



Spotlight on Global Jihad (June 16 - 22, 2016)



Main events of the week

■ This week as well, attacks on major cities controlled by ISIS in **Syria, Iraq and Libya continued**. On these three fronts, ISIS now faces the **possibility of losing outposts of considerable importance in both military terms and in terms of public relations**:

- **In Syria**, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) completed their encirclement of **the city of Manbij**, and fighting is currently ongoing in the city's western neighborhoods. At the same time, the Syrian Army continued to advance towards **the city of Tabqa** and is now near the military airbase to the south of the city.
- **In Iraq**, the Iraqi forces took over **downtown Fallujah**, seized the government buildings there and hoisted the Iraqi flag. Most of the fighting against ISIS continued in the city's northern neighborhoods.
- **In Libya**, forces loyal to Libyan Government of National Accord managed to **enter the city of Sirte**. Fierce fighting is being waged in the city's western neighborhoods between ISIS and the attacking forces. According to a spokesman for the Government of National Accord, the forces are now near the city center and are preparing to complete its takeover.

■ In order to alleviate the severe pressure that ISIS is under, and in light of the major impact of the terrorist attacks in the US and France, **ISIS has launched a media campaign calling on Muslims worldwide to carry out terrorist attacks**. The campaign is directed mainly **against the United States, Western Europe, and Russia**. **Muslims around the world have been called on to "kill the infidels at home"** and wherever they encounter them. In the ITIC's assessment, the campaign is liable to **encourage jihadi operatives worldwide to carry out terrorist attacks inspired by ISIS**.

The US-led campaign against ISIS

Airstrikes

■ This week, the US-led coalition carried out intensive airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Most of the airstrikes in Syria were carried out in the area of Manbij, as support for the

SDF's campaign to take over the city. In Iraq, the airstrikes were concentrated mainly in the areas of Ramadi and Mosul.

Russia's involvement in the fighting

Russia accused of having attacked targets of a rebel organization supported by the United States

- According to a senior US official, on June 16, 2016, Russia attacked targets of rebels supported by the United States **in the area of the Al-Tanf (Al-Walid) border crossing** (located near the Syria-Iraq-Jordan tri-border area). Several rebels were killed in the attack. The Al-Tanf border crossing was taken over from ISIS more than a month ago (May 13, 2016) by the so-called **New Syrian Army**, a framework of rebel organizations **supported by the USA**, which operates in eastern Syria. The loss of the Al-Tanf border crossing impairs ISIS's logistical and operational communication between Syria and Iraq.
- According to **US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter**, the attack was carried out against forces that are fighting against ISIS and therefore this contradicts Russia's assertions that the purpose of its involvement in Syria is to fight against ISIS. Moreover, according to a US Department of State spokesman, during a talk with their Russian counterparts, senior US Department of State officials expressed deep concern about attacks carried out by Russia in southern Syria against forces supported by the international coalition against ISIS (AFP, June 18, 2016).
- **The Russian Defense Ministry** replied that the air forces of Russia or Syria had not attacked units of the Syrian opposition that respect the ceasefire and whose location was reported to the coordination centers of Russia and the United States (Sputnik, June 18, 2016). According to the Russians, during combat it is difficult to distinguish between "moderate insurgent" groups and Islamist organizations (Reuters, June 17, 2016).
- In response to statements made by the US Secretary of State that the United States is running out of patience with "Assad's Syria," **Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov said that Russia was the one losing patience**. According to Gerasimov, Russia complies with all its obligations regarding the ceasefire and provides the US with information about the geographical locations of ISIS and Al-Nusra Front operatives. However, he claims that the United States has yet to determine which

“armed groups” belong to terrorist organizations and which belong to the Syrian opposition (Sputnik, June 20, 2016).

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (www.nationsonline.org)

The campaign to take over the city of Manbij

- Around three weeks since the beginning of the campaign to take over Manbij, **the SDF forces took control of the area west of the city. In doing so, the forces completed their takeover of the rural area surrounding Manbij and the encirclement of the city.** According to a report by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the SDF forces have taken over around 105 villages and towns near the city since the beginning of the campaign (June 14, 2016).
- According to a report from June 19, 2016, **operatives of the Military Council of Manbij, a military framework that belongs to the SDF, entered the city from the west and took over one of the squares on its the western outskirts.** The forces fighting in western Manbij enjoy ongoing air support from the US and the coalition countries (Aranews, June 19, 2016).

■ ISIS, on its part, **continues to conduct a guerrilla war against the attacking forces**. A number of people were reportedly killed and others were injured in a suicide bombing attack carried out by ISIS operatives against SDF outposts in southwest Manbij (Khatwa News Agency, June 17, 2016). In the city itself, ISIS is sending out distress signals: ISIS operatives sent a letter to the Kurdish forces in the name of some of the city's notables, asking them to open a safe route for its operatives to leave the city (Dimashq al-Aan, June 17, 2016). In addition, ISIS has introduced compulsory recruitment for adolescent boys in Manbij, under the slogan "Jihad is an obligation" (Dimashq al-Aan, June 18, 2016).

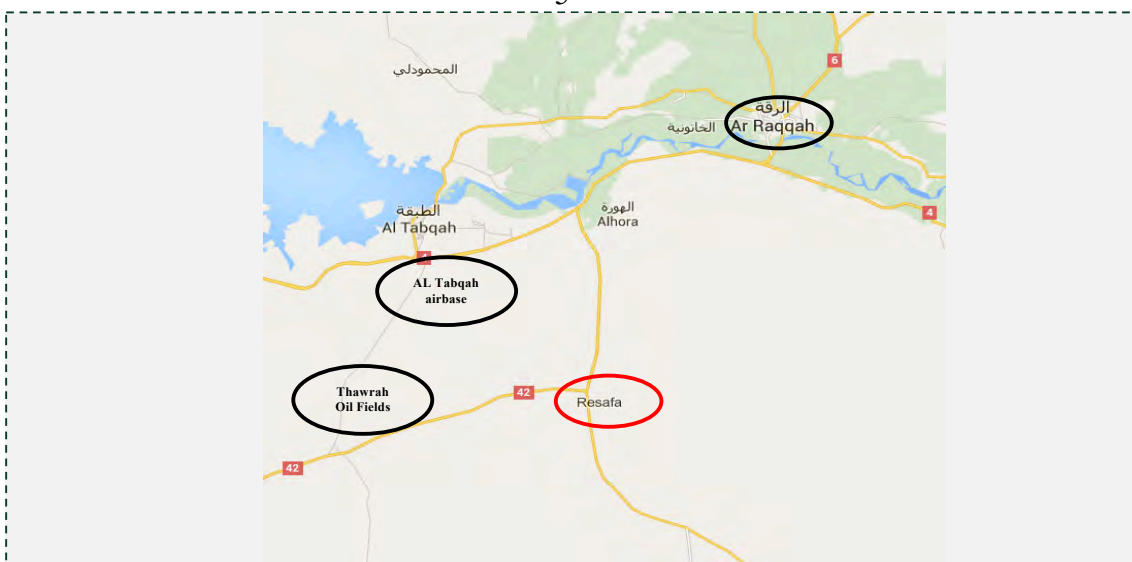


ISIS car bomb detonated against the SDF forces southwest of Manbij (Haqq, June 18, 2016)

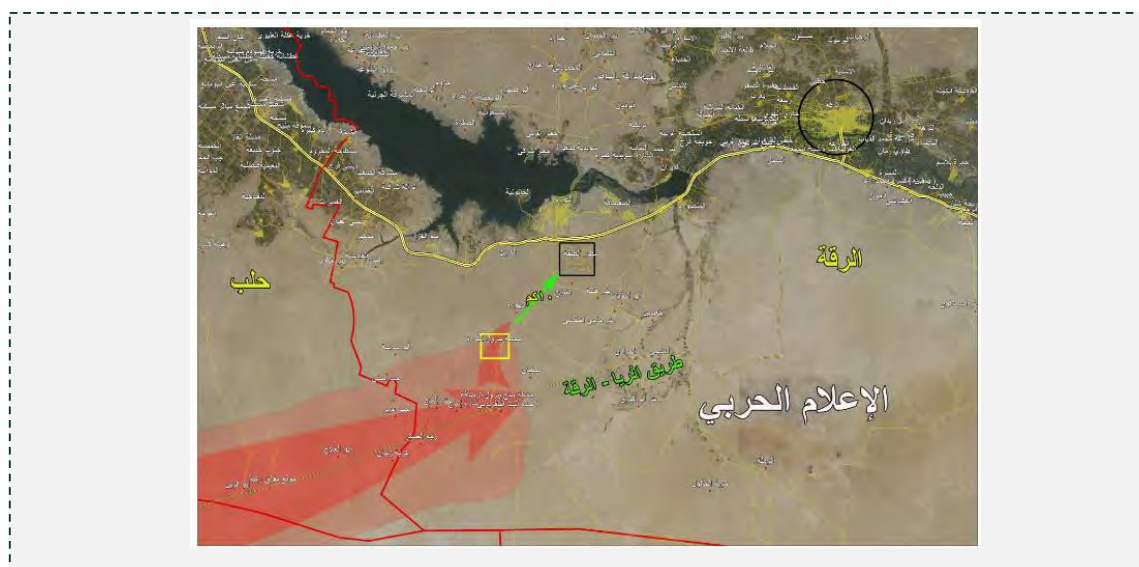
Syrian Army advance towards Tabqa

■ The Syrian Army, which took control of the Al-Rasafah junction last week, continues to advance along the main road to Tabqa (and Al-Raqqah). According to a report from this week, **the Syrian Army is just 7 km from the Tabqa military airbase** (located around 10 km south of the city). The Tabqa military airbase was taken over by ISIS in August 2014. Retaking the airbase would provide the Syrian Army with a **military air base for carrying out attacks against targets in Al-Raqqah, ISIS's so-called capital** (located around 45 km west of Tabqa).

■ This week, fighting took place between the Syrian Army and ISIS in **the Thawra oil field**, located south of Tabqa. According to a report from the morning of June 20, 2016, the Syrian Army has taken over the oil field and the nearby employee housing (Al-Alam, June 20, 2016). ISIS later announced that its operatives had retaken the oil field after the Syrian Army and the "Shiite militias" had controlled it for a few hours (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, June 20, 2016).



The Tabqa military airbase and the Thawra oil field (Google Maps)



Map distributed by the Syrian military information unit describing the Syrian Army offensive on the Ithriya—Al-Raqqah road. According to the map, the Syrian Army attacked the Thawra oil field (marked with a yellow square). The Tabqa military airbase (marked with a black square) is located to its north (ar.pressshia.com, June 20, 2016)

- The Syrian Army fighting in the Tabqa area **enjoys intensive Russian air support**. Over the past few days, as the Syrian Army advanced, Russian warplanes carried out airstrikes against ISIS targets in and around the city of Tabqa. The aircraft also dropped leaflets calling on the militants in the city to lay down their arms and turn themselves in (SOHR, June 18, 2016).

The rural area south of Aleppo

- This week, battles took place in **the rural area south of Aleppo** between the Syrian Army and Jaysh al-Fatah, led by the Al-Nusra Front. The Syrian Army, supported by operatives from Hezbollah and the Shiite militias handled by Iran, tried to

reclaim its control over the rural area south of Aleppo. **The fighting was concentrated mainly in the village of Khalasah, south of Aleppo.** According to reports, Jaysh al-Fatah took over the village and other places south of Aleppo and **the Syrian forces suffered heavy losses.**



The village of Khalasah, site of battles between the Syrian Army and its supporters, and the rebel organizations (Google Maps)

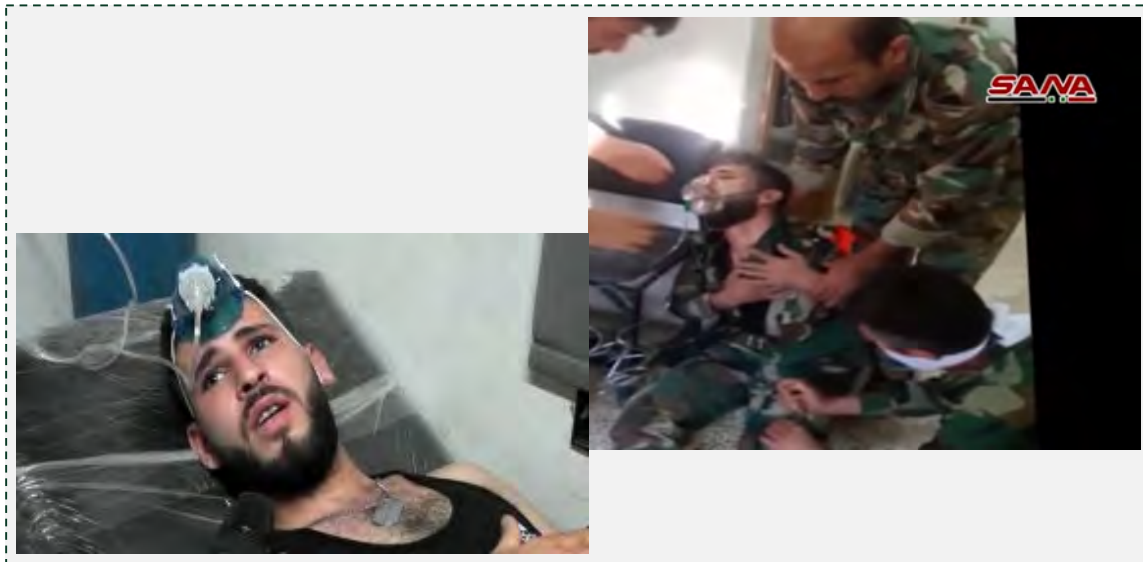
■ According to reports from the SOHR, 86 fighters from the Syrian Army and its supporters have been killed in battle near the village of Khalasah and in other combat zones south of Aleppo. **The fatalities include at least 25 Hezbollah operatives.** In addition, several dozen Jaysh al-Fatah operatives were killed. The large number of fatalities among the Syrian Army and its supporters was reportedly due to massive artillery fire and car bomb explosions (SOHR, June 18, 2016). This could explain **Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani's arrival in the southern suburb of the city of Aleppo** (Mehr, June 20, 2016).



Right: The Jaysh al-Fatah forces that took over the village of Khalasah from the Shiite militias fighting alongside the Syrian Army. Left: Tank shells and crates of ammunition that fell into the hands of Jaysh al-Fatah in the battle over Khalasah (Twitter, June 18, 2016)

Use of chemical weapons in the rural area east of Damascus

- According to a report by the Syrian regime, “terrorist groups” **attacked a Syrian Army position with chemical weapons** in the rural area east of Damascus (eastern Ghouta). The attack was carried out on June 16, 2016. It is not clear which organization the report refers to (ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front, or another rebel organization).
- According to a Syrian News Agency report, the chemical weapons that were used affect the nervous system and some Syrian soldiers suffered from suffocation and breathing difficulties. A video that was released shows Syrian soldiers wearing oxygen masks and choking. According to the Syrian regime, “terrorist organizations” attacked the Syrian Army in the past with toxic gases such as sarin. According to the regime, raw materials for the production of sarin gas have been smuggled from Turkey to “terrorist organizations” in Syria (SANA News Agency, June 16, 2016).



Right: Syrian soldier injured by chemical weapons wearing an oxygen mask. Left: Syrian soldier injured by chemical weapons (SANA News Agency, June 16, 2016)

Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (www.nationsonline.org)

The campaign to take over the city of Fallujah (Updated to June 22, 2016)

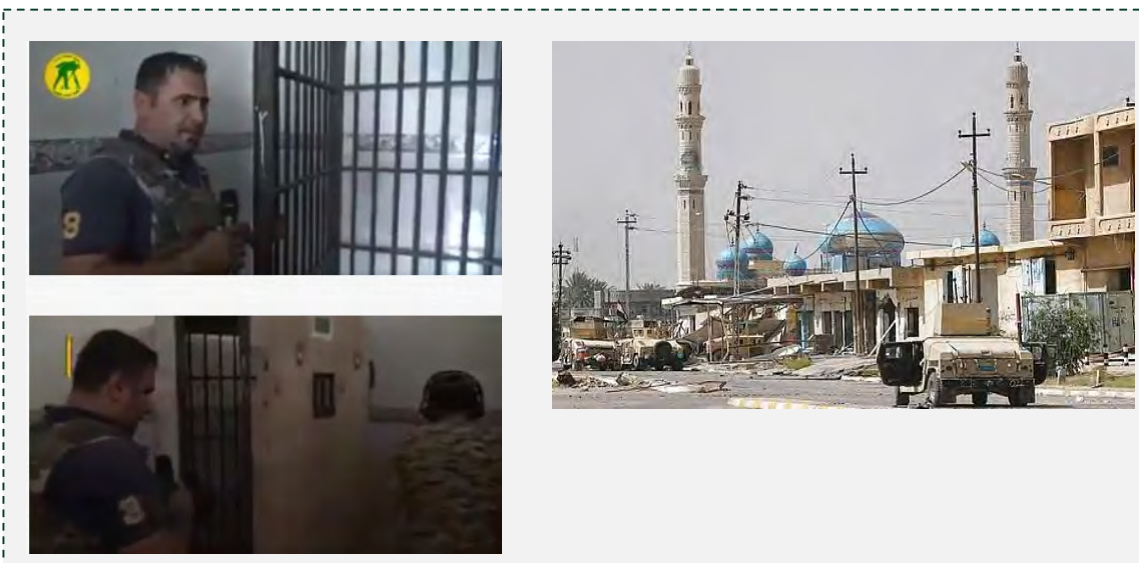
■ **The Iraqi security forces continued their advance towards the Fallujah city center.** After around four weeks of fighting, the headquarters of the operation for the liberation of Fallujah announced the **takeover of the Nazal neighborhood in the city center** (Al-Mayadeen, June 17, 2016). On June 17, 2016, after intensive fighting, **the Iraqi Army reportedly managed to take over the city center and government buildings and to hoist the Iraqi flag over them.** According to **Abdel Wahab al-Saadi**, commander of the headquarters of the operation for the liberation of Fallujah, the largest concentration of ISIS operatives **is now in the Julan neighborhood, in the north of the city** (Sky News, June 17, 2016).

■ Following the takeover of central Fallujah, **Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi** announced that the Iraqi security forces were close to completing the takeover of the city. According to him, only small “pockets of presence” of ISIS operatives remain in the city (AP, June 17, 2016). From past experience, **we know that cleansing the “pockets of presence” of ISIS in the city and its environs is liable to take a long time, in view of ISIS’s skill in guerrilla warfare and the symbolic significance of Fallujah for ISIS.**

■ According to **US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter**, it is still too early to determine whether the Iraqi forces control the whole city and fighting still continues there. It seems that despite the **declarations, the city’s northern neighborhoods are still controlled by ISIS, and the fighting continues in other neighborhoods** (Bloomberg, June 17, 2016).



Right: Iraqi Army soldiers in the Fallujah city center holding an ISIS flag (Al-Ghad TV, June 18, 2016). Left: Iraqi Army soldiers in the Fallujah city center (Shabakat al-I'lam al-Iraqi, June 17, 2016)

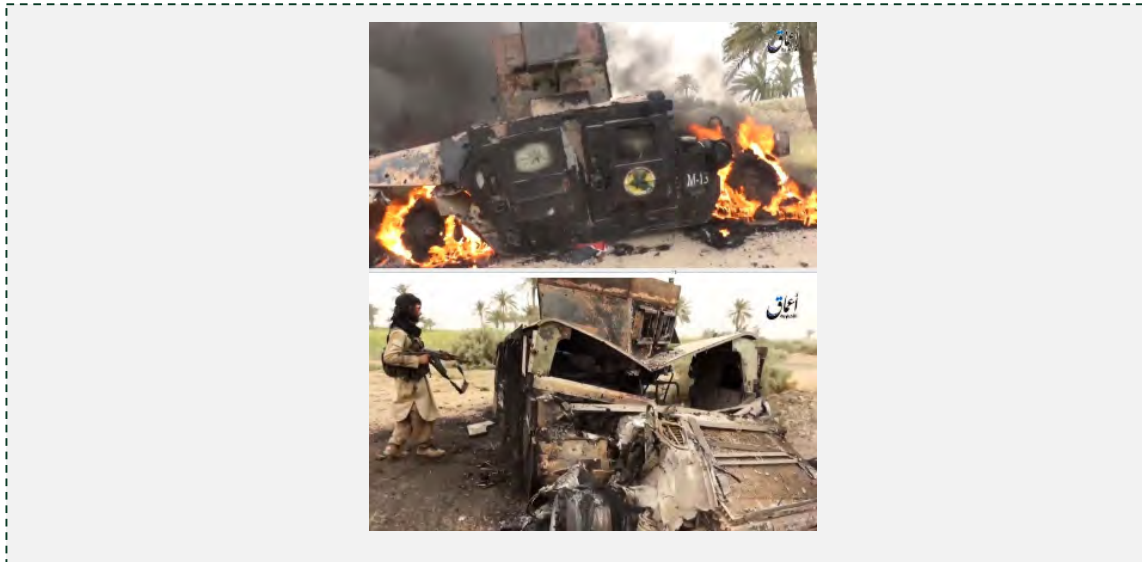


Right: Iraqi Army soldiers in the Fallujah city center (Shabakat al-I'lam al-Iraqi, June 18, 2016).
Left: ISIS prison taken over by the Iraqi forces (Al-Sumaria, June 19, 2016)

Fighting in other areas

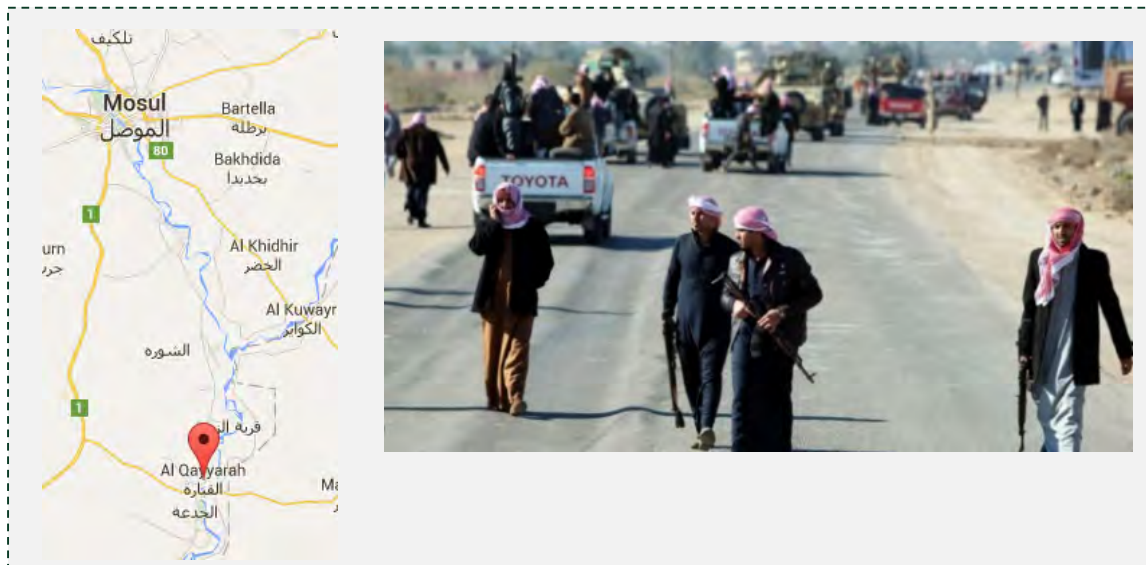
■ Concurrently with the battle over Fallujah, fighting continues in other areas, including:

- **In and around the city of Ramadi**, which was liberated by the Iraqi Army, ISIS continues to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Iraqi forces. This week, ISIS hit Iraqi Army vehicles in northern Ramadi with IEDs (Amaq, June 18, 2016).



Iraqi Army vehicles damaged by IEDs in northern Ramadi (Amaq, June 19, 2016)

- **Nineveh Province:** According to Iraqi Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi, the Iraqi Army has launched a campaign for the liberation of **the town of Qayyarah**, an ISIS stronghold south of Mosul. The Iraqi security forces are liberating the town and its surroundings with the support of around 700 local tribesmen (Al-Sumaria, 19-June 18, 2016).



Right: Tribesmen fighting alongside the Iraqi government against ISIS in the area of Qayyarah (Al-Sumaria, June 19, 2016). Left: The town of Qayyarah, located about 60 km south of the city of Mosul (Google Maps).

The Sinai Peninsula

- The information office of ISIS's Al-Raqqah Province released a video entitled "The Foothold of the Conquerors." The video shows an ISIS operative calling on the residents of Egypt not to be misled by "El-Sisi the Devil," who is collaborating with the Jews and the Saudis against the jihad fighters in Sinai and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The operative calls on the residents of Egypt to abandon democracy and fight in the the way of Allah and jihad against the “devils and tyrants in Egypt.” The speaker congratulates ISIS’s Egyptian Province on its actions and encourages it to continue the battle (Isdarat, June 17, 2016).

Palestinians and Israeli Arabs

- **The Ibn Taymiyyah Media Center**, which is affiliated with Salafist elements in the Gaza Strip, released a video as part of a **campaign entitled “Equip us.”** The video shows a man codenamed **Abu al-Muhtasib al-Maqdisi the Engineer** speaking about the obligation of jihad and the possibility of **participating in it through financial contributions**. The speaker says that jihad through financial assistance is essential because the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (a Salafist-jihadi group in the Gaza Strip) **is greatly in need of funds to purchase weapons**. According to him, the lack of means and shortage of funds are preventing jihad fighters from carrying out dozens of attacks against the Jews, the enemies of Allah (Haqq, June 15, 2016).

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

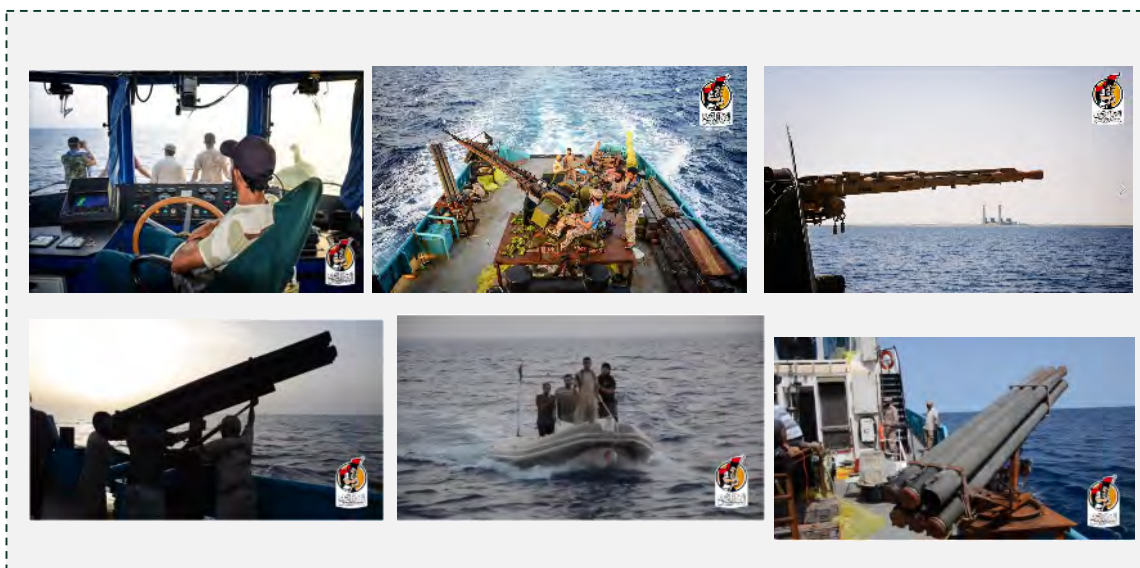
The campaign over Sirte

- Forces loyal to the Libyan Government of National Accord **entered the city of Sirte this week**. There were fierce battles in the Sirte city center and some of the city’s neighborhoods. **According to a spokesman for the Government of National Accord, the forces are now near the city center** (updated June 21 2016).

- According to an announcement by **Rida Issa**, spokesman for the forces of the Government of National Accord, the attacking forces were successful in the battles that took place on June 21, 2016. According to him, the forces control Neighborhood 700, south of the city center. In these battles, 16 soldiers of the attacking forces were killed and 60 were wounded (Reuters, June 21, 2016). According to sources in the Government of National Accord, dozens of ISIS operatives have been killed in the past 24 hours.

- On June 16, 2016, ISIS’s media foundation released a video allegedly indicating that the **Port of Sirte** was controlled by Islamic State operatives. The information center of the operation released its own video showing the Port of Sirte under the control of its forces. It appears that both sides are actually still having difficulty

establishing their control over the port due to the intense exchanges of fire taking place there and in the surrounding area. However, the Libyan Coast Guard apparently controls the area off the coast of Sirte and is preventing the arrival of reinforcements for the ISIS operatives trapped in the city.



Photos documenting the Coast Guard's activity off the coast of Sirte (Facebook page of the information center of the campaign over Sirte, June 19, 2016)

- ISIS, on its part, continues its intensive fighting in Sirte's western neighborhoods and neighborhoods near the city center. At the same time, its operatives are carrying out suicide bombing attacks against the attacking forces in and around the city of Sirte. According to reports by AFP, since June 12, 2016, ISIS operatives have carried out eight suicide bombing attacks in Sirte against the attacking forces. ISIS's Tripoli province claimed responsibility for some of the suicide bombing attacks.

- Along with the fighting on the ground, **propaganda warfare** is also being waged between ISIS-affiliated media and the information center of the campaign over Sirte. This week, the information center **introduced radio broadcasts in Sirte and its environs at the same frequency as ISIS's local station** (Facebook page of the information center of the campaign over Sirte, June 19, 2016).

The battle for hearts and minds

ISIS is threatening further attacks in the US

- In a video produced by the ISIS-affiliated Asawirti Media and released on June 15, 2016, titled **The Heavy Bill: America Pays the Price, ISIS threatens to carry out further attacks against the United States**. The video shows the terrorist who carried out the attack in Orlando, with a song praising jihad playing in the background. At the

end of the video there is a caption: “**Omar Mateen, Allah will receive him [as a **shahid in Paradise**], he did not stand on the sidelines looking at his brothers who are burned every day by the American Crusader planes. He made a resolute decision and placed his trust in Allah and carried out a martyrdom operation among the American Crusaders. He responded in kind [...]**” Then another caption appears, that reads “**Oh Crusaders, what awaits you will be harder and more bitter**” (YouTube, June 15, 2016).



From the video showing the terrorist who carried out the attack in Orlando with the caption: “The Heavy Bill: America Pays the Price” (YouTube, June 15, 2016)

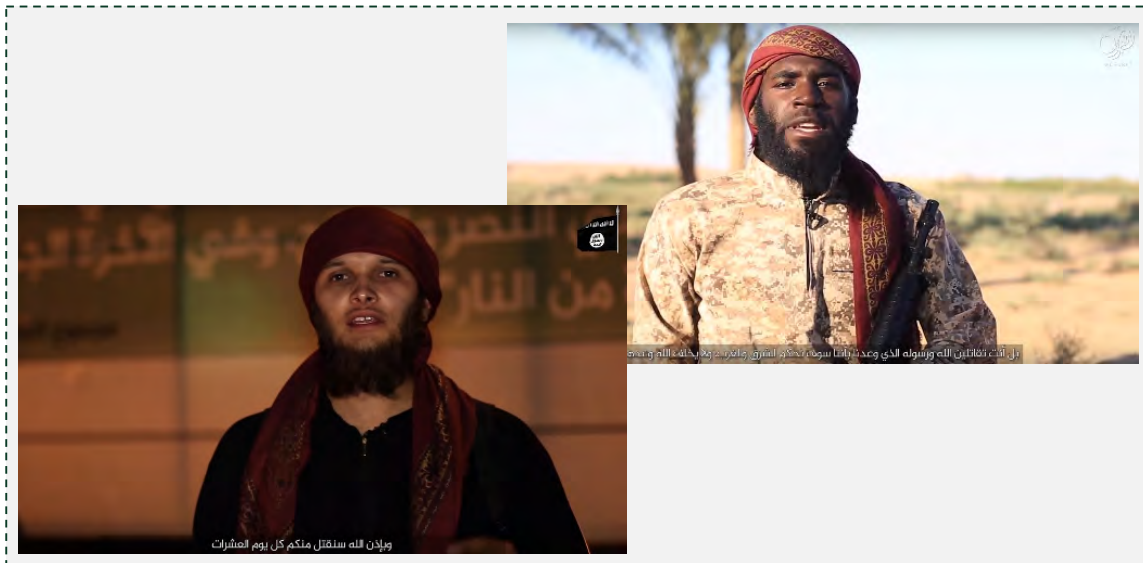
ISIS calls on Muslims to carry out attacks against its enemies around the world

■ In the wake of the deadly mass attack in Orlando, **ISIS’s propaganda machine is calling on Muslims around the world to carry out attacks against the enemies of ISIS, especially the United States and other Western countries.** To this end, ISIS has released videos and posters threatening the United States and other Western countries. One of the posters reads: “Today in Florida, tomorrow in Berlin.” Another poster: “California, there will be battles in your home.”

■ **ISIS’s Euphrates Province** released a video showing foreign fighters threatening Western countries, Russia, and Muslim countries (Haqq, June 19, 2016):

- One of the speakers, codenamed **Abu Ismail the American, who speaks fluent English with an American accent**, says: “America, you are at war with all the Muslims throughout the world who seek to restore the glory of Islam.” According to him, this glory will be restored by defeating and humiliating the US forces.

- A **Russian-speaking operative** codenamed **Abd al-Rahman the Russian** threatens Russia: “Allah willing, we will kill dozens of you every day.” He calls on Muslims in Russia and in the “heretic countries” to help the Islamic State and kill the Crusaders (i.e., the Christians) “wherever you encounter them.”
- An Indonesian-speaking operative, codenamed **Abu Nusaybah the Indonesian**, calls for the killing of Americans on Indonesian soil. Another operative, codenamed **Abu al-Zubayr the Uzbek**, notes that the US and Russia are the “heads of the infidels” and adds, “Allah willing, we will kill you in your homes.” A French-speaker calls for the killing of “the infidels” in their homes the way ISIS operatives did in France and the United States.



Right: Abu Ismail the American: “America, you are at war with all the Muslims throughout the world who seek to restore the glory of Islam.” Left: A Russian-speaking operative threatens: “Allah willing, we will kill dozens of you every day.” (Haqq, June 19, 2016)



Indonesian-speaking operative codenamed Abu Nusaybah the Indonesian calling for the killing of Americans on Indonesian soil (Haqq, June 19, 2016)

- In the ITIC's assessment, ISIS's campaign and the considerable attention that the recent terrorist attacks in the United States and France have received **are liable to have practical effects**. This is because jihad operatives in the West and elsewhere around the world are liable to carry out attacks on their own initiative inspired by ISIS's campaign.