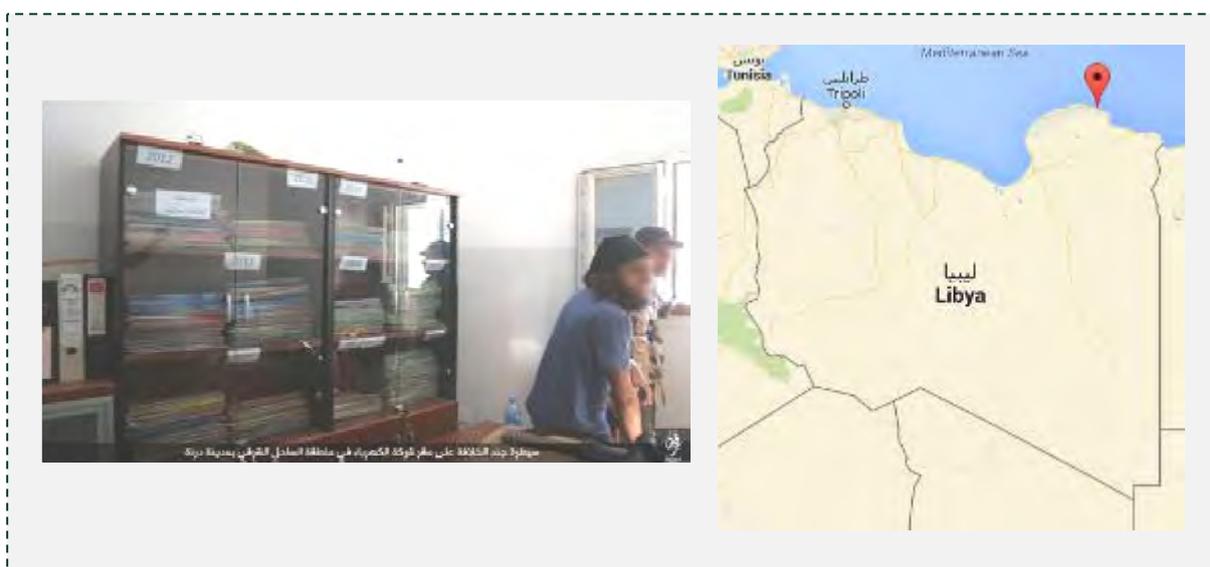
Libya is more important than the call to join the jihad in the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. This is because of the need to "support Islam in Libya" (Al-Arabiya TV, August 23, 2015).

Sirte

■ According to AP reports, **80-200 Boko Haram operatives, who came from Nigeria, are now fighting in the city of Sirte alongside ISIS operatives**, making an effort to establish their control over the city. Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015, and became the West Africa province of the Islamic Caliphate (AP, August 22, 2015). This report requires verification.

Derna

■ On August 23, 2015, an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account posted a link to photos of ISIS operatives after they took over part of the east coast area of the city of Derna (northeast Libya). The photos show, among other things, the building that contained the headquarters of the region's security committee, the regional headquarters of the electric company and other headquarters, which are now in the hands of ISIS (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account; Justpaste.it, August 23, 2015). **The city of Derna has fallen into the hands of a local jihadi group, and ISIS is now trying to regain control over it.**

Left: ISIS operatives at the headquarters of the electric company in the east coast area of Derna (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account; Justpaste.it, August 23, 2015). Right: The city of Derna, northeastern Libya (Google Maps)

Yemen

■ On August 23, 2015, a UAE force managed to **release British hostage Douglas Robert Semple**, held in Aden **by Al-Qaeda operatives**. British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said that the hostage was fine and thanked the Gulf States for their help in his release. Douglas Robert Semple worked as an oil engineer in Yemen. He was abducted in February 2014 in Hadramawt, eastern Yemen (aawsat.com, August 23, 2015).

■ According to British media reports, state security officials in Yemen said that on August 22, 2015, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) operatives seized key positions in and around the city of Aden. According to these security officials, they are expanding their control over the region (independent.co.uk, August 23, 2015).

Uzbekistan

■ On August 21, 2015, ISIS posted a video entitled **Message to the Army of Khorasan**. The video shows ISIS operatives, one of them masked, with Asian-Muslim features. **The Uzbek-language speaker congratulates the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)** on its pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He also calls on Muslims from Khorasan to join ISIS. The speaker expresses the hope that all Muslims will unite under one flag (isdarat.tv website, August 21, 2015). On August 6, 2015, ISIS's branch in Khorasan published a video documenting the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan's pledge of allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (see Spotlight on Global Jihad, August 6-12, 2015).

Masked ISIS operative congratulating the IMU on its pledge of allegiance to ISIS (isdarat.tv website, August 21, 2015)

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Shooting attack in France (initial report)

■ On a **high-speed train traveling from Amsterdam to Paris,** a man emerged from the toilet armed with Kalashnikov assault rifle and a knife, and opened fire on the passengers. Three passengers were injured. A number of passengers overcame the assailant and prevented mass killing. The passengers who overcame the attacker included two American citizens. One of them is a soldier who recently returned from Afghanistan and the other is a US Air Force paramedic.

■ The perpetrator was identified as **Ayoub el-Khazani**, 26, from Morocco, who had lived in Spain until last year. According to Spanish media reports, Ayoub el-Khazani is well known to the security agencies of France, Belgium and Spain **as a member of radical Islamic movements. He left for Syria in 2014 and apparently served for some time in the ranks of ISIS** (The Telegraph, August 22, 2015).

Turkey

■ Turkish security forces in the city of Kilis near the Syrian border detained 16 individuals suspected of attempting to join the ranks of ISIS. According to the security forces, 14 of the detainees are **foreign nationals**. They were detained two days after the detention of 22 suspected ISIS operatives by the Turkish security forces in the Elbeyli region (www.syriahr.com, August 22, 2015). **These detentions may indicate a tightening of Turkish security measures against the foreign operatives who try to join ISIS.**

Spain

■ According to **Spain's Interior Minister**, during a joint operation with the Moroccan police, 14 people were detained in Morocco and Spain on suspicion of being part of **a network of operatives who recruited civilians to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq and to carry out terrorist attacks in Morocco**. One suspect was detained in a city outside Madrid, where he operated. Another 13 suspects were detained in several cities in Morocco (Fez, Casablanca, Nador, etc.). According to Spain's Interior Minister, **126 civilians left Spain to join ISIS** in recent years, and 25 of them were killed. An additional 25 have already returned to Spain. Ten of them were arrested and arrest warrants have been issued for the others (CNN; L'Express, August 25, 2015).

Germany

- In an interview, **German Interior Minister Thomas de Mazière** said that **since 2012, around 700 German nationals had joined the ranks of ISIS:** around 100 German nationals were killed in the fighting **and around a third of them managed to return to Germany.** According to him, those who returned from the fighting are a source of concern among the German security services. He noted that the large number of those traveling from Germany **reflects the difficulties in tracking people traveling to Syria and Iraq.** This is because most of them use an alias and conceal their true identity. The German government plans to confiscate the documents of all those who left for the battle zones. The German authorities are also attempting to deal with all those who finance terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq (Daily Mail, August 23, 2015).

The battle for hearts and minds

Italy

- In light of ISIS's call for a "general mobilization" of Muslims to fight in Libya (see section on Libya), it has embarked on a campaign which stresses that Libya is **"the key to Europe and the road to Rome"**. **In the ITIC's assessment, this campaign is designed primarily to encourage foreign fighters to join ISIS in Libya**, but **it also embodies a threatening message against Italy.** Here are some examples:

A Twitter account affiliated with ISIS in Libya: Masked ISIS operative saying "we will conquer Rome, Allah willing, this is a promise by our Prophet [Muhammad], Allah's prayers upon Him and His blessing of peace" (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 23, 2015)

Call by an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account on Muslims in Tunisia, Algeria, Chad and Sudan to turn to Libya, because it is "the key to Europe and the road to Rome, Allah willing" (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 23, 2015)

An ISIS-affiliated Twitter account posted a picture of an ISIS flag waving on a building in Rome, under the caption "Oh soldiers of the Caliphate, come in your masses to the gate of the conquest of Rome" (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 22, 2015)

A threatening message from ISIS to the Turkish leadership

■ ISIS posted a Turkish-language video in which a Turkish-born operative addresses the residents of Turkey **and threatens the President of Turkey and the PKK as well.** The speaker, codenamed **Abu Yusuf** or **Abu Ammar**, a father of three from the city of Bursa, is a Turk **who moved to Al-Raqqah** (ISIS's "capital city" in Syria). Two other Turkish nationals appeared with him in the video (Taraf, August 19, 2015).

■ In an interview given from the city of Al-Raqqah where he now lives, the operative says that the video was produced in order to convey messages to **Turkish President Erdogan, the PKK and the Turkish people.** He claims that the video was produced on their own initiative without any orders from on high, adding that they are now preparing a longer film. He says that **around 2,000 Turks** live in the area of Al-Raqqah, along with their families. **There are also many Turks among the ISIS's fighting forces** (Taraf, August 19, 2015).

Turkish residents of Al-Raqqah, being used to convey propaganda threatening messages in Turkish (Taraf, August 19, 2015)

In the ITIC's assessment, the threatening message was voiced in light of the Turkish security forces' increased counterterrorism activities against foreign fighters attempting to reach Syria in order to join ISIS. Also in the background is Turkey's intention to establish an "ISIS-free" zone in northern Syria, near the Turkish-Syrian border. **In the ITIC's assessment, this threatening message may be translated by ISIS into terrorist attacks against Turkey.**