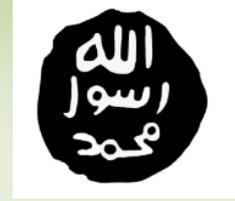




Spotlight on Global Jihad
(August 18-24, 2016)



Main events of the week

■ This week, the fighting in Syria was concentrated **in and around the city of Aleppo** and in the area **west of the Euphrates River, near the Syrian-Turkish border**. In this context:

- **In Aleppo**, the rebel organizations (led by the Fateh al-Sham Front) managed to fend off attacks by the Syrian Army and **maintain the logistical corridor in the south of the city**. Most of the fighting took place in the Al-Ramousah neighborhood, in southern Aleppo, and in the area dominating the road leading south from Aleppo. The fighting is still ongoing, with neither side having the upper hand.
- **In the area west of the Euphrates River, the collapse of ISIS's strongholds continues**: on August 24, a Turkish military force along with rebel forces captured the city of Jarabulus, near the Syrian-Turkish border. The city was captured in an operation that the Turks call **Euphrates Shield**, without significant ISIS resistance. In addition, the Free Syrian Army took over the city of **Al-Ra'i**, an ISIS stronghold north of Aleppo, and its forces are also threatening **the city of Al-Bab**, south of Al-Ra'i (Note: This paragraph of the English version was added after the Hebrew version had already appeared. The paragraph is updated to the morning of August 25).

The US-led campaign against ISIS

■ During the week, the US-led coalition continued its airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria and Iraq, although the intensity was still relatively low compared to previous weeks. **In Syria**, the airstrikes were concentrated in and around the city of Marea, north of Aleppo. Airstrikes were also carried out in Deir al-Zor, Abu Kamal, and Al-Raqqa. **In Iraq**, the airstrikes were concentrated mainly in the areas of Erbil and Mosul. **In Libya**, US airstrikes against ISIS targets in the city of Sirte continued, as support for the forces of the Government of National Accord fighting in the city (US Department of Defense website).

■ **Lt. Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, the new commander of the campaign waged by the United States and the coalition against ISIS**, estimated that the forces supported by the United States in Syria and Iraq were **ready for the “decisive battle” against ISIS in Mosul in Iraq and Al-Raqqah in Syria**. According to Lt. Gen. Townsend, the US would help local forces by significantly increasing the airstrikes as well by training and equipping the local forces. However, he stressed that **the US assistance would not include expanding the involvement of US Army on the ground** (The Washington Post, August 21, 2016). At this point, **this statement appears to be overoptimistic, and in the ITIC’s assessment, the “decisive battle” is not expected to take place in the near future.**

Coordination of airstrikes between US and Russia

■ The US Department of Defense warned Syria and Russia after airstrikes against the Kurds carried out by the Syrian Air Force in the area of Al-Hasakah endangered US forces. **According to US Department of State spokesman Jeff Davis**, US-led coalition aircraft circled above the city of Al-Hasakah after Syrian aircraft had attacked Kurdish targets near bases of the US Special Forces deployed in the area (Fox News, August 19, 2016).

■ During a press conference during his visit to Kenya, **US Secretary of State John Kerry expressed the hope that the talks between Russia and the United States regarding operational cooperation in Syria against ISIS would soon come to an end**. According to him, it is possible that there will soon be a meeting on this matter between him and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov (Reuters, August 22, 2016).

Russia’s involvement in the fighting

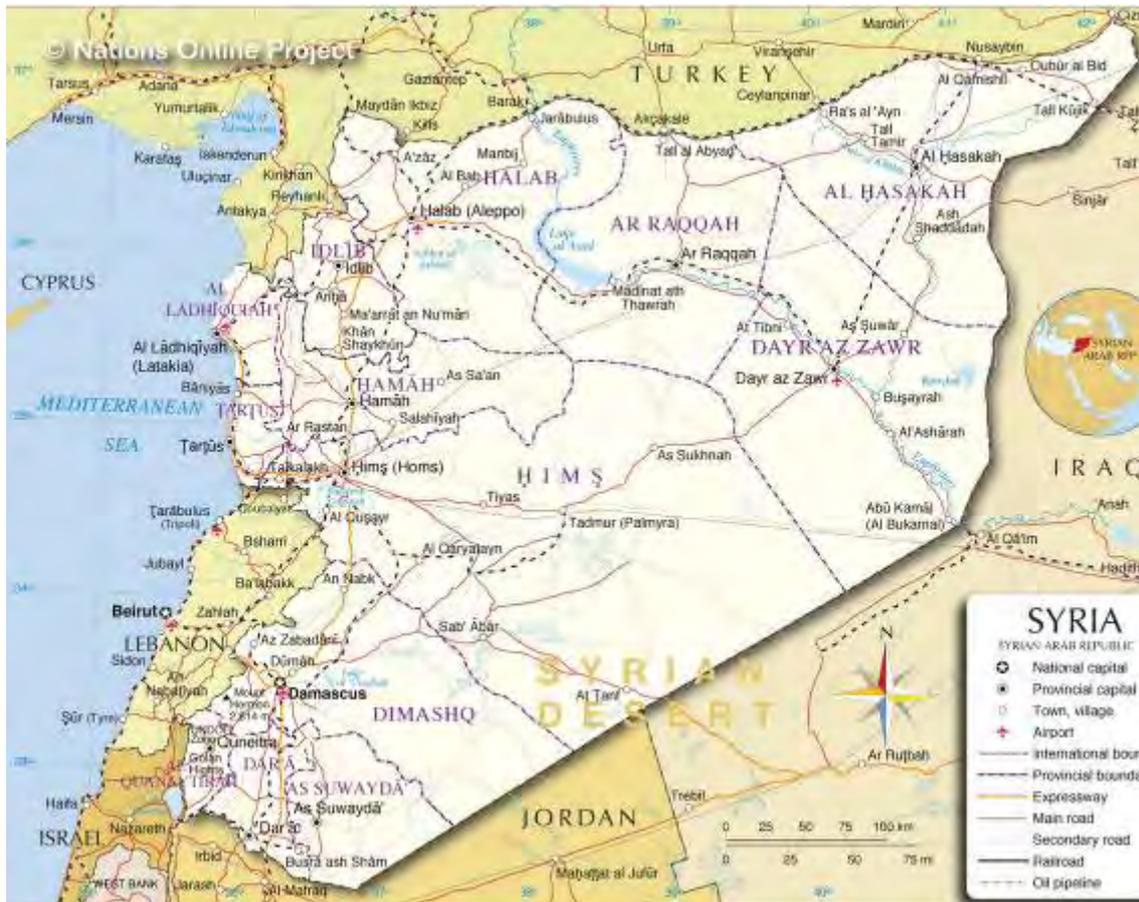
Airstrikes in Syria

■ On August 18, 2016, Russian aircraft attacked **ISIS targets** in Deir al-Zor using long-range missiles. The attack reportedly destroyed five arsenals, six headquarters and a number of armored vehicles. ISIS operatives were also hit. Russia’s Defense Ministry reported that on August 19, 2016, Russian warships stationed in the Mediterranean launched three cruise missiles against **targets of the Fateh al-Sham Front** (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) **in the city of Aleppo**. This was the first launch of cruise missiles from ships located in the Mediterranean region (TASS, August 18, 2016).

■ **Iran has criticized Russia’s use of Hamadan Airport in western Iran to attack targets in Syria. Russian Defense Ministry Spokesman Igor Konashenkov**

announced in response that the Russian planes operating out of Iran had **completed their missions and returned to Russian territory**. He added that any further use of the airport by Russian aircraft would be based on agreements with Iran (TASS, August 22, 2016). Iran's Defense Ministry said that no agreement had been signed between Iran and Russia regarding the use of the airport and that **the cooperation between the two countries was temporary** (TASS, August 22, 2016).

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (www.nationsonline.org)

The Aleppo campaign

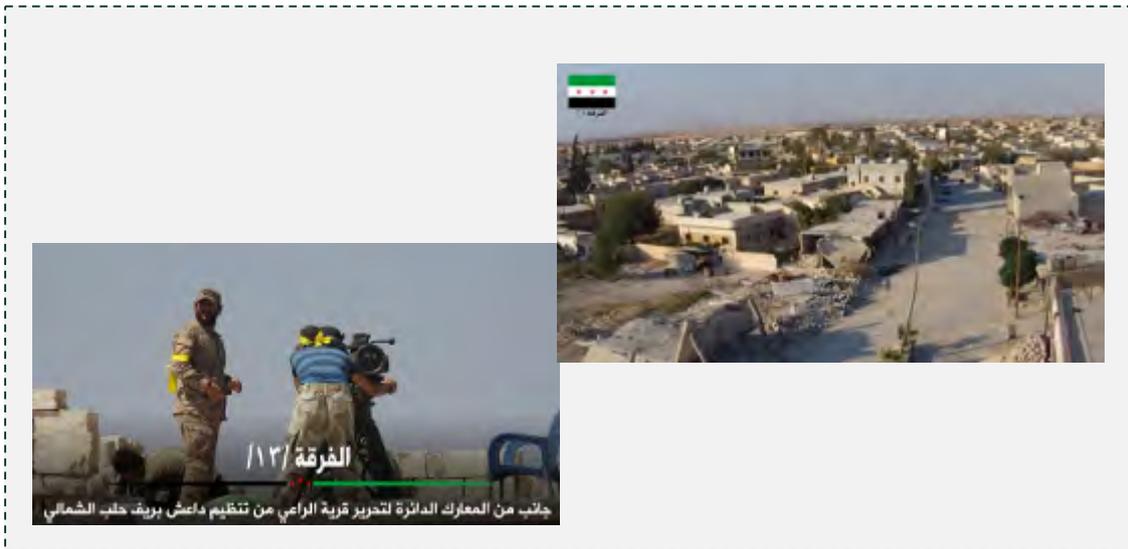
This week as well, **the rebel organizations managed to preserve the corridor south of Aleppo** used for communicating with the rebel organizations in the east of the city, **and to prevent the re-encirclement of the city**. The battles between the Syrian regime forces and the rebel forces led by the Fateh al-Sham Front **continued to focus on the south of the city**. According to the Fateh al-Sham Front's reports, in the current campaign in Aleppo, the Syrian Army and the forces that support it sustained 322 losses, including 70 officers of various ranks (Fateh al-Sham Front-affiliated Twitter account, August 20, 2016).

■ The battles between the rebel organizations and the Syrian Army and the forces supporting it **continued to focus on the Al-Ramousah neighborhood in southern Aleppo**. Fierce battles took place at **the Syrian Air Force's Technical School in the neighborhood**, which controls the traffic routes linking the city of Aleppo and the rural area to the south. The two sides are also trying **to take control of areas dominating the main road leading to the area of Khan Touman**, controlled by the rebel organizations.



Right: The area of the Syrian Air Force's Technical School from the south. Left: Fateh al-Sham Front operatives in the area of the Technical School (The Fateh al-Sham Front's YouTube Account, August 20, 2016)

■ **Northeast of Aleppo**, there were clashes between ISIS operatives and the Free Syrian Army. **The Free Syrian Army took over the city of Al-Ra'i from ISIS**. The city is located about 2 km south of the Syrian-Turkish border (YouTube account of the Sultan Murad Division, August 19, 2016). **This means the loss of another important ISIS stronghold and the weakening of its position in the area between the Euphrates River and Aleppo, near the Syrian-Turkish border.**



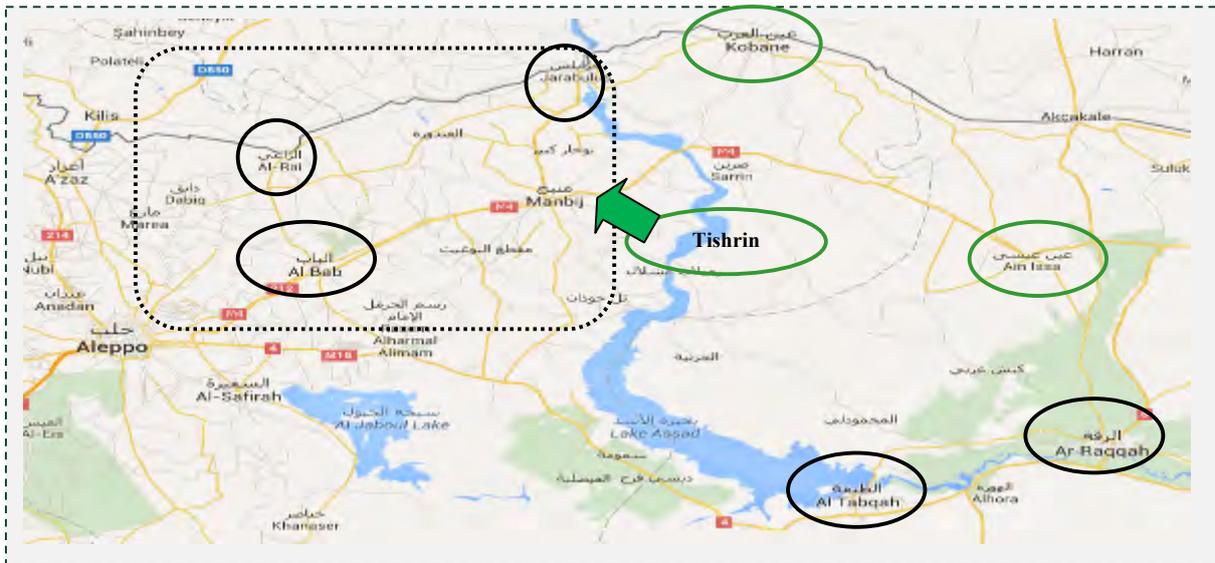
Right: The city of Al-Ra'i, near the Syrian-Turkish border. Left: Fighters from Division 13 of the rebel forces preparing to launch an anti-tank missile at ISIS operatives in the area of Al-Ra'i (Haqq, August 19, 2016)



A building in Al-Ra'i that housed the Islamic State's Sharia Institute (YouTube account of Division 13, August 19, 2016)

The area west of the Euphrates River

- After the takeover of Manbij, the SDF forces continue to cleanse the surrounding villages. They are reportedly advancing towards the city of Jarabulus, near the Syrian-Turkish border. Turkey, which fears the fall of the city to the predominantly Kurdish forces, is encouraging the Free Syrian Army, which has taken over Al-Ra'i, to take over Jarabulus.
- On August 24, a Turkish military force, along with rebel forces, captured the city of Jarabulus (Note: an analysis of the Turkish move will be published soon).



The campaign to take over ISIS strongholds west of the Euphrates River, along the Syrian-Turkish border: the city of Manbij was taken over by the predominantly Kurdish SDF. The city of Jarabulus was captured by the Turkish Army along with rebel forces. The city of Al-Ra'i has been taken over by the Free Syrian Army, and the city of Al-Bab is in the crosshairs of Turkey, the Free Syrian Army, and other rebel organizations.

■ As usual, ISIS responded with guerilla warfare and terrorist attacks: A suicide bomber named **Rami Musa Hamad**, aka **Abu Ahmad al-Ghazawi** (i.e., the **Gazan**), detonated a car bomb in an SDF staging zone southwest of Manbij. The blast reportedly killed about 30 soldiers (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 19, 2016). Another suicide bomber, codenamed **Khattab al-Tunisi** (i.e., the Tunisian), detonated a car bomb against an SDF staging zone southwest of Manbij (Haqq, August 19, 2016). **ISIS operatives blew up a water pipe on the outskirts of Manbij** (Local Coordinating Committees, August 22, 2016). According to the Amaq News Agency, ISIS's media foundation, a US soldier was killed near Manbij. The Central Command of the US Army denied the report.

Main developments in Iraq



Map of Iraq (www.nationsonline.org)

ISIS's terrorist activities and guerilla warfare continue

■ ISIS continues its intensive terrorism and guerrilla warfare against the Shiites, the Iraqi security forces, the Iraqi government, and residents perceived as opponents of ISIS in the various provinces of Iraq:

- **August 22, 2016** - Six people were killed and five others were wounded by a roadside IED planted by ISIS operatives **in the area of Hawija in the Kirkuk Province** in northern Iraq (Al-Arabiya TV, August 22, 2016).
- **August 21, 2016** - Iraqi police reported that a minor was caught while trying to carry out a suicide bombing attack with an explosive belt **in the city of Kirkuk**. During his interrogation he said that he came from Mosul, where he was kidnapped by a masked man who put the explosive belt on him and sent him to the area (Al-Arabiya, August 21, 2016).

- **August 21, 2016** - A policeman was killed and another wounded by an IED deployed against a patrol about 16 km **west of Ramadi** (Al-Sumaria, August 21, 2016).
- **August 20, 2016** - Five suicide bombers detonated five car bombs against the Iraqi Army south **and southwest of Al-Shirqat** (south of Mosul, west of Kirkuk). Dozens of soldiers were killed or wounded and a large quantity of military equipment was destroyed (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 20, 2016)



Right: Suicide bomber codenamed Abu Hamza al-Mosuli, who detonated a car bomb against the Iraqi Army south of Al-Shirqat. Left: The explosion of the car bomb driven by Abu Hamza al-Mosuli (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 20, 2016)

- **August 19, 2016** - ISIS operatives killed 14 Iraqi civilians **in the city of Mosul**, who were accused of providing information to the Iraqi forces. They were put into metal cages in the Mosul city center and drowned (Al-Bawaba, August 19, 2016).

The area of Qayyarah

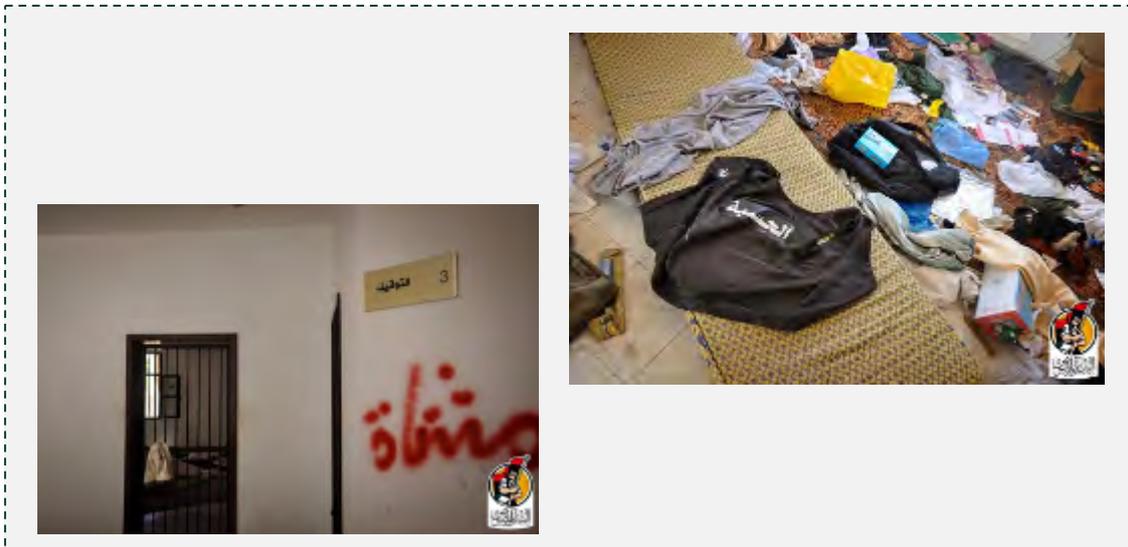
■ **According to a report by the Iraqi Army, it has managed to take over around 75% of the city of Qayyarah**, situated about 60 km south of Mosul. Many ISIS operatives were reportedly killed in the fighting. According to Iraqi Army sources, the Iraqi Army managed to take over the city center and ISIS operatives have withdrawn from there (Al-Jazeera, August 23, 2016). An ISIS suicide bomber blew himself up among the Iraqi forces in central Qayyarah (Al-Nashra, August 23, 2016). **The area of Qayyarah is perceived as a springboard for a future takeover of the city of Mosul, ISIS's stronghold in Iraq.**

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

The campaign for the liberation of Sirte

■ **During the week, the attempt to complete the takeover of the city of Sirte from ISIS continued.** Libyan Army forces fighting in Sirte continue to receive support from the US Air Force. The Libyan forces have advanced and took over a number of positions and neighborhoods from ISIS, including Neighborhood No. 1, situated in the heart of the region which still remains under the control of ISIS. The Libyan forces also took over the former Libyan homeland security headquarters, which had been used by ISIS as a prison, and the headquarters of ISIS's Islamic morality police (*hisba*) (Al-Jazeera, August 22, 2016; Facebook page of the information center of the campaign over Sirte, August 21, 2016).



Right: The vest of a member of ISIS's morality police, which was found at the Islamic morality police headquarters in Sirte. Left: An ISIS detention cell at the former Libyan homeland security headquarters (Facebook page of the information center of the campaign over Sirte, August 21, 2016)

■ According to a spokesman for the Libyan government forces, **ISIS suicide bombers carried out a double car bomb attack in western Sirte.** The attacks killed 10 soldiers and wounded 20 others. After the attack, government forces raided a residential neighborhood in Sirte, killing three ISIS operatives (AP, August 18, 2016). During the fighting, the Libyan Army forces killed **Abu Mariam al-Masri**, a senior ISIS operative in Sirte. Abu Mariam al-Masri is the one who ordered the execution of 21 Copts in February 2015. He also sentenced more than 50 Libyan citizens to death (Al-Fajr, August 19, 2016).

Russia

■ On August 17, 2016, two Russian traffic policemen were attacked in the Balashikha region, some 20 km east of Moscow. The two policemen were wounded, one of them seriously. Two gunmen, who were also armed with axes, shot and injured the policemen. **They were shot dead by the security forces.** The two terrorists were reportedly **Chechens**.

■ **The Amaq News Agency, ISIS's media foundation, claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack.** A video released by the news agency the day after the attack (with subtitles in Arabic) **shows the two terrorists before leaving on their mission.** Their codenames are **Uthman Mardalov** and **Salim Israilov**. In the video, one of the terrorists declares in Russian and Arabic that they are “fighters of the Islamic State” who pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (heavy.com, August 18, 2016). The speakers on the video say that the attack was carried out in revenge for the Russian airstrikes in Syria (Reuters, August 18, 2016).



The two ISIS operatives who carried out the attack east of Moscow (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 19, 2016). Left: ISIS's announcement that two of its operatives carried out an attack against Russian policemen east of Moscow (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, August 18, 2015). The wording of the claim of responsibility is similar to those issued after the recent ISIS-inspired terrorist attacks in Europe.

■ Earlier that day, **four suspects were killed during a raid carried out by Russian Special Forces in an apartment building in St. Petersburg.** According to the Russian anti-terrorism committee, the suspects were the leaders of a “terrorist underground” operating in the Kabardino-Balkaria region in the northern Caucasus. At least three of the dead were wanted men. According to security forces, the suspects were killed after opening fire at the security forces surrounding the building where they

were staying. Weapons and explosives were found in the apartment where the suspects were hiding.

Turkey

■ **A suicide bombing attack was carried out during a wedding in the Kurdish city of Gaziantep**, in southern Turkey. According to the reports, **51 people were killed and 69 were wounded**. The attack was carried out by a suicide bomber, a boy in his teens. Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan said that there were signs **that the attack was carried out by ISIS** (AFP, August 20, 2016). ISIS has not yet publicly claimed responsibility for the attack and we do not have any further information linking it to the attack.

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

Germany

■ German police arrested a man who had been under police surveillance. In the suspect's apartment there were fireworks, gas masks, camouflage suits, a replica Kalashnikov rifle, **and material linking him to ISIS** (Reuters, August 17, 2016).

Britain

■ Two women were arrested after attempting to go to Syria to join ISIS. According to London police, they are 16 and 20 and were arrested in central London. Police say **there has been a recent increase in the number of young people attempting to join the ranks of ISIS**. A week earlier, a British girl was killed in an airstrike in the city of Al-Raqqah. She was one of three schoolgirls who joined the ranks of ISIS (The Independent, August 22, 2016).

The Philippines

■ Three men suspected of being operatives in **Ansar al-Khilafah**, a local ISIS-affiliated group in the southern Philippines, were killed by security forces. According to the police, a special task force searching for the organization's leader entered an apartment **where there were ISIS flags and materials and instructions for making IEDs**. The three men who were killed may have been involved in the attack during the festival in June 2016, in which eight people were injured (The Manila Times, August 20, 2016).

The battle for hearts and minds

Closing Twitter accounts of jihad operatives

- According to Twitter's management, since mid-2015 it has **closed 360,000 accounts used for propaganda on behalf of terrorist organizations**. The management claims to have shortened the response time and increased the staff that scans messages. In the past, Twitter's management was criticized for not doing enough to terminate the activity of ISIS-affiliated accounts. According to an announcement released by ISIS, it perceives anyone who is active on social media as a fighter for all intents and purposes (Twitter account, August 20, 2016).