



Spotlight on Global Jihad (April 20-26, 2017)



Main events of the week¹

- This week, there were no significant changes on the ground in the various fighting zones in Syria and Iraq. SDF forces continue to mop up the areas surrounding Al-Raqqah in order to tighten the encirclement of the city. According to an increasing number of reports, ISIS is evacuating operatives from its "capital" Al-Raqqah to cities along the Euphrates River. In the ITIC's assessment, these are mainly operatives whose presence is unnecessary (government officials and other officials), as part of the preparations for the battle for the city of Al-Raqqah, which ISIS believes is imminent.
- **ISIS and its supporters continue their efforts to carry out terrorist attacks abroad**, as a means of deterrence and in order to divert the attention of the coalition that is fighting against it. This week, there was a **shooting attack on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris** just days before the presidential elections in France (one police officer was killed, and two others were wounded). ISIS claimed responsibility. Three days later, an article was published in ISIS's organ, stating that **France was chosen as a preferred target for attacks** because it is playing a central role in the campaign against ISIS in Syria, Iraq and North Africa. The article **threatens France and the West with a war of attrition that will harm the economy of the West and the morale of its citizens**.

Main developments in Syria

The campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

- **The SDF forces continued mopping up areas around Al-Raqqah** while engaging in local confrontations with ISIS operatives. Their goal is to encircle Al-Raqqah and cut it off from the other areas held by ISIS, as part of the so-called fourth stage of the takeover of Al-Raqqah. In the **city of Tabqa**, which is encircled by the SDF, fighting continues and the SDF forces proceed slowly on the outskirts of the city. **In the area of the Tabqa Dam**, fighting also continues. According to ISIS's announcement, over 15

¹ Spotlight on Global Jihad will not appear next week due to Israel's Independence Day.

SDF fighters were killed this week while trying to advance towards the dam (Haqq, April 22, 2017).



Layout of the forces in the city of Tabqa (updated to April 24, 2017): The area controlled by ISIS is marked in gray; The area where the SDF forces are deployed on the outskirts of the city is marked in yellow (NORS Center for Strategic Studies, April 24, 2017).

■ Fox News reported (April 21, 2017) that, according to official sources in the US Department of Defense, **ISIS has recently moved its “capital” from Al-Raqqah to Deir ez-Zor**. This was done in view of the increasing number of airstrikes on ISIS strongholds (in Al-Raqqah) and the military pressure exerted by the SDF forces on Al-Raqqah from three directions. It was also reported that **drones had photographed hundreds of ISIS administrative personnel** leaving the city of Al-Mayadeen, on the Euphrates River (about 45 km east of Deir ez-Zor), where the Americans had killed an ISIS senior operative (see below).

■ This past month, there were many reports that **ISIS was evacuating hundreds of operatives from Al-Raqqah, including Islamic State senior operatives and administrative and government officials**. These operatives are being moved (in some cases, together with their families) to alternative control areas along the Euphrates River, including the cities of Deir ez-Zor, Al-Mayadeen, and Adan (about 65 km southeast of Al-Raqqah). It was also reported that families of ISIS foreign fighters were fleeing Al-Raqqah to the Province of Deir ez-Zor. The ITIC believes that these are mainly ISIS non-combatant operatives, as part of ISIS’s preparations for the battle for the city of Al-Raqqah, which they believe is imminent.

The area of Hama

■ **In the area north of Hama, the Syrian Army continues to regain control over the towns and villages taken over by the rebel organizations, mainly the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham.** This week, the Syrian Army has taken over the town of Taybat Al-Imam, about 14 km north of Hama (near the town of Soran, which was taken over last week). Syrian Air Force warplanes reportedly attacked outposts of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham north and west of Hama, causing losses to the organization and forcing it to withdraw from the front lines (Al-Hadath, April 21, 2017).

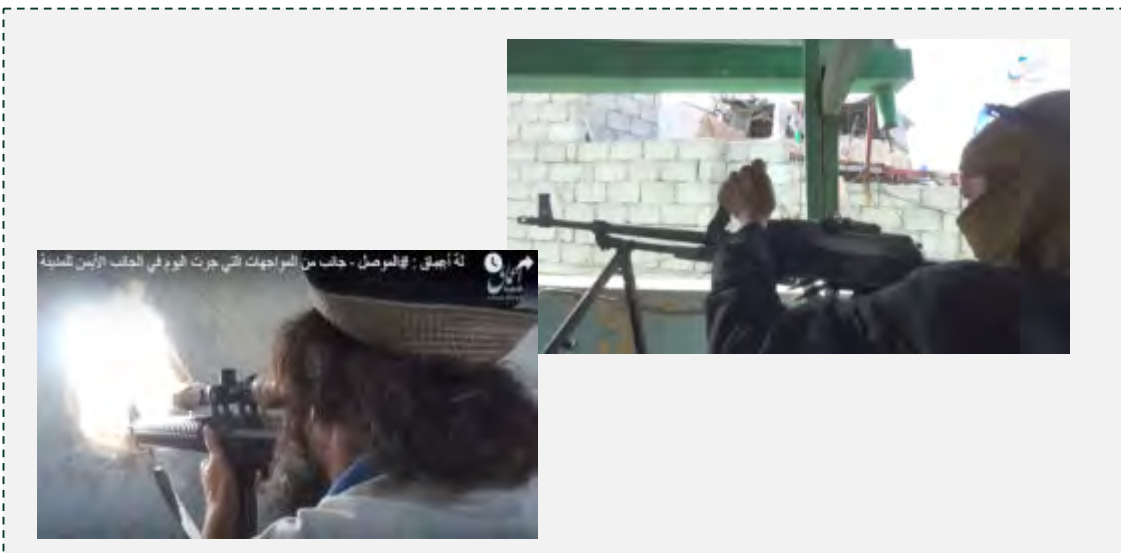
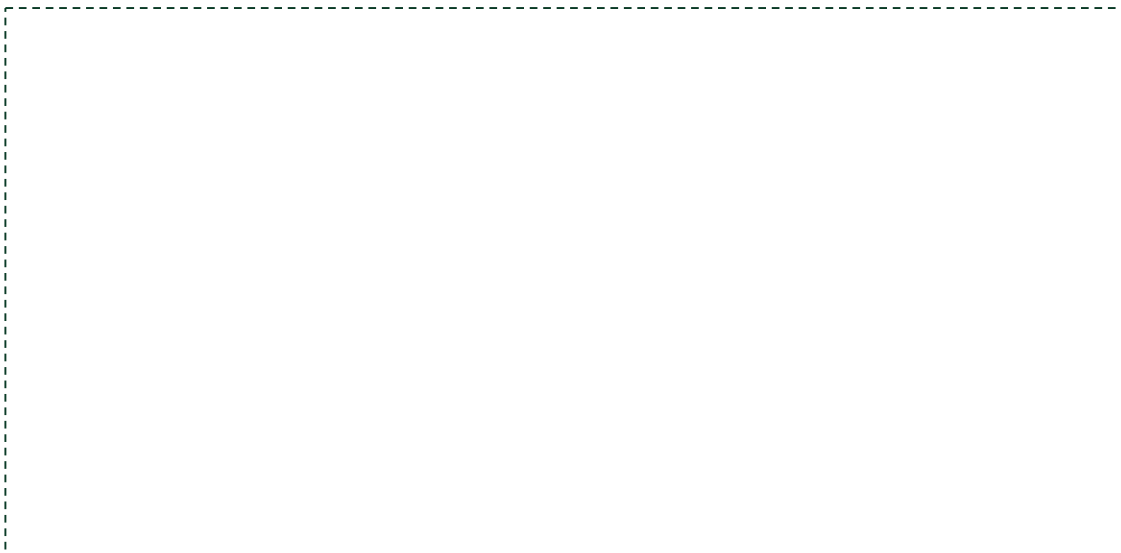
The city of Daraa and the Yarmouk Basin

■ **In the Al-Manshiyya neighborhood in southwest Daraa,** fighting continues even after the announcements of the rebel organizations that they control most of the neighborhood. The Syrian Army fired artillery at Al-Manshiyya and Daraa Al-Balad (Old Daraa). Airstrikes were also carried out against these two neighborhoods. The **Khaled bin Al-Walid Army (affiliated with ISIS)** reportedly took over three towns from the rebel organizations in the Yarmouk Basin, while taking advantage of the fact that their forces are focused on the fighting in Daraa (Araby 21, April 21, 2017).

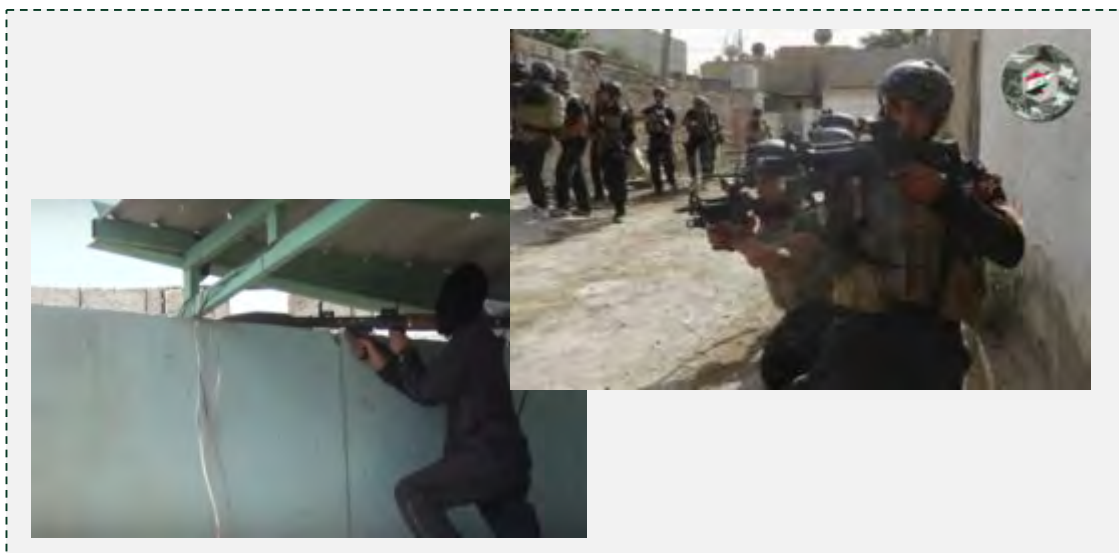
Main developments in Iraq

The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

■ The Iraqi security forces continue to advance slowly in the Old City of Mosul. ISIS continues its fierce resistance, using various fighting tactics against the attacking forces: car bombs, sniper and anti-tank fire. Battles are still being waged around the Al-Nouri Mosque, which is of symbolic importance. However, the Iraqi forces have managed to advance to the north in the western part of west Mosul and take over the Al-Tanak neighborhood (Nineveh Information Center, April 24, 2017). According to an Iraqi Ministry of Defense spokesman's report to the media, 70% of the territory of west Mosul is under the Iraqi forces' control (aa.com.tr, April 24, 2017).



Right: ISIS operative firing at the Iraqi forces. Left: ISIS sniper shooting in west Mosul (Haqq, April 23, 2017)



Right: Soldiers of the Iraqi government counterterrorism apparatus operating in the Al-Tanak neighborhood (Nineveh Information Center, April 24, 2017). Left: ISIS operative firing an RPG (Haqq, April 23, 2017)

■ There have been more Iraqi reports on ISIS senior operatives being killed in Mosul. Iraqi Federal Police Chief Major Shaker Jawdat and an Iraqi Army source reported this week on the killing of the following operatives (Sawt al-Ummah, April 20, 2017; Anatolia, April 16, 2017):

- **Abu Abd al-Rahman**, referred to as ISIS leader deputy, was killed in an attack against ISIS headquarters in the Old City in west Mosul.
- **Abu Maria the Russian and Abu Walid the Tunisian**, senior ISIS commanders, were killed in the Old City.
- **Aziz Ibrahim Faris al-Anzi**, referred to as ISIS's head of security in Mosul, was killed in an airstrike in the Al-Sihha neighborhood in the Old City.
- **Ali Ibrahim Mohamed**, ISIS senior operative, was killed in the west Mosul neighborhood of Al-Tanak.

Sinai Peninsula

Confrontations between Egyptian security forces and ISIS in north and central Sinai continue

■ This week, the Egyptian security forces continued their intense security activity against ISIS targets in north Sinai, mainly in the area of the city of Al-Arish, where Egyptian governance is shaky. ISIS operatives detonated IEDs on the roads leading to Al-Arish. An ISIS suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in

southern Rafah at a roadblock set up by the Tarabin tribe. Two people were killed and three others were seriously wounded (Al-Masry Al-Youm, April 25, 2017).

■ Egyptian media reported that **19 operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province and from the Nile Delta region were killed in Egyptian Air Force airstrikes in North Sinai.** One of them was a senior operative in the Sinai Province who served as head of the Province's Sharia Committee, and another was a senior operative who had been in charge of investigations in the Province (Facebook page of the Spokesman for the Egyptian Armed Forces; Al-Youm Al-Sabea, April 20, 2017).

■ At the same time, Egyptian security forces **carried out raids against ISIS targets in central Sinai.** ISIS operatives were killed in these raids, and substances serving to make explosive charges were seized (Facebook page of the Spokesman for the Egyptian Armed Forces). According to Arab media, the Egyptian security forces are trying to push ISIS operatives to the central Sinai peninsula, encircle them there and intensify military actions against them (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, April 24, 2017).

ISIS announces the execution of Egyptian Army agents

■ ISIS's Sinai Province announced that on April 21, 2017, his operatives in Rafah executed three people who allegedly were agents of the Egyptian Army. ISIS published the names of the three and disseminated a photo of their execution.



ISIS's Sinai Province operative shooting to death three alleged agents of the Egyptian Army (Haqq, April 22, 2017).

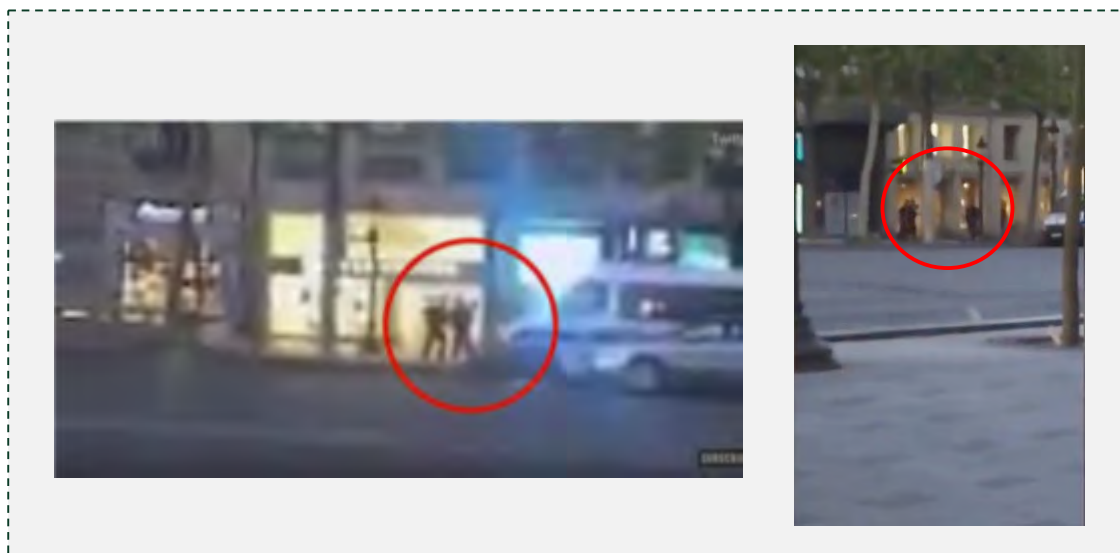
Shooting attack near St. Catherine's Monastery (update)

■ On April 18, 2017, armed operatives carried out a shooting attack against a roadblock of the Egyptian security forces near St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai. An Egyptian policeman was killed and three others were wounded. The attackers were wounded but managed to flee the scene. On April 19, 2017, it was reported that **an Egyptian force had killed one of the perpetrators of the attack**. When the security forces arrived at the place where he was hiding, **he threatened to detonate his explosive belt**. He was killed by the Egyptian force, and Egyptian sappers neutralized the explosive belt (Al-Arabiya, April 19, 2017).

Global jihad activity in other countries

Shooting attacks in Paris²

■ On April 20, 2017, at around 9:00 PM, a **shooting attack was carried out against a police van on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris**. A terrorist opened fire at a police van from his car, apparently while stopped at a red light. A police officer was killed and two other police officers were wounded. The terrorist was shot and killed in the exchange of fire with police. **A note expressing support for ISIS** was found next to the body of the terrorist at the scene of the attack.

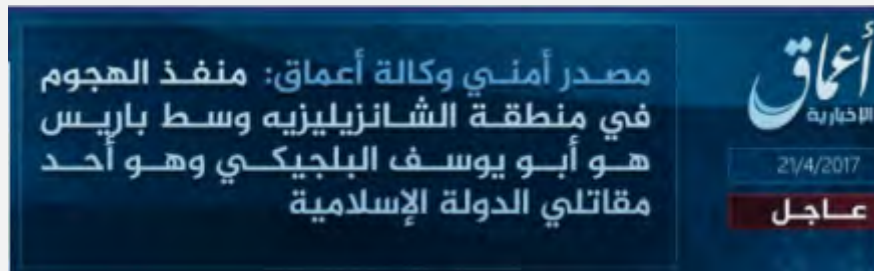


The confrontation between the police and the terrorist at the scene of the attack (YouTube, April 20-21, 2017).

■ About two hours after the attack, ISIS claimed responsibility. According to ISIS's announcement, a "security source" told ISIS's Amaq News Agency that "the

² An initial overview based on French and Western media reports.

perpetrator of the attack in the area of the Champs-Élysées was **Abu Yusuf al-Baljiki (i.e., the Belgian), one of the fighters of the Islamic State.**”



ISIS’s claim of responsibility for the attack on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées (Haqq, April 21, 2017)

■ The French police identified the terrorist as **Karim Cheurfi**, 39, a French native of Algerian descent, from a suburb in the eastern part of Paris.³ Like other terrorists who carried out ISIS-inspired terrorist attacks, **Cheurfi was also known to the French authorities**. He was convicted in 2003 and sentenced to 20 years in prison for attempting to murder two French policemen. He was released in 2015 after his sentence was shortened. The French security forces had information that in early 2016, Karim Cheurfi had attempted to purchase weapons in order to kill policemen in revenge for children killed in Syria. However, police searches and wiretapping found no evidence that Cheurfi had undergone a process of radicalization, or that he regularly visited radical Islamic websites.

³ Rumors about the involvement of another terrorist in the attack have so far turned out to be untrue. However, the French authorities continue to investigate the possibility that the terrorist had accomplices in the attack.



Karim Cheurfi (Twitter; it is not known whose Twitter page this is and when the photo was posted)

Shooting attack in Khabarovsk, eastern Russia

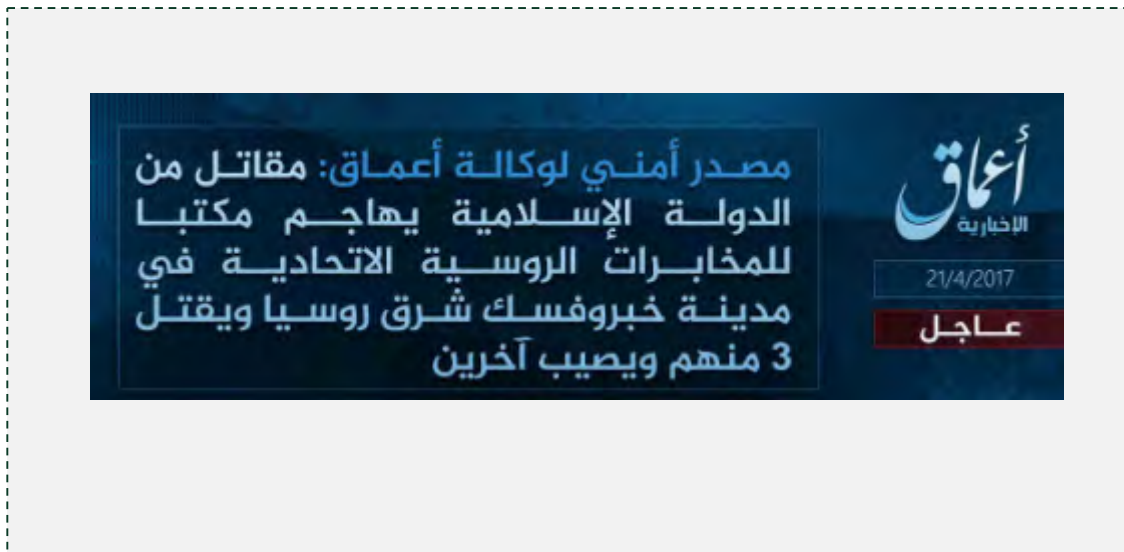
■ On April 21, 2017, a shooting attack was carried out at the headquarters of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) in the eastern Russian city of Khabarovsk (about 30 km from the Chinese border). The shooting took place in the reception room before the security check. Two people were killed in the attack, one of whom was an FSB employee and the other a visitor. Before carrying out the attack, the terrorist, a resident of the city of Khabarovsk by the name of **Anton Konev**, went to a shooting club in the city, shot an employee there and stole a hunting rifle and two handguns that he later used to carry out the attack (Russian Federal Security Service website, April 21, 2017).



The scene of the attack in Khabarovsk (Khabarovsk news website, April 21, 2017)

■ **ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, but the FSB reported that there was a connection between the terrorist and neo-Nazi groups.** In ISIS's claim of

responsibility, a “security source” said that a fighter of the Islamic State had attacked the intelligence office in the city of Khabarovsk, killing three intelligence personnel and wounding others (Aamaq News Agency, April 21, 2017).



ISIS’s claim of responsibility for the attack in Khabarovsk (Aamaq News Agency, April 21, 2017)

Suicide bombing attack in the St. Petersburg subway (update)

■ The Russian media reported that a tenth suspect, **Akram Azimov**, had been arrested on suspicion of involvement in the suicide bombing attack in the St. Petersburg subway (April 3, 2017). In her decision to extend his remand, the judge noted **that the attack was financed by a terror network operating from Turkey** and that the suspect **received cash in Turkey to finance the terrorist attack**. The suspect also provided the terrorist with forged documents for crossing the border (TASS News Agency, April 20, 2017). The Russian media reported that the terrorists who were arrested were ISIS operatives and that the terrorist who carried out the attack had spent time in Syria and was trained there.

Clashes between ISIS’s branch in Afghanistan and the Afghan Army

■ Clashes continue between ISIS’s branch in Afghanistan and the Afghan Army in the Nangarhar Province of eastern Afghanistan. On April 23, 2017, ISIS announced that eight Afghan Army soldiers had been killed by IEDs detonated by ISIS in the Nangarhar Province (Haqq, April 23, 2017). Two days earlier, on April 21, 2017, it was reported that at least 28 ISIS operatives had been killed in the Eastern Nangarhar Province. The Afghan Army deploys ground forces and carries out air operations in this area (Afghanistan Times, April 23, 2017).



The Nangarhar Province (marked in red) (Google Maps)

Counterterrorism and preventive activity

The killing of a senior operative in ISIS's external terror apparatus

- According to a report by the American envoy to the coalition against ISIS, on April 6, 2017, US forces took action against a senior ISIS operative codenamed **Abdurakhmon Uzbeki (i.e., the Uzbek)**, near the city of **Al-Mayadeen** (about 42 km southeast of Deir al-Zor). **Abdurakhmon Uzbeki was a close associate of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He played a key role in ISIS's external terrorist apparatus** and facilitated the movement of ISIS foreign terror fighters and funds (Twitter page of Brett McGurk, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, April 21, 2017).
- According to the US envoy's announcement, it is assessed that **Abdurakhmon Uzbeki** was involved in the New Year's Eve attack at the Reina Nightclub in Istanbul on January 1, 2017. The attack killed 39 people, most of them foreign nationals. ISIS claimed responsibility. According to Turkish media reports, **Abdurakhmon Uzbeki was the handler of Abdulkadir Masharipov, the terrorist who carried out the attack.** Masharipov fled the scene after the attack and was caught in Istanbul on January 17, 2017. Abdurakhmon Uzbeki was reportedly the man who ordered the attack and equipped Masharipov with money and weapons. According to Turkish media reports, Masharipov's interrogation yielded valuable information that was used by US intelligence (milliyet.com, haberturk.com, April 23, 2017; hurriyetdailynews.com, April 25, 2017).

Senior ISIS operative killed in Libya

■ On April 23, 2017, a senior ISIS operative was killed in Sabratah by unidentified armed operatives. The dead man was **Abdullah al-Dabashi**, aka **Abdullah Haftar**, reportedly a senior operative wanted by Western security services due to his participation in the abduction and murder of two Serbian diplomats in Sabratah. Abdullah al-Dabashi was involved in the establishment of ISIS infrastructure in the city of Sabratah and moving ISIS operatives to the Libyan cities of Sabratah and Sirte, as well as to Tunisia (Ayn Libya, April 14, 2017; Akhbar Libya, April 24, 2017).



Abdullah al-Dabashi, aka Abdullah Haftar, senior ISIS operative killed in Sabratah
(Akhbar Libya 24, April 24, 2017)

Media activity

ISIS threatens to carry out terrorist attacks in France

■ On April 23, 2017, ISIS published an article titled “Europe’s open war.” The author, whose codename is Nur al-Din al-Jaza’iri (i.e., the Algerian), notes that ISIS apparently implements a long-term strategy against the international coalition. According to him, **France was chosen as a preferred target for terrorist attacks because it plays a key role in the campaign against ISIS in Syria, Iraq, and even in North Africa.** The article asserts that it is a **war of attrition**, and that **as part of this war, terrorist attacks will be continued in Western countries and particularly in France. This war of attrition will have repercussions on European economy and the morale of the citizens in the European continent, and particularly in France** (Haqq, April 23, 2017).



**Photo of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées which appears in the article “Europe’s Open War”
(Haqq, April 23, 2017)**