



## Spotlight on Global Jihad (April 27-May 10, 2017)



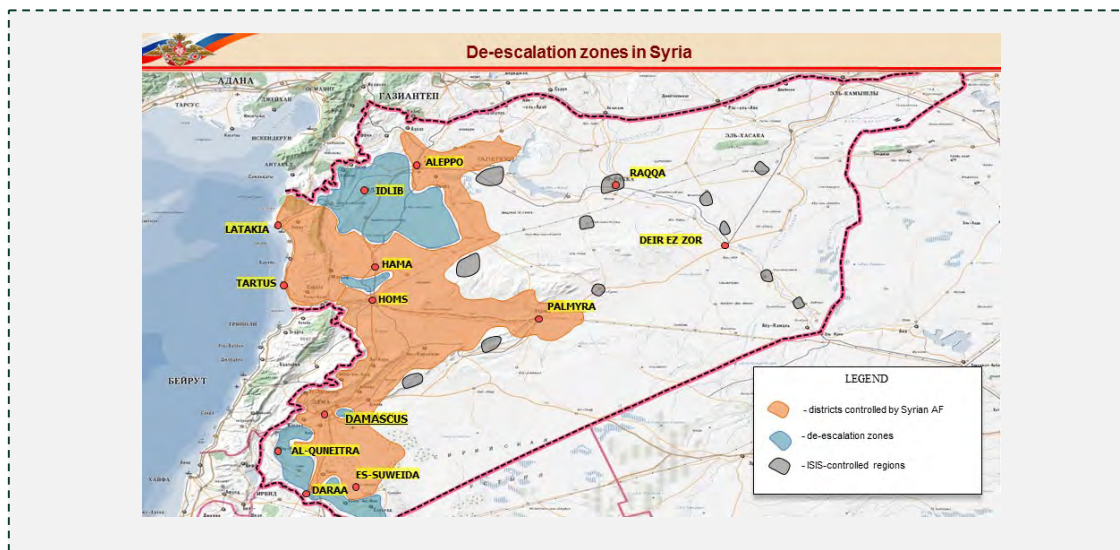
### Main events of the week

- This week, a new ceasefire initiated by Russia entered into effect, with the participation of Iran and Turkey. The agreement defines four de-escalation zones where fighting will be stopped for six months. The chances of implementing the agreement on the ground are actually slim since it doesn't include the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, which collaborates with the Islamic rebel organizations. Another weak point of the agreement is the fact that the US and its allies are not involved in it.
- Noteworthy developments on the ground:
  - **In Mosul**, the Iraqi security forces opened an attack from the north, in view of the fact that fighting in the Old City of Mosul is bogged down. The Iraqi forces reported that they had successes, and it seems that **ISIS's enclave in Mosul is shrinking**.
  - **The SDF forces took over the city of Tabqa** from ISIS, as well as several additional villages and towns in the Al-Raqqah area. **The siege on Al-Raqqah is growing tighter**, and ISIS operatives in the city are preparing for the fighting (according to the spokesman for the US-led coalition, they number 3,000-4,000 operatives).
  - **In the Sinai Peninsula, the confrontation between ISIS's Sinai Province and the Al-Tarabin tribe, the largest in Sinai, is intensifying**. The tribesmen declared that they are at war with ISIS in Sinai, in coordination with the Egyptian government. This confrontation, the most severe since the Salafi jihadists settled in Sinai, may **create a rift between ISIS and the local Bedouin population and undermine the power of ISIS's Sinai Province**.

### The Astana agreement on a new ceasefire in Syria

- **On May 6, 2017, a ceasefire entered into effect in Syria in four fighting zones which were defined as de-escalation zones**. These zones are Idlib, Daraa, Homs and neighborhoods in eastern Al-Ghouta, east of Damascus (see map). Iran and Turkey also joined the ceasefire agreement reached in Astana on Russia's initiative. The agreement, which was published by the Russian Foreign Ministry, stipulates that **fighting will be stopped in these zones for a period of six months**.

During this period, no weapons will be used in these zones, no airstrikes will be carried out, and extensive humanitarian aid will be extended to the population.



Map of the zones in Syria (marked in blue) where Russian military activity was stopped (Russian Ministry of Defense website, May 5, 2017)

■ According to Russia's envoy to the settlement talks in Astana, although flying will be banned above these zones, **the international coalition warplanes will be permitted to continue attacking ISIS and Al-Qaeda's targets** (RT, May 5, 2017).<sup>1</sup> **Staffan de Mistura, the UN secretary-general's special envoy to Syria**, said that the plan is the first step towards a comprehensive ceasefire. **The United States, which is not party to the agreement**, expressed concern about Iran's involvement in the agreement. According to Syrian, Russian and Western media reports, **fighting continues in the ceasefire zones, albeit at a lower level of intensity.**

■ **The main weak point of the ceasefire agreement is that it does not include the Fateh al-Sham Front (the former Al-Nusra Front), which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda.** This organization **collaborates with other Islamic rebel organizations as part of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham.** The stronghold of the Headquarters and other rebel organizations is **the Idlib area**, which is the largest among the de-escalation zones. Continued airstrikes against the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham in these zones may be considered as an attack against the rebel organizations and a violation of the agreement, and **this can bring about another**

<sup>1</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview to the Russian media that Russia is determined to defeat ISIS. According to Lavrov, the countries that are members of the Common Security Treaty Organization are ready to fight against ISIS as part of a joint rapid deployment force (TASS, May 5, 2017). The Common Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a political-military treaty that was established by the CIS on the basis of the Common Security Treaty signed on May 15, 1992.

**escalation in the fighting.** Yet another weak point is the fact that the US and its allies are not part to the agreement, which may also impede its implementation.

## Main developments in Syria

### The campaign to take over Al-Raqqah

■ On May 4, 2017, after 44 days of fighting, the SDF forces reportedly took over the city of Tabqa from ISIS and are fully in control there. ISIS operatives withdrew from the city with their weapons and their families, as part of an agreement reached with the SDF forces on the operatives' withdrawal from the city and the Tabqa Dam area. Some of ISIS operatives went towards the city of Al-Raqqah and some of them turned themselves in to the SDF forces. Dozens of SDF fighters, ISIS operatives and civilians were killed and wounded during the fighting to take over the city (Al-Jazeera, May 4, 2017).



Right: SDF fighters patrolling Tabqa after taking over the city from ISIS (Twitter, May 5, 2017). Left: Foreign fighters who fought in the ranks of the SDF forces hold an ISIS flag (Twitter, May 6, 2017).

■ SDF forces took over several additional towns and villages in the Al-Raqqah area. The SDF forces are now encircling the city from the north, east and west. Reportedly, they are at a distance of **about 16 km north of the city** (Al-Jazeera, May 4, 2017). ISIS is trying to employ car bomb attacks against the SDF. According to ISIS, twenty SDF fighters were killed and ten were wounded by a car bomb explosion in the area of the village of Hazima, north of Al-Raqqah (Zaman Al-Wasl, May 6, 2017).

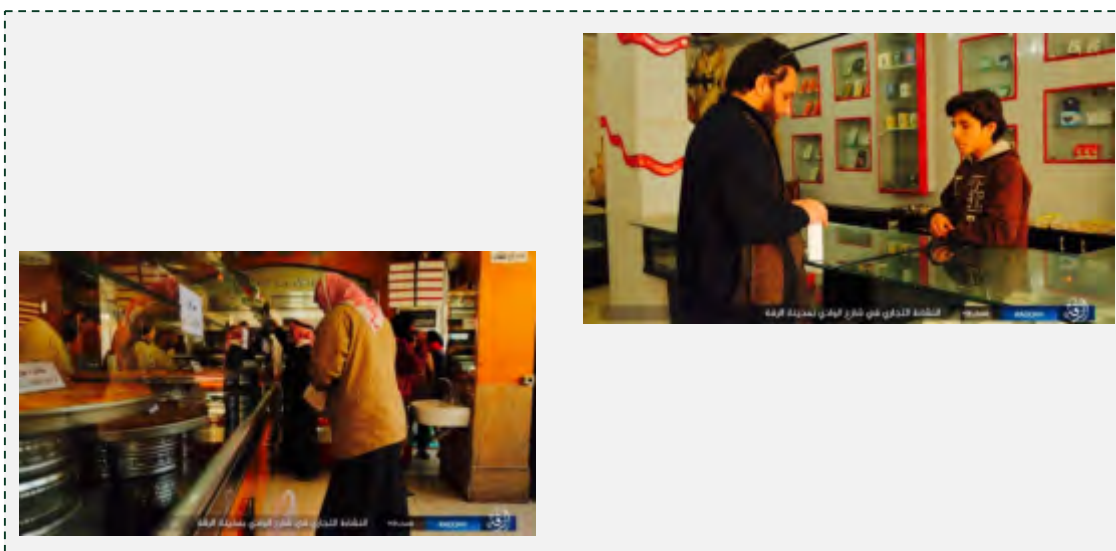


Tabqa and Al-Raqqah (updated to May 4, 2017): The SDF forces (in yellow) are proceeding towards the area held by ISIS (in brown), which is shrinking (Syrian NORs Institute for Strategic Studies, May 4, 2017)

## The situation in Al-Raqqah

- **According to US-led Coalition Spokesman Col. John Dorian**, the encirclement around Al-Raqqah has intensified due to actions of the coalition countries and the SDF forces. According to his assessment, there are currently 3,000-4,000 ISIS operatives in Al-Raqqah, including foreign fighters (ARA News, May 5, 2017).
- **According to ISIS propaganda**, life in Al-Raqqah is going on normally. An examination of the latest issue of **Al-Naba**, **ISIS's organ**, reveals that **ISIS is making an effort to recruit new operatives and train its men in guerrilla tactics behind enemy lines**. The issue includes an article on a course of "storming fighters" which took place in the Al-Shaykhin Camp, in **the area of Al-Raqqah**. According to the course trainers, the trainees mainly practiced actions of **storming and surprise attacks behind enemy lines and deep within enemy territory, whose objective is to inflict on the enemy as much damage as possible, in human life and property**. On another page of the organ, there appears an ad calling on operatives **to enlist in the ranks of the Islamic State** (Al-Naba, May 4, 2017). These items **may indicate that ISIS is suffering from a shortage of human resources due to the losses it sustained**. They also indicate the preparations made by the organization for the battle for Al-Raqqah and the day after.





“Business as usual” in Al-Raqqah, according to ISIS propaganda. Photos from a video released by ISIS, showing Al-Raqqah residents shopping at stores in the Al-Wadi Street in the city (Haqq, April 30, 2017). Such false propaganda was also disseminated by ISIS during the first stages of the attack on Mosul.

## Deir ez-Zor

■ According to Lebanese media reports, ISIS has started the **preparations for a possible attack against it in the Deir ez-Zor area**. As part of these preparations, the operatives started to **dig tunnels, erect sand batteries and concrete walls, plant mines, close roads in the city and increase the monitoring of the Euphrates River to prevent infiltration of the city by boats**. At the same time, ISIS moved **reinforcements of operatives from Iraq and large quantities of weapons and ammunition**. In addition, the organization has made several personal changes among its commanders in the area. Most of the sector commanders have reportedly been replaced. The governor of the Euphrates Province was removed from office, and a new governor was appointed instead. In addition, some of the senior officials in the intelligence apparatus were replaced (Al-Modon, a Lebanese news website, April 26, 2017). In this context, it was reported that an operative codenamed **Abu Muqatel al-Baljiki** (i.e., the Belgian) was appointed as the military official in charge of the Deir ez-Zor area (Al-Ahed, April 26, 2017).

## The Palmyra area

■ Even after Palmyra was retaken by the Syrian Army, **there are still clashes between ISIS operatives and the Syrian forces, mainly in the area east of the city**. ISIS operatives have reportedly managed to take over several sites held by the Syrian regime army (Sham Communication Network, May 4, 2017). The areas mentioned included the silo area, in the northeastern part of the city, and the T3 crude oil pumping

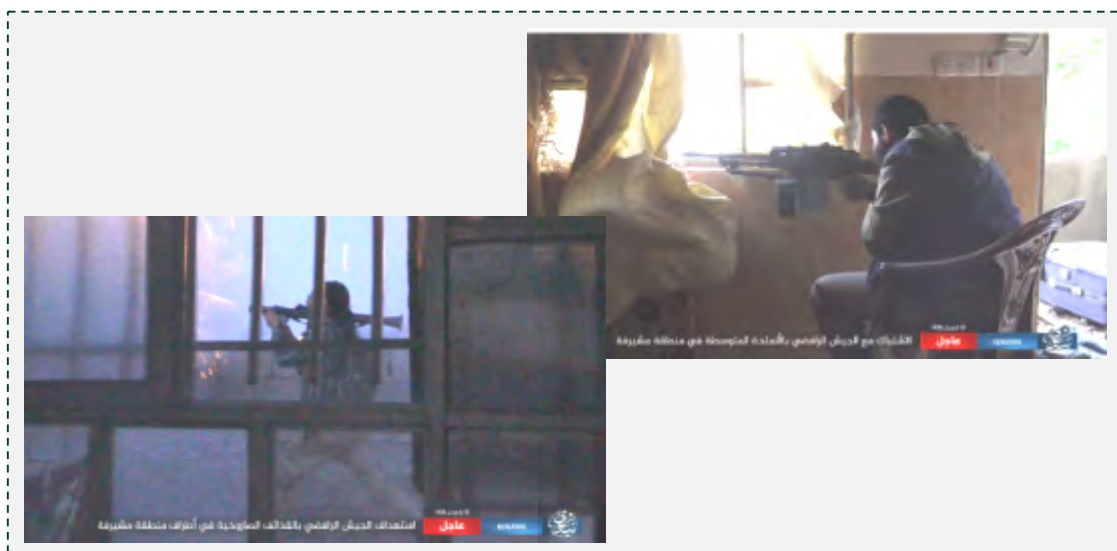
station, about 42 km east of Palmyra. The Syrian Army used fighter planes to attack ISIS (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 2, 2017).

## Main developments in Iraq

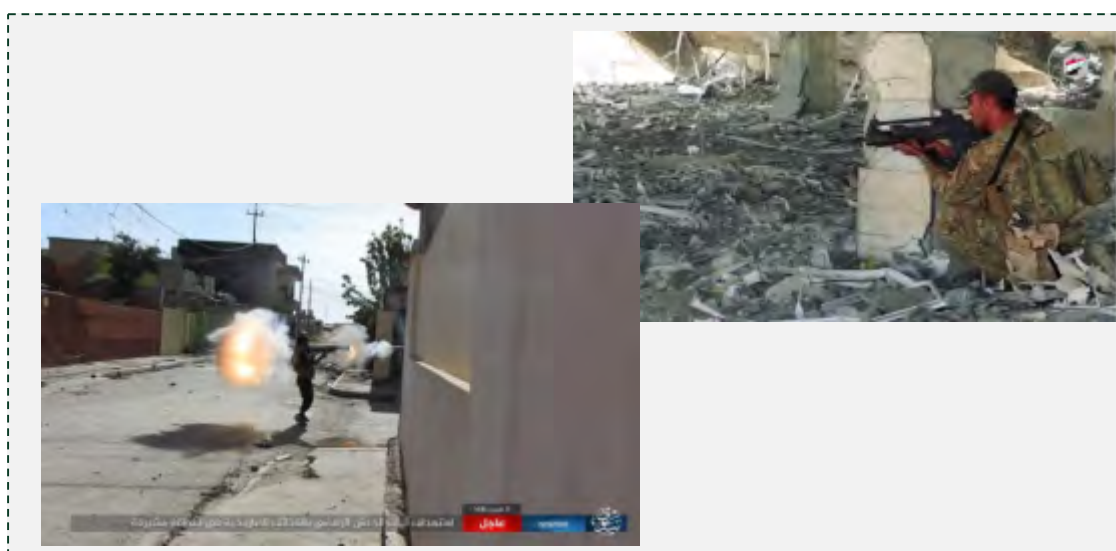
### The campaign for the takeover of Mosul

- In view of the difficulties they were facing while fighting in Mosul, **the Iraqi security forces opened a new front from the north**. The new front is reportedly managed by the Iraqi Army 9th Armored Division forces along with the Iraqi Interior Ministry's Rapid Deployment Force. **The Iraqi forces are proceeding slowly along Road No. 1 which crosses west Mosul from the north to the south.**

- In their attack, the Iraqi forces took over the **Mushayrafa neighborhood**, in northwestern Mosul, which is crossed by road No. 1. The commander of the 9th Armored Division said that during the liberation of Mushayrafa, his forces destroyed five car bombs, killed more than thirty ISIS operatives, and destroyed more than three arms caches (Al-Arabiya, May 4, 2017).



ISIS operatives fighting against the Iraqi security forces in the Mushayrafa neighborhood (Haqq, May 7, 2017)



Right: The Iraqi Army fighting against ISIS in the Wadi Ukab neighborhood, south of road No. 1 (Nineveh Information Center, May 8, 2017). Left: ISIS operative fires a shoulder missile in the Mushayrafa neighborhood which has been liberated this week (Haqq, May 9, 2017).



Map of the control areas that are still held by ISIS in Iraq (in black and brown). These areas include an enclave inside the city of Mosul; The Hawija area, south of Mosul; The Tal Afar area, west of Mosul; Part of the eastern Al-Anbar Province, including the cities of Al-Qaim, Aana and Rawa; Most of the Nineveh Province, from the north of the Al-Anbar Province until the city of Mosul in the east. ISIS currently holds only about 15% of the territory of Iraq, whereas in June 2014 it held at least a third of the country (Syrian NORS Institute for Strategic Studies, May 8, 2017)

## ISIS's response

■ **ISIS continues to carry out terrorist attacks against the Iraqi forces.** A senior Iraqi police official reported that 14 Iraqi policemen were killed and twenty others were wounded in a wave of suicide bombing attacks carried out by ISIS operatives in the city of Mosul (Anatolia, April 29, 2017). On May 3, 2017, ISIS reported that it had killed 12 Iraqi soldiers in Mosul's **Al-Yarmouk neighborhood** (Haqq, May 3, 2017). On May 7, 2017, an official source in the Iraqi Police reported that nine senior security figures were killed and three others were wounded as a result of the detonation of a car bomb in the western part of the city (Anatolia, May 7, 2017).



Abu Janat al-Iraqi, a suicide bomber who carried out a terrorist attack against the Iraqi forces in west Mosul (Haqq, May 5, 2017)



■ At the same time with the fighting in Mosul, **ISIS operatives continued to carry out terrorist attacks in additional Iraqi cities, mainly against government targets, the Shiite population, and tribesmen cooperating with the Iraqi regime. These terrorist attacks indicate that ISIS still has the power to continue holding wide-scale guerrilla activity, even after the loss of Mosul.** Following are noteworthy terrorist attacks:

- **Baghdad:** ISIS claimed responsibility for a suicide attack by a car bomb in the Al-Karadah neighborhood, near a crowd of Shiites. According to ISIS, more than thirty people were killed (Haqq, April 29, 2017).
- **Samarra:** ISIS informed that it had killed over thirty Iraqi security personnel in an attack carried out by its operatives against the police headquarters in the city. According to ISIS, one of its operatives detonated his explosive belt (Haqq, May 2, 2017).
- **Rutba:** Four Iraqi soldiers were killed and four others were wounded in an attack by ISIS operatives against an Iraqi Army outpost east of the city (Reuters, May 2, 2017).



Photos from a video released by ISIS: Iraqi security forces under attack east of Rutba (Amaq, May 3, 2017).

- **Ramadi:** A senior Iraqi police official reported that two policemen were killed as a result of the detonation of an IED in the city of Ramadi, in the Al-Anbar Province (Anatolia, May 8, 2017).
- **Haditha:** ISIS announced that it had killed at least 12 Iraqi soldiers and members of the tribal forces supporting them south of the city of Haditha in the

Al-Anbar Province. This was carried out when ISIS operatives repelled an attack against their strongholds in the area (Haqq, May 9, 2017).

- **Kirkuk:** ISIS reported that it had attacked an Air Force base of the Kurdish forces south of the city of Kirkuk, where American military advisors were reportedly staying. According to ISIS, the attack was carried out by a squad of six operatives who were disguised as Peshmerga soldiers. At least two of them had explosive belts. According to ISIS, dozens of Kurds were killed in the attack, as well as several US soldiers (Haqq; Reuters, May 7, 2017).



The six ISIS squad members before leaving for the attack (Haqq, May 7, 2017)

## Sinai Peninsula

### Confrontation between ISIS's Sinai Province and the Al-Tarabin tribe intensified

■ **Clashes continue in the northern Sinai Peninsula between ISIS's Sinai Province operatives and the tribesmen of Al-Tarabin, the largest Bedouin tribe in Sinai, which cooperates with the Egyptian authorities in the fight against ISIS. Following are the main developments:**

- **In south Rafah, a car bomb was detonated near a large number of cars of the Al-Tarabin tribe.** As a result, four people were killed and many others were wounded. In retaliation, Al-Tarabin tribesmen burned alive an ISIS hostage held by them (Facebook page of Sina News 24, April 25, 2017).
- Three days later, **ISIS operatives abducted two young tribesmen of Al-Tarabin. In retaliation, the tribesmen abducted armed ISIS operatives and demanded the release of all the tribesmen held by ISIS in return for the release**

of their captured operatives. ISIS refused to comply (Al-Jazeera, April 28, 2017).

- On May 2, 2017, the Al-Tarabin tribe announced that **its men had destroyed three vehicles belonging to ISIS**, killed seven operatives, and taken three others prisoner (including the operative in charge of Hisba, ISIS's morality police).
- On May 3, 2017, photos of ten men abducted by the Al-Tarabin tribe were released. In its announcement, the Al-Tarabin tribe claimed that the abducted men were **As'ad al-Amarin, a commander in ISIS's Sinai Province** who is not an Egyptian national, and nine of his operatives. According to Egyptian media reports, As'ad al-Amarin was the operative in charge of supplies and finance in ISIS's Sinai Province (Al-Arab Al-Youm, May 3, 2017; cairolive.com, May 3, 2017).



**Right: Some of ISIS operatives who have been taken prisoner by the Al-Tarabin tribe (Al-Arab Al-Youm, May 3, 2017). Left: Al-Tarabin tribe's announcement on capturing a senior ISIS operative and nine of his men south of Rafah (cairolive.com, May 3, 2017).**

- On May 6, 2017, there were **clashes between ISIS operatives and local tribesmen in south Rafah**. During the clashes, the tribesmen captured large amounts of weapons, explosives, and mines, which they handed over to the Egyptian security forces (Facebook page of the Union of the Sinai Tribes, May 6, 2017).
- Due to these developments, **the Al-Tarabin tribe is preparing for the continuation of the campaign against ISIS:**

- **The Al-Tarabin tribe** appointed **Moussa al-Dalah** as an official spokesman to release announcements concerning the developments in the fight against ISIS. The spokesman announced on his Facebook page that **the tribe's objective is to fight ISIS under Egyptian government support**. The spokesman alluded that the tribesmen would return to normal life only after the “nightmare” called ISIS was ended (Al-Madyan, May 7, 2017).
- On May 8, 2017, **the Al-Tarabin tribe announced that it was waging war against ISIS**, which perpetrates acts of massacre, killing and destruction. The tribe noted that it was operating in coordination with the Egyptian government (Bawabat Al-Qahera, May 8, 2017).

■ Al-Tarabin is the largest Bedouin tribe in Sinai. It originates from Saudi Arabia. **The confrontation between it and ISIS is the first of its kind** since the establishment of ISIS's Sinai Province and the beginning of the settlement of Salafi jihadists in the Sinai Peninsula. The confrontation may **create a rift between ISIS and the Bedouin population in Sinai and undermine the power of ISIS's Sinai Province**. It can be assumed that the Egyptian security forces will seize the opportunity to support the Al-Tarabin tribe **in order to increase the pressure on ISIS and deepen the rift between it and the local Bedouin population**.

### ISIS continues to threaten the Copts in Egypt

■ An ISIS operative who identified himself as the commander of the Caliphate in Egypt said in an interview to ISIS's organ that **the attacks against the churches in Egypt are part of the war against “infidels.”** He called on the Muslims to join the Islamic State and added that if they couldn't do so, **they must carry out attacks against the Christians and those who abandon Islam and inflict great damage on them**. He stressed that ISIS operatives in Egypt are in close connection with the Sinai Province, which “paves the way for them to Jerusalem.” He also warned the Muslims in Egypt **to stay away from sites where there are large numbers of Christians, Western nationals, army, and police, as well as from military, economic and government facilities belonging to the Egyptian government**. This is because ISIS considers them legitimate targets for its attacks (Al-Naba, May 4, 2017).

■ **Recently, ISIS has marked churches and Christian sites as preferred targets for terrorist attacks both in Egypt proper and in the northern Sinai Peninsula**. The Copts in Egypt are portrayed by ISIS as collaborators with the West in its activity

against the Muslims, and therefore **as a legitimate target**. This is the background for several atrocious attacks carried out recently against churches, which caused many losses among the Copts. There were also acts of harassment against the Copts in northern Sinai. The recent threat may indicate that ISIS's branch in Egypt **will continue to act against the Coptic Christians as well as against targets of the Egyptian government and the West**. This is intended to undermine internal stability in Egypt and ease the pressure exerted on ISIS's Sinai branch.

## The conduct of the Islamic State

### Reports that foreign fighters are abandoning ISIS

■ According to British media reports, in the wake of ISIS's defeats in Syria and Iraq, many foreign fighters and ISIS supporters are **abandoning the Islamic State and attempting to flee to Turkey** (The Guardian, April 27, 2017).

- According to official sources in Turkey and Europe, many ISIS operatives who joined ISIS since 2013 **have contacted the embassies of their home countries and asked to return to their homes**. Others who identify ideologically with ISIS are suspected of using their escape **to infiltrate into Turkey and from there to travel to Europe in order to continue the fighting**. Many were caught trying to cross the border, but some (an unknown number) managed to evade the security forces and entered Turkey (en route to their countries).

- Western intelligence agencies believe that these operatives include **operatives from ISIS's External Operations Arm who joined the ranks of ISIS** from various countries such as **Britain, France, Belgium and Australia**. It is estimated that **around 30,000 foreign fighters entered Syria and joined ISIS**. The US government estimates that some **25,000 of them have been killed**. These include **around 850 British fighters** who joined ISIS or other jihadi organizations such as the Fateh al-Sham Front.

■ **The Turkish authorities reportedly detained a number of ISIS foreign fighters who arrived from Syria at the Kilis Crossing in southern Turkey**. The detainees include **Stefan Aristidou**, a British citizen in his twenties who lives in London. He was detained along with his **wife** of Bangladeshi origin. **Kary Paul Kleman**, a 46-year-old US citizen from Florida, was also detained. **The three tried to cross into Turkey after spending more than two years in Syria in areas controlled by ISIS**. The



Turkish prosecutors intend to sentence Aristidou and Kleman to prison terms of between seven and a half to fifteen years. If Aristidou is extradited to Britain to stand trial, he could receive the maximum sentence of life imprisonment (The Guardian, April 26, 2017).

## Global jihad activity in other countries

### Afghanistan

■ On May 3, 2017, a suicide bombing attack was carried out by means of a car bomb detonated **near the US Embassy and government offices in central Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan**. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. The target of the attack was a convoy of foreign soldiers, probably from NATO, which was passing through the city center. Eight people were killed and 28 others were wounded. The wounded included three American soldiers (The Washington Post, The Guardian, Reuters, CNN, May 3, 2017).

## Counterterrorism and preventive activity

### Saudi Arabia

■ The Saudi authorities have detained 46 ISIS operatives in Jeddah. The detainees include 32 Saudi citizens. The rest are foreign nationals from Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, and Sudan. The operatives were detained for their involvement in terrorist attacks, the most prominent of which was the attack carried out by a suicide bomber at the Prophet Muhammad Mosque in the city of Medina in the summer of 2016 (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, May 1, 2017).

### Pakistan

■ **ISIS's leader in Afghanistan, codenamed Abdul Hasib, was reportedly killed in an operation of the Afghan Army's Special Forces in the Nangarhar region in the east of the country**. Abdul Hasib was appointed in 2016 after his predecessor, Hafiz Saeed Khan, was killed in an airstrike by a US drone. Several attacks are attributed to Abdul Hasib, the most prominent being the attack on the Kabul military hospital (Reuters, May 7, 2017).



Abdul Hasib, ISIS's leader in Afghanistan, who was killed by the Afghan Army (Al-Rai Al-Youm, May 7, 2017)

## The battle for hearts and minds

### ISIS calls on its men abroad to carry out terrorist attacks, taking hostages and causing mass killing (Issue 9 of ISIS's organ Rumiyah)

- The latest issue of **ISIS's organ Rumiyah**, which is distributed over the Internet in ten languages, **included another chapter in the series entitled "Just Terror Tactics"** (Rumiyah, May 4, 2017). In this chapter, **ISIS calls on its men to acquire weapons and carry out hostage-taking attacks.** According to the article, the objective of hostage-taking is not to receive ransom money, **but to create as much carnage and terror as one possibly can.** According to the instructions given in the article, the objective is not to hold a large number of hostages, but rather to **sow terrorism through the "language of force, the language of killing, stabbing and slitting throats, chopping off heads, flattening them under trucks, and burning them alive, until they give the jizyah [i.e., poll tax] while they are in a state of humiliation."**
- The article also recommends carrying out the operation **in a crowded place where the perpetrator of the attack is supposed to gain control over the victims and then proceed to slaughter as many of them as he possibly can before the initial police response.** Examples of such attacks are the massacre at the Bataclan Theater in Paris and the massacre at the Orlando nightclub. According to the article, one possible way to acquire weapons is to ram one's vehicle through a gun shop's door when the shop is closed and seize as many weapons as one can take.

■ At the same time, ISIS encourages mass casualty vehicular attacks. The same issue of Rumiya included an infographic titled “Just Terror Tactics - Truck Attacks.” It lists preferred targets for attacks and details of the various types of trucks and how to acquire them.



Infographic recommending vehicular attacks (Rumiya, May 4, 2017)

## ISIS operatives are developing a new social network

■ Speaking at a security conference in London, **Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol** (the European Union’s criminal intelligence agency, which operates as an intelligence coordination organization among police agencies throughout Europe), said that a recent intelligence operation had revealed that **ISIS had developed a new online social network**. He said that it is a social network for all intents and purposes, which can be used to send messages and make contact with a wide range of friends, and is used by ISIS operatives.

■ According to Rob Wainwright, the network was exposed during an operation against online activity which concentrated on ISIS and Al-Qaeda, in which more than 2,000 items of extremist content published on 52 online social networks were identified. During the operation, it emerged that jihad operatives also make use of private channels, and in the past year the use of Telegram, whose contents are encrypted, has enjoyed considerable popularity (Reuters, May 3, 2017; The Jerusalem Post, May 3, 2017).

The development of the new network by ISIS operatives is designed to prevent security agencies from disrupting communication within ISIS. It was developed by ISIS in order to disseminate its content, circumventing the difficulties posed by online social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter.