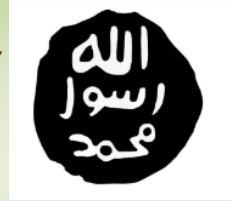




Spotlight on Global Jihad
(February 16-22, 2017)



Main events of the week

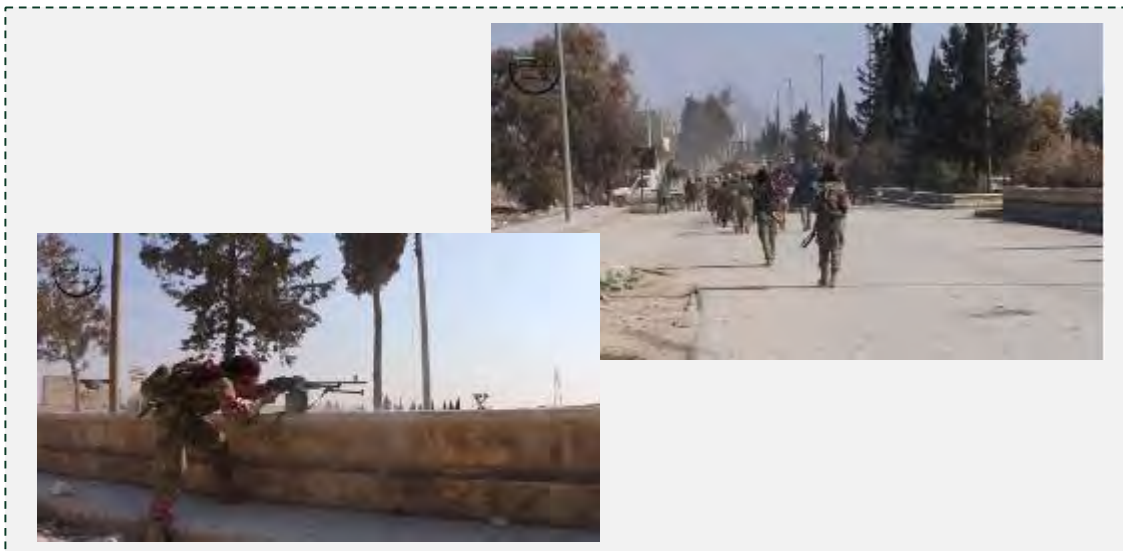
- On February 19, 2017, the Iraqi forces, with US and coalition air support, opened **the offensive to liberate west Mosul**. The participants in the offensive are the Iraqi Army (including elite counterterrorism units), the federal police, and Shiite pro-Iranian militias (Popular Mobilization). The attacking forces number some tens of thousands of fighters, against a few thousand ISIS operatives defending west Mosul.
- The Iraqi forces opened the attack on **Mosul's western and southern outskirts**. At this stage, the Iraqi war effort is focused on **taking over key facilities, including Mosul Airport and the main power station supplying electricity to the western part of the city**. ISIS on its part continues its guerrilla warfare and terrorist activities in east Mosul and Baghdad and other sites throughout Iraq.
- **In the city of Al-Bab, northeast of Aleppo**, fighting continues. The Free Syrian Army and the Turkish Army continue cleansing Al-Bab's neighborhoods and are advancing towards the center of the city. At the same time, talks were held between the Turkish Chief of Staff and the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the next moves after the takeover of Al-Bab. Turkey is striving to establish a "safe zone" under its control west of the Euphrates River, to put the Kurdish forces out of commission, and neutralize their major role in the campaign to take over Al-Raqqah.

Main developments in Syria

The area of Al-Bab

■ **The Free Syrian Army in cooperation with the Turkish Army continue to cleanse the city of Al-Bab. However, its takeover hasn't been completed yet.** The attacking forces took over territories west and north of the city. **They continue heading towards the center of the city** while searching houses and streets. Turkish media reported that in these searches, IEDs had been found and a booby-trapped vehicle had been discovered in one of the houses (milliyet.com, February 21, 2017).

■ This week as well, fighting was centered in **Al-Bab's western and northern suburbs**. Free Syrian Army forces attacked ISIS targets with the support of artillery fire and Turkish Army and Russian Air Force airstrikes (TASS, February 16, 2017). **The Syrian forces**, which reached the southern outskirts of the city, refrained from entering it and **headed southeast**. They advanced on the route leading from Al-Bab to Deir Hafer, reached the town of **Rasm al-Harmal al-Imam** (7 km from Deir Hafer) and **took it over from ISIS**. They were supported by Russian planes. The Syrian forces are currently on the outskirts of Deir Hafer (Qasiyoun, February 21, 2017).



Photos from a video released by the Free Syrian Army's Al-Hamza Brigade, documenting the fighting in Al-Bab (YouTube, February 20, 2017)



Top: The city of Al-Bab, where forces of the Free Syrian Army and the Turkish Army are operating.
Bottom: The city of Deir Hafer; the Syrian forces are currently on its outskirts (Google Maps)

- On February 19, 2017, **Jonathan Jeffrey**, codenamed **Abu Ibrahim al-Faransi** (i.e., **the Frenchman**), who had been in charge of ISIS recruitment in Europe, was reportedly captured by the rebel forces in the vicinity of Al-Bab (Twitter account, February 19, 2017).



Jonathan Jeffrey (Abu Ibrahim al-Faransi), who had been captured by the rebel forces in the vicinity of Al-Bab (Twitter account, February 19, 2017)

Talks between Turkey and the US on the next moves after the takeover of Al-Bab

- **US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford** arrived in Turkey for a meeting with **Turkish Army Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar**. The meeting was held at Incirlik Air Base (Anatolia, February 17, 2017). In their meeting, the Turkish chief of staff informed his counterpart that **the Free Syrian Army had taken**

over most of the territory of Al-Bab (Washington Post, February 17, 2017). He said that he attached great importance to increased support by the US-led international coalition for Operation Euphrates Shield led by Turkey in Syria (Military Times, February 18, 2017).

■ According to the Turkish press, during the meeting, the Turkish chief of staff presented to his American counterpart **two plans for a joint operation to take over Al-Raqqah**. Turkey reportedly prefers the plan, according to which **Turkish and American Special Forces, supported by commando forces and Syrian rebels, will enter Syria through the border town of Tal Abyad**, which is under Kurdish control. These forces will move southward toward Al-Raqqah through Kurdish-controlled territories. **The second option**, which is less preferred by the Turks, is **to direct the forces from Al-Bab** toward the city of Manbij, which is held by the Syrian Democratic Forces, and from there to move toward Al-Raqqah (Habertürk; Reuters, February 18, 2017). **These plans take into consideration that the Kurdish forces on the outskirts of Al-Raqqah (see below) would be taken out of commission and removed of their major role in the campaign, and the main control of the operation would be placed in the hands of the Turkish Army and the organizations supported by it.**¹

Al-Raqqah

■ **The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continue cleansing the area north and east of Al-Raqqah**. This activity, accompanied by intense airstrikes, **poses a major threat to ISIS infrastructures in its so-called capital, Al-Raqqah**. In this context, US Pentagon spokesman Jeff Davis stated that the US had evidence that **senior ISIS operatives and many officials of the Islamic State had started to leave Al-Raqqah heading to the cities of Deir ez-Zor and Adan** (which is situated in the Euphrates River valley, about 65 km southeast of Al-Raqqah, halfway between Al-Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor). According to the Pentagon spokesman, their departure seems to be organized, and it also includes **operatives who do not serve as fighters**, which indicates that ISIS senses that **the fall of the city is imminent** (Reuters, February 17, 2017).

■ **The Syrian regime reported that ISIS had flooded vast areas in the Aleppo region** by pumping large quantities of water at Al-Babiri pumping station on Lake Assad. The water is **pumped by ISIS through ditches to the rural area east of**

¹ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 15, 2017: "Turkey strives to create a "safe zone" along its border with Syria after the liberation of Al-Bab, seeking support from President Donald Trump."

Aleppo with the intention of flooding villages and causing damage to the residents and their lands. It is also possible that the flooding was intended to hamper the advance of the Syrian forces in the Deir Hafer area. The Syrian regime sent technical teams and heavy equipment to divert the flow of the water and minimize the damage (Syrian TV, February 17, 2017).

■ **The Russian Defense Ministry** reported that on February 17, 2017, TU-95 strategic bombers **attacked ISIS targets in the vicinity of Al-Raqqah with cruise missiles.** According to the Russians, the bombers took off from a Russian Air Force base, went through the airspace of Iran and Iraq, and attacked military camps, a training center, and a command center of one of ISIS's main units. The attacking planes were accompanied by Russian Su-30SM and Su-35S planes, which took off from the Hmeymim base in Syria (TASS, February 17, 2017; 1tv website, February 18, 2017).

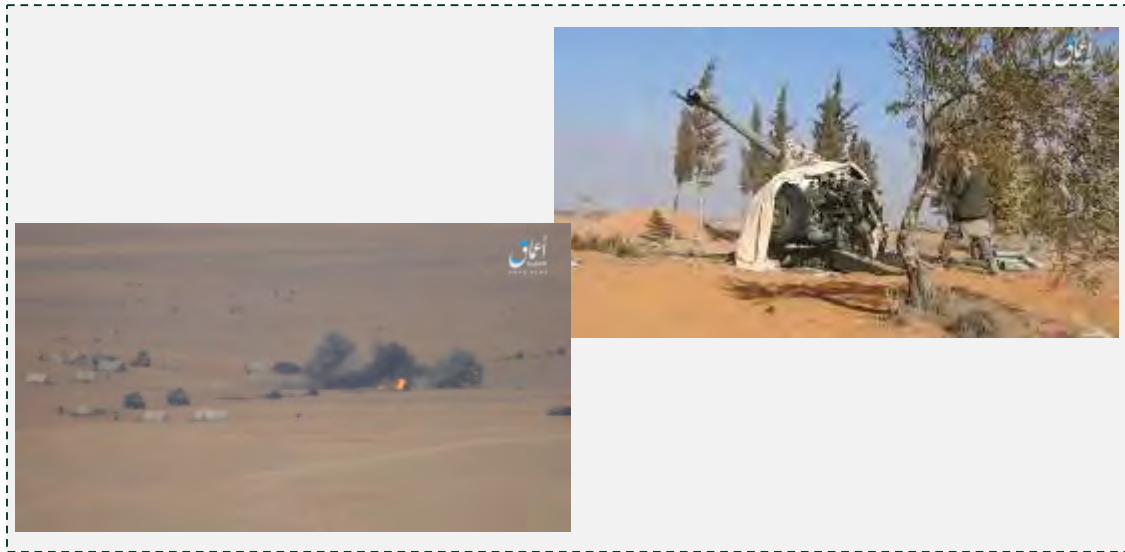


Photos from a video showing a Russian attack against an ISIS headquarters in Al-Raqqah (the Russian Defense Ministry, February 18, 2017)

The Palmyra region

■ **This week, fierce battles continued between ISIS and the Syrian Army.** ISIS attacked Syrian troops in the area of Al-Bayda al-Sharqiya Junction, about 25 km east of the T-4 military airfield. Nine Syrian soldiers were killed (Local Coordination Committees, February 16, 2017). The Russian Defense Ministry stated that on February 16, 2017, four Russian soldiers were killed and two others were wounded by

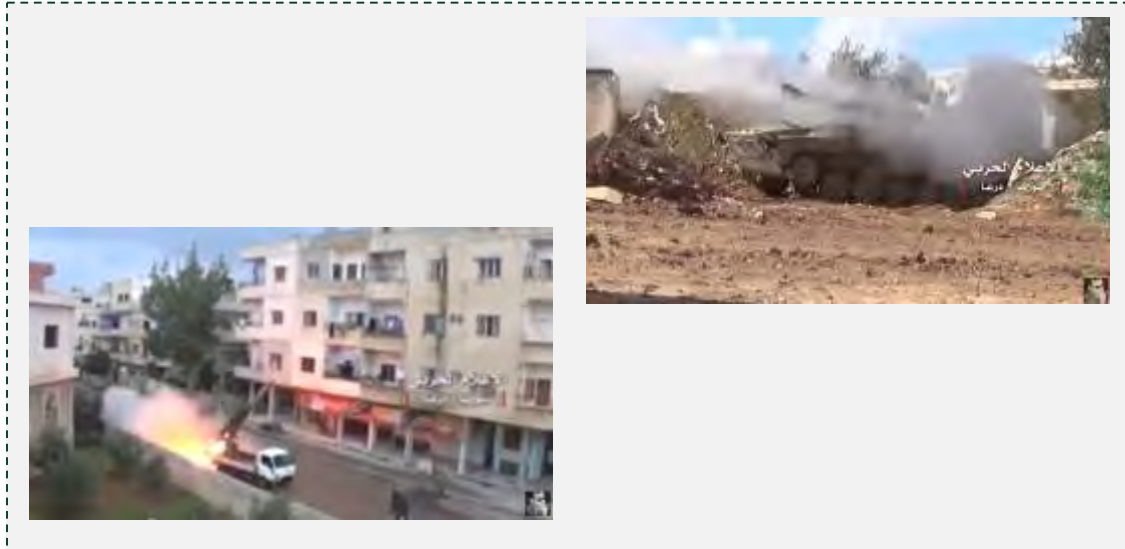
an IED which exploded in their vehicle. They were traveling in a Syrian Army convoy on the route leading to T-4 (Reuters, February 20, 2017).



Photos from a video released by ISIS, documenting the attack on the Syrian Army in the area of the Al-Bayda al-Sharqiya Junction, east of the T-4 military airfield (Haqq, February 17, 2017)

Sothern Syria

■ **Fighting continued this week in the city of Daraa between the rebel organizations and the Syrian forces.** The rebel organizations are trying to **complete their takeover of the Manshiya neighborhood in southwest Daraa.** The attacking forces reportedly broke through the Syrian Army frontline defense and took over several key outposts in the neighborhood (Aranews, February 17, 2017). **Fighting still continues in Manshiya, with no side gaining the upper hand so far.** The rebel organizations announced that since the beginning of their offensive on Manshiya, over a hundred soldiers were killed among the Syrian Army and the militias supporting it, including an Iranian commander (Halab al-Youm; Twitter account, February 19, 2017).



Right: Syrian Army tank fires at the rebel forces in Manshiya. Left: Launching a rocket at the rebel organizations (Syrian Army Spokesperson's Office, February 15, 2017)

■ **In the Yarmouk basin, in the southern Golan Heights**, near the border with Israel, **the ISIS-affiliated Khalid bin Al-Walid Army** is attacking the rebel organizations. According to a Khalid bin Al-Walid Army source, the attack is carried out due to the encirclement of the organization's control areas by the rebel organizations, and due to their prevention of the arrival of supplies to these areas. According to Arab media, the Khalid bin Al-Walid Army employed armored vehicles, including several tanks (Al-Arabiya, February 21, 2017; Amaq, February 20, 2017).



Photos released by ISIS, showing weapons seized by the Khalid bin Al-Walid Army (Haqq, February 21, 2017)

entry of the Iraqi forces, whose objective is to liberate the residents from the hands of ISIS. The pamphlets also call upon ISIS operatives to lay down their weapons and surrender (Al-Jazeera; Al-Arabiya, February 19, 2017).

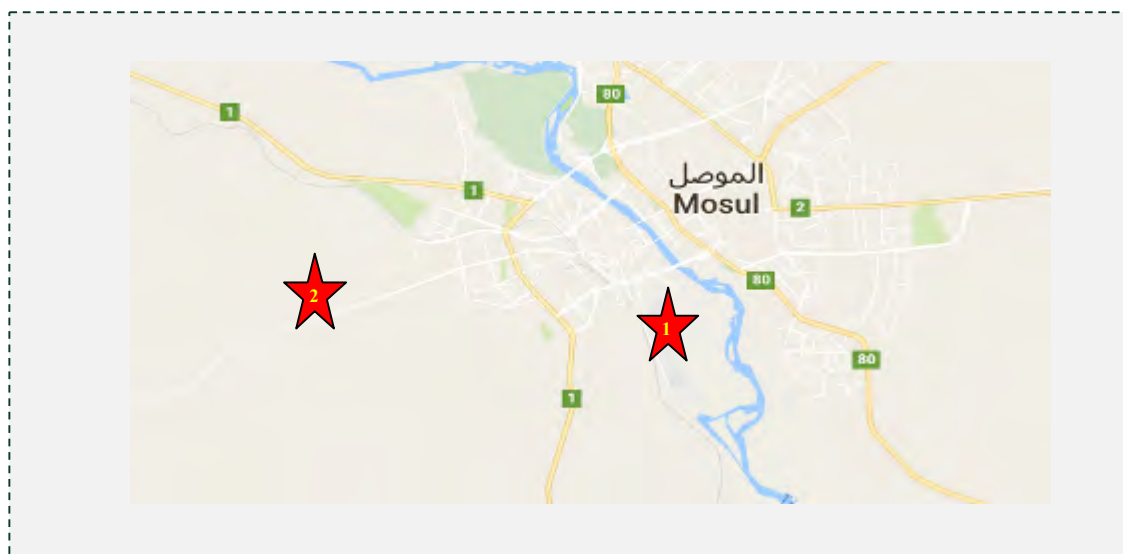


Iraqi Army forces preparing for the attack west of Mosul (Al-Ghad Channel, February 19, 2017)

■ The attack began by intense airstrikes and artillery fire on ISIS targets in west Mosul (BBC in Arabic, February 21, 2017). **The Iraqi forces opened an attack on the western and southern outskirts of Mosul.** According to the Iraqi spokesman for the campaign, the attacking force took over an area dominating Mosul Airport and the highway leading to the city (AP, February 22, 2017). In addition, the Iraqi forces reportedly took over the main power station southwest of the city, which supplies electricity to west Mosul (Sputnik, February 20, 2017).



The three routes of the attack on west Mosul. West: the Iraqi Army and the Shiite militias (green); South: The Rapid Response Apparatus, an elite force subordinate to the Iraqi Interior Ministry (orange); Southeast: Iraqi Police (blue) (the website of the Popular Mobilization forces, the pro-Iranian Shiite militias, February 20, 2017)

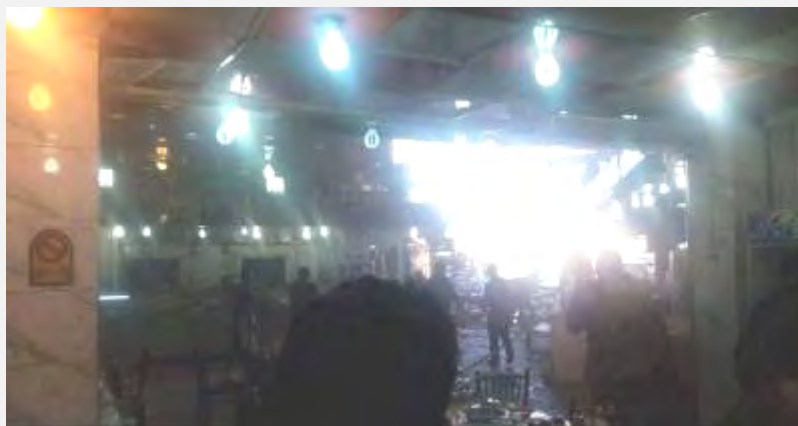


Key areas in south Mosul which are the targets of the first stage of the offensive: Mosul Airport (1) and the main power station (2) (Google Maps)

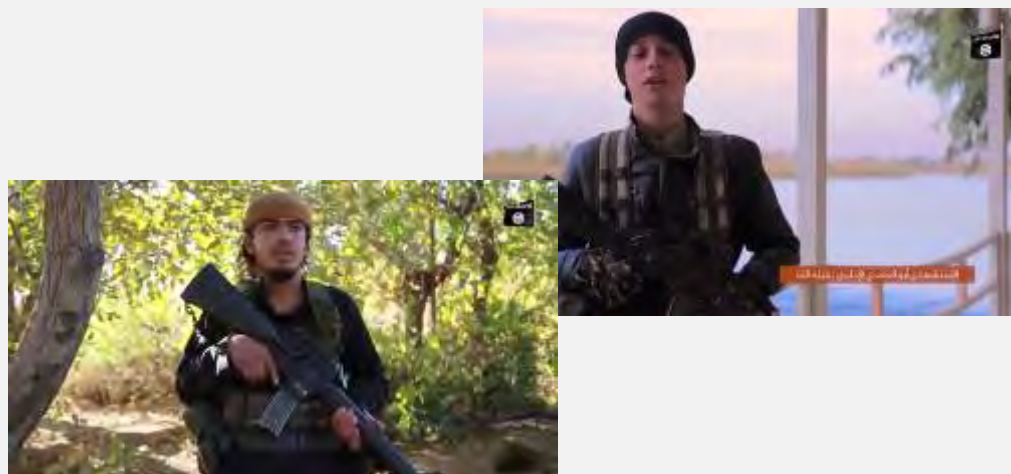
ISIS's response

■ **ISIS continues to attack the Iraqi forces that took over east Mosul.** An Iraqi Army senior official quoted by a reporter of the Turkish news agency said that ISIS had **launched armed drones from west Mosul to the eastern part of the city**. Two children were killed and three others were wounded in the attack. In another attack, a medical center was hit, and 13 civilians were killed and wounded (aydinlik.com, February 21, 2017).

■ **At the same time, ISIS continues to deploy suicide bombers.** On February 19, 2017, ISIS operatives carried out two suicide bombing attacks with explosive belts in the east of the city: one of the attacks was carried out in a restaurant against members of the Iraqi security forces, and the other was carried out against an assembly of Iraqi security forces. In addition, ISIS claimed responsibility for the detonation of a car bomb against the Iraqi Army. Suicide bombing attacks in east Mosul were also carried out by many teenage boys, including **Yazidi boys** who were taken prisoner by ISIS, **forcibly converted to Islam, and underwent religious indoctrination**. In the ITIC's assessment, the widespread use of teenage boys may indicate a decrease in ISIS's pool of suicide bombers operating in Iraq, as they have been extensively used during the campaign for Mosul.



The suicide attack in a restaurant in the east Mosul neighborhood of Al-Zuhour (Al-Sumaria, February 19, 2017)



Teenage boys who carried out suicide bombing attacks on behalf of ISIS against the Iraqi security forces in Mosul (YouTube, February 20, 2017)

■ At the same time, ISIS continued its terror attack throughout Iraq, **mainly in the capital, Baghdad:**

- In the Al-Baya neighborhood in southwest Baghdad, a car bomb parked in a used car lot exploded, killing 52 people and wounding dozens of others. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, which is the biggest in scope in Baghdad since the beginning of 2017 (Al-Jazeera, February 17, 2017; Haqq, February 16, 2017).



The scene of the attack in southwest Baghdad (Al-Jazeera, February 17, 2017)

- In Madinat Sadr, the Shiite quarter in Baghdad, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb, killing 18 people and wounding about 50 others (Reuters, February 15, 2017). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack (Haqq, February 15, 2017).



The scene of the attack in Madinat Sadr, the Shiite quarter in Baghdad (Shafaq News, February 15, 2017)

Global jihad activity in other countries

Egypt

Rocket fire at Israel

- On February 20, 2017, two rockets were fired at Israel from the Sinai Peninsula. The rockets fell in an open area near the Egyptian border, in the Eshkol

Regional Council. There were no casualties, and no damage was caused. The day before the rockets were fired, ISIS's Sinai Province reported that an Israeli drone had hit a car and killed five ISIS operatives in the village of Shibana, south of Rafah (Amaq News Agency, February 19, 2017). **On February 21, 2017, ISIS announced that its operatives had launched two Grad rockets at the Eshkol Regional Council** (referred to as “settlement”) (Amaq News Agency, February 21, 2017).

■ **This week, ISIS issued a video calling for fighting against the Copts in Egypt.** A speaker in the video explains that the Christians (i.e., the Copts) in Egypt control the economy, media and politics, and are the spearhead of the “Crusaders” (i.e., the West) in their war against the Muslims. Therefore, according to the speaker, **the “holy jihad fighters” must harm them.** Later in the video, an operative **codenamed Abu al-Zubayr al-Masri (i.e., the Egyptian) encourages those unable to go and fight in Syria and Iraq to attack the Copts** (“enemies of Allah are in front of you”). **The speaker promises that the attack on the Coptic church in Egypt was just the first operation against the Christians in Egypt, and would be followed by additional operations.**⁴



Masked ISIS operative codenamed Abu al-Zubayr al-Masri threatens the Copts in Egypt and calls on jihad fighters to kill them (Haqq, February 20, 2017)

Pakistan

■ On February 16, 2017, a **suicide bombing attack was carried out at a Sufi temple in the city of Sehwan**, in southeast Pakistan (about 177 km north of the capital, Karachi). A suicide bomber activated hand grenades and blew himself up with

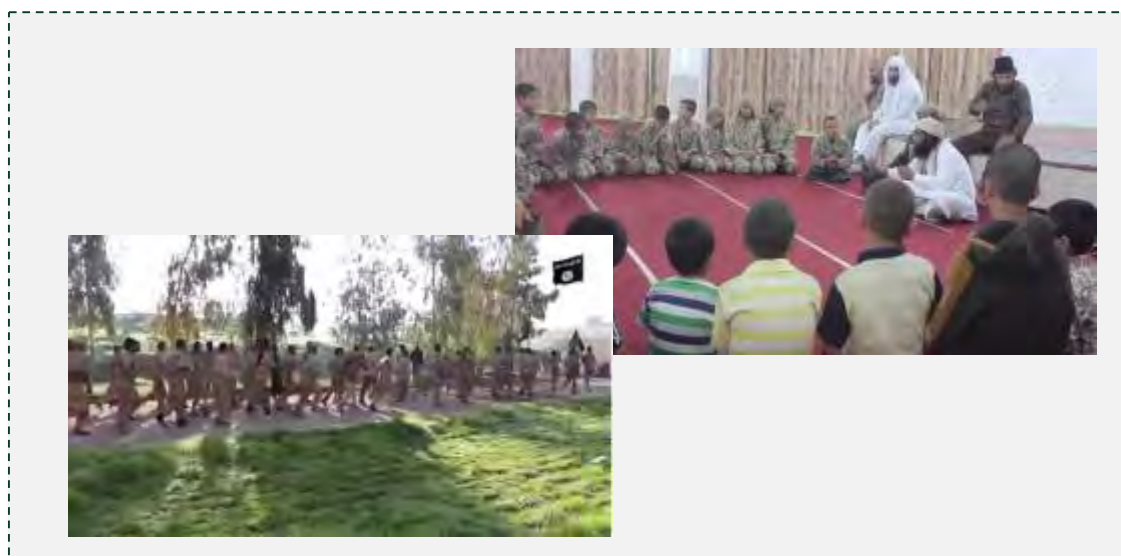
⁴ On December 12, 2016, there was an explosion at a Coptic church in Cairo's Abbasiyah neighborhood. At least 25 people were killed, and 38 others were wounded. According to Egyptian security sources, ISIS's Sinai Province was behind the attack.

an explosive vest inside the temple. **Around 70 people were killed and some 200 others were wounded** (dawn.com, February 17, 2017). **The Islamic State's Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack** (Amaq News Agency, February 17, 2017). In response to the suicide bombing attack, over 100 terrorist operatives throughout the country were reportedly killed in an operation by the Pakistani Army (Reuters, February 17, 2017).

The battle for hearts and minds

Encouraging suicide bombing attacks

■ ISIS's Nineveh Province released a video encouraging suicide bombing attacks. The video shows foreign fighters from various countries who joined ISIS and decided to become suicide bombers. In the video, they talk about their past and about their training after joining ISIS. **The video includes photos of Yazidi children who were abducted by ISIS. The children undergo military training at training camps and attend ISIS's Islamic law (Sharia) classes. The Yazidi children are sent by ISIS to carry out suicide bombing attacks in Mosul and elsewhere.**



Right: Yazidi children forcibly converted to Islam undergoing religious indoctrination by ISIS operatives. Left: Military training of Yazidi children by ISIS (YouTube, February 20, 2017).



Right: Yazidi teenage boy operating a mortar during ISIS's military training. Left: Yazidi children sent by ISIS to carry out suicide bombing attacks (YouTube, February 20, 2017).

Al-Qaeda: Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri's speech

■ On February 18, 2017, the As-Sahab Foundation, Al-Qaeda's media arm, released a **new speech by Al-Qaeda leader Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, devoted primarily to Egypt**. Below are some topics that he addressed in his speech:

- **Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyya** (the organization that Anwar Sadat's assassin belonged to) **operatives**: Al-Zawahiri calls on them to resume their activity and return to their heyday.
- **The Muslim Brotherhood**: Al-Zawahiri rebukes and criticizes the movement's operatives on the grounds that they have "deteriorated" over the years and claims that their conduct, under the leadership of Mohamed Morsi, is inconsistent with Islamic law (Sharia). He says the movement's operatives must "mend their ways," abandon the capitulation agreements with Israel and the alliance with the United States, and declare jihad for the sake of Sharia.
- **ISIS's Sinai Province**: Al-Zawahiri rebukes ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi for the lies that he has told about him.
- At the end of the speech, Al-Zawahiri outlines his **priorities with regard to jihadi activity in Egypt and abroad**. According to him, **American and Jewish interests** are the most important targets to attack, followed by **the interests of the coalition countries**. The next priority is to attack **Egyptian government institutions: the security and intelligence forces, journalists, and judges**.



Al-Qaeda leader Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri speaking in a new video (YouTube, February 19, 2017)