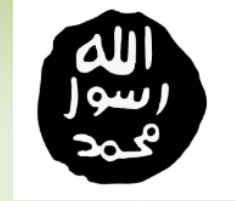




Spotlight on Global Jihad
(January 26-February 1, 2017)



Main events of the week

- **The ceasefire declared more than a month ago is still in effect in most of the regions of Syria.** In the area of **Wadi Barada**, where the water sources of Damascus are located, the Syrian regime had yet another achievement, reaching an agreement in which the rebel organizations surrendered and were evacuated, together with their families, to the Idlib region. In various regions throughout Syria, fighting continued between ISIS and the rival forces. So far, no side has gained the upper hand in the main fighting zones.
- **In Iraq, the Iraqi forces completed their takeover of east Mosul and they are now preparing for taking over the neighborhoods west of the Tigris River.** As part of the preparations for the next stage of the offensive, there were reports of artillery fire at ISIS targets in west Mosul, scattering of leaflets calling on the inhabitants to cooperate with the Iraqi Army, and dispatching reinforcement to Mosul. According to the planned strategy, the siege on Mosul will be tightened by cutting it off from the Tal Afar district to the west (through which ISIS still maintains its ties with Syria).

Main developments in Syria

The Damascus region

Surrender of the rebel organizations in Wadi Barada

- In the Wadi Barada area, which has been one of the main sites where there was no ceasefire, **the Syrian regime scored an important achievement when a surrender agreement was reached with the rebels.** Following the agreement, the Syrian forces received control of the water sources of Damascus, and the rebels, including the Fateh al-Sham Front operatives, **were evacuated to the Idlib region, the stronghold of the rebel organizations in northern Syria.**

■ On January 28, 2017, the Syrian forces entered the **town of Ain al-Fijah**, in whose vicinity the spring supplying water to Damascus is located, and hoisted the Syrian flag there. Syrian Army sapper units started to defuse mines left behind by the rebel organizations, in preparation for the entry of maintenance teams to repair the damage and restore the water supply to the city (Dimashq al-Aan, January 28, 2017). At the same time, buses arrived at the spot and evacuated the rebels and their families to Idlib.



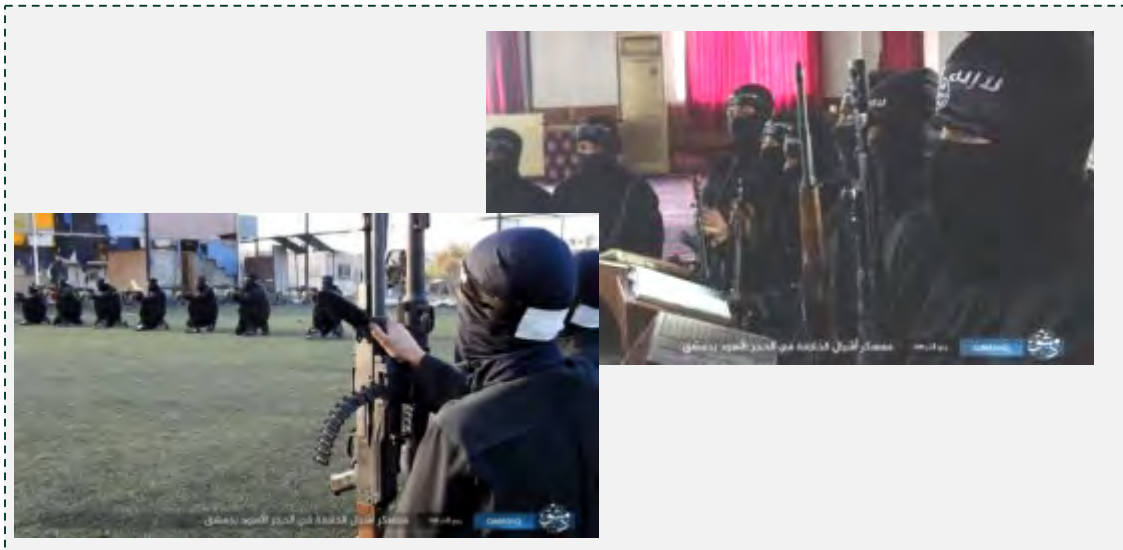
The Syrian Army enters Ain al-Fijah (Al-Mayadeen, January 30, 2017)



Right: Damage sustained by the structure at the Ain al-Fijah Spring (YouTube, December 27, 2016; Syrian TV, January 29, 2017). Left: Maintenance teams enter the structure at the Ain al-Fijah Spring (Al-Mayadeen, January 30, 2017)

■ ISIS released photos of a camp designed for the training of children and youth (“Lion Cubs of the Caliphate”) in **Al-Hajr al-Aswad, south Damascus**. Teenage boys

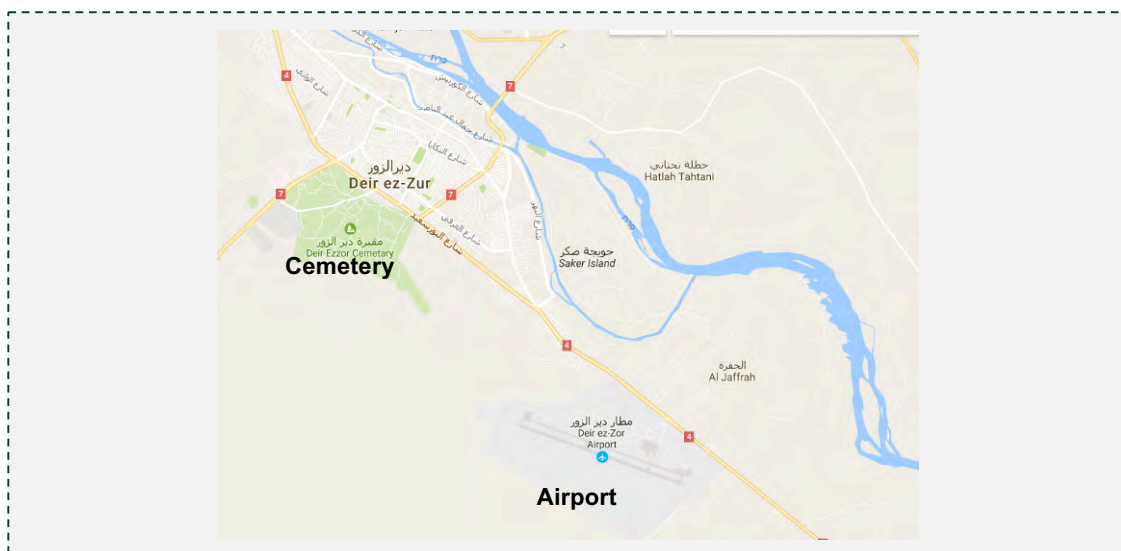
are seen in the camp undergoing military training and reciting passages from the Quran (Haqq, January 28, 2017).



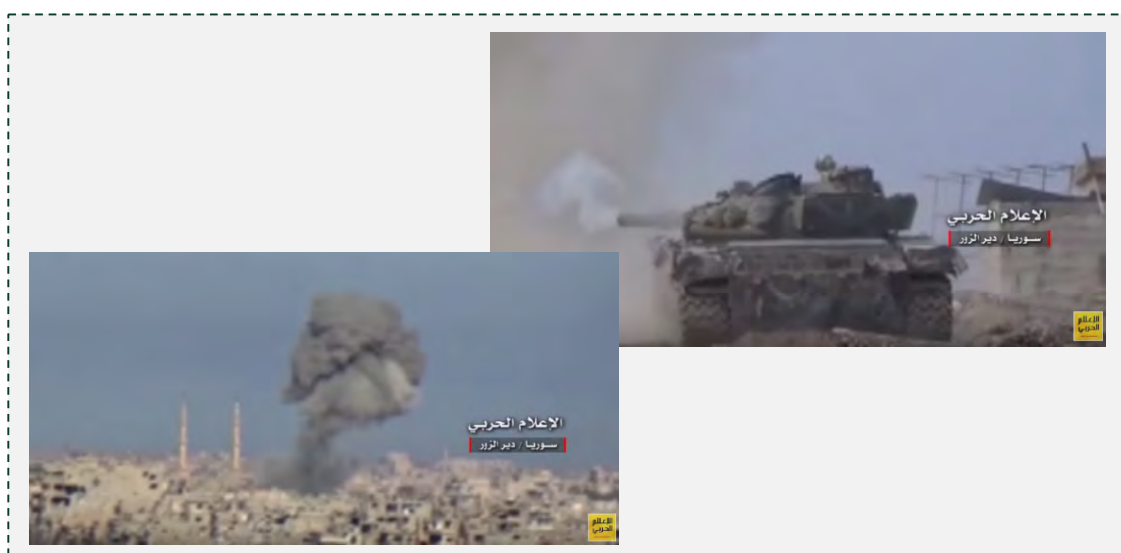
Lion Cubs of the Caliphate training in Al-Hajr al-Aswad, south Damascus (Haqq, January 28, 2017)

Deir ez-Zor

■ In Deir ez-Zor, fighting continued between ISIS operatives and the Syrian forces, with extensive Russian and Syrian Air Force air support. Fighting still focused on **the area between the Deir ez-Zor airport and the cemetery south of the city** (see map). On January 26, 2017, the Syrian forces repelled an ISIS attempted attack in the airport area (Dimashq al-Aan, January 26, 2017). ISIS reportedly detonated a car bomb at the airport (Sawt Lebnan, January 28, 2017), and took over the cemetery area south of Deir ez-Zor. However this has yet to be confirmed. At this stage, it seems that ISIS continues to retain its achievements from the recent battles, mainly, the airport still remains cut off, and ISIS controls several southern neighborhoods.



The battle zone between the airport and the cemetery, south of Deir ez-Zor (Google Maps)



Right: Syrian tank firing at ISIS targets. Left: Syrian and Russian planes attacking ISIS in Deir ez-Zor (Syrian Army Spokesperson's office, January 30, 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 were supported by US-led coalition airstrikes. According to the SDF spokesman, the objective of the next stage of the operation will be to completely isolate the city of Al-Raqqah (Khatwa, July 31, 2017).
- According to the US Department of Defense, the SDF forces are at a distance of 4 km from the Tabqa Dam and less than 30 km from Al-Raqqah. It has been reported that since the beginning of the operation to liberate Al-Raqqah, which started on November 5, 2015, the SDF cleansed over 3,000 km², and the coalition forces

have carried out over 900 airstrikes. These attacks destroyed more than 100 ISIS vehicles and more than 300 fortifications (US Department of Defense website, January 26, 2017).

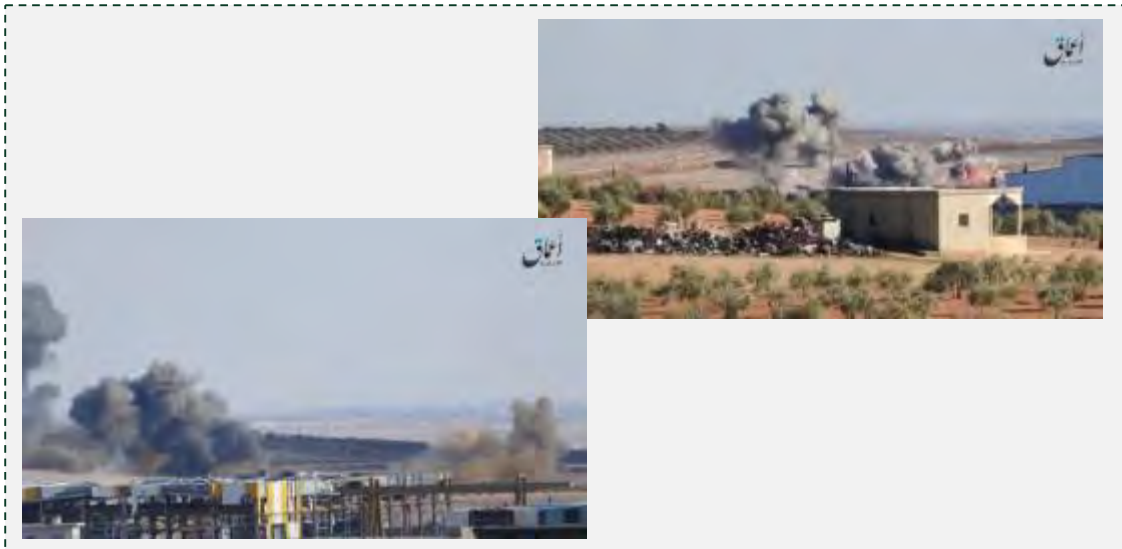


ISIS artillery fire at the SDF forces in the western rural area of Al-Raqqah (Amaq, January 26, 2017)

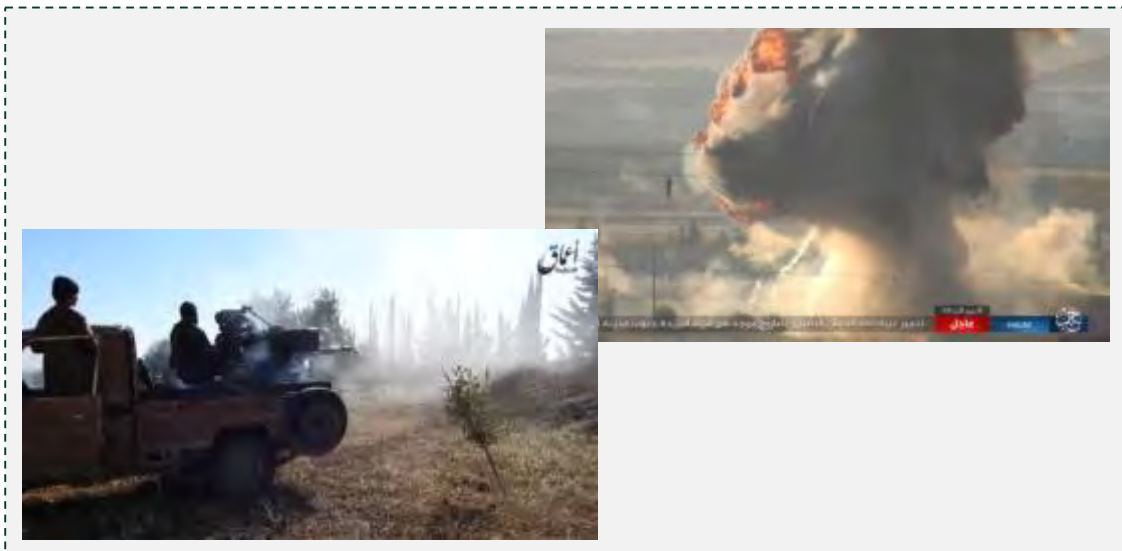
The Al-Bab region

■ 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 continues to attack ISIS targets in collaboration with the Turkish Air Force). **It seems that the Free Syrian Army, upon Turkish instruction, stopped advancing on the northern and western outskirts of Al-Bab and so far has refrained from attempting to break into the city.**

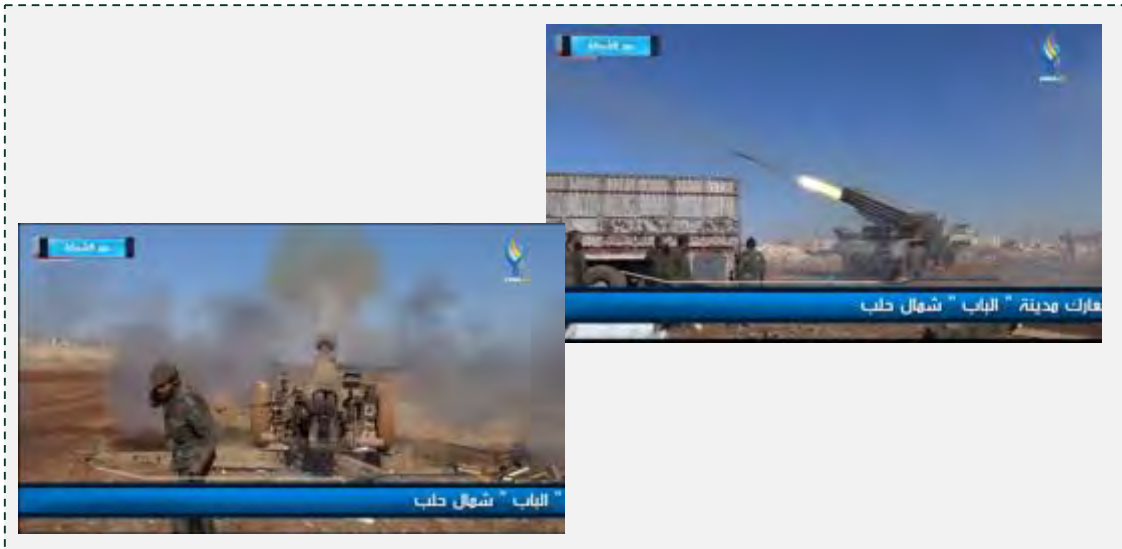
■ **At the same time, the Syrian Army continued to advance towards Al-Bab from the direction of Aleppo, and the Syrian forces currently seem to be close to the city.** According to sources in the Syrian Army and its allies, the Syrian Army took over about 25 villages in **the southern rural area of Al-Bab**. The fighting is reportedly concentrated around the village of Al-Madyuna, about 10 km southwest of Al-Bab.



Video released by ISIS, showing Syrian Army helicopter attack against villages southwest of Al-Bab. ISIS claims that the attack was carried out by barrel bombs and rockets (Amaq, January 27, 2017)



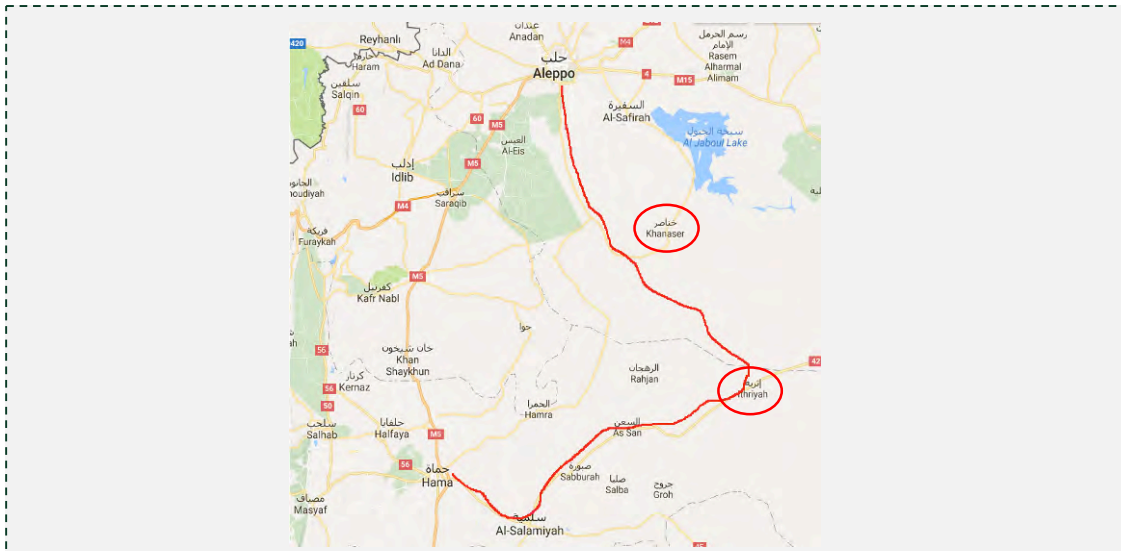
Right: Syrian Army APC hit by an anti-tank missile fired by an ISIS operative (Haqq, January 28, 2017). Left: ISIS operatives firing an anti-aircraft gun at the Syrian Army in the vicinity of the village of Al-Madyuna, about 10 km southwest of Al-Bab (Amaq, January 27, 2017)



Right: Syrian Army launching rockets in the city of Al-Bab. Left: Syrian Army artillery fire at ISIS positions in Al-Bab (SAMA Syrian Channel, January 30, 2017)

ISIS attack initiative to cut off the supply route between Aleppo and Hama

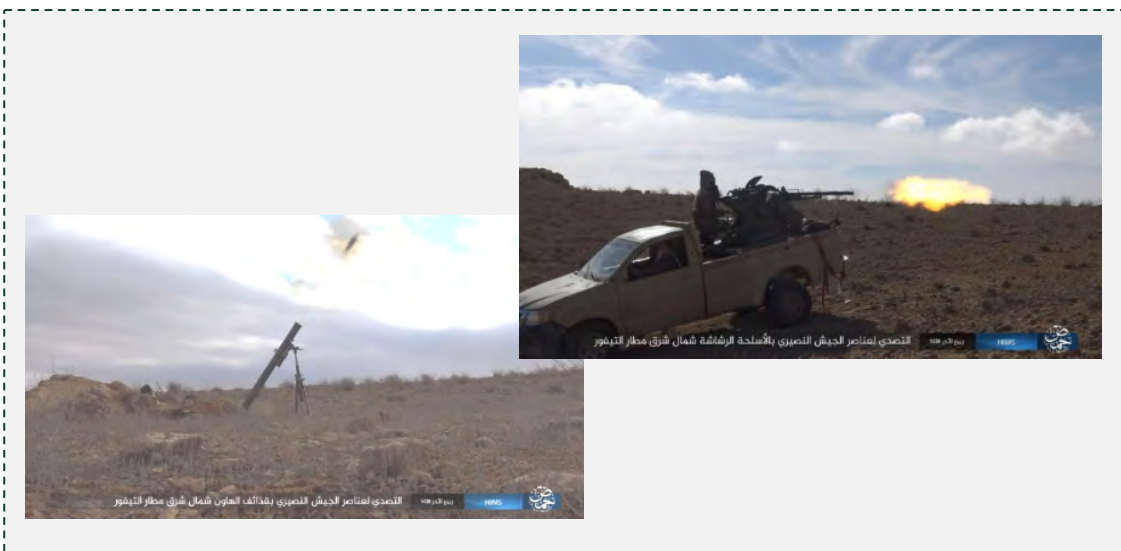
■ This week, ISIS operatives attacked Syrian forces deployed in **the areas of Khanaser and Ithriya**, near the route **leading from Hama to Aleppo**. **This route is reportedly the only path through which supply is delivered to Aleppo** (since the main road between Aleppo and Hama has been cut off by the rebel organizations). On January 26, 2017, ISIS reportedly managed to cut off the route. **However, on January 30, 2017, the Syrian Army managed to reopen it and regain control** (Akhbar Halab Al-Ajela Facebook page, affiliated with the Syrian regime, January 30, 2017). **In the ITIC's assessment, ISIS's initiative to cut off the route was intended to make it difficult for the Syrian forces to establish a presence in Aleppo and to alleviate the pressure on ISIS in the city of Al-Bab.**



The supply route between Hama and Aleppo, which ISIS is trying to cut off (Google Maps)

The Palmyra region

■ This week as well, clashes continued in the area of the T-4 military airfield. On January 27, 2017, ISIS announced that 13 soldiers of the Syrian Army had been killed and several others had been wounded in battles that took place northeast of the airfield. Syrian press reported that forces of the Syrian regime had taken over territories northwest of the airfield, including a compound of an air defense battalion situated about 10 km from the airfield (Dimashq al-Aan, January 29, 2017; Syrian TV, January 30, 2017).



ISIS operatives firing at Syrian Army soldiers northeast of the T-4 military airfield (Haqq, January 29, 2017)

Southern Syria

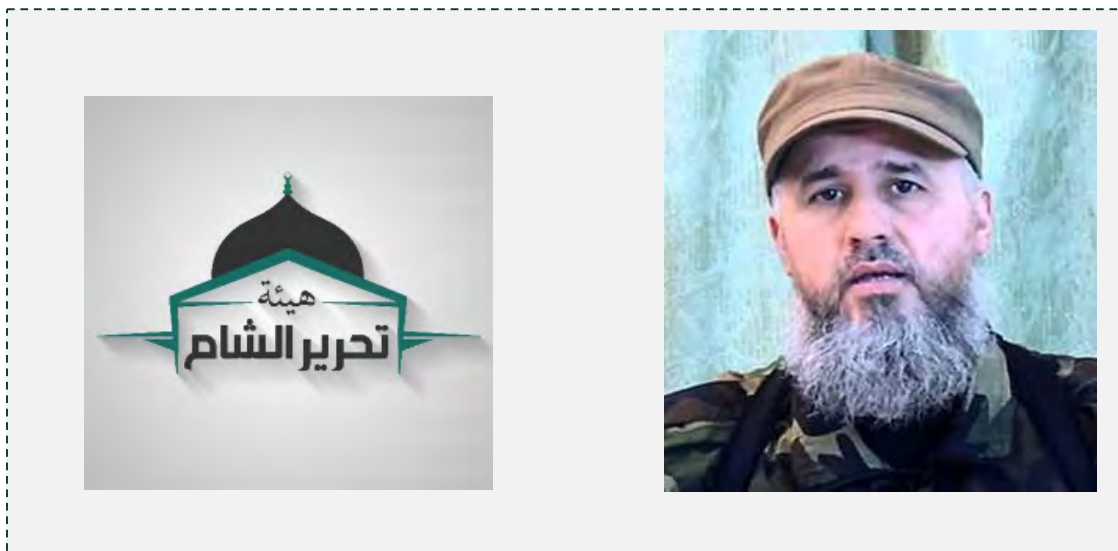
■ **Power struggles between ISIS and the rebel organizations in southern Syria continue. On January 24, 2017, ISIS claimed responsibility for an attempt on the life of the chairman of the tribunal of the rebel organizations in Daraa.** The assassination attempt was carried out by detonating an IED around a prison close to Daraa, where the chairman of the tribunal was present at the time. He was wounded, and two of his bodyguards were killed (ARA News, January 24, 2017; Amaq, January 24, 2017). On January 26, 2017, the deputy chairman of the tribunal was injured after an IED exploded in his car. The car was parked in front of his house in the town of Al-Taybeh, east of Daraa (all4syria, January 26, 2017).

New umbrella framework headed by Fateh al-Sham Front

■ On January 28, 2017, five rebel groups established a new umbrella framework in southern Syria, called **The Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham** (*Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*). It is comprised of **five organizations of Islamic nature**: Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly, the Al-Nusra Front); the Nur al-Din al-Zanki Movement; the Sunna Army; Ansar al-Din Front (*Jabhat Ansar al-Din*); and Al-Haqq Brigade (*Liwa' al-Haqq*). **Fateh al-Sham Front is actually the dominant component among the rebel organizations comprising the new umbrella framework.**

■ A memorandum of opinion released by the new umbrella framework stated its objectives, mentioning, inter alia, **toppling the Syrian regime, and imposing Islamic law (Sharia) on the inhabitants of Syria.** The memorandum calls on the rebel organizations to join the ranks of this umbrella framework (Tahrir_Sham Twitter account, January 28, 2017).

■ **The new framework is headed by a senior jihadi operative called Hashem al-Sheikh (Abu Jaber), who had previously headed Ahrar al-Sham** and left the organization in 2015 owing to **his being affiliated with Al-Qaeda** (Ahrar al-Sham is a large rebel organization of an Islamic nature which opposes Fateh al-Sham Front). **Hashem al-Sheikh**, born in 1968 in Maskana, east of Aleppo, has a degree in mechanical engineering. During the years 2003-2005, he fought in Iraq in the ranks of Al-Qaeda, under the leadership of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (the founding father of ISIS). In 2005, he was arrested, sentenced to eight years in prison, and released in 2011 (Al-Alam, January 29, 2017).



Right: Hashem al-Sheikh (Abu Jaber), a senior jihadi operative affiliated with Al-Qaeda, heading the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (Al-Alam, January 29, 2017). Left: Emblem of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham (Tahrer_Shaw Twitter account)

■ Fateh al-Sham Front (Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria), the dominant component of the new framework, is not included in the ceasefire. **It is now targeted by the Syrian regime, Russia, and other rebel organizations**, which may use the ceasefire to increase the pressure on it. In view of this situation, Fateh al-Sham Front resorts to a familiar tactic which it has employed in the past, of **strengthening its power through the establishment of joint frameworks and collaborations with other Islamic rebel organizations, while making an effort to blur its real identity as Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria**. Establishing the new framework was also designed to **increase the appeal of Fateh al-Sham Front in comparison with ISIS**, the rival jihadi organization. For this purpose, the man placed at the head of the new framework is a long-time jihadi operative who is affiliated with Al-Qaeda and hostile to ISIS.

Main developments in Iraq

The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

■ The Iraqi forces completed their takeover of east Mosul and they are now preparing for the continuation of the campaign – the takeover of the neighborhoods west of the Tigris River. ISIS on its part fired artillery at the east neighborhoods of the city, trying to disrupt the Iraqi Army preparations. American press reported that while cleansing the west of the city, **the Iraqi forces had found mustard gas and a store of Russian surface-to-surface missiles, which belonged to ISIS** (Washington Post, January 28, 2017).



The Iraqi Army completed its takeover of east Mosul (the Nineveh Information Center, January 24, 2017).



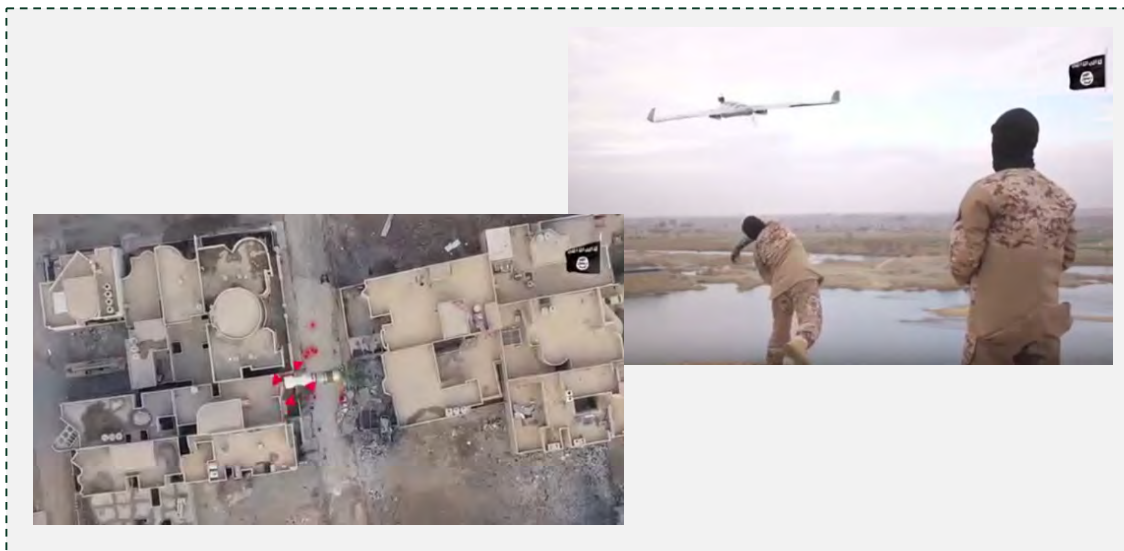
Right: The liberated eastern part of the city of Mosul: convoys of Iraqi Army vehicles on the street (The Nineveh Information Center, January 26, 2017). Left: The east Mosul neighborhood of Al-Zohour – traffic returns to normal (Nineveh Information Center, January 28, 2017)

■ According to **Pentagon Spokesman Jeff Davis**, the Iraqi forces are nearing the **end of the operation in east Mosul**. According to him, ISIS operatives are retreating towards the northern bridge of the Tigris River, with the intention of crossing to the western side of the river. He said that the US destroyed ten more ISIS boats on the Tigris River, to prevent the operatives from crossing (US Department of State website, January 26, 2017).

■ **The Iraqi Army is preparing for the takeover of west Mosul**. The Iraqi troops fired artillery at ISIS targets in the west part of the city (Al-Jazeera, January 25, 2017). **A reinforcement of elite units was reportedly dispatched to Mosul** (Al-

Mayadeen, January 29, 2017). An Iraqi aircraft scattered leaflets in the western part of the city, calling on the inhabitants to cooperate with the Iraqi Army in order to facilitate the operation and avoid civilian casualties (Anatolia, January 21, 2017). In an attempt to tighten the siege on Mosul, it is **planned to cut off the city from the Tal Afar district, west of Mosul. This will cut off ISIS's supply lines from Mosul to Syria, which are still active** (Nineveh Information Center, January 26, 2017).

- **ISIS's propaganda machine** is trying to exaggerate its military strength. As part of this endeavor, ISIS's Nineveh Province released a video documenting a drone in ISIS's possession. The aircraft is allegedly intended to drop bombs from the air. The video documents several cases where the drone has been employed in the Mosul area (YouTube, January 27, 2017).



Showing ISIS's drone being launched and firing (YouTube, January 27, 2017)

The global jihad in other countries

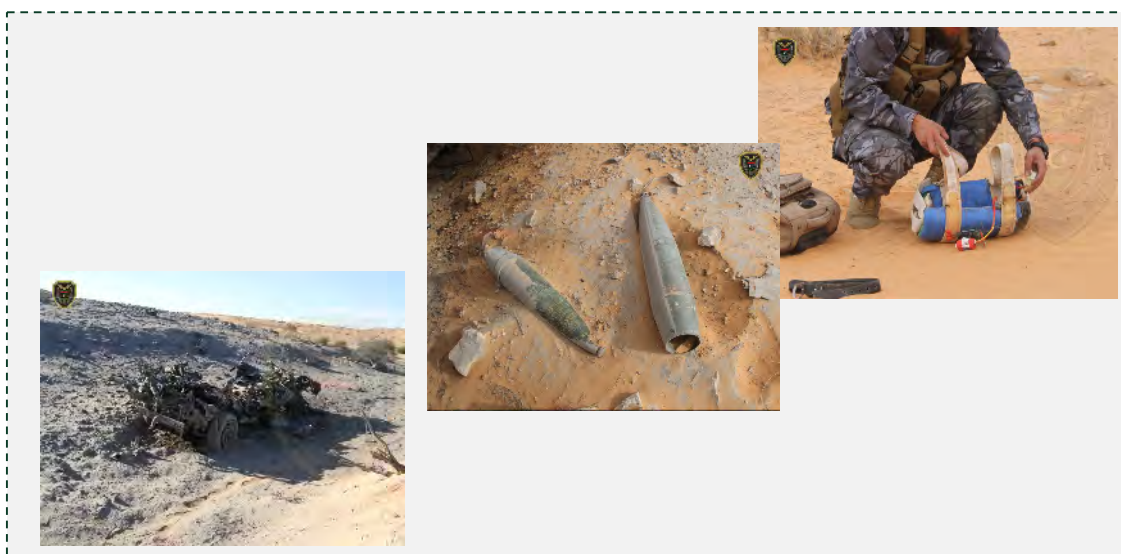
Libya

The Sirte area

- The security operations room of the Libyan Government of National Accord in Misrata announced that a force on its behalf combed the sites attacked by the US southwest of Sirte.¹ The following are the findings of the troops that carried out the combing activity (Facebook page of the security operations room in Misrata, January 26, 2017):

¹ During the night of January 18-19, 2017, US Army bombers carried out an airstrike against ISIS bases located about 45 km southwest of the city of Sirte, which had been taken over from ISIS.

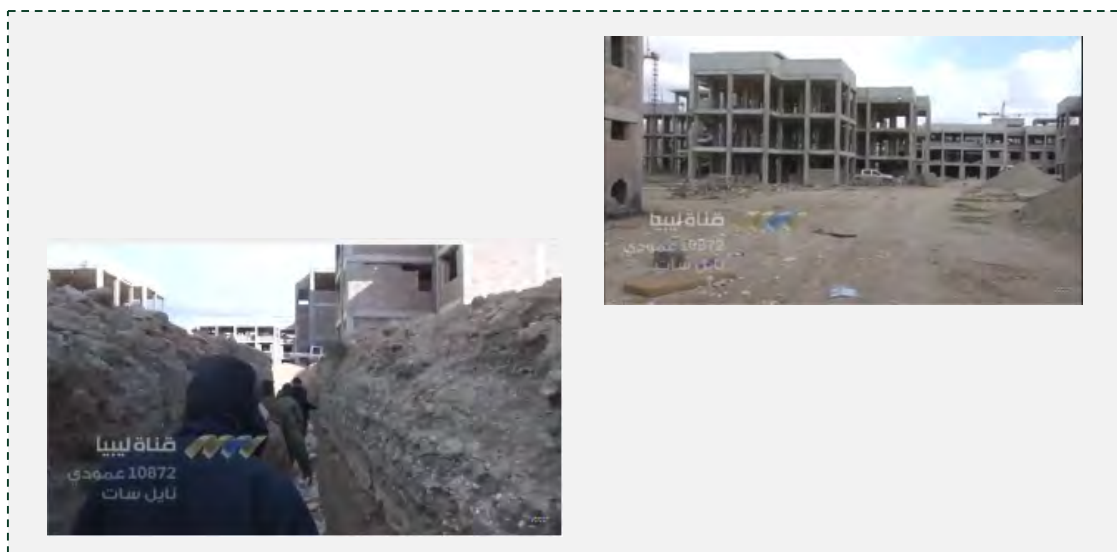
- **At the first site, about seventy bodies of ISIS operatives were found.** The troops found that the site had been used for training, and that most of the operatives staying in it did not flee the battles in Sirte.
- **About twenty bodies of ISIS operatives were found at the second site.** It belonged to a unit named “The Victory Company” (*Sariyyat al-Fateh*), **whose operatives had been trained to carry out terrorist attacks.** There, the troops found shells, explosive belts and camouflage gear.



Findings from the area of the US airstrike (Facebook page of the security operations room in Misrata, January 26, 2017)

The city of Benghazi

- The spokesman for the Khalifa Haftar forces, and senior commanders of his troops, announced on January 25, 2017, that the Qanfuda area in west Benghazi had been liberated from the hands of the Shura Council of the Benghazi Revolutionaries (a local jihadi organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda). They said that the forces were advancing toward the last stronghold of the Shura Council in the west of the city, called “12 buildings” (Reuters in Arabic, January 25, 2017; alarabiya.net, January 29, 2017).



The “12 buildings” area in west Benghazi (Libya’s Channel on YouTube, January 28, 2017)

Yemen

■ In a US attack in central Yemen against AQAP operatives, **14 operatives were killed, one of them described as a senior operative**. It is possible that several civilians were also wounded in the attack. The activity was carried out by the US Special Forces against the house of Abd al-Raouf al-Dhahab, in the Bayda Province, where the US activity has been focused during the recent month. An aircraft attacked the operative’s house, in coordination with Special Forces which arrived by a helicopter and joined local forces. One of the helicopters was hit while landing, and a US soldier was killed (Reuters, January 29, 2017).

Counterterrorism activity

Austria

■ In raids carried out by Austrian police on apartments and unofficial mosques, **14 people suspected of being ISIS operatives were arrested**. The raids had been carried out in the cities of **Graz and Vienna**. Among the people arrested were foreign citizens who immigrated to Austria. The raids were mainly directed against a network headed by Ebu Tejma, a Muslim preacher from Bosnia who had been sentenced to imprisonment **for recruiting youngsters to fight in the ranks of ISIS in Syria** (he has been imprisoned in Graz since July 2016). According to the Austrian Interior Ministry, **about 300 people had left Austria or were apprehended** when trying to leave the country to fight in Syria. **About 40 of them were killed, and about 90 returned to Austria** (The Local.at, January 26, 2017).

Russia

- In the center of the city of Shali, Chechnya, a clash occurred between policemen and three suspects who approached the police checkpoint and refused to show their papers. Two policemen and two civilians were wounded. The three suspects were killed. According to **Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of the federal government in Chechnya**, two of the suspects were on the federal government's wanted list. The network they belonged to was headed by an operative named **Magomed Rashidov, a native of Shali, who is affiliated with ISIS**. Magomed Rashidov left for Syria three years ago and recruits operatives to ISIS through the Internet (1tv website, the Chechen Federal Government website, January 30, 2017).
- **Apti Alaudinov, the deputy minister for Chechen affairs in the Russian government**, said that **the number of Chechens who had left the republic and joined ISIS dropped in 2016**. According to Alaudinov, **a total of 19 Chechens joined ISIS in Syria during 2016**. He also pointed out that the activity of the law enforcement authorities in Russia managed to prevent ISIS from setting up squads whose purpose was recruiting Chechens to the ranks of ISIS (Sputnik, January 26, 2017). **This drop is part of an overall trend of a decrease in the number of foreign fighters joining ISIS.**