



Spotlight on Global Jihad (January 19-25, 2017)



Main events of the week

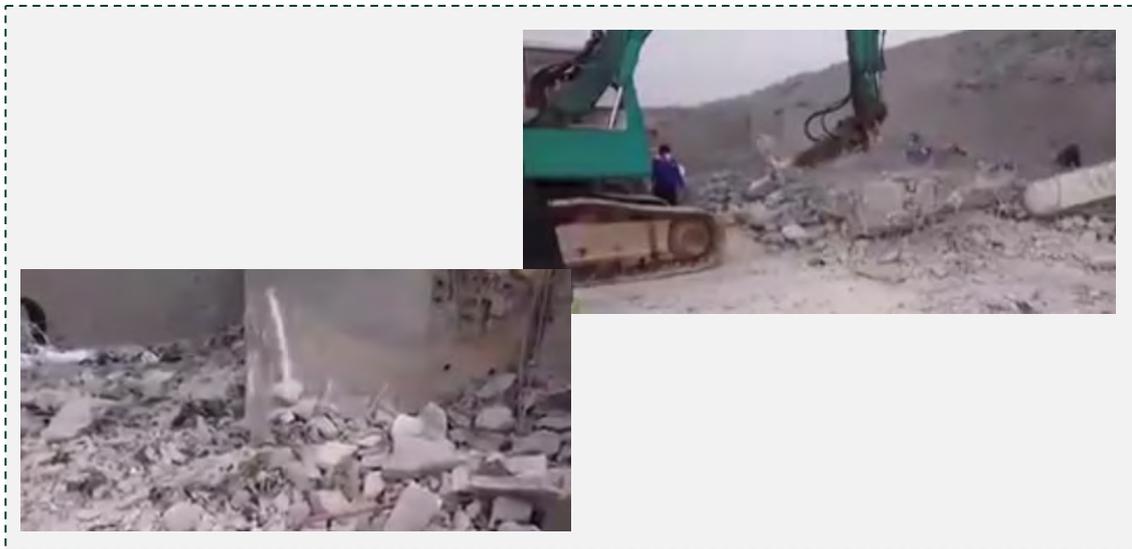
- In spite of the ceasefire in **Syria**, and despite the Kazakhstan talks, fighting continued in two main sites: the **Wadi Barada area**, northwest of Damascus, where the Syrian regime forces continued their efforts to restore control over the water sources of Damascus; and **Deir ez-Zor**, in eastern Syria, where fighting continued between ISIS and the Syrian Army, with extensive Russian airstrikes. So far, neither side has gained the upper hand **in these two sites**.
- **In Iraq**, the Iraqi Army managed to take over the east of the city, apart from a few neighborhoods. ISIS operatives are fleeing by boats to the western part of the city. ISIS continues to carry out deadly attacks against Iraqi troops and civilians.
- **In Libya**, US aircraft attacked two ISIS camps southwest of Sirte, where ISIS operatives who fled Sirte were staying

The international scene: the US, Russia, and Turkey

The United States

- During the past week, US-led coalition forces carried out many airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Most of the airstrikes in Syria focused on the **Al-Raqqah region**, and in Iraq – on the **Mosul region**. The coalition spokesperson said that the coalition countries had also begun to extend air support to the Turkish Army in the **Al-Bab region** (Anatolia, January 22, 2017). In addition, US aircraft carried out airstrikes near the city of Sirte in Libya (see below).

■ The Pentagon reported that unmanned aircraft and US planes attacked an **Al-Qaeda training camp in the Idlib region**, in northwest Syria. According to the Pentagon, more than a hundred Al-Qaeda operatives were killed. The Americans said that the training camp, called **Al-Sheikh Suleiman**, had been operating since 2013 (US Department of State website, January 22, 2017).



Debris of the Al-Sheikh Suleiman camp (Twitter, January 20, 2017)

■ Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook said that two senior Al-Qaeda operatives had been killed in Syria (US Department of State website, January 19, 2017):

- **Abd al-Jalil al-Muslimi**, one of Al-Qaeda commanders in Syria, was killed in a US precision airstrike near Idlib on January 12, 2017. Tunisian-born Al-Muslimi had been trained by the Taliban in the late 1990s.
- **Muhammad Habib Bousaadoun al-Tunisi**, an Al-Qaeda senior operative in charge of operations outside Syria, was killed in another airstrike, carried out on January 17, 2017. Muhammad Habib Bousaadoun, Tunisian-born as well, arrived in Syria in 2014 after having stayed for several years in Europe and the Middle East.

Russia

■ The Russian Defense Minister reported that during the past week, Russian Tu-22M3 long-range bombers, which took off from a Russian Air Force base in Russia, attacked ISIS facilities in **Deir ez-Zor**. Among the targets attacked were arms depots, vehicles, and operatives (TASS, January 21, 2017). The Russian Defense Ministry also reported that for the first time, Russian fighter planes along with Turkish planes attacked ISIS targets on the outskirts of the **city of Al-Bab**, north of Aleppo. The

airstrikes were reportedly carried out by three Russian planes and four Turkish planes (RT; Sputnik, January 23, 2017).



Russian Tu-22M3 bomber airstrike on Deir ez-Zor (Russian Defense Ministry website, eng.mil.ru)

- The Russian Defense Ministry reported that the Hmeymim coordination center received the coordinates of ISIS targets in Al-Bab from the US-led coalition headquarters. The Pentagon spokesman emphasized that the US Department of Defense **does not carry out airstrikes in Syria in collaboration with Russia**, and that coordination focuses only on securing the safety of the air crews and preventing collisions during military operations of the two countries (Military Times, January 23, 2017).

- While continuing its military activity in Syria, the Russian Defense Ministry reported that the reduction of its forces in Syria continues, as instructed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. As part of this process, a military medical unit stationed at the Hmeymim base returned to Russia (Sputnik, January 19, 2017).

Main developments in Syria

The ceasefire agreement

- The ceasefire agreement announced by the Syrian Army on December 30, 2016, is still in force in most of Syria. However, in several sites, mainly in the Wadi Barada area, northwest of Damascus, fighting continued. Clashes also occurred between the Syrian regime forces and ISIS in the **Deir ez-Zor region**, in east Syria. Referring to that, a Russian senior military official said that Russia was concerned with the violations of the ceasefire and that it asked the Syrian leadership to work towards the full enforcement of the ceasefire (Sputnik, January 23, 2017).

■ On January 23, 2017, talks for the settlement of the Syrian issue began in the city of **Astana, Kazakhstan**. Delegations and representatives **from Syria** (on behalf of the regime, the opposition organizations, and a Kurdish delegation), **Russia, Turkey, and Iran** took part in the talks. The US Department of State announced that it would not send a representative due to the transition period after the new president took office. The United States was represented by the **US ambassador to Kazakhstan** (Daily Sabah, January 21, 2017). The **Fateh al-Sham Front** announced that it would not take part in the conference. According to its memorandum of opinion, the Front rejects the conference and its goals. As the memorandum states, no one and no group has the right to negotiate the fate of Syria and its inhabitants without the participation of all parties to the revolution and the active jihadi elements (Ayyam Suriya, January 22, 2017).



The first page of the memorandum of opinion of the Fateh al-Sham Front, rejecting the Astana conference in Kazakhstan (Ayyam Suriya, January 22, 2017)

■ At the end of three days of discussions, an announcement was released, stating a decision, among other things, to **establish a body** including Turkish, Russian and Iranian representatives who will supervise the implementation of the ceasefire. In addition, the three countries pledged to **fight together against ISIS and the Fateh al-Sham Front** (Al-Arabiya, January 24, 2017).

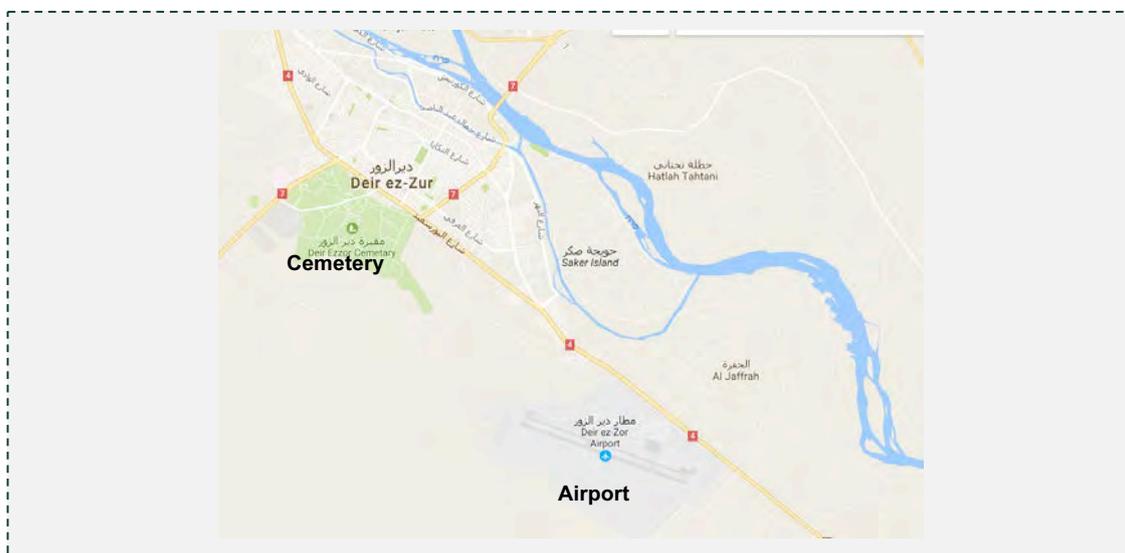
The Wadi Barada area

■ Fighting in the **Wadi Barada area** continues. Representatives on behalf of the UN and the National Reconciliation Committee for Wadi Barada acted towards achieving a (third) ceasefire agreement. On January 19, 2017, an agreement was reportedly achieved for 48 hours. It included cessation of military activity in the area and the

departure of foreign opposition fighters, the immediate entry of teams to repair the water pumps in Ain al-Fijah, and the return of displaced persons to Wadi Barada (Al-Jazeera, January 19, 2017). It didn't take long for the ceasefire to break down, and fighting resumed in the area. The regime forces advanced in the town of Al-Fijah and took over buildings north of the spring that supplies water to the city of Damascus. However, they have yet to control the springs themselves (Syrian Army Spokesperson's office, January 22, 2017). On January 23, 2017, it was reported that a member of the reconciliation committee was assassinated (Dimashq al-Aan, January 23, 2017).¹

Deir ez-Zor

■ In the past week, fighting continued between ISIS operatives and the Syrian regime forces, with extensive Russian air support. ISIS apparently manages to repel the attacks for the time being and even took over several neighborhoods in the south of the city and cut them off from the military airport (Dimashq al-Aan, January 21, 2017). The Syrian troops are trying to advance from the airport area toward the **area of the city cemetery**. Clashes broke out between ISIS and the regime forces on the outskirts of the cemetery, and ISIS reportedly sustained many fatalities (Al-Jazeera, January 24, 2017).

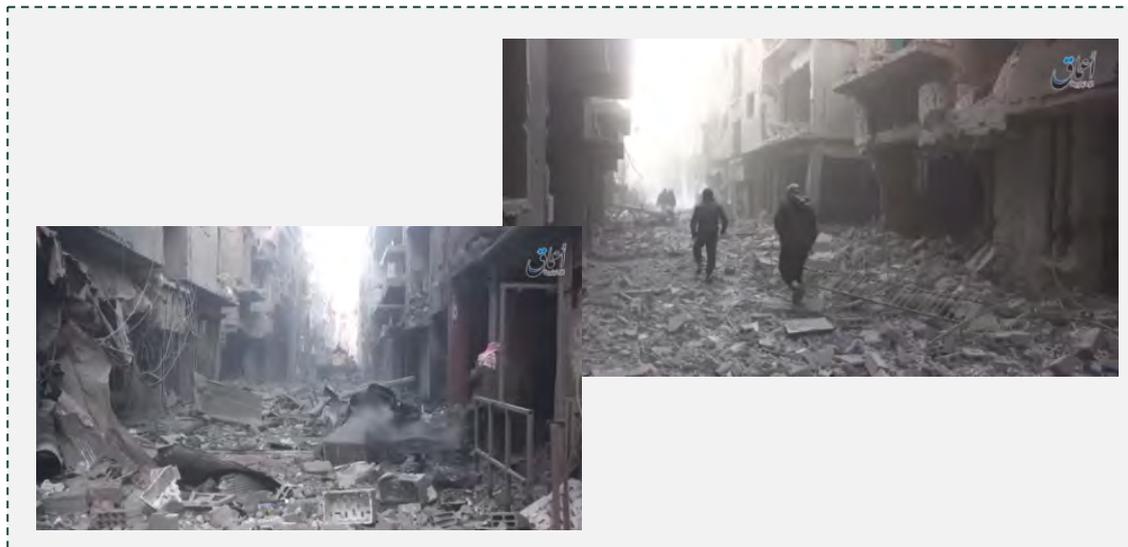


Map of the fighting zone in Deir ez-Zor (Google Maps)

¹ This is the second time a member of the reconciliation committee is assassinated. On January 14, 2017, General (ret.) Ahmad Ghabban was assassinated. He had been appointed by the Syrian regime to handle the crisis in the region (Syrian Army Spokesperson's office, January 14, 2017).



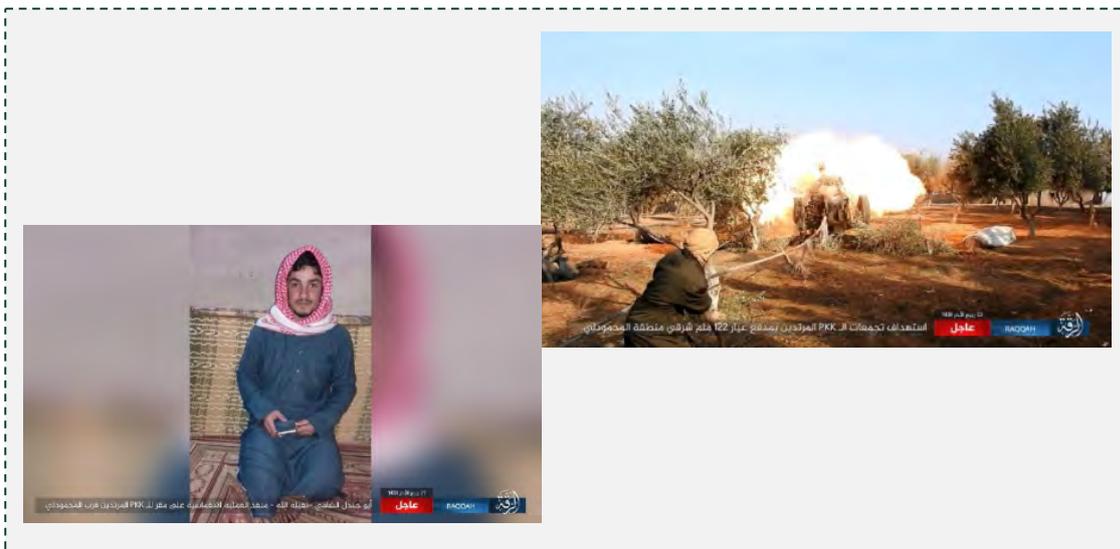
Syrian Army attacking ISIS positions in the area of the Deir ez-Zor cemetery, from the air and on the ground (Syrian TV, January 21, 2017)



Images from a video released by ISIS, documenting the results of the Russian airstrike on Deir ez-Zor (Amaq, January 21, 2017)

The Al-Raqqah region

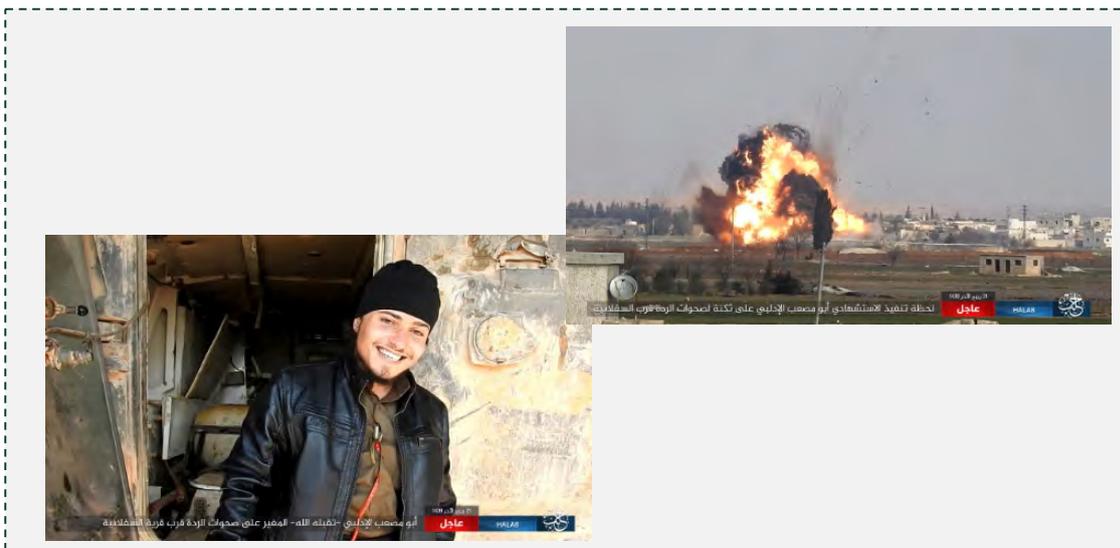
■ Battles between ISIS operatives and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued in the rural area west and northwest of Al-Raqqah. The SDF forces, with the support of US-led coalition airstrikes, reported that they **were approaching the Euphrates Dam**, and that after several days of fighting, they took over the village of **Swaydiyah Kabirah**, west of the city. According to the SDF, over 70 ISIS operatives were killed in the confrontations, and ISIS weapons had been destroyed (Orient, January 21, 2017). ISIS continued to carry out suicide attacks against the forces.



Right: ISIS operatives shooting at the SDF forces east of Al-Mahmoudli (Haqq, January 21, 2017).
Left: ISIS operative codenamed Abu Jandal the Syrian, who carried out a suicide bombing attack against the SDF in the village of Karamanji, north of Al-Tabqa (Haqq, January 21, 2017)

The Al-Bab region

■ Clashes continued on the outskirts of Al-Bab between ISIS operatives and the Free Syrian Army, with extensive air support of the Turkish Army, the US-led coalition countries, as well as Russia (which collaborated with the Turkish Air Force for the first time). On January 21, 2017, the Free Syrian Army encircled once again **Qabasin, north of Al-Bab**. ISIS operatives continued to carry out suicide attacks against the troops. In parallel to the military effort from the north, by the Free Syrian Army with Turkish support, the Syrian regime forces along with local militias started to advance toward Al-Bab from the south (from the Aleppo region).



Right: Detonation of an APC bomb against the forces of the Turkish Army and the Free Syrian Army in the vicinity of the village of Safhaniya (Haqq, a file-sharing website, January 20, 2017). Left: ISIS operative codenamed Abu Mus'ab al-Idlibi, who carried out the attack (Haqq, January 20, 2017)

Main developments in Iraq

The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

■ The Iraqi Defense Ministry announced on January 23, 2017, that the Iraqi forces had taken over the **entire eastern part of Mosul** (Reuters, January 23, 2017). They managed to achieve that after taking over the five bridges on the eastern bank of the Tigris River. Several neighborhoods in the northeast of the city still remain in the hands of ISIS. The Iraqi forces were supported by airstrikes carried out by the Iraqi Air Force and the US-led coalition countries. According to Pentagon Spokesman Captain Jeff Davis, the US-led coalition forces attacked, among other things, boats in which ISIS operatives were fleeing to the western part of the city. They said **they had so far destroyed 143 boats with ISIS operatives on board** (US Department of Defense website, January 23, 2017).



Map showing the control of the Iraqi security forces in the city of Mosul, updated to January 23, 2017. The map shows that most of east Mosul is currently in the hands of the Iraqi forces. Legend: Areas liberated from ISIS are marked in green. Areas where there is fighting are marked in red. Areas that are controlled by ISIS are marked in white (Facebook page of the Nineveh Information Center, January 17, 2017)

■ In east Mosul, the Iraqi Air Force attacked a gathering of ISIS operatives. **Abd al-Wahid Khadir Sair al-Juan**, the aide of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and **Ahmad Khadir Sair al-Juan**, the chief of ISIS's traffic police, were reportedly killed in this airstrike (Al-Sumaria, January 19, 2017). ISIS operatives blew up a large hotel situated on the Tigris bank in west Mosul. The hotel was possibly blown up in order to prevent the Iraqi forces from using it as their base (Reuters, January 22, 2017).

- Social networks activists wrote that the counterterrorism apparatus of the Iraqi government uncovered in Mosul parts of a fighter plane that ISIS was trying to develop (Al-Sumaria, January 19, 2017).



Photos published on social media of a plane that ISIS was allegedly trying to develop (Al-Sumaria, January 19, 2017)

The global jihad in other countries

Libya

- The forces loyal to the Government of National Accord continue to attack groups of ISIS operatives who fled Sirte to wadis adjacent to the city. An aircraft belonging to the air force loyal to the Government of National Accord attacked a vehicle carrying a senior ISIS operative and two others southwest of Sirte. Three ISIS operatives, an Egyptian and two Sudanese, were caught on January 21, 2017, on the road between Abu Najim and Al-Jafra (Al-Wasat, January 21 and 22, 2017).
- On the night of January 18-19, 2017, US Air Force bombers carried out an airstrike in Libya. Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook said that the airstrikes were carried out on the authorization of President Barack Obama and the Libyan government, and that the bombers attacked **two ISIS bases situated at a distance of about 45 km southwest of Sirte**. ISIS operatives who had fled Sirte were staying there (US Department of State website, January 19, 2017). These are the first US airstrikes in Libya since December 19, 2016, when the official end of the operation to free Sirte from ISIS was declared.



Photos from a video presented at a Pentagon briefing. ISIS operatives are seen in one of the camps, transferring weapons (marked in red) from camouflaged vehicles (January 19, 2017).

Yemen

- In Yemen, US drones carried out several airstrikes in the area of **Al-Bayda**. Five people were reportedly killed, apparently AQAP operatives. Among them was Abu Anis al-Abi, a senior operative in the said organization (US Department of Defense website, January 22, 2017).

Conduct of the global jihad

Rumors of Bakr al-Baghdadi's death

- According to several reports in the Arab press and a senior Iraqi official in the Nineveh Province, **ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** was hit in an airstrike carried out in the town of Al-Ba'aj in Iraq, which is situated on the international highway between Syria and Iraq. Additional senior ISIS operatives were also injured in the airstrike (Akhbar al-Aan, January 23, 2017; Al-Sumaria, January 22, 2017). These reports were not confirmed.

ISIS increases sales of fuel products to the Syrian regime

- According to senior officials in the US and Europe who have been monitoring the traffic of oil tankers in the region of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, ISIS has recently increased its sales of oil and gas to the Syrian regime. It provides the Assad regime with the products in return for cash which ISIS needs. According to experts, selling oil and its products to the Assad regime is currently the largest source of finance for

ISIS, and it replaces revenues from collecting customs and taxes in the territories under ISIS's control (Wall Street Journal, January 19, 2017).

Secession of Fateh al-Sham Front operatives

■ Apparently, there is a rift among the Fateh al-Sham Front. **Jihad al-Sheikh**, codenamed **Abu Ahmad Zakour**, member of the Shura Council and treasurer general of the Front, and **Hamza Sanda**, member of the Shura Council in charge of the Aleppo area in the Front, announced their secession. In their announcement, they say that they decided to secede following the rift that had been created and due to the attempts of every faction to act independently. According to the announcement, they currently do not belong to any organization. On the other hand, four battalions of the **Ahrar al-Sham** organization seceded from it and joined the Fateh al-Sham Front (Al-Mayadeen, January 21, 2017).