



## Spotlight on Global Jihad (February 2-8, 2017)



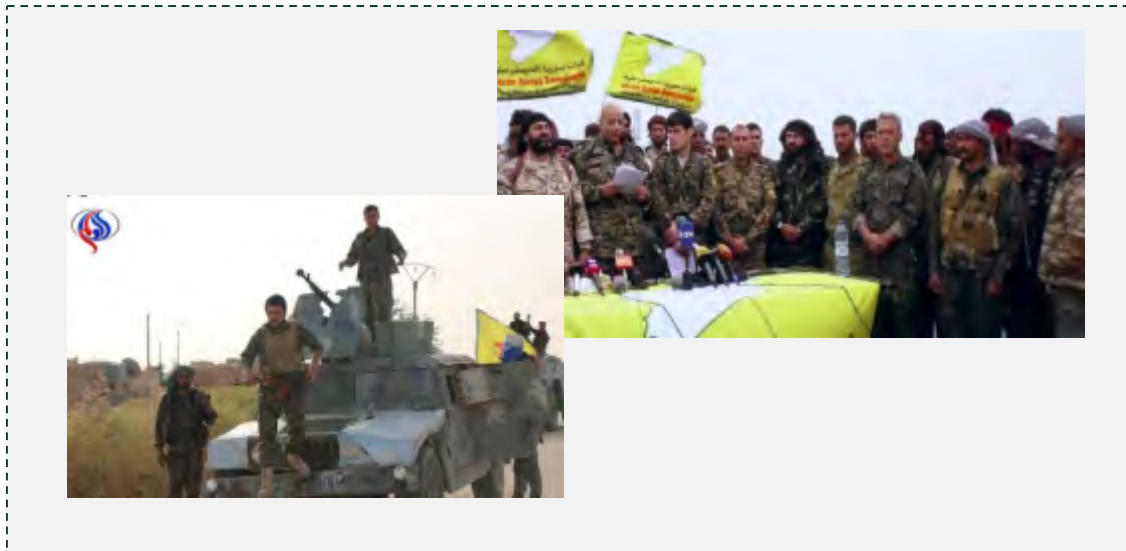
### Main events of the week

- In **Al-Raqqah**, ISIS's stronghold in Syria, and in **Al-Bab**, ISIS's last stronghold west of the Euphrates River, ISIS is under increasing pressure from the attacking forces (the Syrian Democratic Forces with US support, the Free Syrian Army with Turkish support). In the other areas in east Syria, ISIS continues its local offensive initiatives against the Syrian Army, so far without either of the parties gaining the upper hand.
- Following is an overview of the situation in the fighting zones in Syria:
  - The Syrian Democratic Forces announced the opening of the third stage of **the campaign to takeover Al-Raqqah**. The objective of the current stage is to cleanse the area east of the city as a **preliminary stage prior to its encirclement and takeover**.
  - The Free Syrian Army, with Turkish and Syrian Army support, increased the pressure on the **city of Al-Bab**. The Syrian Army reportedly cut off the supply line between Al-Bab and Al-Raqqah, thereby **completing the encirclement of the city**.
  - In the city of **Deir ez-Zor** and to its south, fighting continued between ISIS and the Syrian Army. Currently, ISIS continues to retain its achievements (the encirclement of the military airfield south of the city and takeover of some of its southern neighborhoods).
  - **On the supply route between Aleppo and Hama**, which ISIS is trying to cut off, clashes between ISIS and the Syrian Army continued. The two fighting zones are the areas of the towns of Ithriya and Khanaser, near the route.
  - **In the Palmyra area**, the Syrian Army managed to take over the oil and gas fields and large areas south of the T-4 airfield. However, ISIS continues to retain its main achievements from the attack on Palmyra.
  - **In the Al-Sin (Sayqal) military airfield**, east of Damascus, the Syrian Army succeeded in countering local ISIS initiatives. The fighting in this area is not over yet.
- **The Iraqi Army continued its preparations to take over Mosul's western part**. These preparations included the reinforcement of its forces, intelligence surveillance on ISIS forces in the west of the city, and firing mortar shells at ISIS targets. In the **Tal Afar area** west of Mosul, the Shiite militias and the Iraqi Army are trying to **cut off ISIS's supply route between Mosul and Tal Afar, and from there to Syria, thereby completing the encirclement of Mosul and facilitating the fighting in the west of the city**.

## Main developments in Syria

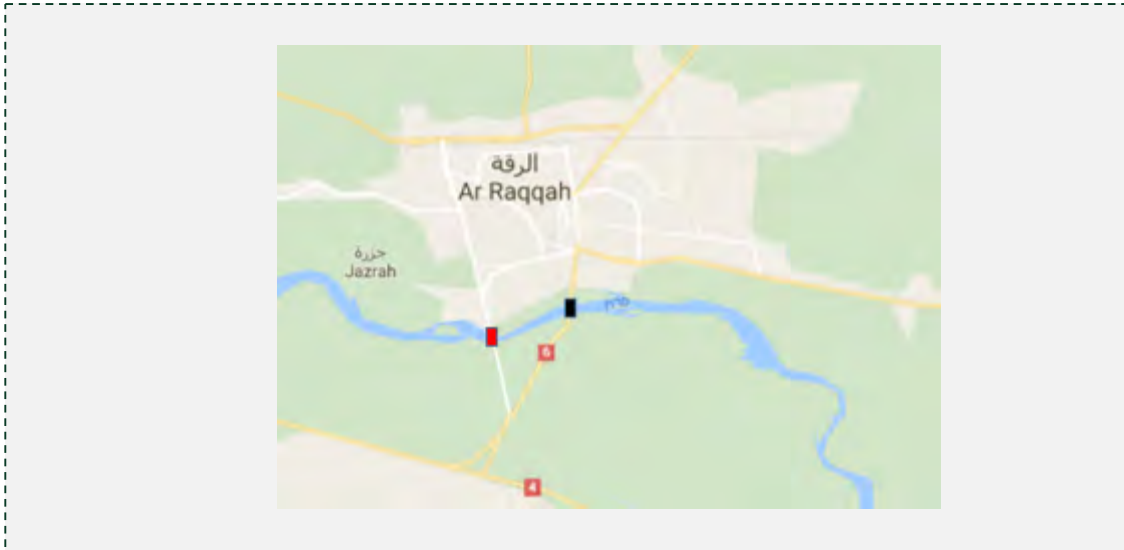
### The Al-Raqqah region

■ On February 4, 2016, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the beginning of the third stage of Operation Euphrates Wrath. Its objective is to take over the area east of Al-Raqqah, a further move towards **the takeover of the city which is ISIS stronghold in Syria. The SDF** took over a number of villages north and northeast of Al-Raqqah. **They are now reportedly at a distance of about 23 km north of Al-Raqqah and 30 km northwest of Al-Raqqah.** They are about 4 km from the Euphrates Dam which is close to Al-Tabqa (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 4, 2017).

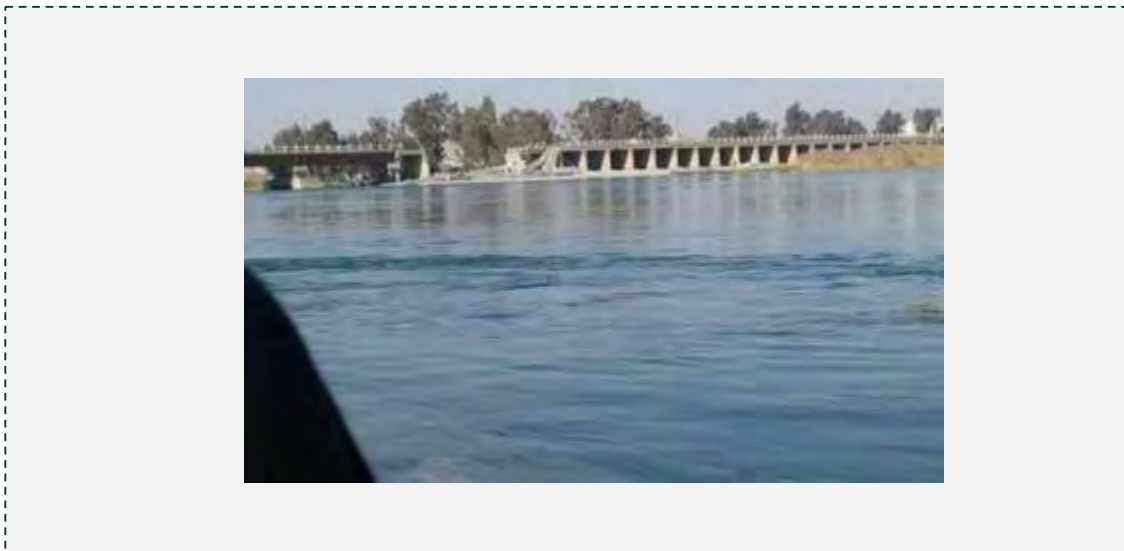


Right: The Syrian Democratic Forces announce the beginning of the third stage of Operation Euphrates Wrath (alsouria.net, February 4, 2017). Left: The Syrian Democratic Forces east of Al-Raqqah (Al-Alam, January 31, 2017)

■ The Syrian Democratic Forces **receive massive air support of the US and the coalition countries.** On February 3, 2017, **coalition fighter planes bombed two bridges** that connected the south of Al-Raqqah to the southern bank of the Euphrates River (the “New Bridge” and the “Old Bridge”). They also **bombed other bridges on the Euphrates River** to cut off ISIS’s supply routes from its stronghold in Al-Raqqah (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 4, 2017); Al-Mayadeen, February 5, 2017). The coalition planes also attacked ISIS targets in and around Al-Raqqah. This attack destroyed three tunnels, artillery, a car bomb, and several ISIS headquarters (centcom.mil, February 5, 2017).



Al-Raqqah's "Old Bridge" (marked in black) and "New Bridge" (marked in red), bombed by the coalition planes (Google Maps)



Al-Raqqah's "Old Bridge", bombed by coalition planes (Twitter, February 3, 2017)

## The Al-Bab region

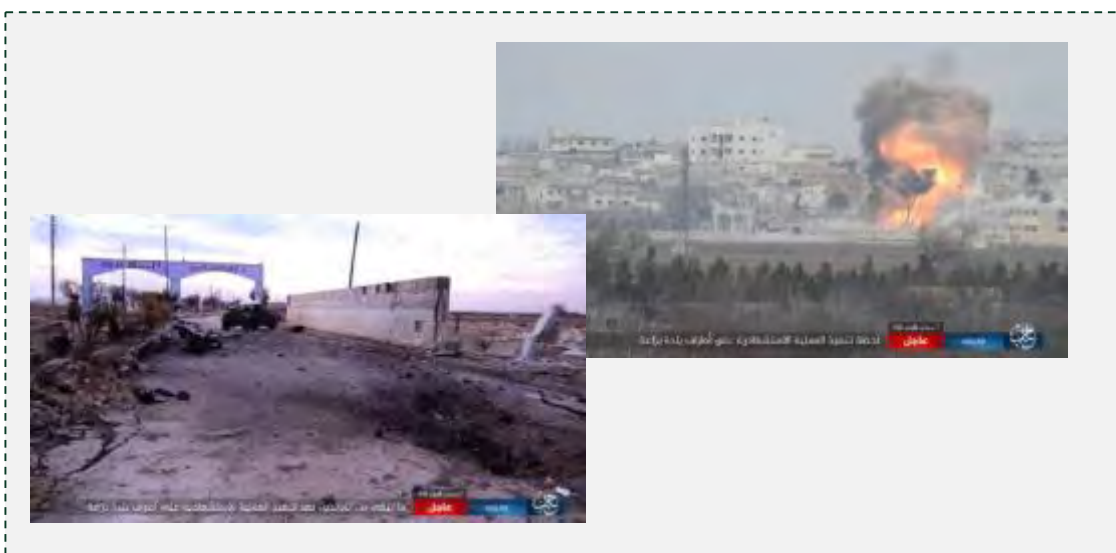
■ The Free Syrian Army, in collaboration with the Turkish Army (operating north and east of Al-Raqqah) and the Syrian Army (operating south of Al-Raqqah), **increased their pressure on the city of Al-Bab**. According to the news agencies and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, **the Syrian Army cut off the supply route between Al-Bab and Al-Raqqah, thus completing the encirclement of Al-Bab**.

■ Clashes between the Free Syrian Army and the Turkish Army on the one hand and ISIS on the other continued this week **in the rural area east and southeast of Al-Bab**. The center of the clashes was the village of Baza'a, east of Al-Bab. ISIS planted

IEDs on the routes leading to Al-Bab and hit APCs of the Turkish Army and the Free Syrian Army.



Right: Turkish Army APC hit by an ISIS-planted IED in the village of Baza'a, east of Al-Bab. Left: Turkish Army APC hit by an ISIS-planted IED. A Free Syrian Army flag is hanging on the APC (Haqq, February 3, 2017)



Right: ISIS car bomb exploding in the village of Baza'a, east of Al-Bab. Left: Devastation caused by the car bomb explosion (Haqq, February 5, 2017)

- **The Syrian Army**, with Syrian / Russian air support, **continued fighting with ISIS south of Al-Bab**. According to ISIS reports, **the fighting took place about 8 km south of Al-Bab**. ISIS reported that it had detonated a car bomb in a Syrian Army staging zone in the village of Aran. ISIS also reported that it had hit a Syrian Army T-72 tank by an anti-tank missile (Haqq, February 4, 2017).

- **The Turkish Air Force continued its massive airstrikes of ISIS targets in Al-Bab and the battle zones around it**. This week, Turkish planes reportedly attacked and hit 85 ISIS targets. A total of 51 ISIS operatives, including ISIS Al-Bab governor

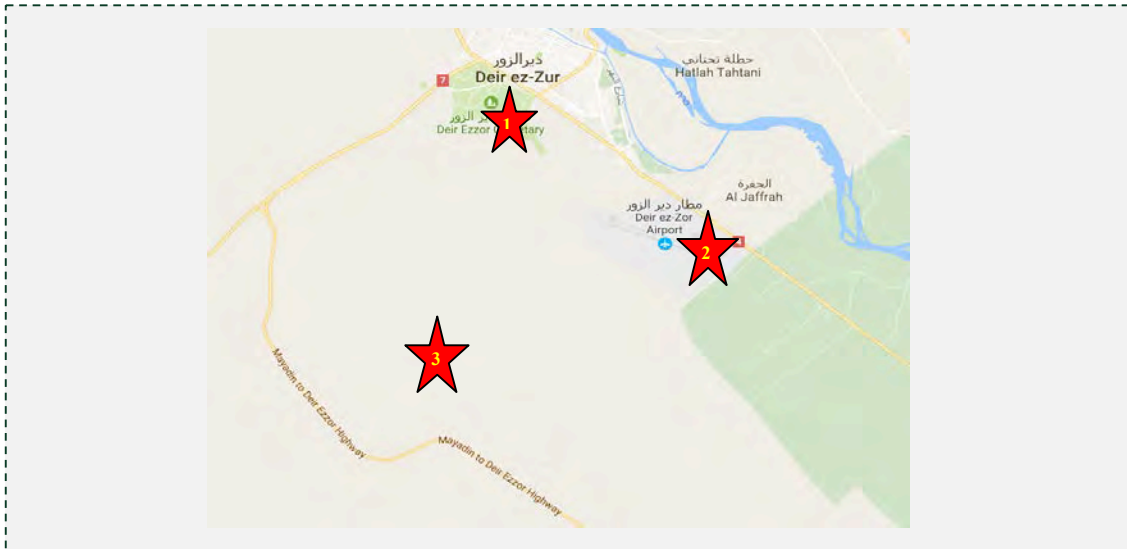
(*emir*), codenamed **Abu Khalid al-Urduni** (i.e., the Jordanian), were reportedly killed. According to Turkish media, the Turkish Air Force destroyed in its airstrikes 83 buildings, ten booby-trapped vehicles, two arms depots, and two artillery pieces (milliyet.com, February 2, 2017).



**Abu Khalid al-Urduni, Al-Bab governor**  
(*emir*), killed in a Turkish Army airstrike (Hurriyet, February 5, 2017)

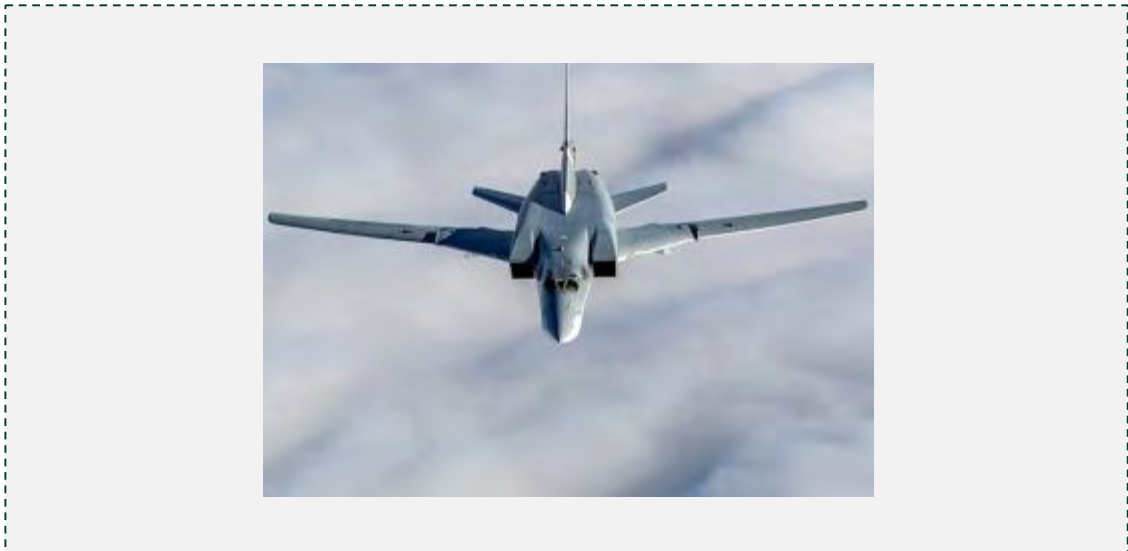
## Deir ez-Zor

■ **In the southern suburbs of Deir ez-Zor** and the airport area, fighting continued between ISIS operatives and the Syrian Army, **with no significant change in the situation on the ground**. Syrian TV reported that the Syrian Army took over dominant areas in the vicinity of **Mount Tharda**, south of Deir ez-Zor, and cut off several supply routes of ISIS (Syrian TV, February 4, 2017). In addition, the Syrian forces reportedly repelled an ISIS attack in the cemetery area, south of Deir ez-Zor (Dimashq al-Aan, February 5, 2017). Currently, ISIS still retains its recent achievements (the takeover of several of Deir ez-Zor's southern neighborhoods and the encirclement of the airport).



**Battle zones in the Deir ez-Zor region: the cemetery south of the city (1), the military airport (2), and Mount Tharda (3) (Google Maps)**

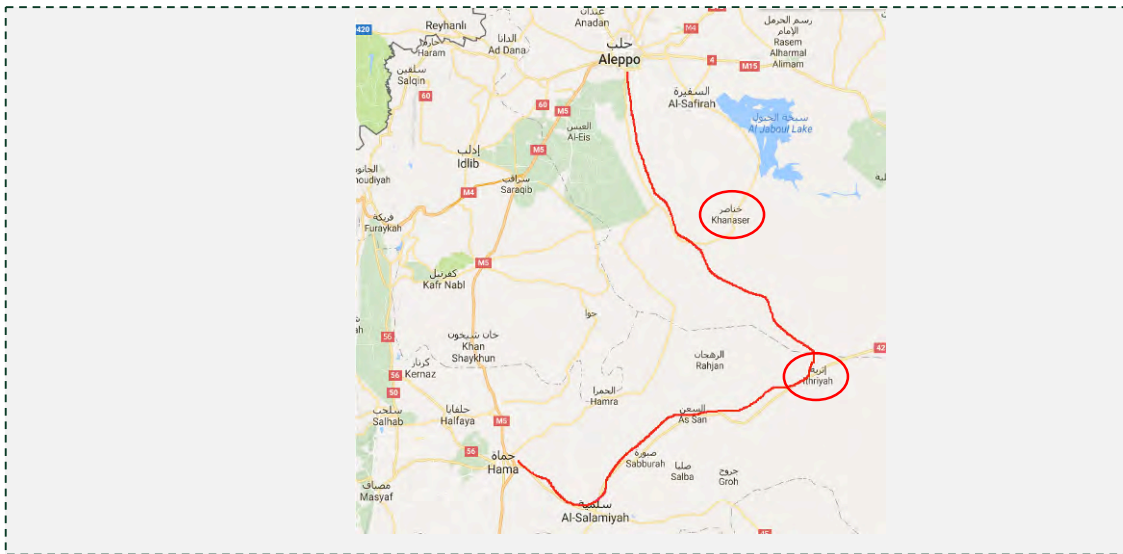
- The Russian Defense Ministry reported that Russian Tu-22M3 long-range planes carried out an airstrike on ISIS targets close to the city of Al-Mayadeen, southeast of Deir ez-Zor. The planes took off from a Russian Air Force base and crossed the airspace of Iran and Iraq. They were accompanied by Sukhoi Su-30SM and Su-35S planes that took off from the Hmeymim base in Syria. The Russian planes attacked terrorist targets and hit ISIS operatives (Russian Defense Ministry's website, February 3, 2017).



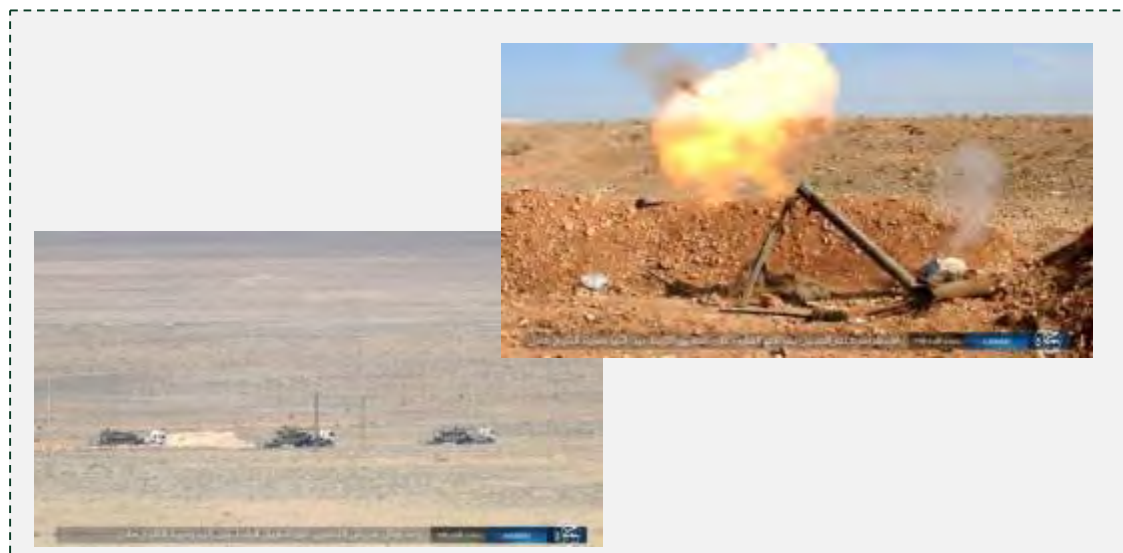
**Russian planes attacking terror targets in the area of Al-Mayadeen (Russian Defense Ministry's website eng.mil.ru, February 3, 2017)**

## Clashes around the route between Aleppo and Hama

■ In late January 2017, ISIS operatives attacked Syrian forces **deployed in the areas of Khanaser and Ithriya, with the intention of cutting off the supply route connecting Aleppo and Hama**. This week, clashes continued between ISIS and the Syrian Army in the area southeast and east of the town of Khanaser, so far without either of the parties gaining the upper hand. Clashes also took place in the **Al-Sheikh Hilal area**, on the route leading from Ithriya to Hama (about 90 km southwest of Ithriya).



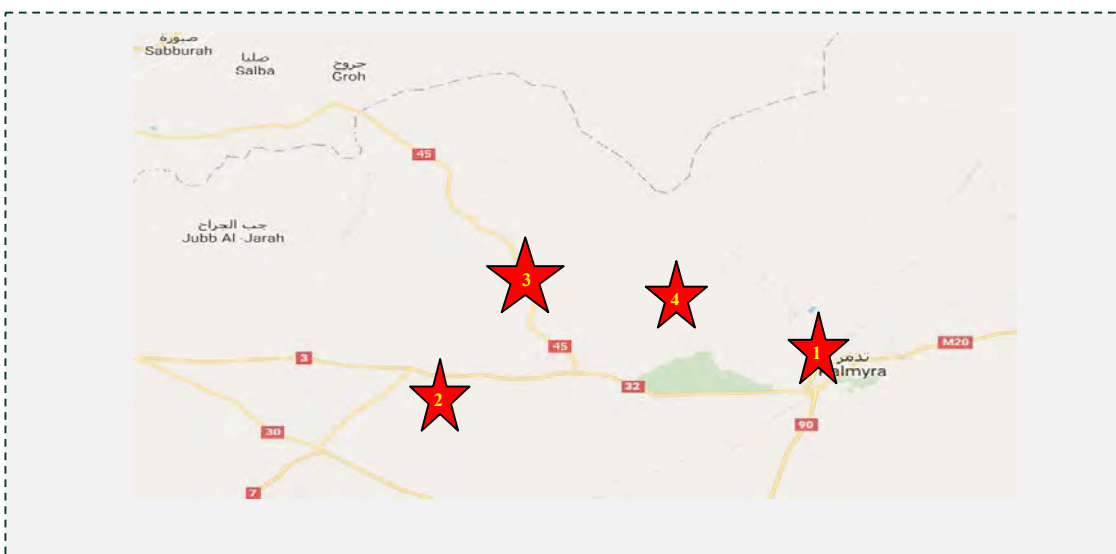
The supply route between Aleppo and Hama, which ISIS is trying to cut off (Google Maps)



Right: ISIS operatives fire mortar shells at a Syrian Army outpost in the area of Al-Sheikh Hilal. Left: Syrian Army tanks on trucks, on the Ithriya-Al-Sheikh Hilal route (Haqq, February 5, 2017)

## The Palmyra region

■ This week, fierce battles took place between ISIS and the Syrian Army in the area of **Jahar Junction (about 18 km east of the T-4 airfield)**. The junction is situated 38 km west of the city of Palmyra, and Road 45, which heads north to the oil and gas fields in the region, starts from it. The Syrian forces, with Russian air support, reportedly took over vast parts of the oil and gas fields Jahar and Hayan (Khotwa, February 5, 2017). According to the Syrian regime, the Syrian forces are now in control of vast areas south of the T-4 airfield (Syrian Army Spokesperson's office, February 1, 2017).



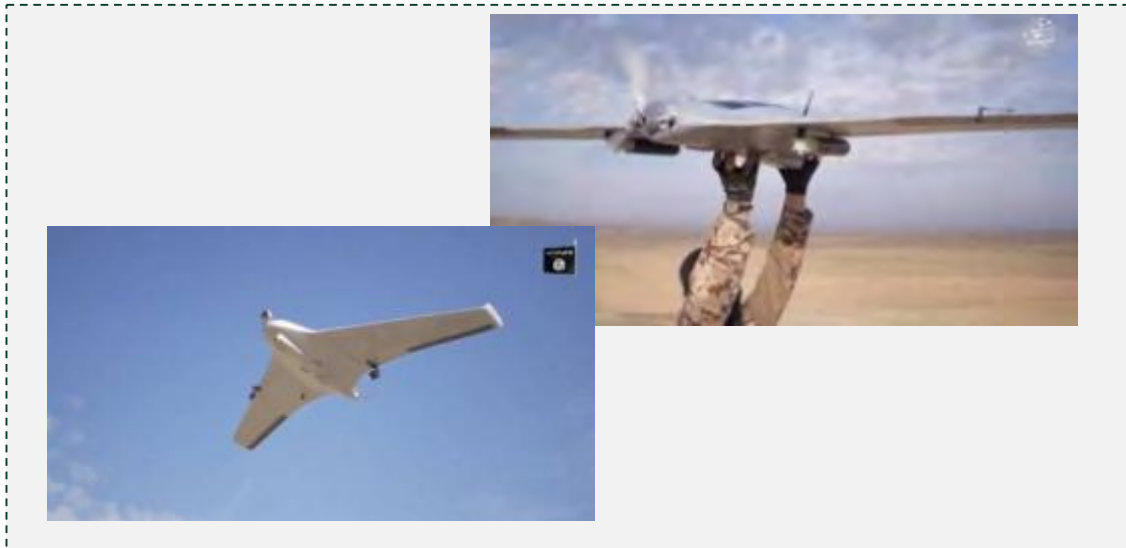
The city of Palmyra (1), the T-4 airfield (2), the Jahar (3) and Hayan (4) oil and gas fields (Google Maps)

## The region east of Damascus

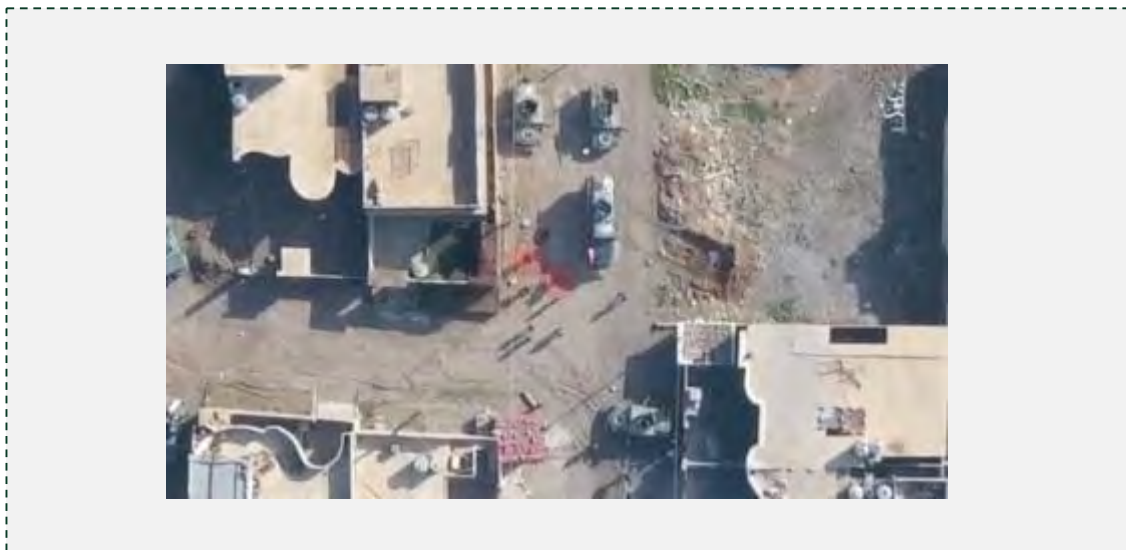
■ On February 4, 2017, the **Syrian Army reportedly restored control of three outposts east of the Al-Sin (Sayqal) military airfield** (about 90 km east of Damascus). ISIS reportedly sustained many fatalities, and some of its weapons, including a tank, off-road vehicles and four vehicles with heavy machine guns, were destroyed (Syrian TV, February 4, 2017; Al-Watan, February 5, 2017).

■ According to ISIS, On February 4, 2017, two Syrian soldiers were wounded **by an armed drone** northeast of the Al-Sin airfield. ISIS claimed that it moved its use of armed drones from Iraq to Syria. According to ISIS, those drones were previously used successfully in Mosul and Tal Afar (Haqq, February 4, 2017).





Right: ISIS operative prepares a drone armed with two bombs (Al-Diyar, February 5, 2017). Left: ISIS reconnaissance drone which is also used for carrying ammunition (Haqq, February 4, 2017)

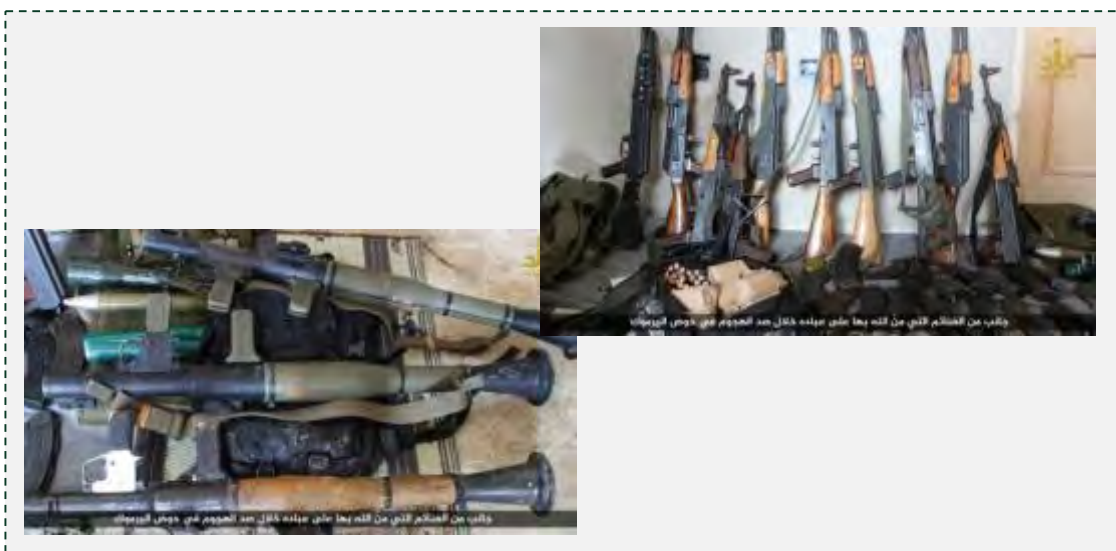


The scene of the drone attack, northeast of the Al-Sin military airfield (Haqq, February 4, 2017)

## Southern Syria

### Power struggles between ISIS and its rivals

■ **The power struggles between ISIS and other rebel organizations in southern Syria continue.** On January 31, 2017, the ISIS-affiliated Khalid bin al-Walid Army announced that its operatives had stopped an advance attempt of a force belonging to the Free Syrian Army, on the Sahem Al-Jawlan Dam route (about 26 km northwest of Daraa). According to ISIS, the attacking force sustained 12 dead and 20 wounded, and lost many weapons.



Right: Free Syrian Army Kalashnikov rifles seized by the Khalid bin al-Walid Army at the Sahem al-Jawlan route. Left: RPG launchers seized by the Khalid bin al-Walid Army (Haqq, February 3, 2017)

### Jordanian attack in southern Syria

■ On the evening of February 3, 2017, Jordanian warplanes attacked ISIS targets in southern Syria. The attacks were carried out on the second anniversary of the murder of Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh by ISIS. The targets that were destroyed included: ammunition depots; a workshop for assembling car bombs; ISIS bases and a Syrian Army outpost occupied by ISIS. Unmanned aircraft and guided bombs were reportedly used in these airstrikes. According to an announcement issued by the Jordanian Army, the airstrikes were carried out in memory of the Jordanians who fell in the war on terrorism.

■ An Al-Jazeera reporter in Amman said that according to “military sources,” the area that was bombed is controlled by the ISIS-affiliated Khalid bin al-Walid Army. The targets were attacked in the wake of intelligence indicating that ISIS operatives were using this area to carry out attacks against the **Army of Free Tribes**, which is handled by Jordan and defends its borders, including its border with Syria in the Syrian desert<sup>1</sup> (Jordanian Army website, February 4, 2017; aljazeera.net, February 4, 2017; Arabi21, February 5, 2017; Al-Arabi al-Jadid, February 6, 2017).

■ According to Jordanian media reports, **the Jordanian airstrikes on ISIS targets in southern Syria were carried out directly and had no connection with the US-led international coalition**. According to the daily Al-Quds al-Arabi, the airstrikes are an

<sup>1</sup> **The Army of Free Tribes** (*Jaysh Ahrar al-Ashayer*) is a local tribal force handled by the Jordanian Army, which operates with US and British support. This force defends the large Rukban refugee camp, located near the Syrian-Jordanian border. The force was established in December 2015. A year later, following the dismantling of the New Syrian Army, this force merged with a new local force, which was established in place of the New Syrian Army (Al-Ghad, January 21, 2017).

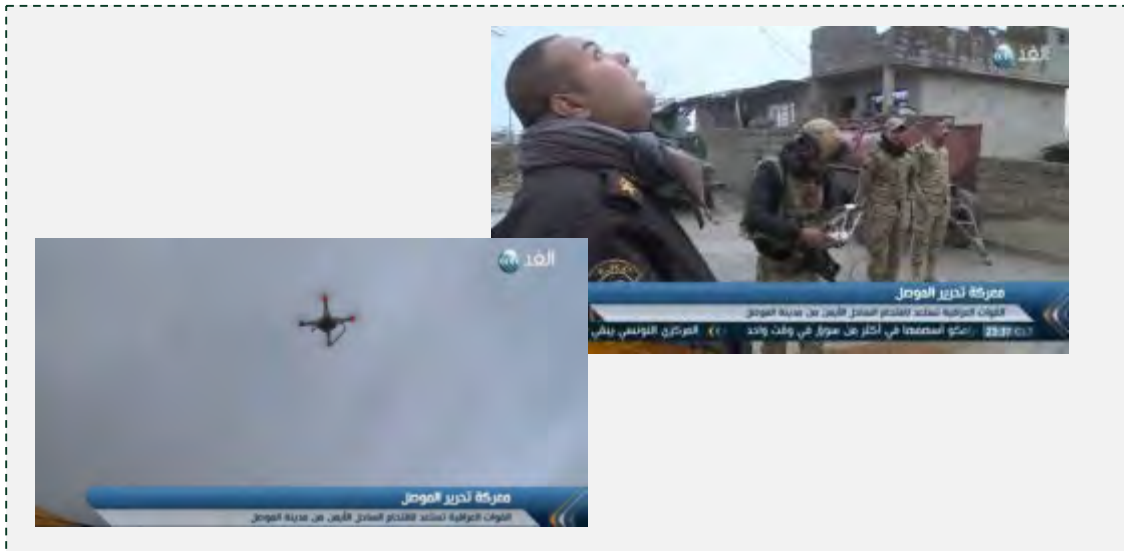
expression of cooperation between the Jordanian regime and the Syrian regime, which was manifested in the recent talks and meetings held by the two sides. The reasons for this, according to the Jordanian daily Al-Ghad, are ISIS's growing influence in southern Syria following the establishment of the Khalid bin al-Walid Army, and the terrorist attacks in Jordan that ISIS carried out and claimed responsibility for (Al-Quds al-Arabi, Al-Ghad, Al-Dustour, February 6, 2017).

## Main developments in Iraq

### The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

#### Iraqi Army activity

- **The Iraqi Army continued its preparations to take over Mosul's western part after having completed its takeover of east Mosul.** The army reinforces its forces and monitors ISIS activity in the western part of the city, mainly through the use of observers and drones. The Iraqi forces also fired mortar shells at ISIS outposts in west Mosul (Russia al-Youm, February 2, 2017; Al-Ghad Channel, February 4, 2017; Al-Jazeera, February 4, 2017).
- According to assessments published in Russian media, **the Iraqi Army is expected to encounter more difficulties when trying to take over the western part of Mosul.** This is because of the many tunnels; the narrower streets and alleys in the west of the city, which heavy machinery will have difficulty passing through; and population density that may lead to mass killing of innocent civilians. In addition, the destruction of the bridges connecting the eastern part of the city to its western part will make it difficult for Iraqi forces to move to the west side of the city. According to estimates, **about 750,000 inhabitants remain in the western part of Mosul** (Russia al-Youm, February 2, 2017).



Right: Iraqi soldier operates a drone west of Mosul to monitor ISIS operatives in the western part of the city (Al-Ghad Channel, February 4, 2017). Left: The drone on the air (Al-Ghad Channel, February 4, 2017)



Mortar fire by Iraqi Army at ISIS targets in western Mosul (Al-Ghad Channel, February 4, 2017)

## ISIS's response

■ **ISIS continued its guerrilla warfare and terror attacks in the Mosul region and in other sites around Iraq.** This week, ISIS operatives reportedly attacked outposts of the Iraqi security forces west of Mosul. A total of 13 Iraqi police officers and Shiite militia operatives were killed in the attack (Al-Jazeera, February 4, 2017). In addition, ISIS operatives activated an IED against an Iraqi Army vehicle north of Mosul, and ISIS snipers shot at Iraqi soldiers (Haqq, February 4, 2017). On February 5, 2017, ISIS fired mortar shells in the Sumar area, east of Mosul, killing 21 civilians and soldiers (Al-Mayadeen, February 5, 2017).

## Tal Afar region

- **Fighting continues in the Tal Afar rural area, where ISIS's supply route leading from Mosul to Syria is located.** The Shiite militias and the Iraqi Army, supported by the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, **are working to cut off the supply route between Mosul and Tal Afar** (Anatolia, February 1, 2017). If this route is cut off, **the encirclement of Mosul will be completed, and it will facilitate the campaign for taking over the western part of the city.**
- On February 5, 2017, ISIS announced that it had taken over outposts of the Shiite militias about 45 km southeast of Tal Afar, and killed the operatives deployed there (Amaq, February 5, 2017). In addition, ISIS announced that it had attacked Iraqi Army outposts by a drone in the vicinity of the Tal Afar airport (Haqq, February 4, 2017). Shiite militia operatives reported that their members had shot down an ISIS drone in the Tal Afar area (Facebook page of the Popular Mobilization, January 31, 2017).



Right: Attacking Iraqi Army outposts near the Tal Afar airport by a drone (Haqq, February 4, 2017).  
 Left: Shiite militia operatives holding an ISIS drone which they claim to have shot down (Facebook page of the Shiite militias, January 31, 2017)

## Attacks on other sites throughout Iraq

- **At the same time, ISIS continued its attacks on other sites throughout Iraq:**
  - **Tikrit:** ISIS claimed responsibility for attacking three outposts of the Shiite militias east of Tikrit. According to ISIS, the outposts were taken over and set on fire (Haqq, February 3, 2017).

- **Baiji-Haditha road:** According to an Iraqi “security source,” on February 5, 2017, the Iraqi Army thwarted an ISIS suicide attack by a car bomb. Iraqi soldiers launched a Kornet anti-tank missile at the car bomb and blew it up (Al-Sumaria, February 5, 2017).
- **Baghdad area:** An IED exploded at the vicinity of stores in the southern Baghdad **neighborhood of Al-Furat**. Four people were wounded (Al-Sumaria, February 4, 2017). That same day, an IED exploded in the **neighborhood of Al-Suwaib**, in the southwest of Baghdad. One man was killed, and five others were wounded (Al-Sumaria, February 4, 2017).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Turkey

- On February 5, 2017, the Turkish Police counterterrorism unit carried out a series of raids in 29 cities. The objective was to arrest ISIS operatives and prevent attacks. A total of **763 suspects were arrested** in these raids, in Ankara, Istanbul, Bursa, Şanlıurfa, Konya and other cities in Turkey. Four rifles, two pistols and propaganda and training materials were found in the suspects’ possession. Police reported that **ISIS had planned to carry out showcase attacks, with Turkey being the preferred target** (haberturk.com, February 7, 2017; haberler.com, February 5, 2017).
- **Most of those arrested are foreigners.** They include **two Germans from Hamburg and Bremen**. Turkey is reportedly holding **at least 780 people suspected** of having ties with ISIS, including 350 foreigners. Some of them have already been tried and convicted (Reuters and other news agencies, February 5, 2017).

### Egypt

- The spokesman for the chief prosecutor in Cairo reported that a Russian national by the name of **Abdul Hamid Roslan was detained in Egypt on suspicion of membership in ISIS**. A search of his apartment revealed camouflage fatigues, e-mail correspondence, and evidence of phone calls with ISIS leaders. Evidence of money transfers and orders to carry out attacks was also found. His interrogation revealed that he was trained in ISIS camps in Syria, having arrived there via Turkey. He returned to Egypt and began planning a terrorist attack in Egypt. Russian diplomats have confirmed the arrest (TASS News Agency, February 2, 2017).