



Spotlight on Global Jihad (October 10-27, 2016)



Main events of the week

- **On October 17, 2016, Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi** announced the beginning of a military operation to take over Mosul. The city of Mosul, ISIS's main stronghold where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate (June 4, 2014), is of symbolic value. The operation is led by the **Iraqi army and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces**, with the assistance of **Shiite militias** (under Iranian influence) and **Sunni tribesmen**. **The attacking forces receive air support from the United States and the coalition countries. The attack on Mosul was carried out from the south and the east, and subsequently also from the north. The attacking forces on the front managed to arrive at the eastern and northern outskirts of the city within nine days, while those advancing from the south are met with a strong resistance** (Iraqi elite forces and Kurdish forces are situated about 5 km east and south of the city).
- The offensive on the city of Mosul, with a **population of about one million**, is **the climax of the campaign against ISIS** waged by the Iraqi army and the Kurdish forces, with the assistance of the United States, for about a year and a half. During this campaign, **ISIS has lost about a half of the territories under its control in Iraq, including a number of important cities in western and northern Iraq** (ISIS has also lost an important territory in eastern and northern Syria, including most of its strongholds west of the Euphrates River, along the Syrian-Turkish border). The liberation of Mosul will signify the complete removal of ISIS from the major urban centers to the deserts and rural areas, undermining the administration and territorial foundations of the Islamic State established by ISIS.

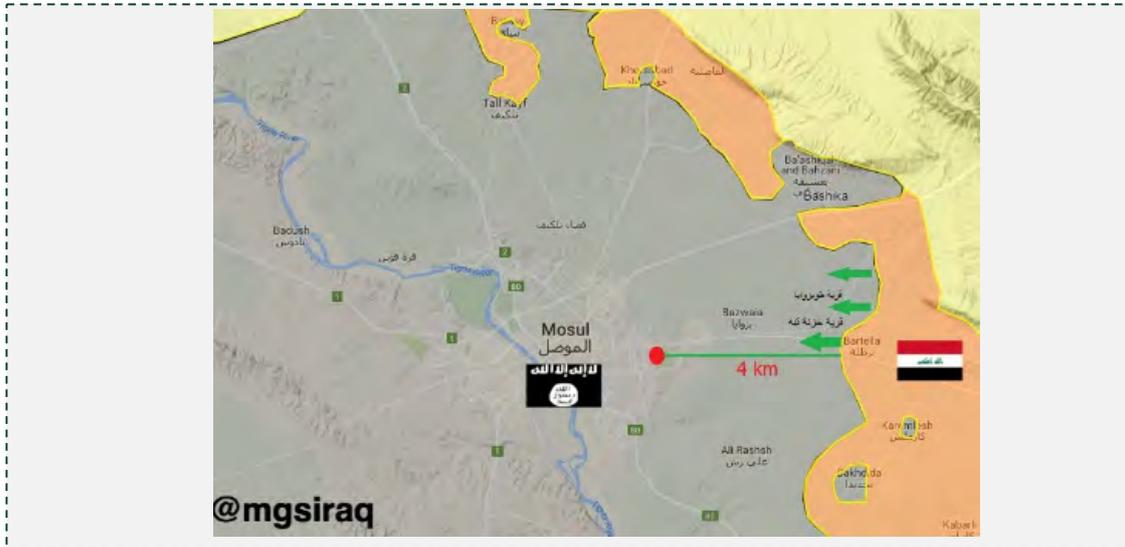
The campaign to take over Mosul¹

- The attack on the city of Mosul is **carried out from several directions**: The Iraqi army advanced from the south while the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army counterterrorism elite force are attacking it from the east. The Kurdish forces are also operating north of the city. The first days of the attack were characterized by a **quick** advance of the attacking forces. However, later on, their advance was slowed down due to stalling operations by ISIS, mainly in the area south of Mosul. The Arab media reported that **the attacking forces had taken over about 80 towns and villages during eight days of fighting**. These forces **have reached the eastern and northern outskirts of Mosul** while still being engaged in cleansing pockets of resistance which remained behind.
- East and northeast of Mosul are operating the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi elite forces (the counterterrorism force). These forces have liberated two major towns, the town of Ba'shiqah, situated about 13 km northeast of Mosul, and the town of Bartella, some 13 km east of Mosul. The Iraqi media has reported that the Iraqi counterterrorism elite force operating in this region is now situated about 5 km east of Mosul. The Kurdish forces liberated the town of Batnay, situated about 15 km north of Mosul.



The Iraqi counterterrorism force situated about 5 km east of Mosul (Al-Sumaria, October 25, 2016)

¹ A detailed analysis of the campaign to take over Mosul and its implications will be published in a separate document.



The Iraqi army counterterrorism force attacking Mosul from the east has reached the eastern outskirts of Mosul (Iraqi army Twitter account, October 24, 2016).



The towns of Bartella, Ba'ashiqah and Batnay (east and north of Mosul) which were liberated from the hands of ISIS (Google Maps)

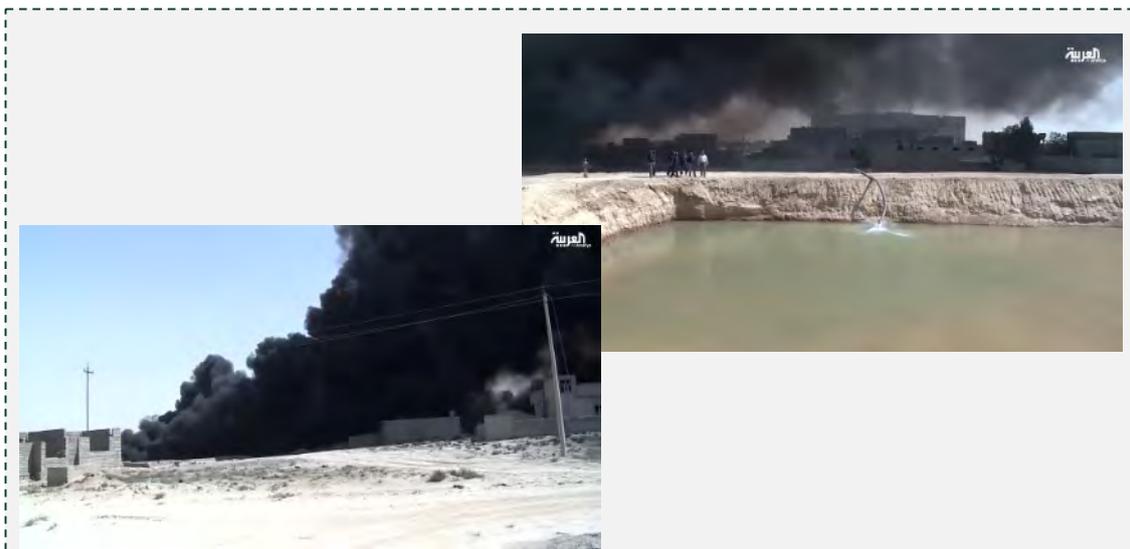
■ ISIS has so far responded to the offensive in several ways:

- **Guerilla operations to stall the advance of the attacking forces.** ISIS has operated suicide bombers, detonated car bombs, mined roads, and fired mortar shells, artillery and antitank missiles at the attacking forces. In addition, **ISIS operatives set fire to oil wells, oil-filled ditches, and tires.** This was done so

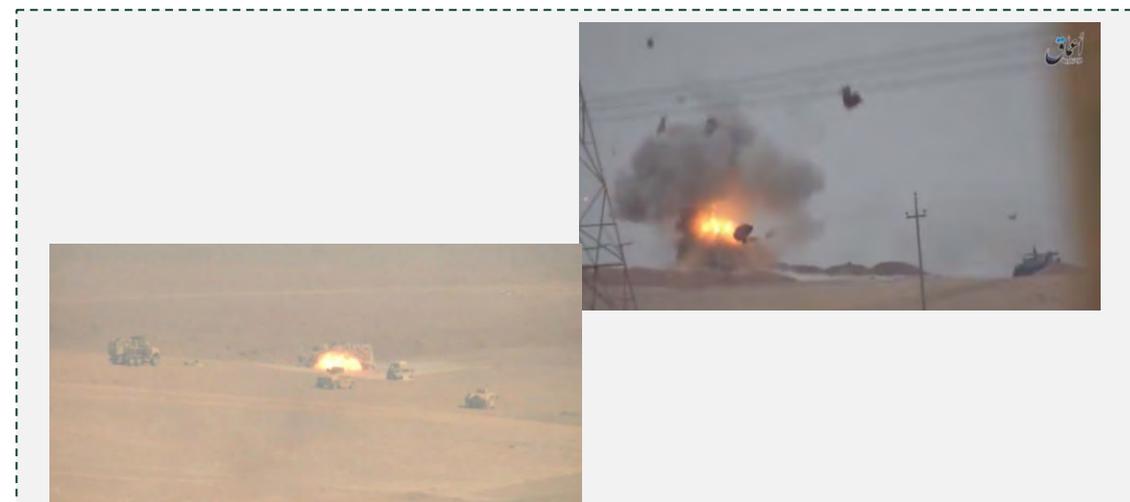
that the smoke rising from the burning sites would make it difficult to carry out airstrikes and slow down the advancing forces. Furthermore, a sulfur factory was set on fire in the city of Mishraq, about 40 km south of Mosul. As a result, a yellow toxic cloud of sulfur spread in the area (hundreds of local residents turned to receive medical treatment due to breathing difficulties, eye burns and asphyxiation).



Setting fire to oil wells south of Mosul (Al-Alam, October 22, 2016)



Setting fire to oil wells near Qayyarah (Al-Arabiya, October 6, 2016)



Right: ISIS antitank missile hitting an Iraqi army tank, near Al-Qayyarah junction south of Mosul (Haqq, October 24, 2016). Left: ISIS antitank missile hitting an Iraqi army truck north of Mosul (Haqq, October 25, 2016)

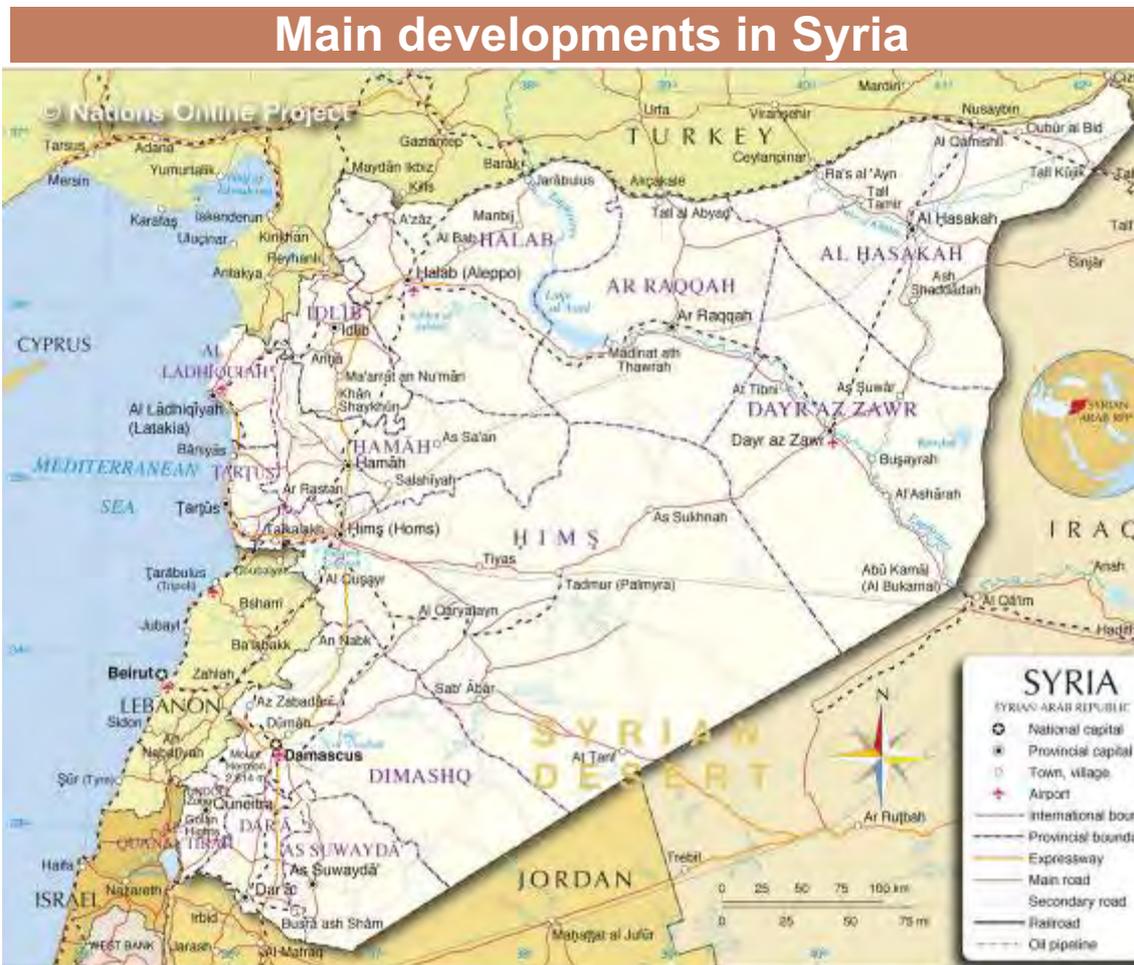
- **Building up the defense around Mosul:** ISIS operatives **booby-trapped bridges and mined the main roads** leading from the west bank of the Tigris River to the east bank. It has also been reported that most of ISIS operatives moved to the east bank of the river. The ITIC believes that they did so to respond to the offensive efforts carried out by the Peshmerga and the Iraqi commando forces east of Mosul. Furthermore, ISIS operatives set up three defense lines on the outskirts of the city, mined residents' cars, and got ready to carry out suicide bombing attacks, including by boys (i.e., the Lion Cubs of the Caliphate) (Al-Arabiya, October 24, 2016).



The city of Mosul and the Tigris River. Along the river, there are five bridges leading to the center of the city and connecting the west and the east banks (Google Maps)

- In addition to its direct response to the offensive, ISIS initiated **three extensive guerrilla attacks between October 21-24, 2016, in the cities of Kirkuk, Rutba and Sinjar, which are distant from the fighting scene in Mosul. Their aim was to detract resources and attention from the offensive on Mosul, raise the morale of ISIS operatives, and demonstrate that ISIS is still in possession of quite substantial operational capabilities, even when subject to heavy pressure.** ISIS propaganda machine reported extensively on these attacks, threatened the forces

attacking Mosul with a prolonged war of attrition, and called on ISIS supporters around the world to attack the "infidels" to assist the Islamic State.



Aleppo and its environs

■ In the northeast of Aleppo and in the compound of the military colleges southwest of the city, **local clashes took place** between the Syrian army and the rebel organizations. These clashes, in which the Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) took part, did not lead to significant changes on the ground. At the same time, Russian and Syrian planes carried on with their airstrikes in Aleppo and its environs.

■ After some three weeks of fighting in the city of Aleppo, Russia announced a temporary, 8-hour ceasefire on October 20, 2016. The ceasefire was supposed to start at 08:00 and last until 16:00, during which the Syrian army and the Russian army were supposed to stop any offensive action. The Russians announced that during the ceasefire, **a number of routes would be opened to allow the rebel forces and besieged civilians to exit the city**. At the same time, the Russian army announced that it was ready to discuss any initiative for a solution to the crisis in the city.

■ On October 18, 2016, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that as part of the preparations for the temporary ceasefire, Russian warplanes stopped carrying out airstrikes against targets in the city of Aleppo. According to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, the cessation of the airstrikes was supposed to allow the rebel forces to leave the eastern parts of the city which were under their control. The United States, the UN, and the European Union welcomed the announcement, yet made it clear that the time frame set for it was not enough to deliver humanitarian assistance to the population. Russia announced that it would extend the ceasefire by three hours, but added that it would not accept any requests for further extension. Eventually, Russia extended the ceasefire by two additional days.

■ **The rebel organizations responded by a complete refusal to withdraw and refrained from leaving the city during the ceasefire.** Most of the civilians as well did not comply with the call to leave. The rebel organizations reportedly prevented the population from leaving the eastern part of the city. **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** mentioned before the American Secretary of State that "armed groups" in east Aleppo were opening fire at civilians trying to take advantage of the respite in the fighting and leave the city (Sputnik, October 24, 2016). He accused the Fateh al-Sham Front and Ahrar al-Sham of preventing civilians from leaving the city by means of "extortion, threats and exerting violence."

■ On October 24, 2016, at the end of the ceasefire, there were reportedly heavy clashes between the Syrian forces and the rebel organizations. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), Russian and Syrian airstrikes resumed. Russia denied the information on the resumption of the airstrikes.

The area west of the Euphrates River: Dabiq

■ In the area west of the Euphrates River, the rebel organizations supported by the Turkish army continue with the third stage of Operation Euphrates Shield. The

objective of the current stage is to take over the **city of Al-Bab**, ISIS's last stronghold west of the Euphrates River. So far ISIS has not mounted any significant resistance.

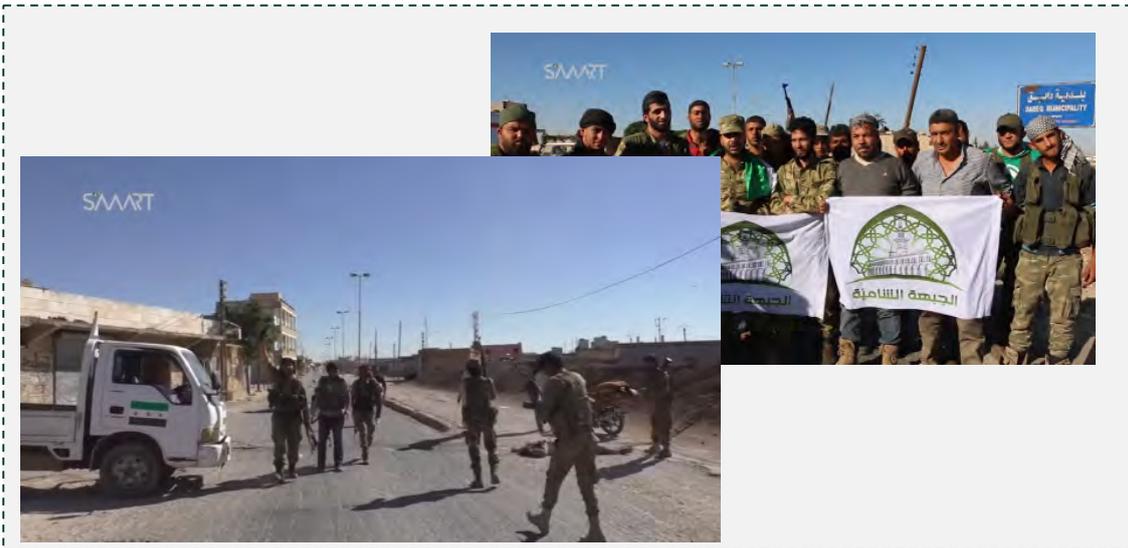


The area west of the Euphrates River where ISIS has lost most of its strongholds: Jarabulus (taken over by the rebel organizations, with Turkish support); Manbij (taken over by the Kurdish forces (Syrian Democratic Forces)); A'zaz (occupied by the rebel organizations); and Dabiq (taken over by the rebel organizations, with the support of the Syrian army). The city of Al-Bab is ISIS's last major stronghold west of the Euphrates River (Google Maps).

■ On October 16, 2016, members of the Free Syrian Army and Al-Jabha al-Shamiya took over the town of Dabiq. As reported on the Turkish media, the attacking forces were assisted by Turkey and the coalition forces' air support (Hurriyet.com.tr, October 17, 2016). Dabiq has symbolic meaning for ISIS: in this town, according to Muslim tradition, the Muslim armies will confront the infidel armies at the end of days and prevail over them (an Armageddon of sorts). This town has symbolic meaning for Turkey as well.² From Dabiq, the forces of the Free Syrian Army, assisted by the Turkish army, continued to move toward Al-Bab, ISIS's last important stronghold west of the Euphrates River. The rebel organizations supported

² In the area of Dabiq took place, on August 24, 1516, a major battle where the Ottoman Empire won a victory over the Mamluks (the Battle of Marj Dabiq). Sultan Selim I led the Ottoman forces, numbering about 65,000 soldiers, against the Mamluk forces of about 80,000 soldiers. The Ottoman victory opened the road to Damascus and to its takeover by the Ottoman Empire, and subsequently to the takeover of Greater Syria (Al-Sham) and Egypt from the Mamluks. Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield started on August 24, marking the 500th anniversary of the battle waged near Dabiq.

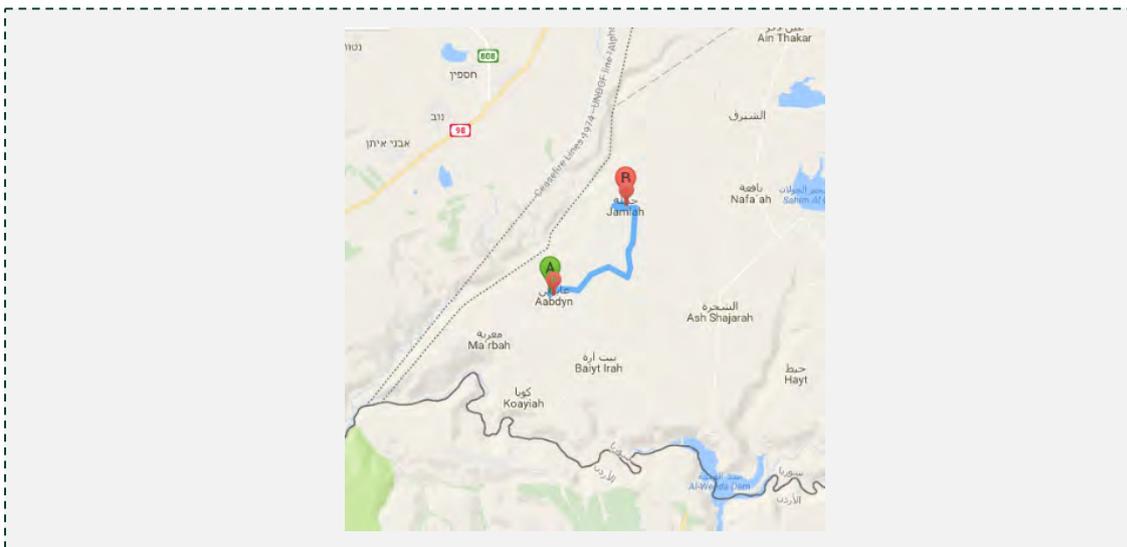
by Turkey are reportedly at a distance of about 15 km northwest of Al-Bab. According to the reports, they clashed with the predominantly Kurdish SDF forces.



Right: Members of Al-Jabha al-Shamiya near the sign of entrance to the town of Dabiq. Left: Free Syrian Army members in Dabiq after the town had been taken over from ISIS (SMART News Agency YouTube channel, October 16, 2016).

The Syrian Golan Heights area

■ The ISIS-affiliated Khaled bin al-Walid Army announced on October 21, 2016, that its commander Abu Hashem al-Shami was killed when an IED was detonated by the rebel organizations. The IED was activated against him while he was traveling on the road between Abedin and Jamla, at the southern Syrian Golan Heights, near the tri-border area of Syria, Jordan and Israel (Twitter account, October 22, 2016).



The road between Abedin and Jamla, where the commander of the Khaled bin al-Walid Army was killed by an IED (Distance Calculator)

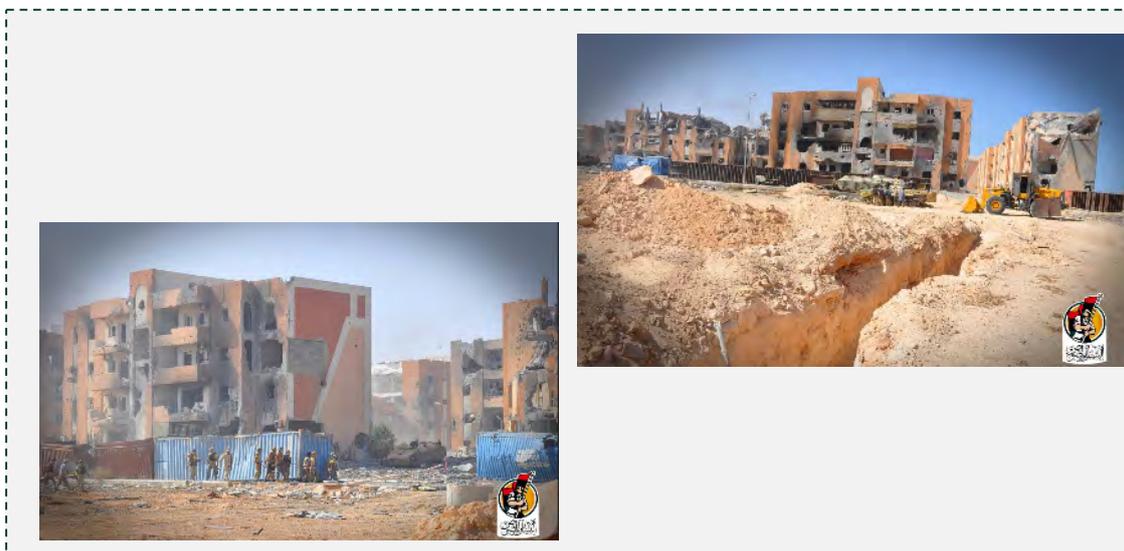
Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

- On October 22, 2016, Brigadier General Adel Rajai, commander of the Egyptian Army 9th Armored Division, was shot dead outside his house by assassins who drove a motorcycle, in the city of Al-Obour, about 30 km northeast of Cairo. An organization calling itself *Liwa al-Thawra* (Revolution Brigade) claimed responsibility for the assassination (Al-Masri al-Youm, October 22, 2016). Adel Rajai served in North Sinai and reportedly had been in charge of destroying the tunnels between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.
- Following the assassination of Brigadier General Rajai, the Egyptian army started on October 23, 2016, an intensive military activity against ISIS's Sinai Province. The activity focused on the northern Sinai Peninsula, in the areas of Al-Arish, Sheikh Zuweid, and Rafah. The Egyptian media reported that 28 terrorist operatives had been killed, 54 had been arrested, and terror bases, vehicles and motorcycles of various types had been destroyed. Before that (on October 21, 2016), the Egyptian Air Force attacked 24 terror bases in the northern Sinai Peninsula, and the land forces carried out intensive activity against the operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province. Twenty-one operatives had been killed in this activity, and motorcycles were destroyed, as well as IEDs which were ready to be activated against the Egyptian security forces (Egyptian Army Spokesman's Facebook page, October 21, 2016).

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

- The forces of the Libyan Government of National Accord **continue to encroach in the territories controlled by ISIS in the city of Sirte**. This week, the Libyan forces completed their takeover of the "600 buildings" district and continued to advance in the Marine neighborhood, the last major stronghold remaining in the hands of ISIS. The Libyan forces freed six foreign hostages abducted by ISIS (an Indian doctor and five Filipino nurses). In addition, the Libyan forces freed more than twenty civilians, three of them Turkish nationals and 11 Eritrean women, who were held captive by ISIS.



Sights of destruction in the "600 buildings" district after it has been liberated from ISIS (Facebook page of the campaign over Sirte, October 22, 2016)

Pakistan

■ ISIS's Khorasan Province announced on October 25, 2016, that three of its suicide bombers attacked a training center of the Pakistani police in the city of Quetta, in west Pakistan (not far from the border with Afghanistan). The assailants were wearing explosive vests and had in their possession light weapons and hand grenades. They exchanged fire with the Pakistani policemen for several hours. At the end of the attack, the three of them blew themselves up amidst a group of policemen. Over sixty people were killed in the attack, and additional 120 were wounded (Amaq, October 25, 2016). The ITIC could not verify that those who carried out the attack were ISIS operatives.³

³ The Karachi branch of the Taliban in Pakistan also claimed responsibility for carrying out the attack.