



Spotlight on Global Jihad
(February 9-15, 2017, 2017)



Main events of the week

■ **This week, Free Syrian Army forces entered the city of Al-Bab, in cooperation with the Turkish Army.** The attacking forces took over the city's western neighborhoods (about 40% of the area) and are making their way to the city center. The takeover of the city **will complete the collapse of ISIS's strongholds west of the Euphrates River and will place Turkey's plans to create a "security zone" in Syrian territory on the political agenda.**

■ **In the city of Daraa** in southern Syria, several rebel organizations, including the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, launched an attack against Syrian Army strongholds in the **Manshiya neighborhood on the outskirts of the city.** According to Arab media reports, the purpose of the attack is to prepare the ground for taking over the whole city **and to block the route leading from the city to the Jordanian border.** The attack underscored once again **the willingness of the Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) to collaborate with other rebel organizations,** while blurring its jihadi nature and ties with Al-Qaeda.

■ In Iraq, the Iraqi Army continues its preparations to take over the western part of the city of **Mosul.** At the same time, the Iraqi authorities are trying to restore normal life in the city's eastern neighborhoods. ISIS, on its part, is carrying out terrorist attacks in the eastern part of the city, including suicide bombing attacks, in order to hamper the preparations for taking over the western part of the city and disrupt attempts to restore normal civilian life.

■ Operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province launched four Grad rockets at the Israeli city of Eilat **from the Sinai Peninsula.** Three rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, and the fourth landed in an open area outside Eilat. ISIS's Sinai Province claimed responsibility and threatened that the future of the Jews would be even more bitter.

The international arena

US expectations to take over Al-Raqqah and Mosul over the next six months

■ **US Army Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend,** US commander of the international coalition against ISIS, stated that in his opinion, **over the next six months it will be possible to take over two ISIS strongholds, Al-Raqqah in Syria and Mosul in**

Iraq. He estimated that the **operation to take over Mosul would begin in the next few days.** This statement was made during a tour of northern Baghdad on February 8, 2017.

■ **Townsend's spokesman Air Force Colonel John Dorrian** said at a press conference that he expected the local forces supported by the United States (the Syrian Democratic Forces) **to completely isolate Al-Raqqah in the weeks ahead and to prepare the ground for taking it over.** The background for these statements is **US President Trump's request to accelerate the campaign to defeat ISIS** (reuters.uk.com, February 8, 2017).

Main developments in Syria

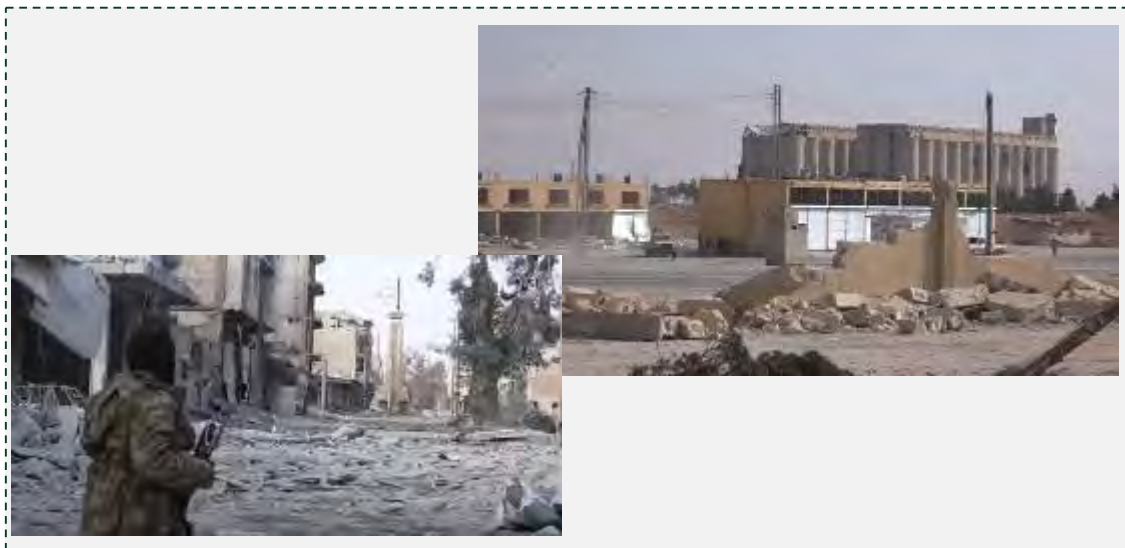
The area of Al-Bab

■ **This week, Free Syrian Army forces entered the city of Al-Bab and took over its western neighborhoods, in cooperation with the Turkish Army.** According to Turkish and Syrian media reports, **the Free Syrian Army has taken control of 40% of the area of Al-Bab.** The Syrian Army reached **Tadif**, a suburb located on the southern outskirts of Al-Bab, but stopped its advance there (this was apparently coordinated with Russia in advance). ISIS operatives in the city center are showing strong resistance, and fighting is still ongoing.

■ On February 11, 2017, **the western and southwestern suburbs** were taken over from ISIS, including two sites of importance: **the Al-Bab silos and Al-Hikmah Hospital** (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), February 11, 2017; Hiwar, February 11, 2017). On February 12, 2017, the Free Syrian Army took control of various sites **in north and northwest Al-Bab**, including **Al-Rai Junction** in north Al-Bab, on the road to the Syrian-Turkish border. The attacking forces are advancing from these neighborhoods to the city center, **which is still controlled by ISIS.**



Map of the control areas in Al-Bab: the Free Syrian Army and the Turkish Army (in the west), the Syrian Army (in the south) and ISIS (in the east and north), updated to February 14, 2017 (Google Maps and news websites)



Right: Free Syrian Army combatants at the Al-Bab silos in the southwest of the city (Smart News Agency's YouTube channel, February 12, 2017). Left: Central Al-Bab, which is still controlled by ISIS (Amaq News Agency, February 13, 2017).

■ Concurrently with the Free Syrian Army's advance, **the Syrian Army advanced to the city of Al-Bab from the south**, with Russian air support. The Syrian forces reached **Tadif**, a suburb located **on the southern outskirts of Al-Bab**. **In the area of Tadif, the Syrian Army has apparently halted its advance, apparently on the basis of an advance agreement with Russia** (Basnews; Hurriyet, February 11, 2017).

■ According to a Turkish journalist who is close to President Erdoğan, about **80-100 ISIS operatives** are now participating in the fighting, **including around 20 foreigners** (Timeturk.com, February 14, 2017). ISIS operatives are attempting to block the advance by the attacking forces by means of trenches dug in the streets of Al-Bab and massive use of tunnels. ISIS operatives also detonated car bombs and fired antitank missiles, RPG rockets and artillery at the attacking forces. ISIS posted photos of the

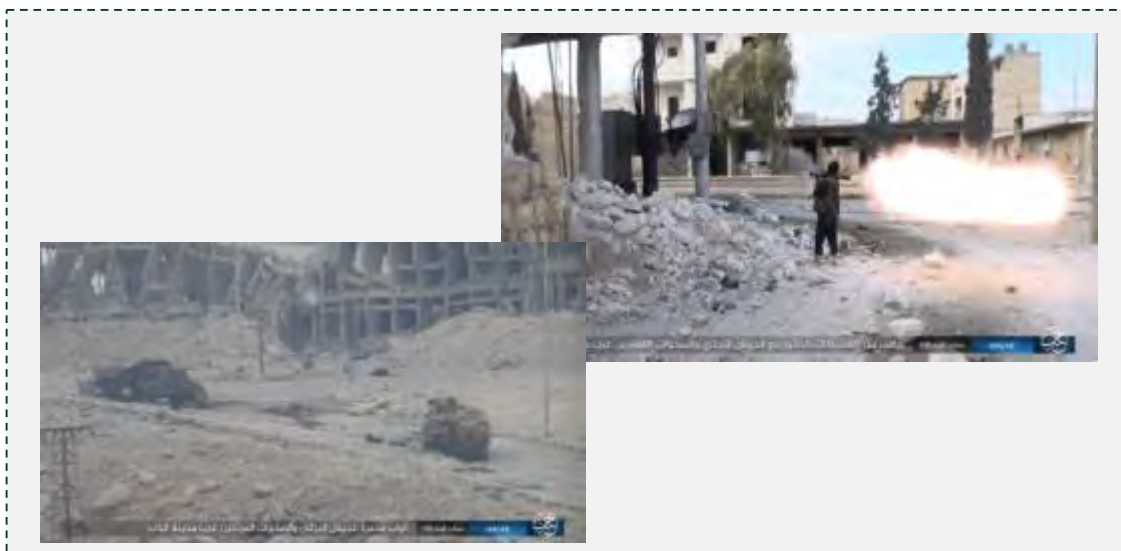
tunnels used by its operatives to defend against the attacking forces. Turkish “military sources” claimed that **these tunnels were used 10-15 years ago to transport water for irrigation from the Euphrates River to agricultural areas**. During the operation, these tunnels were attacked from the air (Milliyet.com.tr, February 12, 2017).



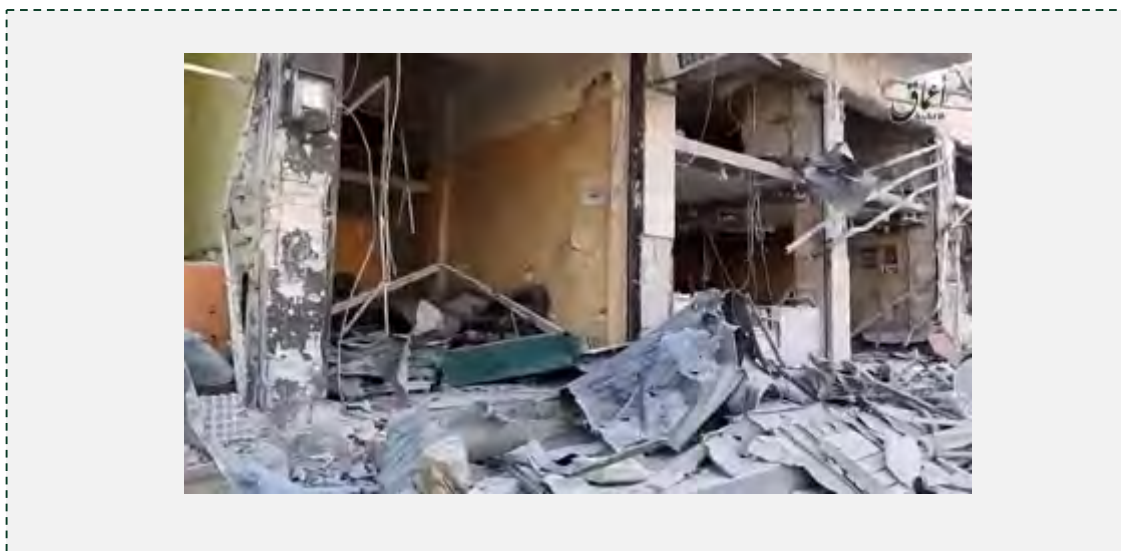
Right: The Free Syrian Army locates a tunnel in Al-Bab (Al-Diyar, February 13, 2017). Left: An ISIS tunnel located outside Al-Bab, which allows entering the city and going out of it. The tunnel was built based on the city’s water canals (all4syria.info, February 4, 2017)



Turkish planes attack ISIS tunnels in Al-Bab (Rahab News, February 13, 2017)



Right: ISIS operative launches an RPG rocket at the Turkish Army and the Free Syrian Army west of Al-Bab. Left: Two Turkish Army APCs which were destroyed (Haqq, February 10, 2017)



The devastation in Al-Bab, shown over and over again by ISIS's propaganda machine (Amaq, February 12, 2017)

■ **The campaign over Al-Bab is carried out with Russian air support.** Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov announced that on February 9, 2017, **three Turkish soldiers were killed by mistake and 11 others were wounded in a Russian airstrike.** According to the announcement, the Russian pilots operated based on data received from the Turkish partners, and based on that same data, Turkish soldiers were not supposed to be in the area that was attacked. President Putin expressed his condolences on the death of the Turkish soldiers (TASS, February 9-10, 2017). In a telephone conversation between the Russian and Turkish presidents, they agreed to increase the military coordination in all aspects of the attacks against ISIS in Syria (TASS, February 9, 2017).

The Palmyra region

■ This week, fierce battles continued between ISIS and the Syrian Army. They focused on an area 15 km east of the T-4 airfield. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, **the Syrian Army with Russian air support opened an attack against the city of Palmyra, and its forces are now at a distance of less than twenty kilometers from the city.** The ministry's announcement further states that the Syrian forces are making an effort to liberate Palmyra as quickly as possible, because of intelligence (including drone photos), according to which ISIS operatives are now bringing into Palmyra a large amount of explosives in order to blow up the remaining antiquities in the city (1tv, February 13, 2017).



Photos showing the antiquities destroyed by ISIS in Palmyra (from a video released by the Russian Defense Ministry, February 12, 2017)

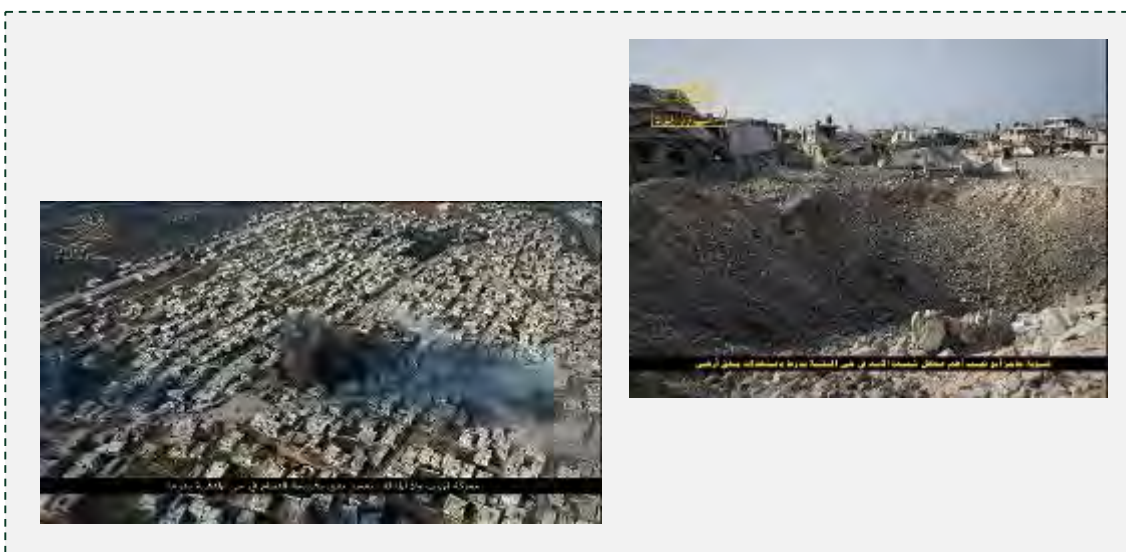
Daraa region

■ On February 12, 2017, **several rebel organizations opened an attack against the Syrian forces in the Daraa neighborhood of Manshiya.** The attacking forces included operatives of the **Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham led by the Fateh al-Sham Front** (formerly the Al-Nusra Front). The objective of the attack is to take over the neighborhood of Manshiya which has been under the Syrian regime's control since 2013. The Al-Arabiya al-Hadath Channel reported that the Syrian forces had turned the neighborhood into a military base after driving out the residents. Taking over Manshiya will allow the rebel organizations to complete the takeover of Daraa, block the road leading to the border with Jordan and control the outskirts of the city (Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath, February 14, 2017).



The Daraa neighborhood of Manshiya, the stronghold of the Syrian forces, attacked by the rebel organizations. The neighborhood of Daraa al-Balad (Old Daraa), which is under the rebel organizations' control, is seen nearby (Wikimapia).

■ According to a report of the rebel organizations' operations room in Daraa, a **booby-trapped tunnel was blown up under a Syrian forces checkpoint (probably at the entrance to Manshiya)**. Two operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham **carried out two suicide bombing attacks** against Syrian outposts. **The suicide bombing attacks reportedly allowed the rebel organizations to enter the neighborhood of Manshiya and take over several important buildings.** Battles currently take place in the neighborhood. **Abu Riyan al-Muhajer**, who had been the military official in charge of the Fateh al-Sham Front in Daraa, blew himself up in a car bomb in the neighborhood of Manshiya.



Left: Explosion of the booby-trapped tunnel in the neighborhood of Manshiya. Right: The location of the explosion (Facebook page of the rebel organizations' operations room in Daraa, February 12-13, 2017)



Abu Riyan al-Muhajer, a senior jihadi operative of a Jordanian origin (from the city of Maan), who blew himself up in a car bomb in Manshiya (Hamrin News, February 12, 2017)

- The Syrian forces fired artillery and carried out airstrikes against neighborhoods in Daraa which are under rebel control. Russian planes attacked rebel organizations' targets in Daraa and the rural area around it. The neighborhood of Daraa al-Balad, which borders on Manshiya, had been the maintarget of the attacks.
- The attack in Daraa is the first significant attack initiative in which the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham took part since it announced its establishment about two weeks ago. This attack reflects the fact that the **Fateh al-Sham Front** (former Al-Nusra Front, the dominant component of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham) **is willing to collaborate with other rebel organizations. This collaboration is part of a policy which is intended to blur the jihadi character of the organization and portray it as a legitimate organization among the other rebel organizations in Syria.** This policy was expressed by **Hashem al-Sheikh (Abu Jaber)**, commander of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, who called on the Syrian residents and the rebel organizations **to unite around the new framework**, emphasizing that the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham is an "independent entity" which does not represent a continuation of any of the previous organizations (Al-Durar al-Shamiya, February 9, 2017).

Main developments in Iraq

The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

- **The Iraqi Army continues its preparations to take over Mosul's western part.** In the meantime, **ISIS continues to act against the Iraqi forces in the eastern part of the city** with the intention of disrupting their efforts to settle in the neighborhoods

which they took over, hinder their attempts to restore normal civilian life, and impede their preparations to take over the western part of the city.

■ **The Iraqi government is trying to restore normal life in the liberated neighborhoods in eastern Mosul.** A total of 250,000 school children reportedly returned to their studies (Al-Sumaria, February 6, 2017). ISIS street signs have been removed and replaced with national slogans and emblems. The streets are being cleaned, and the ruined infrastructures are being rebuilt (Al-Ghad Channel, February 12, 2017).



Right: Going back to school in east Mosul (Al-Sumaria, February 6, 2017). Left: Wall with a picture of the Iraqi flag instead of ISIS slogans, which were removed (Al-Ghad Channel, February 12, 2017)



Right: Cleaning the streets in east Mosul (Al-Ghad Channel, February 12, 2017). Left: Youths who volunteered to clean the streets (Al-Ghad Channel, February 12, 2017)

■ **ISIS operated this week against the Iraqi forces that took over the western part of the city.** On February 10, 2017, four Iraqi soldiers and civilians (according to

another report ten) were killed, and 26 others were wounded in **two simultaneous suicide bombing attacks**: the first was carried out by a suicide bomber who blew himself up with an explosive belt near a restaurant, and the second by a car bomb blown up near a crowd of Iraqi soldiers **in the neighborhood of Al-Zuhour in northeastern Mosul** (Al-Jazeera, February 10, 2017). In addition, **ISIS continued to use drones for attacking the Iraqi forces in Mosul**. On February 7, 2017, ISIS released a video documenting a number of cases where **drones were used against the Iraqi Army** (Amaq, February 7, 2017).



Right: A bomb dropped by an ISIS drone on a crowd of Iraqi soldiers in Mosul. Left: The moment of the explosion (Amaq, February 7, 2017)

■ The US Army announced on February 10, 2017, that **Rashid Qassem, an Algerian-born ISIS operative with French citizenship**, who was apparently associated with the attacks carried out by ISIS in France, **was killed in a coalition airstrike in the vicinity of Mosul** (Reuters, February 10, 2017). Rashid Qassem had been a rap singer and was referred to as the first Frenchman who had joined ISIS. He also appeared in ISIS's propaganda videos. In one of those videos he appeared praising the vehicular attack in Nice. In that video he is shown beheading a man who was accused by ISIS of collaboration with the coalition countries (Al-Arabiya, February 11, 2017).



Rashid Qassem (left) before beheading a man who was accused of collaboration with the coalition countries (Al-Arabiya, February 11, 2017)

ISIS's response: terror attacks and guerrilla warfare throughout Iraq

■ At the same time of ISIS's defensive in Mosul, it continued its attacks on various sites throughout Iraq:

- **Baghdad:** Iraqi "security sources" reported that during the evening of February 11, 2017, a volley of Grad rockets landed in Baghdad's "green area", where the Iraqi government buildings are situated. There's no information on casualties. It is estimated that the rockets had been launched from north of Baghdad (Al-Hurra, February 11, 2017).
- **Tal Afar:** ISIS announced that it had killed 14 Shiite militia operatives about 50 km southeast of Tal Afar (Amaq, February 11, 2017).
- **Baqubah:** ISIS announced that its operatives had killed in an ambush several Iraqi soldiers who traveled in a military vehicle east of Baqubah (Haqq, February 11, 2017).
- **Tikrit:** ISIS announced that it had killed 28 Iraqi soldiers and policemen by blowing up a car bomb parking in the northern Tikrit neighborhood of Qadisiyah (Haqq, February 11, 2017).
- **Fallujah:** A suicide bomber apparently affiliated with ISIS blew himself up by a car bomb at an Iraqi Army checkpoint on the Fallujah-Aameriyaroad. Two Iraqi soldiers were killed, and two others were wounded (Al-Sumaria, February 9, 2017).

■ According to an infographic released by ISIS, **during January 2017, it had carried out 90 suicide bombing attacks in Syria and Iraq.** Despite the propaganda nature of the infographics, **the data it presents clearly demonstrates ISIS's capability to continue carrying out large-scale suicide attacks in spite of the pressure exerted on it.** In addition, it evidently shows that **carrying out attacks in Iraq is top priority for ISIS** (a total of 71 suicide bombing attacks in Iraq vs. 19 in Syria). The suicide bombing attacks in Iraq were carried out by blowing up car bombs and detonating explosive belts and vests (Haqq, February 6, 2017). **The campaign over Mosul is indeed accompanied by terror and guerrilla attacks, in Mosul and around the entire Iraq, where ISIS is making extensive use of suicide bombers.**



Infographic on 90 suicide bombing attacks carried out by ISIS in Iraq and Syria in January 2017 (Haqq, February 6, 2017)

Global jihad activity in other countries

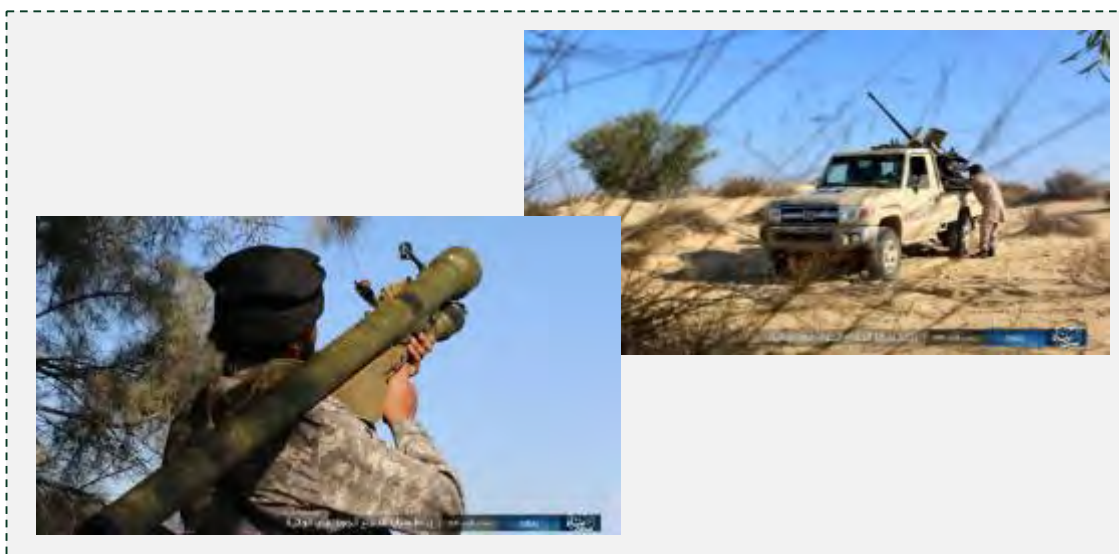
Egypt

Rockets launching at Eilat

■ On February 8, 2017, ISIS's Sinai branch operatives launched **four Grad rockets at the Israeli city of Eilat.** Three of the rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, while the fourth landed in an open space outside Eilat. **There were no casualties and no damage.** On February 9, 2017, ISIS's Sinai branch claimed responsibility for the attack and threatened that the future of the Jews would be even more bitter.

Anti-aircraft weapons in the possession of ISIS's Sinai branch

■ On February 11, 2017, ISIS's Sinai branch released photos documenting the air defense weapons in its possession. The Sinai branch noted that its operatives were operating anti-aircraft guns mounted on off-road vehicles and Strela anti-aircraft shoulder missiles. According to the announcement, **the purpose of those anti-aircraft weapons is to hit aircraft belonging to the Israeli and the Egyptian Air Force.**



Right: One-barrel anti-aircraft gun mounted on an off-road vehicle. Left: Strela anti-aircraft shoulder missile (Haqq, February 11, 2017)

Libya

■ According to “security officials” in Misrata, **the remaining ISIS operatives in Libya moved to canyons, deserts and mountainous areas around the city of Bani Walid**, and from there to the desert south of Sirte. The military intelligence commander in Misrata said that **a group of 60-80 operatives was operating in the area of Qaraza**, 170 km west of Sirte, and another group of about a hundred operatives is **in the area of the oil fields Zella and Mabruk**, 300 km southeast of Sirte. There are also reports of **a third group in Uweinat, near the border with Algeria** (Reuters, February 10, 2017). According to a Libyan intelligence officer who served in the forces that took over Sirte, the operatives are moving in small groups during the night, in two or three vehicles, in order not to expose themselves to attacks (Reuters, February 10, 2017).

Afghanistan

■ ISIS's Khorasan Province announced that on February 6, 2017, **one of its operatives carried out a suicide bombing attack in the Kabul Court of Appeal.** According to the announcement, the terrorist, codenamed **Abu Bakr al-Tajiki**, blew himself up using an explosive vest among a group of judges and other officials in the court. About 60 people were killed and wounded. The organization concluded its announcement with the words, "Let the infidels, and first and foremost their diabolic judges, know that their infidel judgments against jihad fighters who believe in Allah's unity are service to the Crusaders; that will not go without a cruel punishment" (Haqq, February 7, 2017).

■ ISIS claims that the Islamic State's Khorasan Province is expanding in eastern Afghanistan and that many Taliban commanders and operatives joined its ranks after the death of the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. According to an article that appeared in one of ISIS-affiliated media outlets, the Khorasan Province is now more able to recruit local residents in the eastern areas bordering on Pakistan. ISIS's Khorasan Province intends to recruit students of religious schools belonging to Salafist Islam in eastern Afghanistan, although people in charge of these schools deny any connection to the Islamic State. Afghan "security sources" told the newspaper Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that all of the perpetrators of suicide bombing attacks in the Khorasan Province are students of the religious schools that belong to Salafist Islam in eastern Afghanistan (Haqq, February 8, 2017).