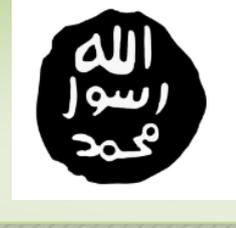




Spotlight on Global Jihad
(March 31 – April 6, 2016)



Main events of the week

- **ISIS's series of failures in Syria and Iraq continues:** the Syrian Army took over **the city of Al-Qaryatayn, southeast of Homs**. The takeover of the city (following the takeover of Palmyra) enabled the Syrian Army to open the Homs-Damascus highway and create territorial contiguity in its control area east of Homs. Now the Syrian Army and its allies are preparing to complete the cleansing of **the Aleppo area** and take over the city. **In Iraq**, the Iraqi Army took over **the city of Hit**, on the banks of the Euphrates River, thereby taking another step towards cleansing the Sunni Al-Anbar Province.
- ISIS, which has failed to halt its failures, is carrying out **terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare against its various enemies**. Among other things, this week ISIS carried out suicide bombing attacks against Shiite targets in the Baghdad area. At the same time, ISIS, using its affiliated media and operatives, embarked on a **campaign of threats against Western countries (especially Germany), Russia and Israel**. These threats are designed to deter ISIS's enemies from continuing their attacks against it, taking advantage of the anxiety caused by the attack in Brussels. In the ITIC's assessment, **as the pressure on ISIS in Syria and Iraq increases, its motivation to carry out these threats may also increase**.

The ceasefire agreement

- **The ceasefire** has entered into its sixth week, **with characteristics similar to those of the previous weeks**. This week, the Russian coordination center at the Hmeymim base reported an average of around eight violations per day (similar to last week). At the same time, the Russian coordination center announced that the ceasefire had been expanded to include two more villages, which means that it now includes 53 towns and 44 organizations (Russian Defense Ministry website, eng.mil.ru, April 4, 2016)

■ **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** spoke by phone with his American counterpart **John Kerry** about the measures to be taken to strengthen the ceasefire in Syria. Sergey Lavrov stressed that the Syrian-Turkish border must remain completely closed in order to prevent terrorist operatives from Turkey from reaching Syria (Al-Arabiya, April 1, 2016; Sputnik, April 2, 2016). According to the US State Department spokesman, the Assad regime continues to be the biggest violator of the ceasefire.

The international campaign against ISIS

■ The US-led international coalition continued to carry out attacks in Iraq and Syria against ISIS targets and those of other terrorist organizations that are not included in the ceasefire agreement. During the week, aircraft of the coalition countries carried out many dozens of airstrikes. The vast majority of the airstrikes were carried out in Iraq, particularly in the areas of Hit, Sinjar and Mosul, and a small number in Syria, mainly in Al-Raqqah and the Aleppo area (US Department of State website).

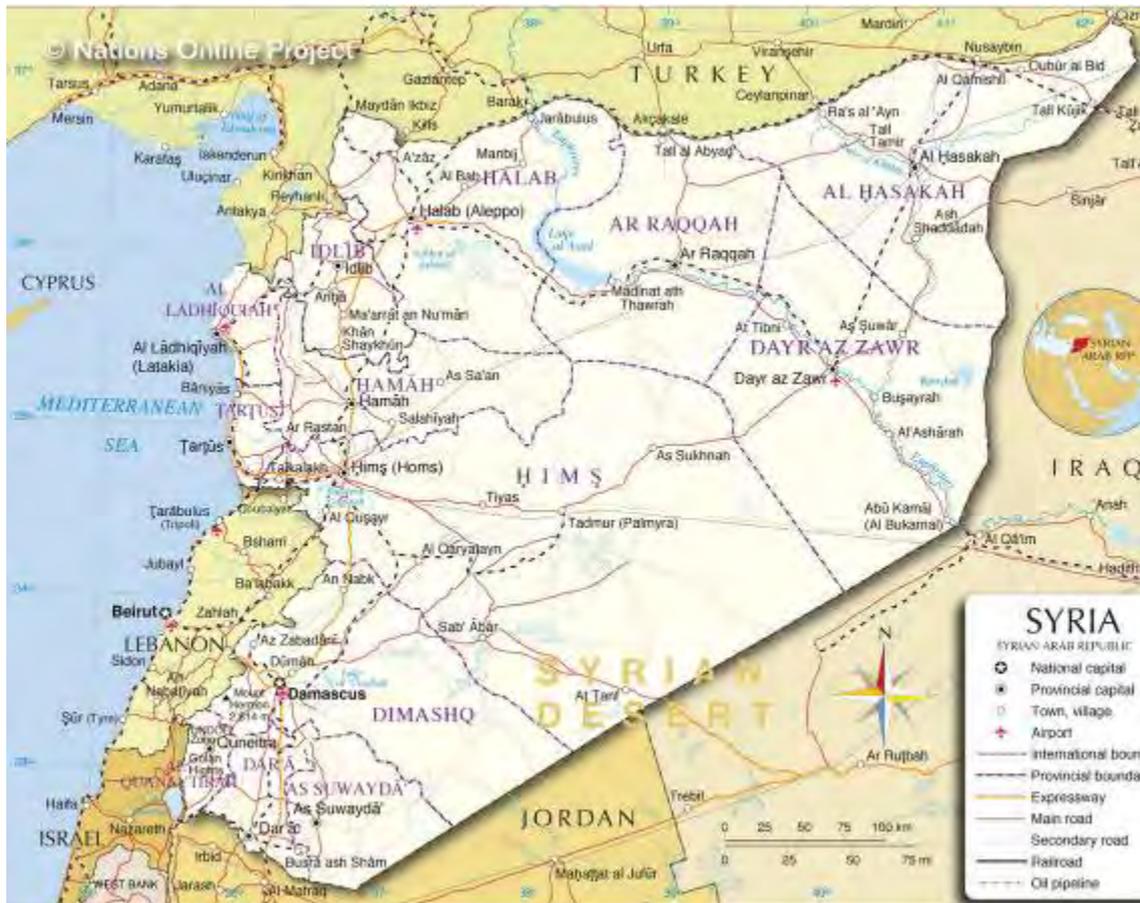
■ The US Army Central Command announced that in light of the increasing terrorist threat in Turkey, it has been decided to evacuate civilians stationed in southeastern Turkey, including at Incirlik Air Force Base. According to the announcement, soldiers in combat positions will not be evacuated and the operations carried out against ISIS from Turkey will not be compromised. According to the commander of the US Army Central Command, the decision was made in coordination with the Turkish government. At the same time, the US Department of State issued a travel warning for southeastern Turkey (World Tribune, April 4, 2016). **In the ITIC's assessment, these measures have been taken by the United States in light of the increasing terrorist threat in Turkey.**

■ **Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff**, said that the effectiveness of the international coalition airstrikes against ISIS had increased. This is due to the improved intelligence and the military capability of the forces fighting in Syria and Iraq, supported by the United States. According to Dunford, the airstrikes are intended to hit ISIS commanders and operatives, destroy ISIS's economic infrastructure and support the forces fighting in Syria and Iraq (Defense News, March 29, 2016). On another occasion, Dunford said that one of the most challenging missions is building a Syrian-Arab military force to fight against ISIS. According to Dunford, this force will be built taking Turkey into consideration, since Turkey objects to the involvement of Kurdish forces and Arab elements in the international coalition against ISIS (Sputnik, March 29, 2016).

Russia's involvement in the fighting in Syria

■ This week, Russia transferred five tons of humanitarian aid to the Homs Province, where fighting against ISIS has been concentrated in recent weeks (Sputnik, April 4, 2016). Russia also took in 2,000 Syrian refugees, residents of Aleppo who had fled from Syria. The refugees have been sent to the city of Noginsk, near Moscow, and Russia is now working to settle their residency status, which will entitle them to health insurance and allow them to attend schools (Sputnik, April 3, 2016).

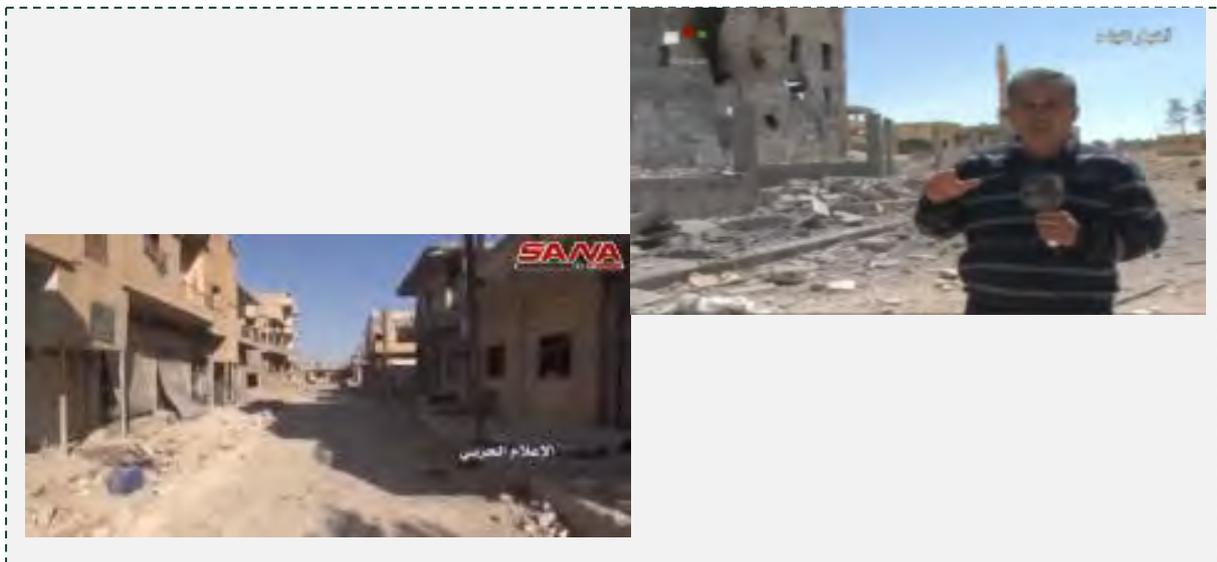
Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (www.nationsonline.org)

The takeover of Al-Qaryatayn

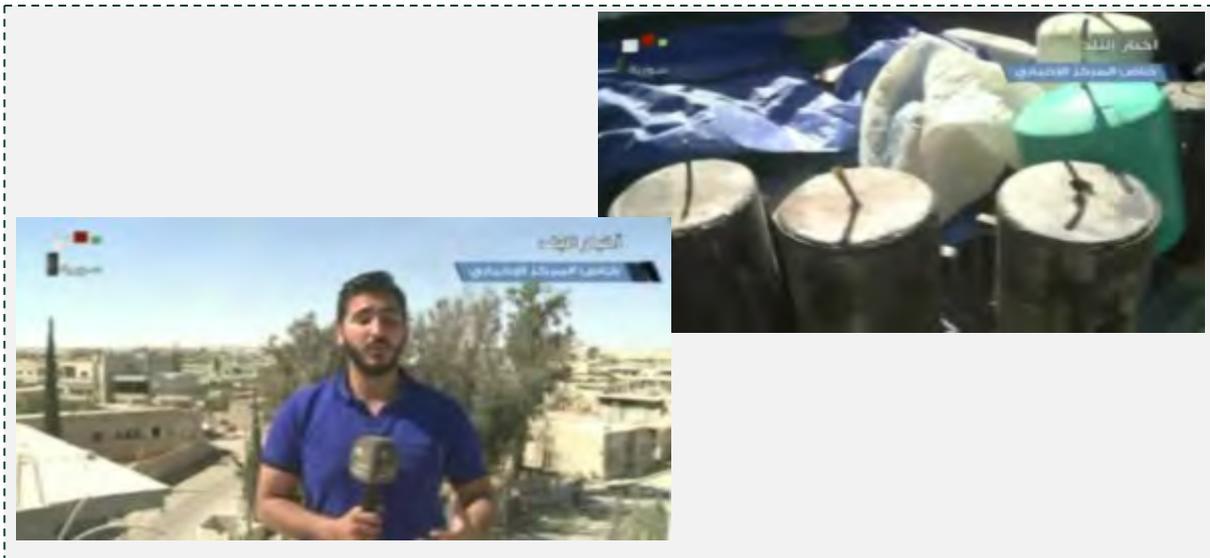
■ Following the takeover of Palmyra, the Syrian effort was diverted to the city of Al-Qaryatayn, southeast of Homs. On April 3, 2016, the Syrian Army completed its takeover of the city and adjacent villages. Following the takeover of Al-Qaryatayn, the Damascus-Homs highway was opened to traffic (Dimashq al-Aan, April 4, 2016). In Al-Qaryatayn, as was the case in Palmyra, the Syrian Army took control of a ghost town, most of whose residents had fled. Damage was evident in many of the city streets and large quantities of IEDs had been planted.



Left: A street in Al-Qaryatayn (SANA News Agency, April 3, 2016). Right: Syrian TV reporter in the main street of Al-Qaryatayn (Syrian TV, April 4, 2016).



Left: A church in the city which, according to the TV reporter, was set on fire by ISIS operatives. Right: The cultural center of the city of Al-Qaryatayn, which served as ISIS's operations room. The Syrian TV reporter noted that ISIS operatives had burned the documents there before fleeing (Syrian TV, April 4, 2016).



Left: Another Syrian TV reporter in Al-Qaryatayn, in an area where the destruction is less evident.
Right: IEDs planted by ISIS operatives in Al-Qaryatayn (Syrian TV, April 4, 2016)



Banknote found in Al-Qaryatayn. Issued by ISIS, it features a picture of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (SANA News Agency, April 3, 2016).

- The takeover of the city of Al-Qaryatayn and the surrounding villages **represents an additional achievement (in military terms and in terms of public relations) for the Syrian Army and its allies, after the takeover of Palmyra. The takeover of the city enabled the Syrian Army to open the Homs-Damascus highway and maintain territorial contiguity from Homs eastward, all the way to the area of Palmyra. In addition, in the future, the area of Palmyra may serve as a launching zone for the Syrian Army in its attempt to take over more territory in ISIS's control core in eastern Syria.**

Initial steps to restore normal life in the city of Palmyra

- After the takeover of the city of Palmyra, **the Syrian Army expanded its operations to the city of Al-Sukhnah, northeast of Palmyra, to which some ISIS operatives had fled.**

Russian and Syrian fighter planes and helicopters attacked targets in the city (SOHR, April 1, 2016). Airstrikes were also carried out on targets **in the area of the Arak oil field**, located about 26 km northeast of Palmyra, and on ISIS vehicles on the Al-Sukhnah-Palmyra road.

■ On completion of the takeover of Palmyra from ISIS, the Syrian regime began initial rehabilitation activities. **Homs Province Governor Talal al-Barazi** visited the city and noted that work had already begun on the rehabilitation of the infrastructure that was destroyed (SANA News Agency, March 31, 2016). Most residents left the city and are now waiting to return to their homes.



Right: Homs Province Governor Talal al-Barazi visiting Palmyra. Left: Homs Province Governor looking at cages used to hold prisoners, which were built by ISIS in Palmyra (SANA News Agency, March 31, 2016)

■ **According to the head of operations at the Russian General Staff**, the takeover of Palmyra was an important achievement in the campaign because of its cultural value, its proximity to oil and gas fields, and the fact that it is an important crossroads. He added that **Russian military personnel took part in planning the campaign** and that the Russian Air Force had carried out 500 airstrikes in the area. Russia sent a special sapper unit, because ISIS had left a large number of mines and IEDs in the city. According to a report by the Russian control center at Hmeymim Base, **so far the Russian forces have deactivated 1,230 mines and IEDs in Palmyra** (Sputnik, April 2, 2016).



The cities of Palmyra and Al-Qaryatayn, which have been taken over by the Syrian Army. The Arak oil field and the city of Al-Sukhnah, which are held by ISIS, are located northeast of Palmyra (Google Maps)

Local clashes in other provinces throughout Syria

■ In other provinces in Syria, including provinces where the ceasefire applies and areas where it does not, local clashes continued between the various forces:

- **The area of Aleppo:** This week, there were clashes between the Syrian Army and its supporting forces and the rebel organizations (mainly the Al-Nusra Front). On April 1, 2016, the Al-Nusra Front and other rebel organizations took control of **the important area of Tel al-Eis, south of Aleppo** (Dimashq al-Aan; Khatwa, April 2, 2016). In addition, a Syrian aircraft was reportedly intercepted by rebel organizations in the Aleppo area, with a surface-to-air missile (The Long War Journal, April 5, 2016).



The town of Tel al-Eis, which fell into the hands of the rebel organizations (Google Maps)

- **The area of Deir al-Zor:** The Syrian Army attacked targets near the military airbase, with Russian air support (Local Coordinating Committees, March 30, 2016). The Syrian forces also blew up a 20-meter long tunnel located under sites controlled by ISIS in the south of the city.
- **Idlib** - around 25 Al-Nusra Front operatives were killed in a US airstrike on a meeting place for its senior operatives in the area of Idlib. Jihadi social networks announced the death of **Abu Firas al-Suri** (i.e., the Syrian), a senior operative in Al-Qaeda. **Abu Firas the Syrian** is the codename of **Radwan Namus**, a former officer in the Syrian Army who formerly served as the Al-Nusra Front spokesman. Most recently, he was in charge of the Al-Nusra Front's institutes of Islamic law (Sharia). **Abu al-Hammam**, a senior operative in the Al-Nusra Front and operative in the Khorasan network, was also killed in the attack.
- **Al-Raqqah** - during the week, a large number of airstrikes were carried out against ISIS targets in **Al-Raqqah**. Syrian warplanes attacked a meeting place of senior ISIS operatives in Al-Raqqah. Some senior operatives were reported killed. ISIS reportedly prepared for a possible confrontation in the city, prohibiting Armenians and Christians from fleeing (Khatwa, March 30, 2016).

Preparations for continuity

■ According to the Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Mayadeen channel, **the establishment of an operations room for the liberation of Aleppo and its rural areas has been completed.** Russia, Iran and Hezbollah have sent forces there to support the Syrian Army in combat against the rebel organizations (Al-Mayadeen, April 5, 2016).

Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (nationsonline.org)

Al-Anbar Province

Hit

■ This week, the Iraqi Army managed to take over most of the city of Hit, on the banks of the Euphrates River, about 70 km northwest of Ramadi. On April 2, 2016, the Iraqi Army entered the city after having taken over its environs. On April 3, 2016, the Iraqi Army completed the takeover. According to the counter-terrorism apparatus subordinate to the prime minister of Iraq, **all the city streets and houses were booby-trapped by ISIS, after the residents left the city** (Al-Sumaria, April 2-4, 2016; Sky News, April 4, 2016). ISIS, on its part, deployed suicide bombers against the Iraqi Army in the town of Kabisa, east of Hit (April 2, 2016).



Iraqi soldiers near the city of Hit displaying the ISIS flag (Al-Ghad Channel, April 3, 2016)

Ramadi

- On April 3, 2016, the Iraqi Army announced that it had taken over a house in the city of Ramadi, which had served as a **big workshop for manufacturing explosives and explosive belts for ISIS** (Al-Sumaria, April 3-4, 2016).

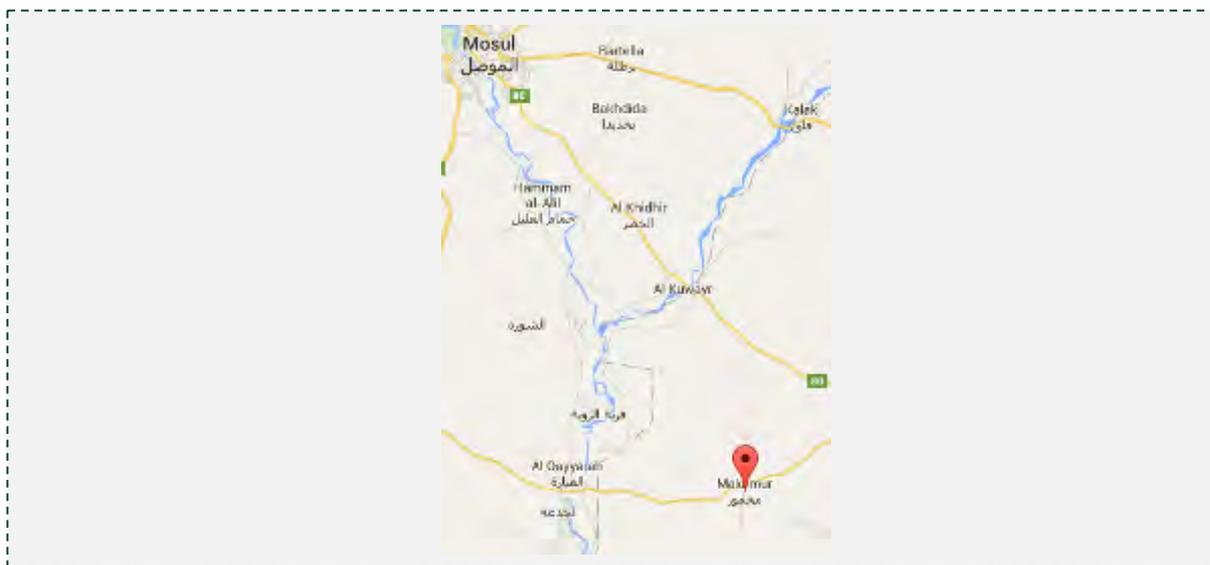


Weapons found in an ISIS workshop (Al-Sumaria, April 3-4, 2016)

Nineveh Province

- The Iraqi Army continues to report on the activity carried out on commencement of an operation to take over the Nineveh Province and the city of Mosul. This week, the Iraqi media reported on airstrikes against ISIS targets in the area south of Mosul. Dozens of ISIS operatives were killed in these attacks, including two senior operatives who were in charge of artillery and the morality police (Shafaq News; Al-Baghdadia, April 2, 2016).

■ ISIS, on its part, carries out guerrilla warfare against its enemies. This week, ISIS claimed responsibility for five suicide bombing attacks against the Kurdish forces (Peshmerga) **in the city of Makhmur, south of Mosul**, which serves as a base for attacks against ISIS (Akhbar Dawlat al-Islam, April 2, 2016). According to a report on Al-Jazeera TV, 15 Peshmerga fighters were killed in these attacks (Al-Jazeera TV, April 1, 2016).



The city of Makhmur, south of Mosul, which serves as a base for attacks against ISIS (Google Maps)

The area of Baghdad

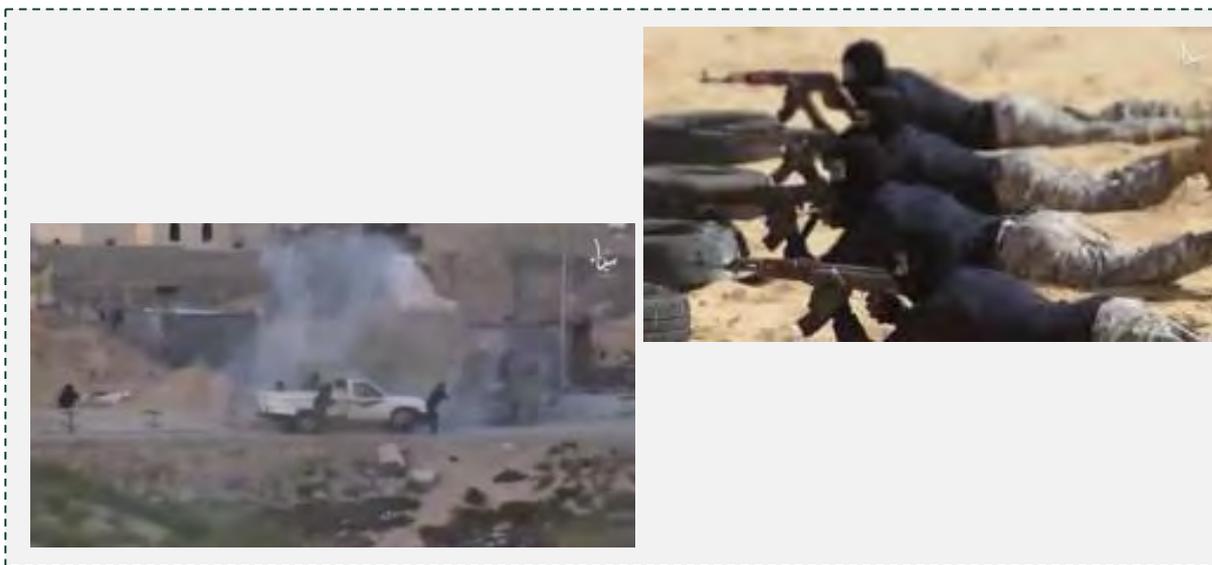
■ The city of Baghdad and its environs continue to be a **center for terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare carried out by ISIS**. This week, there were two noteworthy suicide bombing attacks (April 4, 2016). One was carried out by a suicide bomber who blew himself up in the Shiite neighborhood of Al-Sadr. Five people were killed and nine were wounded. Another attack was carried out by a suicide bomber driving a car bomb, which exploded at a meeting point of Shiite militias in northern Baghdad.

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

■ During the week, the Egyptian security forces continued their intensive activity against ISIS's Sinai Province in the areas of Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish and Rafah. On March 30, 2016, the Egyptian security forces uncovered two tunnels under the border fence and arrested 24 people of various nationalities who tried to enter Egypt illegally. In addition, the Egyptian security forces seized weapons, including four barrels of explosives, during a military operation in southern Rafah and southern Sheikh Zuweid (Al-Masry al-Youm,

March 30, 2016). At the same time, ISIS operatives continued their guerrilla activities against the Egyptian security forces, mainly by planting IEDs.

- ISIS's Sinai Province released a video of ISIS operatives reenacting two attacks carried out against the Egyptian security forces. One attack was carried out on March 19, 2016, at the Al-Safa checkpoint south of Al-Arish, killing 18 Egyptian policemen. The second attack was carried out against an Egyptian police checkpoint in a square in the city of Al-Arish, killing five policemen (January 21, 2016).



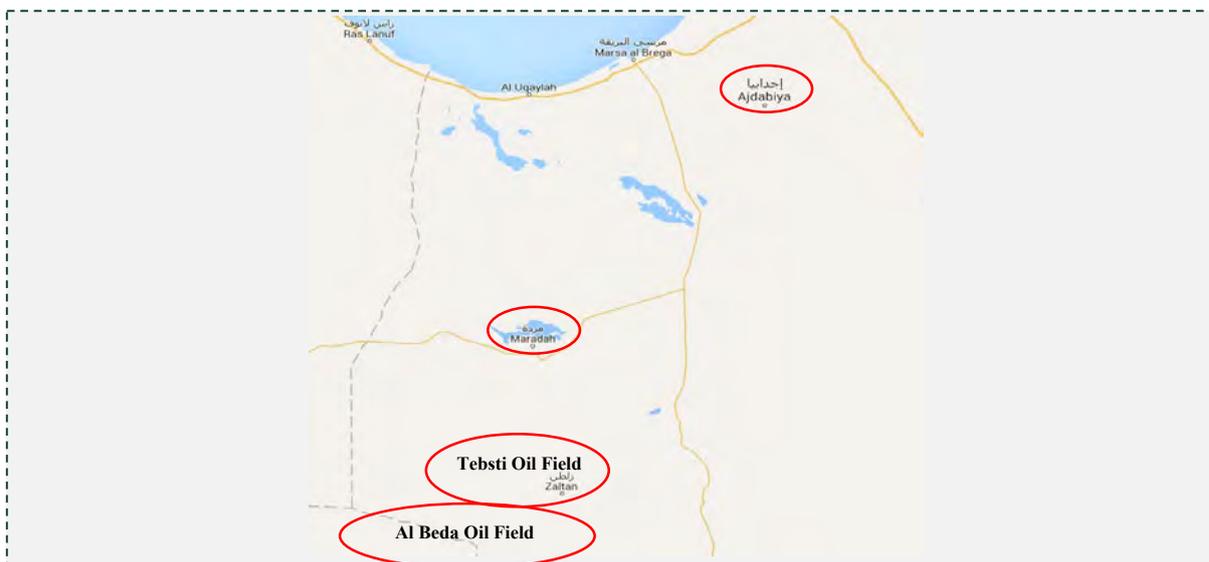
Right: ISIS operatives being trained to carry out attacks. Left: ISIS force attacking the Egyptian security forces at the Al-Safa checkpoint (Akhbar Dawlat al-Islam, March 31, 2016)

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

Attacks on oil fields south of Maradah

- According to a source in the oil facilities guard unit, ISIS operatives attacked two oil fields **south of Maradah (see map)**. According to the source, the guard force managed to repel the attackers without damage to the oil fields. The Al-Khaleej Al-Arabi company, one of whose oil fields was attacked, said that the field was not damaged (Akhbar Libya 24, April 3, 2016; Al-Wasat Portal, April 2, 2016; Twitter account of the head of the planning department at the Al-Beda oil field). **This attack follows other attempts by ISIS to attack oil fields, so far without much success.**



The two oil fields attacked by ISIS south of Maradah (Google Maps)

Exploiting illegal migrants for ISIS's purposes

■ According to “Libyan sources,” **ISIS controls the desert and sea routes used for smuggling illegal migrants who pass through Libya on their way to Europe.** ISIS sees these migrants as a means to increase its revenues. Some of these migrants are tempted by ISIS to join its ranks for a monthly salary of over USD 1,000 (The Times, March 28, 2016).

Threats of carrying out attacks in Tripoli

■ **Abu Abdullah al-Masri**, head of ISIS's Sharia Court in Sirte, threatened in his Friday sermon “**to soon burn Tripoli,**” and **fill it with jihad fighters and suicide bombers.** He also threatened to launch a campaign against Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA). The threat was apparently voiced following the arrival in Tripoli of members of the Presidential Council of the Libyan Government of National Accord, whose formation was agreed upon in talks held in Tunisia by the opposing sides (Al-Wasat Portal, April 2, 2016).

Dagestan

■ **ISIS's Caucasus Province has claimed responsibility for two attacks in Dagestan.** The announcement was published by Amaq, ISIS's media arm. On March 29, 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility for activating two IEDs against two Russian military vehicles in eastern Dagestan. According to the announcement, the blast killed 10 Russian soldiers and wounded three others. On March 30, 2016, ISIS reported another explosion, which took place at a Dagestan police checkpoint. The blast killed several

policemen. **Since the declaration of ISIS's Caucasus Province, over five attacks have been carried out against the Russian security forces** (The Long War Journal, March 31, 2016).

Saudi Arabia

■ According to a report by the **Saudi Interior Ministry**, an IED was detonated against a police vehicle in **Al-Dilam**, about 95 km southeast of Riyadh. One person was killed and two more vehicles were damaged (Al-Arabiya, April 3, 2016). On April 3, 2016, ISIS announced that its operatives had detonated two IEDs against a police station in the city of Al-Dilam. According to the announcement, three police vehicles were burned in the attack (Amaq, April 3, 2016).

The battle for hearts and minds

Article calling for the opening of a new front against Israel

■ The ISIS-affiliated **Al-Haqq News Agency** published an opinion piece written by an operative codenamed **Abdullah Mohammed Mahmoud**. The operative calls on ISIS to open a front against the “Jewish enemy” immediately, saying that this is an imperative. According to the author, there are several reasons for this call: a response to the so-called Israeli fighting alongside Egypt against the Islamic State in the Sinai Peninsula; revenge of the so-called Jewish participation in the international campaign against ISIS; a response to Israel's prolonged occupation of Palestinian territories. **The author stresses that Israel could be attacked via the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula** (Twitter, March 31, 2016; Al-Haqq News Agency, March 31, 2016).

Other threats by ISIS against Europe and the United States

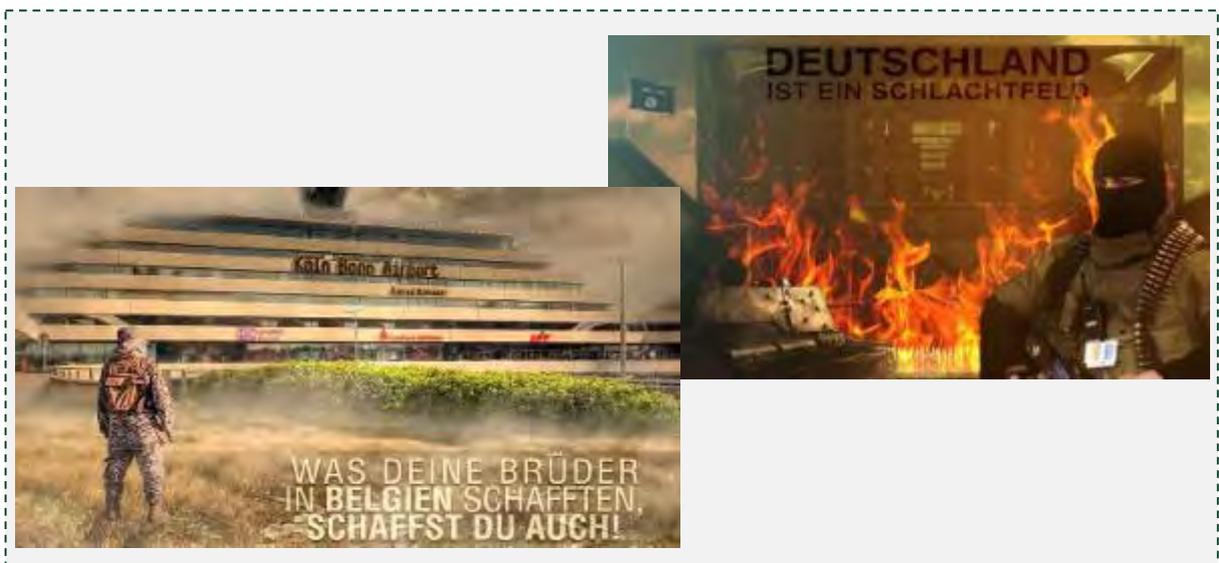
■ ISIS's Euphrates Province in Iraq released a video **threatening the United States, Europe and Russia with additional attacks, which will continue as long as the campaign against ISIS continues**. The video shows three masked men, **one of whom speaks in French**. The speaker notes that as long as the coalition countries continue to take action against ISIS, attacking targets in “Crusader” countries is legitimate as far as ISIS is concerned (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, March 27, 2016).



French-speaking operative in the center of the frame threatening attacks against Western countries and Russia (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, March 27, 2016)

ISIS calls on Muslims in Germany to carry out terrorist attacks

- ISIS published German-language posters, circulated on social networks, **calling on Muslims in Germany to carry out attacks against Germany. Chancellor Angela Merkel's office and Cologne Bonn Airport were mentioned specifically.** It was said that that was a continuation of the attacks carried out at the airport and metro in Brussels (Reuters, according to information published on the SITE website, March 31, 2016).



Two of the posters that were published. Left: A poster calling on Muslims in Germany to carry out a terrorist attack at Cologne Bonn Airport. This poster shows the airport with the caption: "What your brothers succeeded in doing in Belgium, you too will succeed in doing." Right: A poster with the inscription "Germany is a battlefield," with the office of the German Chancellor in flames in the background (Twitter, March 30, 2016)

Call to kill Al-Nusra Front leader

- On April 1, 2016, an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account posted what ISIS claims is a poster with a **photo of Al-Nusra Front leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani**. The poster, which includes the story of Al-Julani's life, **calls to kill him and** another operative named **Ahmed Zakour (Halabi)** who is shown next to him. The poster refers to both of them as "the Jews of the jihad," a term that suggests that they have "betrayed" the way of true jihad (Twitter, April 1, 2016).



Poster allegedly showing Abu Mohammad al-Julani and the call to kill him (Twitter, April 1, 2016)