



## Spotlight on Global Jihad (August 4-10, 2016)



### Main events of the week

- The main event of the week was the successful **lifting of the siege on the city of Aleppo** by the rebel organizations with which the Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) collaborates. The rebel organizations took over one of the neighborhoods south of the city, opened a corridor to the besieged neighborhoods in eastern Aleppo, and connected with the besieged rebel organizations. However, the achievements of the rebel organizations are still unstable, and the fighting continues south of Aleppo.
- **The Kurdish-Arab Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are gradually completing the takeover of the city of Manbij**, west of the Euphrates River, near the Turkish border. Most of the city has apparently been taken over, but there remain a few pockets of resistance of ISIS operatives. The takeover of Manbij, located on the route leading to the Syrian-Turkish border, will cut the logistical connection between ISIS in Syria and Iraq and the outside world, and will jeopardize ISIS's other strongholds located west of the Euphrates River, near the Turkish border (the cities of Jarabulus, Al-Bab and Al-Ra'i).

### The US-led campaign against ISIS

- During the week, the US-led coalition continued its intensive airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, most of the airstrikes were concentrated mainly in and around the city of Manbij, where the SDF managed to take over most of the city's neighborhoods (see below). Airstrikes were also carried out in the areas of Al-Raqqah and Deir al-Zor. In Iraq, the airstrikes were concentrated mainly in the areas of Erbil and Mosul. In Libya as well, US airstrikes against ISIS targets in and around the city of Sirte continued (US Department of Defense website).
- Speaking at a press conference, **US President Barack Obama** noted that the United States had carried out more than 14,000 airstrikes against ISIS targets to date. He expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the campaign against ISIS, but stressed that ISIS still had the ability to carry out terrorist attacks. He noted that ISIS's

losses in Iraq and Syria were actually motivating it to place greater emphasis on terrorist attacks outside Iraq and Syria, including the United States. According to Obama, it is impossible to subdue the terrorist organizations using military force and therefore efforts must be made to stabilize the region (CNBC, August 4, 2016).

## Main developments in Syria



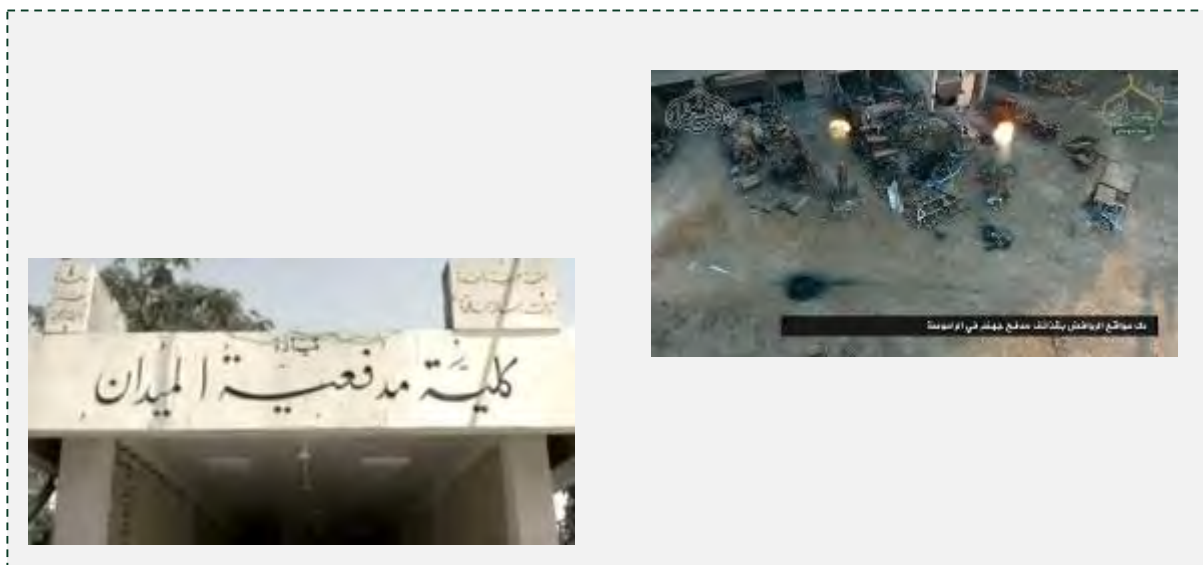
Map of Syria ([www.nationsonline.org](http://www.nationsonline.org))

■ **This week, the rebel organizations managed to lift the siege on the city of Aleppo**, where there still are around 300,000 residents. The siege was lifted at the end of an attack which lasted about a week, in which **the Fateh al-Sham Front** (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) also participated. The rebel organizations managed to **take over the Al-Ramousah neighborhood, in southern Aleppo**, and from there they connected with the rebel organizations **besieged in the east of the city**. However, the corridor created by the rebel organizations between the southern rural area of Aleppo and the east of the city **is still unstable** and both sides are **preparing to continue fighting**.

■ On August 6, 2016, a week after the beginning of the campaign to lift the siege on Aleppo, **the rebels announced that they had managed to take over the Al-**

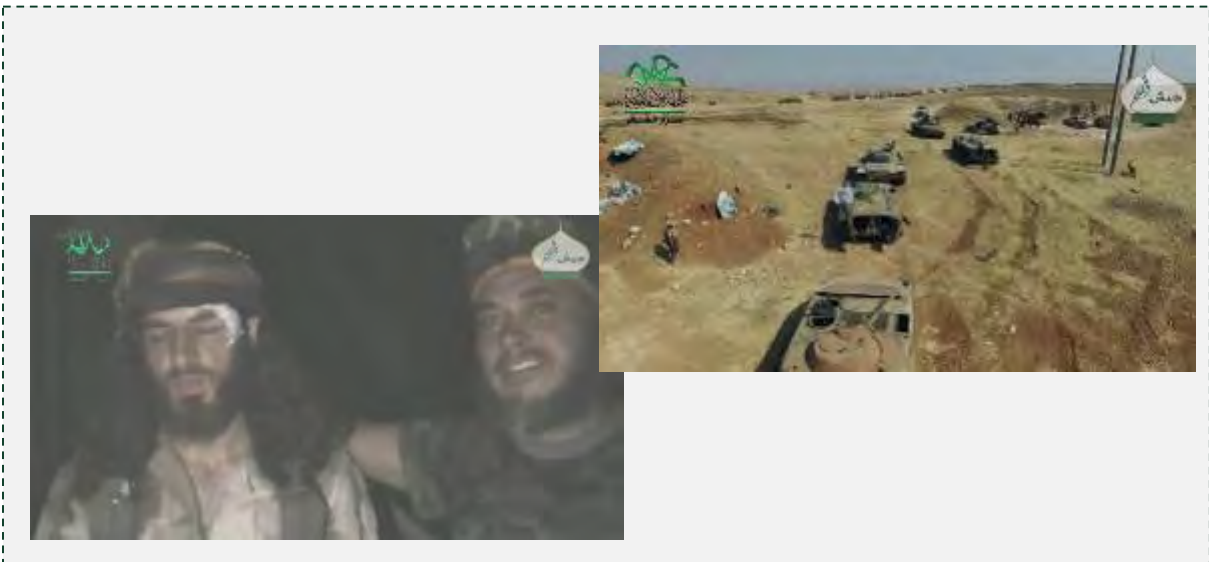
**Ramousah neighborhood.** This neighborhood is located in southern Aleppo and contains important Syrian Army bases (Halab al-Youm, August 6, 2016). The takeover of the Al-Ramousah neighborhood **enabled the forces opposed to the Syrian regime to open a corridor to the besieged Aleppo neighborhoods and connect with the rebel organizations besieged in the east of the city. It also made it possible for the rebel organizations to deliver supplies to the besieged neighborhoods.**

■ However, it seems that they have not been able to achieve a safe corridor between the areas under their control and the eastern part of the city. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), **the fighting in the region continues.** The Syrian Air Force and Russian aircraft assist the Syrian ground forces in an attempt to prevent the rebel forces from stabilizing their achievements. The fighting continues in the Al-Ramousah neighborhood area and in the rural area south of Aleppo.



**Right: Jaysh al-Fatah operatives launching mortar shells at Syrian Army forces in the Al-Ramousah neighborhood in the southern part of the city (Twitter, August 7, 2016). Left: The entrance sign to the headquarters of the Syrian Army's Military Academy of Artillery in the Al-Ramousah neighborhood (Twitter, August 5, 2016)**

■ The war room of the rebel framework named Fatah Halab (“the Aleppo Victory”) announced that **the fighting would continue until the rebels take over the entire city.** The announcement also calls on all those fighting alongside the Syrian regime to surrender. **Abu Mohammad al-Julani, the leader of the Fateh al-Sham Front,** an organization that plays an important role in the campaign, published an announcement praising the victories and stressing the importance of the Aleppo campaign (August 5, 2016). **The two sides are reportedly concentrating operatives and equipment in preparation for another round in the campaign over the city (SOHR, August 8, 2016).**

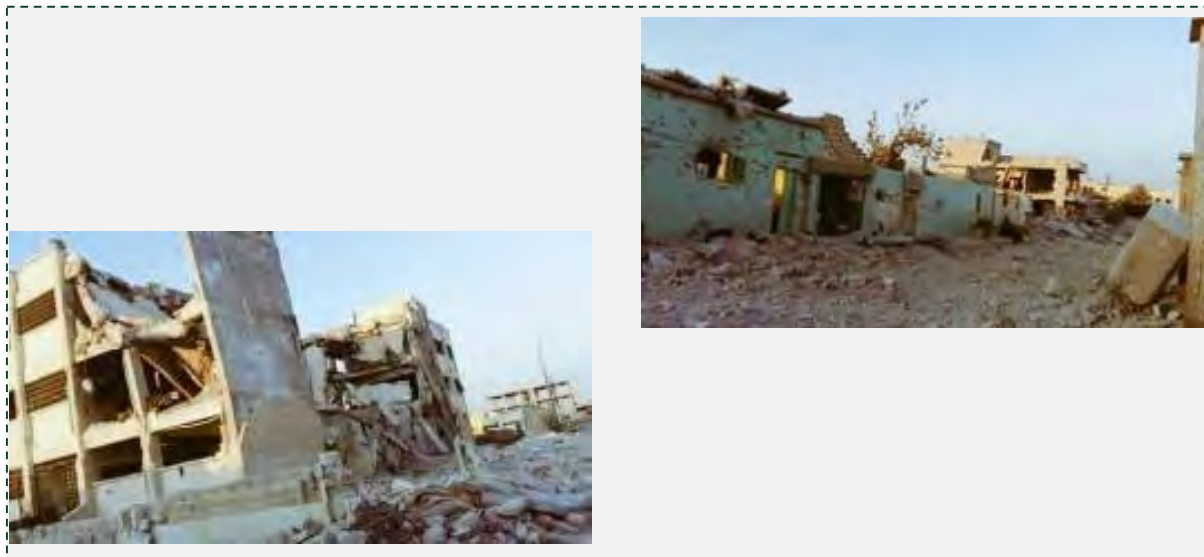


Right: Jaysh al-Fatah APCs and tanks before leaving for the campaign to lift the siege on the city of Aleppo. Left: Photo from a video showing Jaysh al-Fatah operatives meeting with operatives of the rebel organizations who had been besieged in the city of Aleppo (Twitter; YouTube, August 7, 2016)

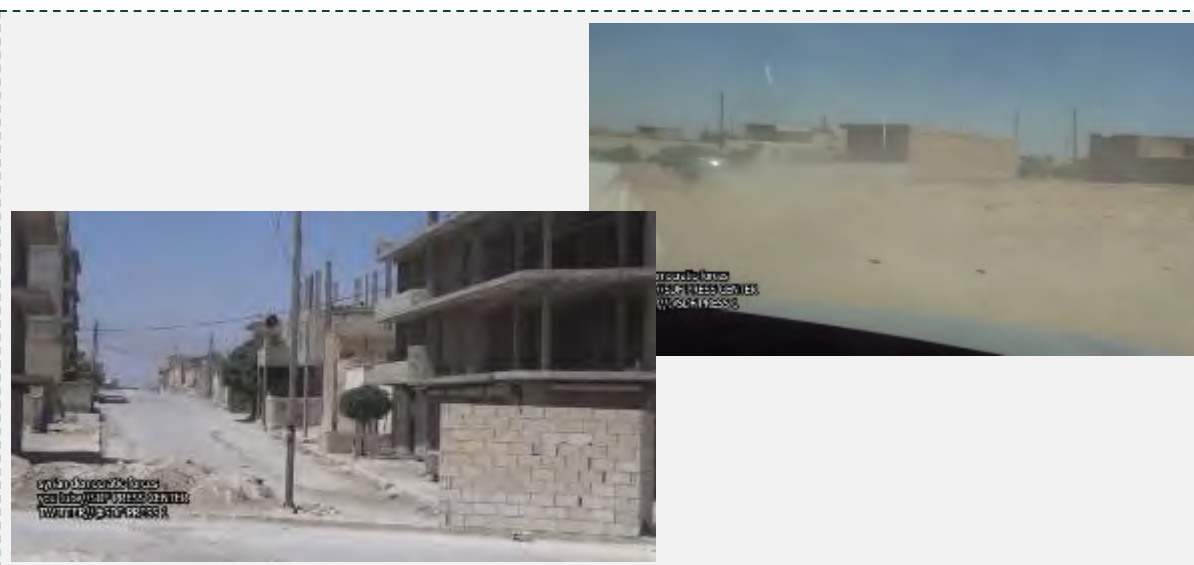
## The battle for the city of Manbij

- In the city of Manbij, the fighting between ISIS operatives and the SDF continued, so far for nearly three months. **According to a report from August 6, 2016, the SDF troops were able to gain almost complete control of the city and to cleanse most of the city from the presence of ISIS operatives** (Al-Arabiya, August 6, 2016).
- According to **Sharfan Darwish**, spokesman for the military council of the SDF, **his forces now control about 90% of the area of the city but the fighting in the city is still ongoing** (AFP, August 6, 2016). According to **Adnan Abu Amjad**, commander of the forces fighting in Manbij, **small groups of ISIS operatives still remain in the city** and are surrounded by the SDF, whose forces continue to advance steadily to the city center. According to him, the main obstacle now is ISIS's use of civilians as human shields (middleeasteye.net, August 6, 2016)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the implications of the takeover of Manbij, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from June 22, 2016: "Offensive against the Syrian City of Manbij May Be the Beginning of a Campaign to Liberate the Area near the Syrian-Turkish Border from ISIS."



Photos published by ISIS showing the damage caused in Manbij by coalition airstrikes (Haqq, August 6, 2016)



The Al-Ghassaniyah neighborhood, northeast of the Manbij city center, which was taken over by the SDF (Facebook page of the Syrian Democratic Forces, August 6, 2016)

## Additional incidents

- Fighting continued in other areas in Syria, although the intensity was relatively low.

Noteworthy examples:

- **The area of Palmyra:** On August 7, 2016, ISIS's Homs Province announced that 23 Syrian Army soldiers had been killed by ISIS operatives east of Palmyra (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 7, 2016). According to the Russian Defense Ministry, six long-range bombers from Russia attacked ISIS targets east and north of Palmyra. According to the announcement, the airstrike destroyed an ISIS headquarters and major military camp, underground armories, and vehicles, among other things (Sputnik, August 8, 2016).

- **The area of Daraa:** A number of people were reportedly killed as a result of an attack by the Syrian Army forces against concentrations of Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) operatives in Daraa (Damascus al-Aan, August 4, 2016). According to a report from August 8, 2016, the Fateh al-Sham Front operatives evacuated most of their outposts west of Daraa (SOHR, August 8, 2016).

## Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq ([www.nationsonline.org](http://www.nationsonline.org))

### ISIS's terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare continue

- ISIS continues its terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare against the Shiites, the Iraqi security forces, and the Iraqi government:
  - **August 7, 2016:** A suicide bombing attack was carried out in a village **south of Mosul**. Eleven people were killed, including six soldiers. The terrorist attack

was carried out by suicide bombers, who blew themselves using explosive belts (Anatolia News Agency, August 7, 2016).

- **August 6, 2016:** According to an Iraqi Army commander, **ISIS operatives executed at least 85 civilians, including women and children, at a military base in the suburbs of the city of Hawija (southeast of Kirkuk).** The civilians who were executed are among the approximately 3,000 people who were abducted by ISIS while fleeing to Hawija a few days ago (Press TV, August 6, 2016).
- **August 4, 2016:** ISIS operatives carried out a suicide bombing attack against a Shiite militia headquarters in the area of **Al-Sadd al-Azim** (“the huge dam”) of **Diyala (about 75 km east of Tikrit).** According to ISIS, about 170 militia members were killed and wounded (Haqq, August 6, 2016).
- **August 3, 2016:** Twenty-six Iraqi Army soldiers were reportedly killed in an attack by ISIS in **western Al-Anbar** (Al-Jazeera, August 3, 2016).
- **August 3, 2016:** Four people were killed and 11 others were wounded in an IED explosion against a convoy of Shiite militias in southern Baghdad (Anatolia, August 3, 2016).

■ According to the Iraqi Army, its forces carried out a large-scale security operation north of Baghdad, aimed at strengthening security in the city. Thirty houses used by ISIS were destroyed in the operation, many suicide bombers were killed and large quantities of weapons and equipment were seized (Al-Sumaria, August 8, 2016).

## The area of Qayyarah

■ The Iraqi Army continues to fight in **the town of Qayyarah and its environs**, about 60 km south of Mosul, **which is perceived as a launching point for a future takeover of the city of Mosul.** This week, fighting continued in the area of the military airbase near Qayyarah. On August 8, 2016, a senior Iraqi security source reported that the Iraqi Army had repelled a massive attack by ISIS against the Iraqi security forces in the area (Shafaq News, August 8, 2016). On August 7, 2016, 11 Iraqi soldiers were killed in an ISIS suicide bombing attack in Qayyarah (CNN, August 7, 2016).



Photos from a video released by ISIS documenting mortar shell fire at the Iraqi Army south of Qayyarah (Haqq, August 7, 2016)

## The takeover of the Al-Walid border crossing

- According to a report from this week, **the Iraqi Army has taken over the Al-Walid border crossing between Syria and Iraq from the hands of ISIS**. Iraqi soldiers neutralized several car bombs left by ISIS. The Iraqi Army began to deploy its forces along the border in the area between the Al-Walid crossing and the Al-Tarbil crossing between Iraq and Jordan (Fallujah TV, August 3, 2016; YouTube, August 6, 2016).



The Al-Walid border crossing between Iraq and Syria and the Tarbil border crossing between Iraq and Jordan (Google Maps).



■ On May 17, 2016, the Iraqi Army liberated the city of Rutba, near the Iraq-Syria-Jordan tri-border area, from the hands of ISIS. The Iraqi Army subsequently took over the Rutba-Tarbil highway (Tarbil is a small town with a border crossing between Iraq and Jordan). **Now the Iraqi Army has apparently completed its takeover of the area between the city of Rutba and the Al-Walid border crossing** (the Syrian side of the crossing was taken over in May 2016 by a group of rebel organizations called the New Syrian Army, which is supported by the US and the West).



Right: Iraqi Army soldiers at the Al-Walid crossing neutralizing one of the car bombs left by ISIS.  
Left: Iraqi Army soldiers at the Al-Walid crossing (YouTube, August 6, 2016)

## The Sinai Peninsula

### The killing of the commander of ISIS's Sinai Province

■ According to an announcement by the Egyptian Army, **Abu Duaa al-Ansari, commander of ISIS's Sinai Province, was killed in an Egyptian attack in the area of Al-Arish along with some of his senior aides.** According to the announcement, acting on preliminary information, a counterterrorism unit, with the assistance of the Egyptian Air Force, attacked strongholds of ISIS's Sinai Province **and managed to hit the commander and some of his aides.** The attack also blew up arsenals and ammunition (Facebook page of the Egyptian Armed Forces, August 4, 2016).



The Egyptian Army spokesman announcement on the killing of the leader of ISIS's Sinai Province and several of his aides (Official Facebook page of the Egyptian Army spokesman, August 4, 2016)

- According to Egyptian sources, **Abu Duaa al-Ansari's** real name is **Mohammad Freij Ziada**. According to these sources, Mohammad Freij Ziada is the brother of the organization's founder, **Tawfiq Freij Ziada**, who was killed around two years ago (Al-Bawaba, August 6, 2016). **ISIS's media foundations have not yet mentioned the killing of Abu Duaa al-Ansari and several of his aides.**



Mohammad Freij Ziada (right), who was killed in an Egyptian Army airstrike. Left: Tawfiq Freij Ziada, who was killed around two years ago (Nilenet, August 7, 2016)

## The global jihad in other countries

### Libya

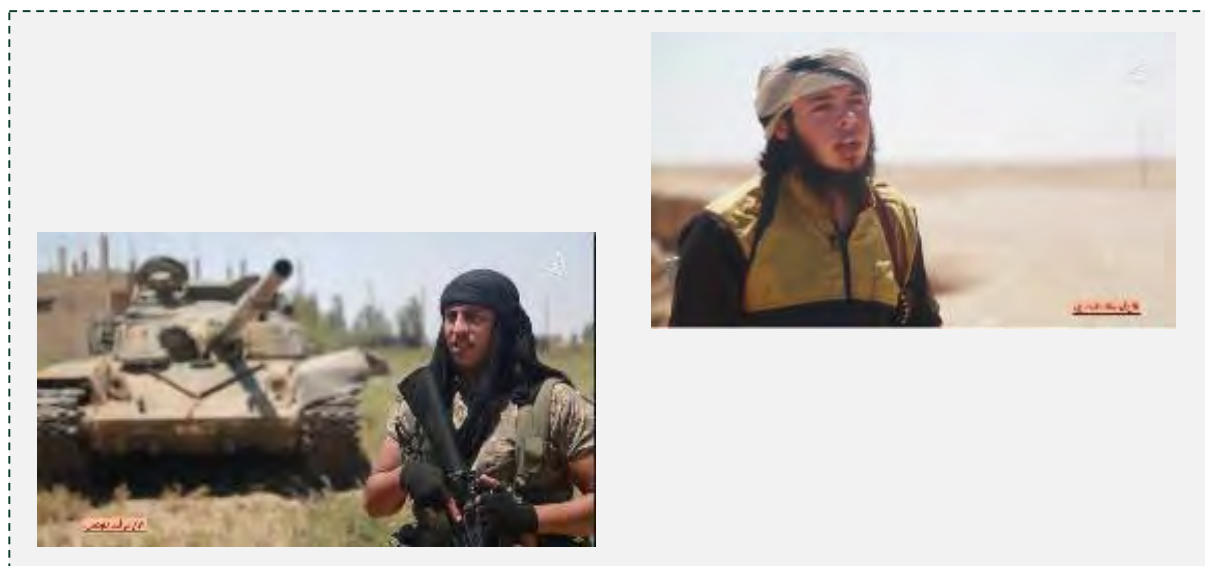
#### The Sirte campaign

- The campaign to take over the city of Sirte, which began in late May 2016, **continues**. The operations room of the forces loyal to the Libyan Government of

National Accord announced that final preparations were being made for decisive battles to cleanse Sirte from the presence of ISIS (Facebook page of the information center of the campaign over Sirte, August 6, 2016; Al-Wasat Portal, August 6, 2016).

■ **US planes continued to attack ISIS targets in the city of Sirte.** Between August 1 and August 4, 2016, eleven airstrikes were carried out. Four more airstrikes were carried out on August 6, 2016. The Chairman of the Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord made it clear that the American airstrikes would be limited to Sirte and would be carried out within a defined timeframe (AFRICOM website, August 5, 2016; Facebook page of the information center of the campaign over Sirte, August 6, 2016; CNN in Arabic, August 6, 2016).

■ A video released by ISIS expressed its distress signals regarding the situation of its operatives in Sirte. The media arm of the Deir al-Zor Province (*Wilayat al-Khayr*) released a video calling on ISIS operatives in Libya to endure and **place their trust in Allah**, who will ultimately grant them the victory. One of the speakers mentions that **shahada, i.e., martyrdom on behalf of Allah, is also considered a victory** (VIMEO file-sharing website, August 7, 2016).



Two speakers in the video on the situation in Libya released by ISIS. Right: Abu Malik al-Masri. Left: Abu Assad al-Tunisi (VIMEO file-sharing website, August 7, 2016)

## West Africa

■ The Islamic State announced **the appointment of a new commander of the West Africa Province** (established on the basis of the Boko Haram organization). The new commander is **Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi** and he was appointed in place of Abu Bakr Shekau (Reuters, August 3, 2016). Abu Bakr Shekau, former head of the Boko Haram

organization, pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in March 2015 and turned the organization into the West Africa Province of the Islamic State.

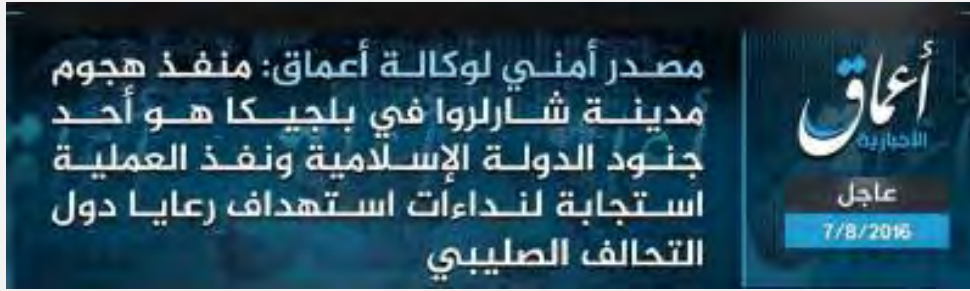
■ The announcement published in ISIS's Al-Naba magazine included an interview with the new commander. In the interview, Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi notes that **ISIS's West African Province is now concentrating on operations in the neighboring countries, because they declared war on it.** According to him, the Province is operating against churches and Christians ("Crusaders") due to the extensive missionary activity in the region. Furthermore, Al-Barnawi admitted that the West Africa Province recently lost some of the areas under its control and is attempting to retake them.

## Attacks inspired by ISIS

### Stabbing attack in Belgium

■ **On August 6, 2016, a stabbing attack was carried out using a machete near the police station in the city of Charleroi in Belgium.** Two female police officers were wounded in the attack. The attacker shouted "Allahu Akbar" while attacking with his machete. He was shot by police and died of his wounds in the hospital. The 33-year-old attacker, from Algeria, had been staying in Belgium illegally since 2012. He had a criminal record and was known to the authorities. The Belgian Prime Minister said that the incident was a terrorist incident and added that Belgium would increase its security measures around the country's police stations (Reuters, August 7, 2016).

■ **The Aamaq agency, ISIS's media foundation, announced that the attack in Charleroi, Belgium, was carried out by one of the "soldiers of the Islamic State."** According to the announcement, he carried out the attack in response to calls to hurt the nationals of the "Crusader coalition" (Aamaq, August 6, 2016). This version is compatible with earlier announcements released by ISIS following the ISIS-inspired attacks carried out in Western countries in recent months.



ISIS's announcement that one of its operatives carried out the attack in Charleroi, Belgium (Haqq, August 6, 2016).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Britain

■ The New York Times published an interview with a Briton named **Harry Sarfo who went to Syria a year ago to fight in the ranks of ISIS, along with a friend from Germany**. Harry Sarfo is now in jail in Bremen, Germany. According to him, upon their arrival in Syria, they were told that ISIS does not want more Europeans coming to Syria, but it needs them in their native countries to help carry out acts of terrorism, especially in Germany and Britain. The operative asked them to return to Germany because ISIS was planning a coordinated terrorist operation in Germany, France and Britain (The New York Times, August 3, 2016).